

“A View of Christ Over all – An Overview of Colossians”

Colossians 1:1-2

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC, April, 2020

In the Spirit this Lord’s Day, let’s worship together in Colossians chapter 1.

This month our President said in the Oval Office, though churches Sunday ‘will not be able to gather together with one another as we normally would [he urged us on Sunday to]...focus on prayer, reflection, and growing in our personal relationship with God. So important. I ask all Americans to pray that God will heal our nation; to bring comfort to those who are grieving; to give strength to the doctors, nurses, and healthcare workers; to restore health to the sick; and to renew the hope in every person... Almost 3,000 years ago, the Prophet Isaiah wrote these words: “Darkness covers the Earth... but the Lord rises upon you, and His glory appears over you... For the Lord will be your everlasting light.”...We give thanks for the majesty of creation and for the gift of eternal life. And we place our trust in the hands of Almighty God... [Trump earlier mentioned the] Lord and Savior Jesus.’

The pastor next to him explained ‘Jesus stood in substitution for our sin.’<sup>1</sup>

The White house website posted this a few days ago, signed by President Trump: ‘As our Nation has faced the unique challenge...during the past few weeks, we have turned to God for guidance, comfort, and hope. Throughout this difficult period, we have witnessed the core tenets of Christianity – love, compassion, and kindness ... [and it later added] 1 Peter 4:10: ‘Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God’s grace in its various forms.’ ... Even in the darkest hours, God’s abundant love and mercy are unwavering. The light of Christ will always triumph over the trials and tribulations we face because He has defeated death. Today, let us take a little extra time to pray for the strength of our country and our people, and ask that God hold all Americans in the palm of His hand. Together, let us rejoice in knowing that Christ has risen.’<sup>2</sup>

**The link to that and these notes are on our sermon website**

That’s the official WhiteHouse.gov website: ‘the light of Christ will always triumph!’ Let’s pray for our nation, world and the church of the risen Christ.

Almighty God, Father. Our hope isn’t in the Oval Office, it’s in your throne room above. But we thank you for government and pray for all, above all, to be saved by grace through faith, to repent and receive the free gift of eternal life. Give leaders wisdom to lead. You are sovereign and you hold in your hand the heart of kings. Your hand turns as you will. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus, we come in your love and mercy. We thank you that you stood as the substitute for our sins and you sit in heaven now as our risen King. Come, Holy Spirit, as our helper. Show us Christ. We pray for healing and hope for all in this, and above all, the light of Christ to triumph. *We pray in His name*

Col 1:<sup>1</sup> *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,* <sup>2</sup> *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. Today by His grace I’ll introduce our new verse-by-verse study. Colossians is my new favorite book of the Bible!*

**For our intro and outline: who, what, where, when, why**

**1<sup>st</sup> Who** – v. 1 starts with Paul and Timothy. He’ll say ‘we’ in v. 3 but in v. 23 and following he switches to ‘I.’ So the apostle Paul’s the author and his brother in the faith Timothy was with him, his protégé and pastoral partner and personal right hand man in many of Paul’s letters. Timothy maybe even the writing hand for Paul till the end where Paul say he writes with his hand. But this is the inspired apostle’s words that are ultimately God’s words, not written to us, but for us.

v. 2 makes clear **the who**: *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae*. So it's to this church, but for us as Christians

We need to first see what it meant to the original context and congregation and then what it means for us in our context by way of application. I'll talk more about the where and when of Colossae in a bit, but let's start with who in the context of 3 concepts v. 1-2 introduce: new identity, family, authority

- a. **New identity** – The first word of this letter wasn't the first name or identity he grew up with. This was a new name and identity of a man who used to put Christians in prison, but now is in prison for being a Christian. *Saul of Tarsus*, Hebrew of Hebrews, a self-righteous Jew – he's now *Paul*, renouncing self to love Gentiles, like Colossians. A Pharisee extreme separatist turned evangelist. Mr. Law has now become Mr. Grace-to-You in v. 2 (every letter)

Who were these Colossians before? Ch 1 says later they were in the domain of darkness, ch 2 says they were dead in their sins, and ch 3 says their old self lived in immorality and idolatry. But those texts say sovereign grace made them alive and transferred them to Christ's kingdom, so they've put on a new self in Christ.

