

Letter written by Paul probably from Rome, probably in AD 60 or 61.

Colossae was a city in the Lycus valley of Western Anatolia – there were two neighbouring cities Laodicea and Hierapolis. Not far from Sardis.

Paul was probably based in Ephesus during his years evangelising Asia but he no doubt organised planting the church at Colossae and all the seven churches addressed in Revelation.

Was probably a prosperous church which blunted its witness.

Probably after this letter was written all the churches in Asia turned away from Paul's teaching – 2 Tim 1:15

Paul warns against excessive ascetism, Angel worship (2:18) and “would be” religion (2:23) – maybe they were into a Jewish form of Pythagorean worship. There also seem to be elements of Gnosticism (2:18). The Colossae heresies chiefly threatened the deity of Christ and personal freedom from dietary and other worship restrictions.

To counter heresies Paul starts off with a firm grounding of Christology and stressing the superiority of Christ to all other powers – this leads to Paul playing down the role of the spirit (1:27).

1:1-2

Paul associates Timothy with himself as author – like Philemon, but unlike Ephesians. Timothy was obviously sharing in Paul's ministry on an important and permanent basis. Timothy was from Lystra (half Jewish half Greek) and converted by Paul. Neither Epaphras or Timothy are called apostles.

1:3-8

Thanksgiving. Paul only omits this from Galatians. Even though he joined others in Paul normally says “I” – here he says “we”.

V5 – hope – many of the blessings lie ahead

V7 – Colossae originally evangelised by Epaphras

V8 – most of the news good, but some bad which is what prompted Paul to write. This is the only reference to the Spirit in the letter.

1:9-14

Prayer for Colossians welfare

V9 – Paul prays for heart knowledge as opposed to head knowledge (understandable given the problems in the church and the Gnostic emphasis of those trying to lead them astray).

V10 – if the Colossian church has this right knowledge they will live and act in a manner worthy of God.

V11 – praying for the power of God in their lives, not some other power see Ephesians 1:20. The idea of patient endurance sounds Stoic, but the idea of combining this with joyfulness is uniquely Christian.

V12 who are the saints ?people or angels. Angels is supported by Qumran texts. Similar to Daniel 7:18,22

V13 our inheritance is not of this world but better than the promised land – and we get this even as gentiles. “Dominion of darkness” – see words of Jesus Luke 22:53 (see also Ephesians 6:10) – sinister Satanic forces. Jesus rescued us from these forces by his conquest of evil and death on the cross. These sort of powers are probably the sort of forces to which the Colossae Christians were paying homage. Paul is saying they don’t need to do that any more.

This verse is saying the we have ALREADY been rescued. Interesting that he says kingdom of the Son and not the kingdom of God – he seems to use God for the future and the Son for now – see 1Corinthians 15:24.

V14 we have redemption NOW and it’s Christ who gained it for us – this verse doesn’t say how he did it, although we know it’s by the cross. We each appropriate this redemption to ourselves as we come to faith.

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1:15-20

Hymn in honour of Christ – honours Christ for what he has done expressed in verses 13-14. We need to thoroughly understand this so as not to be led astray. Prose is like early Christian hymns.

V15 “image of invisible God” – similar to image of God 2 Corinthians 4:4. Christ perfectly reveals the nature and being of God. God also created us in his image – it’s because we are in God’s image that Christ could be incarnated as a man.

V16 reminiscent of the prologue to John’s gospel – I don’t think we should make too much of the difference “in him” and “through him” – the “by him” at the end of the verse could probably be better translated “through him” as per NKJV and John’s gospel. The mention of thrones and powers is probably put in especially to address the Colossae heresy. Note everything was made FOR Christ – he is the goal of all creation.

V17 really restates the teaching of v15-16. Like John’s prologue he was before the universe and he sustains it.

V18 Paul now says something new – Christ is the head of the church, his body – see 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. Christ is the source of the life of the church and also its Lord. It’s the risen Christ who is the head.

V19 repeats that Christ is absolutely pre-eminent.

V20 Christ's work on the cross has reconciled us to God and not merely us but all things. All creation was blighted by the Fall – that's why there has to be a new creation at the end of the age. BUT this is not universalism.

V21 reminds us that we were all sinners alienated from God.

V22 Justification image – needed, Christ speaks of judgement. Emphasis is death of Christ's physical body which emphasises the real incarnation of Christ (probably a misunderstanding of the nature of the incarnation was part of the Colossae heresy).

V23 we need to remain firmly on the one foundation of our faith. Paul is himself a miracle of heavenly grace.

1:24 – 2:7

Paul's stewardship of the divine mystery

V24 Paul now talks about his own part in the ministry. By bearing hardship himself he was entering into Christ's sufferings BUT he is not saying Christ's work on the cross needs to be supplemented.

