



Colossians

Colossians lays out a vision of Christian living focused around the person of Christ (as laid out in the beautiful Christ-hymn of Colossians 1.15-20). In Colossians the vision of Christ, from the first chapter, is used as the underpinning for how those in Christ should now live. If they have died and risen with the Christ who created the world and is the head of the church, then their identity has now changed and they are expected to behave accordingly.

Ephesians and Colossians are often recognized to be companion books as their message is very similar



How long will it take?

Reading time: 13 mins
Short of time? Just read 1.1-2; 1.13-2.5;
 2.20-3.17



Genre

Epistle



Anything tricky?

One of the passages that a number of people find challenging is 3.18-4.1 which talks about how husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves should relate to one another. The challenge is to work out how much of this applies to the original context (i.e. the Colossians) and how much to us today.

Notice that there is a very similar passage in the companion letter, Ephesians



Inspiring quotes

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.
(Colossians 1.15-17)

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

(Colossians 3.1-3)

¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.

¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

(Colossians 3.16-17)



About the Author

The letter is attributed to Paul and Timothy in 1.1 and is signed from Paul in 4.18.

Ever since the 18th century, New Testament scholars have questioned whether the different tone, style and vocabulary might suggest that it might have been written by a later member of the Pauline community using Paul's theology as a base.

There is no absolute agreement on this, however, so as you read it, see whether you think it sounds and feels like the rest of Paul's letters or not.

What do we know about him?

Paul is probably the best known of all the early Christians. Before encountering Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus, he was a zealous Pharisee who sought to maintain the purity of Judaism. After his experience on the Damascus road, he turned his zeal to proclaiming Jesus Christ among the Gentiles. This brought him into conflict with some other early Christians, not least Peter, who thought that followers of Jesus Christ should

convert to Judaism. He travelled around the Roman Empire (though primarily in Asia Minor – modern-day Turkey – and Greece) proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ and founding communities of Christians as he went. He also wrote a large number of letters, 13 of which are preserved in the New Testament.

Colossians is traditionally thought to be one of these.

Timothy was born in Lystra in Asia Minor of a Jewish mother and Greek father. Acts 16.1-3 recounts his meeting of Paul in Lystra and of Paul's desire to take him with him on his journeys. Paul often sent Timothy to communities that he had founded to take letters to them and so that he could report to Paul about what was going on, as indeed he did with the Thessalonians (see 1 Thessalonians 3.2 and 6). Two letters in the New Testament (1 and 2 Timothy) are reputed to be letters of encouragement from Paul to Timothy in Ephesus. Christian tradition identifies Timothy as the first Bishop of Ephesus.



About the times

Colossians is said to have been written while Paul was in prison (4.3). If Paul was the author of the epistle, then this would date it to ad late 50s or early 60s. Those who do not think that Paul wrote it think that it comes from a much later date sometime between ad 75-95. This is because the themes of Colossians could be seen to reflect the needs and concerns of a later Christian community.

What were people feeling?

The question that lies behind Colossians appears to be the question of how to live out what they believed about Christ in their everyday lives. As a result Colossians has much to say to a modern audience.



How is it structured?

1.1-2	Opening greetings
1.3-12	Prayers for the Colossians
1.13-20	Christ, creator and redeemer
1.21-2.5	Paul's proclamation of the eternal mysteries of God
2.6-19	A new identity in Christ
2.20-3.17	The consequences in attitude to dying and rising with Christ
3.18-4.1	Implications of this for living in community
4.2-18	Closing prayers and greetings.



What kind of Book is it?

An Epistle, or letter – both Colossians and Ephesians are letters which offer a vision of how to live out the Christian faith. In both, the theology of the first half of the letter is applied in the second half of the letter to everyday living.



Look out for...

The language used of Christ and what this means for those who have died and risen with him.

Colossians, like Ephesians, talks a lot about how the mysteries of God have been revealed in Jesus, look out for the twin themes of mystery and revelation through the book.

Colossians begins and ends with prayer – notice what role prayer plays in what Paul has to say.



What could this mean for me?

The vision of Colossians is that what you believe about Christ must affect not only what you do, but who you are. Reflect on this as you read and ask yourself how closely you tie up in your mind the question of who Christ was with who you are.



Discussion group questions

- Were there any parts of the book that you particularly liked or which inspired you?
- Were there any parts of the book that you disliked or which troubled you?
- What did *you* think the book was about?
- What do you think it means to set your minds on the things above? What are the dangers of doing this too much? And what of doing it too little?
- Many people find the instructions about the relationship between husbands and wives, parents and children, and masters and slaves difficult in the modern world. Talk about this passage (3.18-4.1), what is your view of what is said here? [If you've already talked about Ephesians you may not want to do discuss this again here!]
- Colossians is a letter in which the argument builds from Paul's vision of who Christ is in chapter 1, to what difference this makes to us in chapter 2 and then, in chapters 3 and 4, how we should live differently as a result. Discuss this, were you convinced by Paul's argument?
- Did you read anything in the book that touched you, expanded your faith or made you think more deeply about your life and how you live it?



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