1:2 calls them *saints* (set apart by God to be different, cut above, that's their calling) and *faithful* (that's conduct, consistency and continuing faith). That's their new identity, it says '*in Christ*'-the key phrase in this letter and this life: know who you are in Christ

- b. **Family** – Notice again how v. 1 ends '*... Timothy our brother*,<sup>2</sup> *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father*. That's family language. Go to ch 4. Paul talks about Onesimus, who was actually a slave. 4:9 '*and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you.*' The book of Philemon is a companion book to Colossians, and this Christian slave in both books is a family member in Christ, your beloved brother, one of you in every way (same language used of their leader Epaphras in v. 12). It was a radical idea: 3:11 says *no slave, free, but Christ is all and in all*. NT Christianity revolutionized society and human family (3:18f)
- c. **Authority** – 1:1 *...an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God*. That's the sovereign authority that sets the stage for this letter. It isn't suggestions or tips for living, it's authorized authoritative words from the herald of King Jesus (Christ means the Anointed, the Messiah-King). v. 13 says believers are in His kingdom, and v. 18 says Christ is the head of the church. He's our authority, no Pope or pastor. Authority, family, and new identity set the tone. v. 2 ends with *peace from God*, and even that has a ruling tone in ch 3, v. 15, it says '*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...*' So Paul writes to family with authority about living our identity.

That's who, #2 what's it all about? hint: SS answer. <sup>1:16</sup>*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.* <sup>17</sup>*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* <sup>18</sup>*And he is the **head of the body**, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn **from the dead**, that in everything he might be preeminent.*

I take that as the key statement or theme verse of the book: that Christ in everything has the pre-eminence (including over presidents, governments). Other translations say '*so that in everything he might have the supremacy*' (supreme place above all), or that He '*will have first place in everything*.'<sup>3</sup>

He rules over rulers, and even what's invisible (invisible enemy viruses). In v. 15 Christ is the image of the invisible God, in v. 17 He upholds all things.

The theme of Colossians is Christ's preeminence or supremacy over all. His majesty is seen in creation and His glory is over all, through all, and in all.

### **Today will be an overview: a view of Christ over all**

I like how one writer says it 'Christ is everywhere in Colossians; Christ is everything in Colossians... [in ch 2 He's] the sphere in which the believer lives his life... the soil in which we thrive and the arena in which are built up to become what we are designed to be [look at ch 3, v.16 and following]

Christ's 'word is to become the substance of our thoughts, the meditation of our hearts, the song on our lips, the theme of our conversations, and the substance of our worship. His name [in v. 17] is to be stamped over every-thing we say or to. [In v.18-22] He governs and defines marriage, parenting [work]... **STOP!** Consider this:... *first place in everything!*... This very Jesus is first in the Father's heart...Ought He not hold the same position in ours?'<sup>4</sup>

Lord of my heart...[we sing] whatever befall...Still be my vision, O ruler of all  
Thou and Thou Only, Be first in my heart, High King of heaven, my treasure Thou art!

### **Is He #1 in your heart? Your King? Your treasure?**

ESVB:<sup>5</sup> 'Christ is Lord over all of creation, including the invisible realm.' In 2:15 He conquered spiritual invisible enemies at Calvary. Look at 1:18, it says He's preeminent as '*the firstborn from the dead,*' that means the first place or first to rise (others in His family will rise later at His return). That language takes us to Rev 1 where we were last week, Christ holds the 7 stars (maybe symbolizing He holds the universe together) and calls Himself the beginning and the end, ruler of earthly kings and firstborn from the dead

### **He is risen! He is risen indeed! And He is reigning!**

Col 3 tells us to keep seeking things above where Christ is in heaven, seated at the right hand of the throne. Paul wants that to be the vision of the church.

