

The Preeminent Christ: Colossians

The Church in Colossae seems to have been founded by a man named Epaphras (1:7), who knew Paul. Paul himself had never met the Colossian brethren (2:1), but upon learning of the situation in Colossae from Epaphras, he penned an inspired letter to them. In many ways, Colossians is quite similar to Ephesians, just with a reversed emphasis. Some have said Ephesians highlights “the church of the Christ” while Colossians highlights “the Christ of the Church.” Ephesians is a great treatise on the church as the body of Christ, while Colossians is a treatise on Christ as the head of the church. Much like Ephesians, the letter of Colossians is divided into two parts: the first half (ch. 1-2) is primarily doctrinal, while the latter half (ch. 3-4) focuses on practical application. The “Colossian heresy” is difficult to define. It seems multiple influences may have been permeating the church, leading to a syncretism of Judaism and paganism in addition to their faith in Christ. It doesn’t seem the Colossians had fallen to this false-hood yet, but there was a danger. Thus, Paul writes his letter, highlighting the preeminence and the sufficiency of Christ. Christ is preeminent above all thing, as the thesis of the letter spells out in 1:18-19. If Christ is preeminent, what could be added to make Christianity any better? Also, Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient. What more is needed for salvation than Christ and faithful obedience to Him? Nothing, for we are “*complete in Him*” (2:10). Because Christ is preeminent, and because He has reconciled us to God through His sacrifice, our lives should be radically changed. We have the high charge of “walking worthy of the Lord” (1:9) and the final chapters outline what such a worthy walk looks like. Colossians is a small letter, but it carries a contemporary and powerful message!



Until the Coming of the Lord: 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Paul visited the city of Thessalonica and established a congregation there during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-9). During three weeks of preaching, some Jews, many devout Greeks, and “not a few” of the leading women believe and obeyed the Gospel. The Jews of the city became jealous, however, and mounted some serious persecution of Paul and his companions. Thus, before too long the brethren had to send Paul away for his own safety. Paul hadn’t wanted to leave the new congregation so quickly, and within a few months Paul sent Timothy back to check on the new church. There was much to rejoice over, but there were also some things that Paul needed to address. The church was facing, and would continue to face, persecution. Thus, Paul wanted to encourage the brethren. Predominantly, there were questions about the Lord’s return. This is the primary theme of both First and Second Thessalonians. There was confusion and even false ideas about the Lord’s return. Would those who had died miss the second coming? Had the Lord already returned? Would He be coming soon, and if so, why worry about mundane things like work? Thus, Paul wrote the first letter to encourage the brethren and teach them more fully about the Lord’s return, and the hope all Christians have in the resurrection, both those who have died and those who still live. Further, there is a right and holy way to live in lieu of the Lord’s pending return. Christians are to live holy, sanctified lives. This is not a call to leave daily responsibilities, however. Christians are to work and provide for themselves. Shortly after writing the first letter, Paul had to write the second letter providing even further teaching, exhortation, and some rebuke about these topics based on news he had received. Once more, these letters from long ago carry contemporary exhortations for Christians throughout all the ages!

“That You May Grow Thereby...”

A weekly Bible reading plan



Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians Small Letters with Big Messages

Overview

This week we return to the New Testament and the Pauline Epistles. We’ve already read through Paul’s longest letters—this week we’ll look at four of his shorter letters that were written to congregations. These letters may be short, but they are still powerful and wonderful books. These letters are also some of Paul’s most positive of letters. There are still elements of admonition, warning, and rebuke, but these letters are much less confrontational than others (such as Galatians). Each of these letters is short enough they can be read in one sitting, which is recommended. Try to read each letter completely, and then go back and review smaller sections. You might be surprised how much more you learn after getting “the big picture” of a letter by reading it all the way through!

Suggested Reading Schedule

Monday: Philippians 1-4

Tuesday: Colossians 1-4

Wednesday: 1 Thess. 1-2

Thursday: 1 Thess. 3-5

Friday: 2 Thess. 1-3



The Epistle of Joy: Philippians

The Church at Philippi was started during Paul’s second missionary journey. Acts 16 records two incredible conversions—those of Lydia and the Philippian jailer. Paul had to leave Philippi shortly after the jailer’s conversion, but it’s likely he visited the congregation on other occasions (Acts 20:1, 5-6). Based on the letter to the Philippians, Paul had a special, close relationship with this congregation.

They were very supportive of Paul and his work. Part of Paul’s purpose in writing the letter was to thank them for their gift of support.

Philippians is a wonderful example of encouragement and exhortation. It doesn’t appear that Philippi was suffering from doctrinal error, false-teachers, or immorality. Just because things are going well, however, doesn’t mean people don’t need encouragement. In the staunchly imperial city of Philippi, Christians would surely suffer persecution. Thus, Paul’s letter is a great exhortation to faithfulness to Christ, and a reminder of the joy Christians possess, no matter their circumstances. And Paul wasn’t just writing flowery words—he was living them. Paul wrote Philippians from prison, and yet Philippians is a letter bursting with joy and courage.

The overall theme of the letter is found in 1:27, “*Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents.*” From there, Paul develops exhortations of faithfulness, unity, and endurance throughout the letter.

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