

New Testament Letter: Colossians Intro – 1:23

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Writer: Paul the apostle

Date: AD 60

Purpose: To guide the Colossian congregation away from heresy and into the truth about Jesus and His saving work.

Reading Colossians: In Colossians, the apostle Paul warns against greedy, [dishonest] false teachers who would steal the congregation away from their Lord, Jesus the Christ. To renew the congregation's faith and service, Paul repeatedly strikes upon the truths they once knew: Jesus is Lord of creation, the fullness of God dwells in Him, their life is hidden with Christ in God. And so, they are renewed in the image of their Creator (3:10).

Blessings for Readers: Though Colossians is one of Paul's shorter Letters, it is especially rich with descriptions of Christ, His work, and the blessings He extends to us through Holy Baptism. As you study Colossians, pray that the Lord would protect your congregation and all Christians from false teachers, for in Christ alone "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (1:14).

Outline:

- I. Preaching (chapters 1–2)
- II. Paul's Instructions (chapters 3–4)

ESV Bible Intro: Paul wrote to the church in Colossae to fortify it against false teachers who might try to impose strict rules about eating and drinking and religious festivals. Paul shows the superiority of Christ over all human philosophies and traditions. He writes of Christ's deity and of the reconciliation he accomplished with his blood. He explains that the right way of living in this world is to focus on heavenly rather than earthly things. God's chosen people must leave their sinful lives behind and live in a godly way, looking to Christ as the head of the church (1:18).

Paul's Circumstance: He was in his first year of house arrest in Rome.

Location of Colossae: About 100 miles east of Ephesus.



Luther: [In chapter 1 Paul] praises and wishes for the Colossians, that they continue and increase in faith. He [defines] what the gospel and faith are, namely, a wisdom which recognizes Christ as Lord and God, crucified for us, which has been hidden for ages but now brought into the open through his ministry.

Greeting: 1:1-2

1. ¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.
 - a. Paul was an apostle *because Jesus called him into that position*. Are you open to God's plan for your life?
 - b. Some of Paul's missionary team sailed with him from the port of Sidon in Phoenicia to Rome; Timothy was most likely part of that team.

Thanksgiving and Prayer: 1:3-14

2. ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.
 - a. Note the importance of prayer.

b. How did Paul know they had faith in Jesus? _____

3. Of this *[the hope laid up for you in heaven]* you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ 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**, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. // What three words are critical to being saved?

4. He *[Epaphras]* is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. ⁹ And 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... // In these verses, notice Paul's desire for the believers in Colossae:

- a. ¹⁰ 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;
- b. ¹¹ being **strengthened with all power**, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;
- c. ¹² giving **thanks to the Father**, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The Preeminence of Christ: 1:15-23

5. ¹⁵ He *[the Son of God]* is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

- a. *image*: ^{NAU} **Hebrews 1:3** "...He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature..."
- b. **Firstborn**. The early heretic Arius (AD 260–336) and modern groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses have sadly

misunderstood Paul's words in Col 1:15, suggesting that Jesus is a created being and not true, eternal God. But Paul used the expression "firstborn of all creation" not to describe Christ as a creature but to describe His right as a firstborn: He is ruler and heir of all creation, for He existed before creation and all things were created **through Him and for Him** (1:16–17).

6. ¹⁶ For by him *[the Son of God]* 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 *[see John 1:1-3]*. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. // See the laminin clip: 27:36 – 34:32
7. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church *[who is included?]*. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead *[the first to be raised and live forever]*, that in everything he might be preeminent.
8. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell *["not by the conversion of the divinity into flesh, but by the assumption of the humanity into God" (Athanasian Cr.) – the Son of God put on flesh; flesh did not put on God]*, ²⁰ and through him *[Christ]* to reconcile to himself *[the Father]* all things *[we are helpless, so God worked through His Son to reconcile us]*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
9. ²¹ And **you**, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² **he** *[Christ]* has now reconciled *[you]* in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him *[the Father]*, ²³ **if** indeed you continue in the faith *[so it is critical to be cautious; test, examine, watch yourself (2Co.13:5)]*, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. See Deut. 6:6-9...