That vision of who Christ is needs to be where set our mind or affections on, what's above, not what's here on earth. What John was shown in glory up in heaven Paul shows us how to live for here on earth, all for Christ's glory. In Revelation, Christ is seen as one walking among the 7 lampstands, standing as if slain, seated on a cloud like a son of man wearing a golden crown, or riding on a white horse. He's called Faithful and True, root and descendant of David, the bright and morning star, Alpha and Omega, first and the last, beginning and the end, Word of God, and King of kings and Lord of lords.

My Study Bible<sup>6</sup> introduces Colossians with 'The Glories of Christ' (this is part of it): 'One of the great tenets of Scripture is the claim that Jesus Christ is completely sufficient for all matters of life and godliness [as we'll see in Col 2] ... all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Him (Col. 2:3); the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him (Col. 2:9)... He created all things and all things were made by Him, through Him, and for Him (Col. 1:16); He upholds all things by the word of His power (Col. 1:17)... He is [in the Bible] the Sun that enlightens; the Physician that heals; the... Friend that comforts... the Rock to sustain under the heaviest of pressures; He is seated at the right hand of the throne [3:1]; He is better than the angels ... greater than Satan; and stronger than death [2:15, 2:18] ... He is our Peace [3:15]; He is our Hope [1:27]; He is our Life (Col. 3:4) [that's just part of it]

This is a Christ-centered book. Colossians shows us the Christ-centered life. On that first Easter Sunday in Lk 24 Jesus explained how the whole OT, not just the prophets, but the Law and the poetic writings all pointed to Him, all scripture looks to Christ. The Bible is a Him-book, a book all about Him, all about Jesus. Him we proclaim, Col 1:28 says. When I started the OT book of Ruth last year I talked though how each OT book points to Jesus, where Ruth fits in that presentation of Christ. Where does Colossians fit in all that?

That's who and what, #2. **Where does Colossians fit in showing Christ?**

- In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is presented as the King of the Jews.
- In Mark's gospel He's the Servant and the Ransom for many.
- In Luke He's the Great Physician and the Son of Man.
- In John He's the Son of God that whosoever believes in shall not perish.
- In the book of Acts He's preached as the rejected but resurrected Messiah.
- In Romans He is Just and Justifier to all who call on His name to be saved.
- In Corinthians He's the Last Adam and Sin bearer who became sin for us.
- In Galatians He's our Adopting Redeemer from the curse of the law.
- In Ephesians He is our Unsearchable Riches seated in the heavenlies.
- In Philippians He has the name above every name and supplies every need.
- And in Colossians, He is the Pre-eminent One with supremacy over all.**

- In Thessalonians He's the returning King who rescues from wrath to come.
- In Timothy He is the one and only Mediator between God and man.
- In Titus He's our Blessed Hope, our great God and Savior who will appear.
- And in Philemon He's the Master who makes slaves be treated as brothers.
- In Hebrews He's the great High Priest and once for all sufficient sacrifice.
- In James He is the glorious Lord who heals and helps us have joy in trials.
- Peter calls Him precious living cornerstone, Chief Shepherd and Guardian.
- In 1-3 John He is the true believer's Advocate and Assurance of salvation.
- In Jude He's a Judge coming with 10,000 holy ones against false teachers.
- In Revelation He's the Lion of Judah and the worthy Lamb who was slain.

That's my King! Do you know Him? That's where Colossians fits its like 1 of 66 pieces in a puzzle. The whole picture is Christ, the image of God, the fullness of God, as Colossians calls him, and this piece of the NT portrait has special light and glory like John, Corinthians, Hebrews, in that section. All scripture centers on Christ, but this is in a special part with bright glory.

That's where the book fits in the Bible, but where in the world is Colossae?

<sup>2</sup> *To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae...* where's that at?

