

Colossians Introduction

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[0 : 00] Well, we're starting a new series, the book of Colossians. I love the book of Colossians. It's a great little book. And to get started here, I just want to read verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1 of Colossians, and then we will get rolling here this morning.

It says in chapter 1, beginning in verse 1, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Let's pray. Father, thank you for the privilege of being able to come and to look at your word and to preach and to take some understanding from this word that you've given and apply it to our lives.

And we pray that you would give us what we need and help us to be satisfied in you. In Christ's name, amen. All right, so let's talk a little bit about preaching for just a second.

Preaching, it is perhaps one of the craziest things that we do. Educational theory would say that you do not remember more than about 10% of what you hear.

[1 : 13] And yet, this is exactly the thing that Paul the Apostle, through the Lord Jesus Christ, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tells us we need to be doing. As a matter of fact, Paul the Apostle understood how crazy this thing called preaching is as he says that it's the foolishness of preaching.

And a part of the reason that we preach, and a part of the reason that we do this, you know, back in the day, I remember that preaching was all about how someone said something, instead of what they said.

You know, how you said something, if you were funny, if you had stories, if you were entertaining, if you kept people's attention, you knew all the rules of rhetoric, and people would enjoy it. And because they enjoyed it, they would want to come and listen again.

But the problem with that is that Paul, you know, tells us in 1 Corinthians that what he wants to do is to know nothing except Christ and him crucified.

We want to be people who love preaching because of what it says, not because of how it says it.

Now, I do believe that how you say something is important, but it cannot be the primary reason why I listen to preaching.

[2 : 26] It has to be for what it is saying. And the reason that we preach is because the word of God, you will remember, is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Every word is from God himself. And when he gives to us his word, and when it is rightly interpreted, and that is then told, it's as though the voice of God is speaking.

And I cannot understand the number of people who want to hear God, but then they jettison preaching out of their life. That makes no sense to me at all.

And maybe it's because I'm a pastor and a preacher, you know. Maybe that's just it. But I don't think so. I think the truth of the matter is, is that this is the word of God. And we want to know what God said.

And so what I'm trying to do as I preach is I'm trying to take what this has said, what it meant for them, and then what that means for us today and how to apply it.

[3 : 34] And I would just say this as well. You have to always remember that there is only one meaning to every passage. There might be multiple applications of that, but it only means one thing.

And so what we want to do is we want to find that one thing using the rules of interpretation to get there and see what it is. One of the things that I do when I'm preaching through a new book of the Bible is I like to do an introduction to the book.

I like to sort of lay the framework, lay the groundwork. And I'm taking the book as a whole and giving to you some pieces of it to kind of help you get your hands around it so that you can read it for yourself.

And I'm going to encourage you to read the book of Colossians at least once a week for the remainder of the time while we're preaching on this, which will be not a short time. That's all I will say to you.

It will take you 12 minutes to read through the book of Colossians. It's not very long, but it is packed full.

[4 : 36] And I want to persuade you to study Colossians, to study Colossians, and to just soak in the marrow of everything that's in this book and get it all out.

Get all the goody out of it that you can. And I want to persuade you with that by giving you three reasons this morning, and that's my sermon, okay? Here are the reasons.

Number one, because we still struggle with smallness. We still struggle with smallness. Now, I'm going to talk about the city of Colossae for just a second. I've got a couple of maps here for you. Let's see the first one. All right, so this is a map. You can recognize the large landmass there on the right-hand side. That's modern-day Turkey, right? That's modern-day Turkey.

Can you see where Italy is? See where Italy is? All right, so my red arrow is pointing right to where Colossae was, okay? Now, my next map is going to zoom in on that little spot, okay?

[5 : 35] So here's the next one. You see there's Colossae, and over to its west is the city of Laodicea. They were about 11 miles from one another. Colossae is on the river, right?

Laodicea is to its west, and it is about 11 miles. We're going to zoom in one more time. And there's another city to the north of it called Hy...

Oh, no, I'm not going to be able to say it. Hierapolis, Hierapolis, Hierapolis. Those three cities are pretty close to one another, and they make up this little Lycos Valley, or the Lycos River runs through there.

And in the 150, 130 B.C., this was a thriving place. Colossae, Laodicea, Hierapolis were all big cities.

As a matter of fact, it was considered a great port. And as a matter of fact, its primary industry was wool export. They exported a lot of wool, and their wool was black wool because there were volcanoes nearby, and the ash would get into some of the rivers, streams, ponds, whatever, and they would take the wool and go dye it in that ash of the volcanoes.

[6 : 53] But something happened to this little area. About 60 A.D., an earthquake hit this area.

The earthquake was so massive, it destroyed all three cities. And though they all built back, Colossae never, ever reached back to its full potential that it once had.

As a matter of fact, it was considered just a small village. And not long after that, the road that normally went through there was rerouted in another direction, and eventually Colossae, by 300 A.D., ceased to be a city at all.

As a matter of fact, there's a picture. And this picture is standing on the mound in Colossae, looking out towards the mountains. And I just wanted to show you kind of the ruggedness of the area that it reminds me of a place that sort of time has forgotten.

It's one of the cities in the New Testament that has never been excavated for archaeological purposes at all. It's still just buried and forgotten.