New Testament Letter: Colossians 1:24 – 2:12

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Paul's Ministry to the Church: 1:24-29

10. ²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church [that is, all who have godly sorrow and trust in Jesus], ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. // The underlined phrase is difficult:
- Lenski: "A certain amount of suffering falls to the lot of the church because of its connection with Christ. A large part of it has to be borne by the leaders of the church, among whom God has placed Paul as the foremost" (73).
 - Christ's sufferings for our salvation are complete (vv. 20, 22; 2:9–15).
 - All Christians suffer with Christ as part of their service to Christ. When we live for Him, we confess Him, and when we confess Him, we will suffer:
 - ^{NAS} **2 Timothy 3:12** And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.
 - ^{NAU} **Romans 8:17** and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.
 - Baptism connects us to Christ—both to His sufferings and to His salvation (Col 2:12). Paul gladly accepted suffering for the sake of the Gospel and believed that it brought benefits to the Church. // ^{NAU} **2 Corinthians 1:5** For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.

11. ²⁷ To them [the saints – those elected to believe in Jesus] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
- "At one time Judaism was solid in the opinion that no Gentile could possibly be saved except by becoming a Jew. It was so inconceivable that Gentiles were to be saved... that it required a special revelation... to bring Peter to the level of the real truth" (Lenski, 79).
 - Acts 10: Cornelius – a Gentile and Peter – a Jew both had extraordinary visions. When Peter went and talked about Jesus, the HS gave the Gentiles faith and enabled them to speak in tongues – to show that God loved the Gentiles!
12. Notice the all-inclusive words in **bold print**: ²⁸ Him [Christ] we proclaim, warning **everyone** and teaching **everyone** with **all** wisdom, that we may present **everyone** mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with **all his** [Christ's] energy that he **powerfully works within me**. // Paul was so faithful to his calling, so caring about others, and so determined to do whatever he could in the strength of Christ to help others know the truth and be set free! May the HS help us to care about others so much that we are communicating whatever we can to help them know the truth and be set free!

Luther on Chapter 2: [Paul] warns them against the doctrines of men, which are always contrary to faith. He depicts these doctrines more clearly than they are depicted anywhere else in Scripture and criticizes them in a masterly way.

Paul's Ministry to the Church: 2:1-5

1. **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, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together [*instructed or drawn closer together*] in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.
 - a. *struggle*. The word refers to giving your all in an intense competition. **Paul shows great pastoral concern for their spiritual welfare.**
 - b. *Laodicea*. The letter spoken by Jesus and written down by the apostle John for the seventh church mentioned in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.
 - c. *God's mystery, which is Christ*. All that we can [know] and need to know about God is ultimately revealed to us in Christ.
2. ⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible [*believable*] arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. // Similar: ^{NAS} **Phil. 1:27** Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel...

Alive in Christ: 2:6-15

3. ⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. // *rooted and built up*. Both metaphors, one from **nature** and the other from **construction**, point to something that is firm and enduring.

- a. How did YOU receive Christ?
 - b. What does it mean to walk in Him?
 - c. How does “rooted and built in Him” make a difference in your life?
 - d. From 1 – *lowest*, to 10 – *highest*, what is your level of thankfulness?
4. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy [*human wisdom: i.e., F+W=H*] and empty deceit [*the attractiveness of sin: i.e., following your feelings*], according to human tradition [*in contrast to God's truth: i.e., be good vs. trust in Jesus*], according to the elemental [principles] of the world [*i.e., humanistic teachings – like evolution – that reject God and other supernatural beliefs*] and not according to Christ.
 5. ⁹ For in him [*Christ*] the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. // **Paul says everything that is of God dwells in Christ. We confess this in the Nicene Creed...**
 6. ¹¹ In him [*Christ*] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.
 - a. *circumcision*. **A sign of God's covenant establishing the people of Israel:** ^{NAU} **Genesis 17:10** “This is My covenant...: every male among you shall be circumcised.”
 - b. **But in Christ the purpose of the covenant with Abraham (to be a blessing to all the families of the earth; Gn. 12:3) was fulfilled. The new covenant is established with a different circumcision, Baptism (FC Ep XII 6).**
 - c. **Baptism is not just a symbol of what God does through the teaching of God's Word. It is water combined with God's Word that makes it a washing of regeneration (see Titus 3:5–7).**

