

# EXPOSITORY TEACHING ON THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

## MESSAGE ONE: INTRODUCTION

### ➤ Questions:

- How many of you have read Paul's letter to the Colossians?
- What things do you remember in this epistle?

**Author:** Paul, an apostle of Christ. It is assumed that the church in Colossae was about five years old when Paul wrote this letter.

**Date:** ca. AD 60-62

**Place of writing:** Colossians, Philippians, Ephesians and Philemon are known as prison epistles. **Col. 4:18**, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you."

### ➤ Questions:

- If you were imprisoned, what would be the reason? For Paul, it was only the gospel.
- If you were imprisoned, what would you do? Rather than being discouraged over his situation, Paul wrote this letter from prison (probably in Rome) to encourage believers in Christ.

**Illustration:** Richard Wurmbrand in his book "*Tortured for Christ*" shares, "A brother was preaching to the other prisoners when the guards suddenly burst in, surprising him halfway through a phrase. They hauled him down the corridor to their "beating room." After what seemed an endless beating, they brought him back and threw him—bloody and bruised—on the prison floor. Slowly, he picked up his battered body, painfully straightened his clothing and said, "Now, brethren, where did I leave off when I was interrupted?" He continued his gospel message." (pg. 41)

**The City of Colosse:** Colosse was a small town located in the region of Phrygia. It was about 100 miles/160 kms east of Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), about 10 miles from Laodicea and about 13 miles from Hierapolis. Hierapolis (4:13)<sup>1</sup>, Laodicea (2:1; 4:13-16; Rev. 3:14-22), and Colosse together make up tri-cities.

---

<sup>1</sup> "For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis."



**Church plant in Colossae:** Who planted this church? Many think Paul, but he didn't.

- a. Paul confessed of not seeing these believers face to face. **Col. 2:1**, "For 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."

Also, observe these phrases, "We always thank God.....since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus" (**1:3**) and "And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you" (**1:9**).

- b. Do you find the name "Colossae" in the book of Acts? The book of Acts does not mention Paul visiting Colossae or founding it.
- c. The gospel was preached to the Colossians by Epaphras, "Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 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 in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant." (**Col. 1:5-7**)
- d. Epaphras was a native of Colossae (**4:12**)<sup>2</sup>, probably converted when Paul ministered in Ephesus for three years (**Acts 19:10**)<sup>3</sup>, and went back to his city and planted this church.

**What do we learn from the establishment of church in Colossae?** Warren Wiersbe writes:

During Paul's ministry in Ephesus, at least two men from Colossae were brought to faith in Jesus Christ—Epaphras and Philemon (see Philemon. 19). Epaphras apparently was one of the key

<sup>2</sup> "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you..."

<sup>3</sup> "This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia (including Hierapolis, Laodicea and Colossae) heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

founders of the church in Colossae, for he shared the Gospel with his friends there (Col. 1:7). He also had a ministry in the cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col. 4:12-13). Philemon had a church meeting in his home (Philemon. 2).

There is a good lesson for us here: God does not always need an apostle, or a “full-time Christian worker” to get a ministry established. Nor does He need elaborate buildings and extensive organizations. Here were two laymen who were used of God to start ministries in at least three cities. It is God’s plan that the Christians in the large urban areas like Ephesus reach out into the smaller towns and share the Gospel. Is *your* church helping to evangelize “small-town” mission fields? (*Be Complete*, pg. 18-19)

**Purpose of the letter to Colossians:** Paul heard from Epaphras about how the church in Colossae was doing (**Col. 1:8**, “He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit”). Epaphras stayed back and Paul sent Tychicus and Onesimus to pass his message to the Colossians (**Col. 4:7-9**, “Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.”)

**Paul addresses two major problems:**

a. *The problem of paganistic lifestyle.* In **Col. 1:21-23; 2:6 and 3:5-11**, Paul instructs on the importance of holy living.

b. *The problem of heresies.*

- *Philosophies and traditions of men* - denying the supremacy of Christ and sufficiency in Him (**2:8**)
- *Judaistic legalism* – going back to the rite of circumcision, food regulations, and observance of special days (**2:11,16-17**)
- *Angel worship* – diversion from the glory of Christ (**2:18**)
- *Asceticism* - mistreating the body as the means to control its lusts (**2:20-23**)

**Central Message of the Letter:** Supremacy of Christ, Sufficiency in Christ and Christ-like living.

The letter to the Colossians is a message our generation must hear and apply:

- In an age of rapid rise of spiritual gurus (Deepak Chopra, Sri Sri Sri Ravi Shankar), numerous religious beliefs (Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism), atheistic views (denying the existence of God and Biblical Christ) and false teachings on the person of Christ (Islam, JW, Mormons)—we must know the *supremacy of Christ* (how Christ is unique and supreme)

- In a generation where the church is influenced by eastern religious practices (Yoga, Hindu superstitious beliefs), secular psychological views (excessive preference to self-esteem), success mantras (success oriented motivational talk), technological advancement (addiction to electronic gadgets) and prosperity teaching (earthly affluence)—we must find our *sufficiency in Christ* (Christ is our absolute wisdom, righteousness, treasure, joy and satisfaction).
- At a time where the church has become much like the world (absorbing worldly passions, pursuits and lifestyle) rather than being the light of the world—we need to be conformed to *Christ-like living* (imitating Christ in our daily Christian life).

-----

**Outline**  
(Taken from John MacArthur’s Study Bible)

**I. Personal (1:1-14)**

- A. Greetings (1:1-2)
- B. Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
- C. Prayer on behalf of the church (1:9-14)

**II. Doctrinal (1:15-2:23)**

- A. The Person and work of Christ (1:15-23)
- B. The ministry of Paul (1:24-2:7)
- C. The sufficiency of Christ versus worldly philosophies (2:8-23)

**III. Practical (3-4 chps)**

- A. Living the risen life (3:1-9)
- B. Putting on the new man (3:9-17)
- C. Managing the Christian household (3:18-4:1)
- D. Conducting one’s speech (4:2-6)
- E. Imparting greetings and farewells (4:7-17)

-----

### Questions for Reflection

1. From where did Paul write the letter to the Colossians?
2. Is gospel the reason for your suffering? If not, why do you suppose you are not suffering for the gospel?
3. What do you do when you go through suffering?
4. Did Paul plant the church in Colossae? If not, what are your reasons for Paul not being the church planter in Colossae?
5. What do you learn about Epaphras from this letter?
6. What is the central message of Colossians and how it is relevant to our present time?
7. What new things have you observed in this message and how were you personally challenged through the ministry of the Word of God?

-----

*Preached by C. Stephen David to the Assembly of Living Witnesses, Hyderabad, India, on June 26<sup>th</sup>, 2016*