In the 1960s Hendriksen wrote 'Everyone is acquainted, of course, with the shape of western Asia Minor.'<sup>7</sup> I think he was serious. But I had to look up where that is, and for those who didn't minor in geography, this isn't Asia today, it's modern Turkey. The Mediterranean that runs from Israel to Italy passes Ephesus on the coast, Colossae is 100 miles inland, 1000 from Rome

Laodicea was close to Colossae, distance of Shingle Springs to Placerville. Hundreds of years earlier Colossae was booming on a major road, kind of like Coloma was booming in the 1840s – more people than San Francisco – but now it's a small town. People now go through Placerville to Tahoe, not Coloma, and even people in Sac haven't heard of Shingle Springs (to city people it sounds like Radiator Springs). There's still the old road of Hwy 49, but Hwy 50 goes through Placerville, so Coloma has less through traffic. Colossae was similar as the new Roman highway routed through Laodicea.

If you look at Col 4:15 there was a church there: <sup>15</sup> *Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.* <sup>16</sup> *And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.* Some think that's the Ephesians letter, a circular letter going around. Colossae was a small town, too small to make the list of 7 churches in Revelation (95 AD). It's not just for our education, it's for edification: a big God cares for small towns, too (like we are), not just big cities. There's an admonition: Laodicea became a lukewarm church, but here they shared warm fellowship. In Rev 3 to those later lukewarm brethren, Christ said He's at the door for fellowship

**That takes us from the where to the when?** Scholars and smart guys think Paul wrote to the Colossians around 62 AD when he was a prisoner in Rome.

Look at **4:3**: *'At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, **on account of which I am in prison**...* **4:10** *Aristarchus **my fellow prisoner** greets you ...<sup>18</sup> I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. **Remember my chains.** Grace be with you.* So when Paul starts the letter saying he's with Timothy, it may be he's writing for Paul who dictates to him, but the end is Paul's own handwriting. Paul is in chains because of the gospel but gospel grace can't be chained!

When Paul is writing this isn't just information, there's application for us. These times when we're sheltering behind closed doors we need to pray for open doors for us to declare Christ. You may be more homebound but the gospel is not bound, in fact these are times when the gospel can abound!

Grace is how Paul ends and how Paul begins, and all of life is all of grace.

If you back to ch 1, Paul begins with his standard greeting of 'grace to you' but then he talks about how that grace came to you in Colossae. End of 1:5 mentions *'...the gospel, <sup>6</sup> which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God...*' May it for us, too

**Which takes us to last part and point: Why is Colossians important?**

First answer is all scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, rebuke, correction, and training in righteousness. But why this scripture at this time? After being in the OT last year and not being in a NT letter since Philippians, I've been eager to get back (the next book after Philippians is as good as any). The elders actually discussed that desire early this year at our retreat and planned to start Colossians after Easter after the church series for 2020 (renewing our vision and renewing our purpose statement). It fits with Colossians: we exist by God's grace, for His glory as our ultimate purpose).

That 2020 view comes into clearer focus in this book and its view of Christ. We don't reinvent our purpose/priorities, we reorient to the sufficient Word.

Julius Kim:<sup>8</sup> *'As clearly as any book of the Bible, Colossians rivets us on who Christ is and what he has accomplished—the very motivation and power believers need to live by faith, walk in obedience, and glorify God... the entire letter...redirects Christians often-distracted focus back to Christ, who is the Creator of all things, Savior of all people, and Victor over all enemies'*

That belief in Christ (ch 1-2) is the foundation for behavior for Christ (3-4).

If I believe the supremacy of Jesus (1-2) I bow in submission to Jesus (3-4). First 2 chapters: what Christ did for us; last 2 are what He does through us.

It starts with Christ as universal head over humanity and the church, then it fleshes out later in the book with how that looks in the family and our work.

Like Ephesians, the first half of the book is doctrinal, the 2<sup>nd</sup> half practical.

There's no commands in the first 35 verses, identity first then responsibility.

This is as relevant to Californians as Colossians (CA's sins are in chap 3).