V25 Paul states his view of his commission

V26 the message Paul has been given is a mystery – hitherto concealed, but now revealed (the revelation interpretation pattern goes back to Daniel). Christ himself is the mystery.

V28 Paul and the apostles proclaim Christ. There is no elite all can receive this gospel. The repetition of everyone suggests a fight against Gnostic teaching of special revelation.

2: 1-5

Concern for Christians in the area

V1 Paul is struggling for all believers in opposition to false teaching and false belief.

BUT we need to differentiate between "special knowledge" and our duty as Christians to study God's word.

V4-5 Anxiety less believers may be misled – wants to keep them focussed on Christ.

2:6-7

Maintaining the Tradition of Christ

Tradition – strong Jewish derivation. Faith in Christ gives us a truth which nothing can subvert. They will have ample time to overflow with gratitude to God.

2:8-15

The all sufficiency of Christ – the heart of the heresy. It sounds like they were denying the reality of the incarnation. The universe was brought into being through Christ and all wisdom is accessible through him.

V8 don't deviate from the gospel to worldly views

V9 Christ the God/Man

V11-12 The new circumcision – baptism is a spiritual circumcision. This new spiritual circumcision entirely does away with the need for a physical circumcision. New baptism is a participation in Christ's death and the old self is stripped off and the new "Christ self" put on.

V13 God forgave our sins even whilst we were still sinful.

V14 we were bankrupt under the law, but Christ did away with that on the cross – he took the bill of our debt and nailed it to the cross. Jesus' accusation was nailed to the cross and so was ours.

V15 the cross not only dealt with the forgiveness of sins but was a triumph over evil.

2:16-23

Guard your freedom

V16-17 we have freedom in relation to food and religious festivals. We settle things between our individual consciences and God.

V18-19 freedom in respect of ascetism and angel worship. We shouldn't feel disqualified by shows of apparently superior humility. Colossian heresy probably involved angel worship. We must remain under the direction of Christ.

V20-23 when we died with Christ in the death of baptism we died to the rules and principles of this world. Death severed the bond which bound a slave to his master, so our baptism ends our slavery to sin. The world has negative rules Don't, Don't – we do what is right without all these negatives, we need to grow. Negative prohibitions are typical of worldly wisdom, but they don't conform to the true spirit of the gospel. It's all part of the truth that we can't save ourselves by works.

Colossians 3

You were raised with Christ ... therefore V1-4. Not only did the Colossians die with Christ, but they have been raised from the dead with him. When Christ was resurrected he ascended to glory – so what does that mean for us? We continue in our earthly bodies, but have embarked on a new way of life empowered by Christ.

V1 The idea of Christ seated at the right hand of God goes back to a Messianic interpretation of Psalm 110:1. Jesus refers to that Psalm on two occasions recorded in the gospels. In this section Paul is really saying what has been done for us in Christ is the argument and incentive towards Christian living. We no longer have a private life of our own and we possess the fruits of the resurrection here and now.

V2 let what is above give character to all we do. Judge everything by heavenly standards

V3 we have died to the old order

V4 our lives are safely hidden (tucked away) with Christ. Paul said that for him to live was Christ, here he is saying that's true for all believers. He's not only their life but their hope.

Christ's second coming when we shall be made like him is unknown but that coming is certain.

V3:5 – 4:6 The Christian Life. Teaching already given is now applied in detailed practice. Ethical teaching starts to be divided into categories which could be easily taught and remembered – “put off”, “put on”, “be subject” “watch and pray”.

V5-11 Put Off. Now that we are new men and women in Christ, live like that.

V5 put off, put to death. Reckon as dead those things which are part of the old life – an extension of the meaning of members not literally parts of our bodies. Paul sees sin as dwelling in those parts of our bodies which commit those sins. Because we have died in Christ the domination of old habits is broken. We exist on two planes – spiritually we belong to the world to come, physically we are of this world. Fornication – prohibited sexual relations – so common in the Graeco Roman world that it was necessary to continually stress it. Impurity is wider, it includes misuse of sex, but includes other kinds of moral evil. The list climaxes with covetousness which is equated with idolatry (Eph 5:5) – it's idolatry because we are valuing earthly things ahead of God.

V6 the v5 vices merit retribution

V7 Paul reminds the Colossians that they used to be numbered amongst such sinners.

V8 tells them to put off these old sins like you would cast off old clothes that no longer fitted

V9 another sin that polluted us was lying. New nature being continually renewed with a progressive increase in knowledge renewed in conformity to the image of the Creator.

V10 the life and power of Christ is constantly renewed as we become more Christ like. The Gnostic heresy knowledge being offered to the Colossians was a poor thing in comparison to the knowledge of Christ.

