

If you think about it, the typical Christian life consists of bright moments of heavenly wonder and joy interspersed with hour after arduous hour swimming upstream against the things of this earth.

We all have days in which the spirit of *this* world seems stronger than the Spirit of the next. We are bombarded with

- opinions that challenge, even denigrate our faith
- competing philosophies, belief systems, and faiths
- a diluted Christianity; or a super-irrigated, legalistic Christianity; or a so-called “Christianity” built on fine-sounding error
- philosophies that redefine God the Father and Christ Jesus from an earthly perspective

Every day we feel the tug of temporal forces pulling us away from Christ. What is truly frightening to the one who sincerely wants to follow Christ is the cold truth that we are not even consciously aware of much of the opposition. It is so subtle, or so common as to pass by without notice—but, sadly, not without effect. Whether we recognize them or not, the lies of this world do violence to our faith.

Paul’s letter to the Colossians is an antidote to all this. It addresses specifically the lies that we know about—erroneous teachings that corrupt true faith—and it does so by presenting, in certainly the most fully developed, eloquent description of Jesus, the superior alternative to those erroneous teachings: the person of Christ. This is a full and sufficient prescription, for if by placing our faith and trust in the superior Christ we successfully thwart the obvious attacks, we will become better equipped to thwart those *less* obvious—the ones that used to slip by unnoticed.

In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul makes the case for the supremacy and sufficiency of the *real* Christ and explains to us how to live with and for Him—how to acknowledge Him as *Lord of All*. A.T. Robertson calls Colossians a “full-length portrait of Christ.”

AUTHORSHIP

Let’s begin by looking at some of the mechanics of this church and letter. You should know that not everyone agrees that the apostle Paul wrote this letter. In fact, it is estimated by Douglas J. Moo (one of my principal resources for this study) that up to 60% of modern scholars think he did not. However, no early Christian doubted his authorship, nor do any of the contemporary scholars I have included in my research. And we need not. The text claims he did, and we have no good reason to doubt that.

THE COLOSSAE CHURCH AND PAUL’S RELATIONSHIP TO IT

[\[refer to map\]](#)

Colossae was located on the south bank of the Lycus river in Asia-Minor (present-day Turkey). It was near Laodicea and Hierapolis—all three inland and to the east of Ephesus, which was located on the west coast. At the time of Paul’s letter, Colossae was a fairly insignificant city, but it had earlier been an important trade city, at the crossroads of two well-traveled highways. Colossae had been the center of a thriving textile industry; a certain high-quality dark red wool was known as “Colossian wool.” But, just as happens today, the route of one of those highways was moved to favor Laodicea, and thus Colossae began its apparent decline. (Moo)

The population of Colossae was no doubt predominantly Gentile, but there was also a substantial number of Jews. Located as it was on a major highway, Colossae was a place where many different religious and philosophical viewpoints thrived and intermingled—which helps explain what has come to be termed the “Colossian Heresy,” the addressing of which by Paul being the primary purpose for the letter before us.

Read Colossians 2:8.

The probable founder, and certainly leader of the Colossae church was Epaphras.

Read Colossians 1:7 (admittedly the middle of a sentence)

[the translations are evenly split on “our”/“your”; both are certainly true]

Epaphras was a native of Colossae: “..who is one of you [your number]” (4:12)

The evidence is that the apostle Paul never visited the church in Colossae.

Read Colossians 2:1

By my reckoning, this is the only letter Paul addressed to a church he had never visited, much less began. So how did this letter come about? In big chunks, here is how it came about:

- Epaphras was concerned about the situation at his church.
- He journeyed to the imprisoned Paul—probably in Rome—to consult with him about “the presence of heretical teaching at Colossae that was threatening the well-being [integrity] of the church” (Vaughan).
- Because in his letter to Philemon, Paul refers to Epaphras as “my fellow prisoner,” the pastor was unable to carry in person Paul’s letter back to Colossae.
- So Paul commissioned Tychicus [too-khee-kos’] for that task:
Read Colossians 4:7-8.
- and sent with him as a companion Onesimus—the ex-slave about whom the brief letter, Philemon, is written.

Read Colossians 4:9.

A Servant’s Attitude

This situation and the resulting epistle speak highly of both Epaphras and Paul. Here is what Matthew Henry has to say about it.

Matthew Henry: One would have thought none would have come to be flourishing churches but those which Paul himself had planted; but here was a flourishing church planted by Epaphras. God is sometimes pleased to make use of the ministry of those who are of less note, and lower gifts, for doing great service to his church. God uses what hands he pleases, and is not tied to those of note, that the excellence of the power may appear to be of God and not of men, 2Co_4:7.

Though Paul had not the planting of this church, yet he did not therefore neglect it; nor, in writing his epistles, does he make any difference between that and other churches. The Colossians, who were converted by the ministry of Epaphras, were as dear to him, and he was as much concerned for their welfare, as the Philippians, or any others who were converted by his ministry. Thus he put an honour upon an inferior minister, and teaches us not to be selfish, nor think all that honour lost which goes beside ourselves. We learn, in his example, not to think it a disparagement to us to water what others have planted, or build upon the foundation which others have laid: as he himself, as a wise master-builder, laid the foundation, and another built thereon, 1Co_3:10.

SEVERAL PATHWAYS THROUGH COLOSSIANS

As a way to survey the letter to the Colossians, in the remainder of our time this morning I would like to trace several threads through the book.

Summary Statement

First, we can summarize the primary purpose of the letter. Although a number of topics are addressed by the apostle during the course of this epistle, if we were to whittle it all down to the overriding theme, the purpose of the letter was

- to encourage the Colossians to resist erroneous teaching;
- to counter this, Paul presents to them the centrality and supremacy—the *sufficiency*—of Christ Jesus.

Descriptions of Christ

How does Paul address or refer to Christ in this letter? Here are some I have gleaned; there are probably more.

King (1:13)	All (3:11)
Lord (2:6)	Peace (3:15)
Alive! (2:12)	Word (3:16)
Ruler & Advocate (3:1)	Channel [to the Father] (3:17)
Life (3:4) [a powerful statement]	Mystery (4:3)

The Sufficiency of Christ

In Colossians, how is the case for the sufficiency of Christ Jesus made? (from Vaughan)

- He is the object of the Christian's faith (1:4)
- He is God's Son (1:13)
- the Redeemer (1:14)
- the image of God & Lord of creation (1:15)
- head of the church (1:18)
- reconciler of the universe (1:20)
- He is the essence of the mystery of God; in him all God's treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hidden (2:3)
- He is the standard by which all religious teaching is to be measured (2:8)
- In him dwells the fullness of the Godhead (2:9)
- and under him every power and authority in the universe is subjected (2:10)
- He is the reality of the truth foreshadowed by the regulations and rituals of the old covenant (2:17)
- By his cross he conquered the cosmic powers of evil (2:15)
- and following his resurrection he was enthroned at the right hand of God (3:1)
- Our life now lies hidden with God in Christ, but one day both he and we will be gloriously manifested (3:3-4)

Him

Finally, let's focus in on two passages that in their repetition of a theme dramatically and eloquently illustrate the purpose of this letter. Note the driving, insistent repetition.

Read Colossians 1:15-22.

Read Colossians 2:9-15.