This speaks to us. 2:1 *I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face*

Paul wanted to encourage this church that he hadn't met. There's a word in that for us who can't meet now or see people in our church face to face, we can write to encourage them, like Paul did. There's a lot of real ministry that isn't face to face Sunday. Paul's ministry was often to those he couldn't see.

Look at 1:25, he's talking about the church 'of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you...' So Paul ministered to the church from a distance, not in person, and so can we.

As I read this in light of the crisis we're in, it's more timely than I can plan. How do you pray when homebound? Like Paul did under his house arrest. His orders to stay in a home were binding literally, Acts 28 says in Rome he stayed in a home for 2 years awaiting the government's word on his future (sound familiar?). There was no internet, Instagram, Facebook, Facetime, or Zoom, just his room. How does he pray for those he can't see face to face?

1:9 *'so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, <sup>10</sup> so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks...*

Application: pray that for people in your church. You can see their faces in the photo directory. Take a page a day or half a page and if you don't know specific requests, pray this. You could write to them and share your prayer with them, even include these words in a note, and/or ask how you can pray.

I've given you that as application a number of times, are you doing that? If not, you can obey God's command to pray today, directory is good way and you can follow up with loving one another, contacting people on that page. Col 2:5 can be us: *though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit...*

Here's another homework assignment whether you're working from home or not, 1<sup>st</sup> pray for your church like I just mentioned through Colossians. #2 I ask all of you to read through Col 1-4 this week (today if you can, more than once if you can). If not in a reading plan, start here, 12 minutes in ESV app, can read it to you when you drive. If you are working from home, 3:22 is one of those verses to read in a new light, it talks about working for your earthly masters, '*...not by way of **eye-service**, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men [end of v. 24] You are serving the Lord Christ.*

Unique applications working from home (funny video I got). As you read this book, I seriously think you'll see it couldn't be more timely for these times. For those more at home with each other, 3:12 and following will be needed more than ever, and may be a great section to memorize, meditate. The day I put these notes together a brother gave me a commentary that says this 'little letter of Colossians should be required reading for anyone seeking to live for Christ...Few portions of Scripture more powerfully and pointedly address many of the key issues confronting us in the current cultural climate ...Held before us here are life-changing, soul-liberating truths about the possibilities and power of living out our union with Christ. Freedom from what binds and liberty for long-encumbered relationships is set before us... In Colossians we are brought to fresh and breath-taking vistas of Him "who is our life" (Col 3:4). Such a look promises to bring new life to tired saints'<sup>9</sup>

It's instructive to us that Paul doesn't talk about his suffering or situation much at all for the first 3 chapters, he was to talk about his supreme Savior.

As we talk, how much do we talk about ourselves vs. talk about our Savior?

Our world is totally focused on another C word, we need to focus on Christ.

I'm intentionally trying to rarely say that C word that dominates the news, I want Christ to be the word and One I hear much more of and make much of.

For more application, questions at YT description and on our SA page after. Take time to let the Word take root, meditate on them, discuss with others.

If you don't know this glorious Christ as your Lord, there's grace to you in this book. Turn from your sin, and trust Him alone to save you, treasure His infinite worth. Come in lowly repentance and lift up His preeminence as #1 in your life, first in your heart. Confess Jesus is your King and believe that He died for your sin and is risen indeed. Say it with me... He is risen ....

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-easter-blessing-bishop-harry-jackson/> (reference from Isaiah 60:2).

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/presidential-message-easter-2020/>

<sup>3</sup> NIV and NASB.

<sup>4</sup> John Kitchen, *Colossians and Philemon for Pastors*, 35-37.

<sup>5</sup> *ESV Study Bible*, longer theme statement: 'Christ is Lord over all of creation, including the invisible realm. He has secured redemption for his people, enabling them to participate with him in his death, resurrection, and fullness.'

<sup>6</sup> *The MacArthur Study Bible*.

<sup>7</sup> William Hendriksen, *Colossians*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Gospel-Transformation Bible*, Crossway, introduction to Colossians.

<sup>9</sup> John Kitchen, *Colossians and Philemon for Pastors*, 17.