V11 not only old sinful habits are done away with in our new life, but also barriers between people – racial, religious, cultural, economic and status barriers (reminiscent of Gal 3:28). Note Paul sending back Onesimus no longer as a slave but as a brother. No male and female doesn't mean that distinguishing roles are abolished but inequality. So in the Christian church a slave could be a leader – what a revolutionary concept and slaves could face trials and persecutions courageously e.g the slave girl Blandina in the Rhone valley in AD177. Solidarity was displayed when the Roman matron Perpetua stood hand in hand with her slave girl Felicitas in the arena.

V3:12-17 Put On. All those of us who have put on the “new man” should manifest those qualities.

V12 all believers are Christ's chosen people. So we should all manifest something of the divine qualities. God's kindness and severity are both divine qualities. Kindness is one of the nine fruits of the spirit. Gentleness is akin to patience. God shows patience towards the chosen people and sinners.

V13 We need mutual tolerance Jesus' standard was high (Matt 18:22). This mutual tolerance and forgiveness should mark all our relations with each other. We need to forgive each other in order to be forgiven.

V14 and above all else have grace which binds all the other virtues together. Love your neighbour as yourself. Love is the fulfilment of God's law which does your neighbour nothing but good.

V15 peace is a bond in the unity of the spirit. When hostile forces have to be kept away peace garrisons the believers heart (see Phil 4:7). Here the peace of Christ has to be accepted as an arbitrator to regulate relations between believers. Peace is a prominent fruit of the spirit.

V16 the word needs to be in us individually and also as a community. Christians should be able to teach and instruct one another – but wisely and tactfully. Mutual instruction and praise of God go hand in hand. Singing at church meetings is recommended with a thankful heart.

V17 a summing up covering every aspect of life. We don't have a detailed code of rules we need to do whatever we do for the glory of God. We need to do what Jesus would do. Can we do whatever we are doing without compromising our Christian values, can we do it in Christ's name?

V3:18-4:1 Be Subject. We have a duty of mutual deference – see also Col 3:18-4:1 and Ephesians 5. Generally the head of a household was a man but it could be a woman e.g. Lydia Acts 16:15, or Chloe of Corinth 1 Cor 1:11, or Nympha of the Lycus valley Col 4:15.

V18 the family was long established the church was not, but women have already been given equal status – however, it was not good for the church to destabilize society – but the words as is fitting in the Lord bearing in mind the earlier teaching on equality mean that a husband be given his traditional role but he must have due deference to his wife – and as we see in the next verse he must love her.

V19 the husband's role is naturally the counterpoint of the wife's role. He must love her and care for her, she defers to him.

V20-21 then come the mutual duties of children and parents. Children are called on to complete obedience to their parents BUT parental orders and discipline must correspond to Christian values. Parents are called on to be reasonable and not upset their children. Let parents see that they deserve obedience.

V3:22-4:1 Slaves and Masters. I think in the modern context this includes employees.

V22 they should obey their employees in orders in accord with Christian values. We also need to look at the letter to Philemon. As Paul says he was a slave is a freedman of the Lord and he who was free is a slave of Christ (1 Cor 7:21-22). We should be faithful and conscientious employees – not for fear of earthly masters but for fear of our heavenly master.

V25 we shall all be judged – there may have been unrest here amongst slaves at the time given the emphasis on the wrongdoer. Judgement on disobedience is as certain as reward for faithfulness.

V4:1 if slaves have their duties, so do masters – they must treat slaves fairly and justly. These don't fully apply today, but the underlying principles do.

V4:2-6 Watch and Pray.

V2 Prayer and Thanksgiving can't be separated. We need to engage in powerful repeated prayer.

V3-4 As in Eph 6:18 this gives rise to a specific request for prayer for Paul and his team. His request is really that a door be opened for his message of the gospel. Paul was preaching and teaching whilst he was under house arrest.

V5 his readers are asked to behave wisely with non-Christians. We are told to take opportunities to witness.

V6 we are asked to witness with grace and wisdom. Jesus promises that we will be given the right words that can't be resisted (Luke 21:15). We should always be prepared to defend and promote the gospel with gentleness and reverence.

V7-9 Paul's messengers. The reference to Tychicus is almost the same as that in Ephesians so probably he took both letters and maybe a letter to Laodicea as well (if so now lost) (see v16). Onesimus was bound just for Colossae on business we find in the letter to Philemon.

V10-14 Greetings from Paul's companions. Greetings from six of Paul's friends.

V10 we see that Mark was Barnabus' cousin.

V14 we see that Luke was a doctor

V15-17 Messages to friends. Here we learn of Nympha the household head mentioned earlier.

V18 final greetings. Paul like many ancient letter writers dictated his letters, but signed them at the end to confirm their genuineness. Don't forget that I'm in chains was probably a final plea for prayer.