New Testament Letter: Colossians 2:13 – 3:17

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Alive in Christ: 2:6-15 – *continued*

7. ¹³ And **you, who were dead** in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made alive together with him [Christ]**, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands [*remember: whenever we sin, we owe a debt that we cannot pay*]. **This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. // WOW!** When we were totally dead and helpless, God legally canceled our debt – *because of Jesus' full payment on our behalf!*
8. ¹⁵ [God] **disarmed the rulers and authorities [*those forces of evil who were holding us captive*] and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him [Christ]. // **Paul had in mind the Roman custom of stripping defeated armies of weapons and armor and parading them in a triumphal procession.****

Let No One disqualify You: 2:16-23

9. ¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. // Think about some of the former ceremonial laws: Avoiding certain foods and celebrating certain festivals.
- Why did God require such things?
 - Why are such things no longer required?
10. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism [*lowliness of mind, humility*] and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous [*fleshly*] mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head [Christ], from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together

through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

- Paul warns believers not to be deceived by those who claim special revelation. If it is not truly centered in Christ, it is not of the Holy Spirit; rather, it comes from the sinful nature.** Think about the stories of Mary appearing in various places; do such stories **draw people to Christ** or **pull them away** from Christ?
 - As our heads feed our physical bodies, *so Christ feeds His spiritual body*, and every true believer is connected. Think about your life:
 - When and how are you receiving nourishment from Christ?
 - When a person is alive **physically**, what two ingredients are needed to maintain good physical health?
 - Where is your focus – on your physical health or on your spiritual health?
 - When a person is alive **spiritually**, what two ingredients are needed to maintain good spiritual health?
11. ²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations-- ²¹ "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used) -- according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism [*humility*] and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. // *Let us avoid worthless practices.*
- Man-made regulations of false religion have nothing to do with Christ and the forgiveness of sins.**

- b. Desires of the flesh cannot be overcome by self-denial. They can only be overcome by God's grace in Christ.

Luther: In chapter 3 [Paul] exhorts them to be fruitful in the pure faith, doing all sorts of good works for one another, and he describes for some various stations in life the works which are appropriate to them.

Put On the New Self: 3:1-17

1. **3:1** If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
 - a. What does it mean to be *raised with Christ*?
 - b. What does it mean to *seek the things that are above*?
2. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died [to sin], and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
 - a. Think about *who you are in Christ* – dead to sin, spiritually alive, and heading for eternal glory.
 - b. Think about your next week of life, *you have 168 hours*; now, identify and add up the time you plan to spend on spiritual things; for example:
 - i. Bible time and prayer: ____
 - ii. Witnessing: ____
 - iii. Volunteering at church: ____
 - iv. Sacrificing for others: ____
 - v. Attending service and class: ____
3. ⁵ Put to death [STOP DOING] therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity [unholy living], passion [lustful desire], evil desire [unrestrained desire for something forbidden], and covetousness [a sinful desire for more], which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. // So, it's important to STOP!

4. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them [*before you were in Christ*]. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice [evil], slander [abusive speech], and obscene [filthy] talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.
5. ¹¹ Here [*in Christ*] there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian [uncivilized person], Scythian [a person from the area that is now southern Russia; such people *were thought to be the most barbaric of the barbarians*], slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.
6. ¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts [the deep, inner seat of tender emotions], kindness, humility, meekness [strength that accommodates to another's weakness], and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. // See the Bethlehem Forgiveness brochures for some important info!
7. ¹⁴ And above all these put-on love [see 1 Cor. 13:4-7], which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule [be like a baseball umpire] in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.
8. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly [How? By:], teaching and admonishing [warning, instructing, as giving instructions regarding belief or behavior to] one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. // **There is NO DIVISION between the sacred and the secular** concerning what a Christian says and does. Christ should accompany us in all facets of life.

New Testament Letter: Colossians 3:18 – 4:18

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Rules for Christian Households: 3:18-25

9. ¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. // *submit*. Working together in harmony necessitates that one leads and another follows, much like members of an athletic team do to achieve a united success.
10. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. // *love*. Husbands must lead the way in love, just as Jesus leads the way in His love for us: “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...” (Eph. 5:25 NAU).
11. **C:** ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. // *As a boy, Jesus submitted to His parents*: “[Jesus] went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them...” (Lk. 2:51 NAU).
12. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke [make resentful, irritate, rouse to anger] your children, lest they become discouraged. // In an opposite way, let us teach them what is best and encourage them to do it!
13. ²² Bondservants [as one who serves in obedience to another's will], obey in everything those who are your earthly masters [such as employers], not by way of eye-service [only giving the impression of properly doing our work], as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord [doing your best unto God's glory (Matt. 5:16; 1Cor. 10:31)]. // We may **see our employer**, but in everything we are ultimately serving **the Lord!** From that reality should come forth the right attitude for doing any task.
14. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, **as for the Lord and not for men**, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. // Lenski: “A good Christian

employee must never get the thought that his employer will give him no more for throwing his soul into the work than for just working along like other employees do. He has come to know that he is working for the Lord, no matter what his lowly job may be, and ‘that from the Lord he will duly receive the due return gift’ ... in inheritance.”

15. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer [whether the employer or the employee] will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. // Lenski: “...if either does wrong to the other, God will pay the guilty one without partiality.”
1. **4:1 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.** // **Paul does not condone slavery or advocate revolt.**
 - a. Where the Bible speaks of slavery continuing among God's people (who were themselves slaves for nearly five centuries), slavery appears as a temporary allowance for human weakness rather than a perpetual, God-given right. Following the exodus, the Law of Moses permitted the holding of even Israelite slaves, but only for a period of six years (Ex 21:2) (page 101).
 - b. **Slavery in the New Testament:** In the Roman world, slaves could serve in a variety of positions (from chain gang to cook, from hairdresser to obstetrician). Roman slaves quite often held positions of great power and responsibility. Slaves were most often prisoners of war taken from foreign lands, or non-Roman individuals sold by their families to repay a debt. Fair-skinned Britons and blond Germanic peoples were included in their number.

Typical Roman slaves hoped for release at age 30, the usual age for discharge. While in service to their master, slaves could earn wages, buy and sell property, enter into contracts, and own slaves themselves. Frequently, Roman free persons sold themselves into slavery in order to pay debts, while non-Roman persons sold themselves in order to eventually obtain Roman citizenship (page 101).

Luther: In chapter 4 [Paul] commends himself to their prayers and gives them greetings and encouragement (AE 35:386).

Further Instructions: 4:2-6

2. ² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. // Watchful for what? _____
3. 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 that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. // Please pray in similar ways for us and our congregation!
4. ⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.
 - a. *outsiders*. Our life before unbelievers should put a favorable light on the Word we proclaim.
 - b. *seasoned with salt*. We should strive for sincerity, tact, and eloquence...

Final Greetings: 4:7-18

5. ⁷ Tychicus will tell you all about my activities [remember, Paul wrote from his confinement in Rome]. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹ and with him Onesimus [who is the key person in Paul's letter to Philemon],

our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you [a believer]. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

6. ¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you [probably with Paul while he was under house arrest and attended to his needs], and Mark the cousin of Barnabas [Acts 15:37-40] (concerning whom you have received instructions-- if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus [Jesus was a common Jewish name]. These are the only men of the circumcision [Jews] among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me.
7. ¹² Epaphras [most likely the founding pastor of the Church at Colossae], who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.
8. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas [only here is Luke described as a physician, but there are indications of his medical background in his writings (e.g., Lk 22:44; Ac 28:8)]. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.
9. ¹⁶ 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 [a lost letter, or possibly Ephesians]. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, "See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord." [Indicating that Christ called him to serve.] ¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand [making it authentic, like a signature]. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. // *my chains*. Although Paul often expressed hope and joy in the face of persecution, he needed the prayers and encouragement of his fellow believers.