[8 : 03] I think that's interesting. The church. The church was started most likely because in Ephesus, in Acts 19, verse 10, it talks about how Paul's been in Ephesus.

He's been preaching there. And there's a gentleman who was probably there. This is all probably because it's a little bit of a speculation. This man's name is Epiphras. You'll find him in chapter 1, verse 7 of Colossians.

He probably heard and went back to the region of Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis, and shared with them and planted three churches in each of these cities.

As a matter of fact, look at Colossians 4, 12 through 13. Here's what's fascinating to me.

Here's an unknown, shrinking, natural disaster-affected agricultural town with a pastor nobody knows about.

[9 : 24] And the only way we know anything about any of it is because Paul wrote the book of Colossians. Sounds like the town that time forgot a little bit.

Paul wrote the letter and probably wrote the letter because there was a runaway slave who came to him while he was in prison from Colossae, from a member in the church at Colossae.

And Epiphras came maybe to look for this slave, but also to tell Paul that the church was facing troubles. You can see those names in Philemon.

There's only one chapter in Philemon, but Philemon, verse 23, and Colossians 4, 9. That's where you get that. And as Paul is writing to kind of help clear the scope of things for the church, I find it fascinating that Colossians is one of the best books in all the Bible to give us the doctrine of Christ, to give us a glimpse of the glory and the splendor that is Jesus Christ.

And he writes to this church who faces extinction because people leave. Our culture is bent on the idea that bigger is better.

[10:53] When it comes to land that you buy, when it comes to Chick-fil-A and you want to supersize that, when it comes to watching a football team walk out and you see all of those guys looking a ton larger than all those guys, or you can look at a football team and look at how many people are lined up on the sidelines and over here, and we say they're a bigger team, they have more depth, and it's considered a better thing.

But, you know, there are things that are small that are considered much better than things that are big, like laparoscopic surgery. That's better. But the problem is that this bleeds over into the church, and we have this mindset that a bigger church means it's more successful.

That a larger attendance means that this is successful. And churches will even think back to their heyday when they had larger attendances, and they were saying, well, that was then and that was their success days.

Those were the golden days. In the Southern Baptist Convention, it is a thing to talk among pastors about how big the church is, how many people you're baptizing, and what you're going to do to grow bigger even next year.

And I'm not against there being a large group of people who attend, but you have to understand that success of a church is not defined by the numbers of people who attend.

[12:16] If so, then the heretic Joel Osteen would be a superstar. You do not judge things based upon the attendance of those who were there. Paul did not write to this little bitty church and say to them, listen, guys, what's wrong with your attendance?

You're all tiny and small in your little natural disaster area. Why aren't you any bigger than you are now? You should have already had at least double the number of people coming to your place. Here's 10 tips for having more attendance at your church. Paul doesn't write any of that. What does Paul write to them? Look to Christ. Love Christ.

Obey Christ. And I'm here to tell you, God knows where First Baptist Church Medina is. And it does not matter how big or how small we are.

It matters one thing. Look to Christ. Love Christ. Obey Christ. Obey Christ.

[13:26] So that's the first reason that we want to study the book of Colossians, is to get our mindset that it's not about the size of the church. It's about the God we serve. The God we serve.

All right. Second reason. We struggle with syncretism. Wow, that's a mouthful. Syncretism. I'm not going to explain that word yet, but I'm going to come back to it and explain it to you.

Some of you may already know what it means. But there's a couple of ingredients I need to put together into this reason here. The first ingredient is that Colossae had a strange form of Judaism. Now, when I say Judaism, I mean some kind of Jewish religion. You'll remember when we preach through the book of Galatians, they had a form of Judaism that was legalistic.

They were called Judaizers. And they were telling people that if you really want to be in heaven with God, you're going to have to work for it. You're going to have to do some work, and you're going to have to earn God's grace.

[14:26] You're going to have to earn that thing. That's what the Galatians were being taught. Well, this group of, this Judaism, they were different.

They were called the Essenes. I think I have a slide that says, yeah, there you go, the Essenes. These Essenes were not legalists. Not at all. What the Essenes were, were something kind of like spiritual elites.

Spiritual elites. They were, in their estimation, the most enlightened. They had arrived spiritually to a place of perfection.

And that was due, in their mind, to going out into the desert, to live like monks, separated out from society, practicing all of their rituals, from circumcision to baptism to whatever else they could come up with.

Their rituals then made them the spiritual elite. And as they showed up in Colossae, and they came to the church at Colossae, they looked at these Christians and said, you believe in Jesus, great

start, great start.

[15 : 38] We like that, but you're missing something. We can help you become more full. We can help you become complete.

We can help you finish your training, if you will. So that was one part of the problem. The other part of the problem was the beginning stages of a thing called Gnosticism.

Gnosticism. Woo, Gnosticism. We're having all kinds of big words this morning. Gnosticism.

Gnostics. It comes from the Greek word gnosis. It means knowledge.

Knowledge. This was a... Okay, I'm going to see if I can explain this and not lose you here, okay?

And let me just say this. Everything I'm about to say is false and wrong, right?

This is what bad people thought, okay? So don't think to yourself, oh, is that what you think? No, I don't. If you say I think that, hmm, there's going to be trouble. Okay, so Gnosticism said that there was a supreme God who lived in the Pleroma.

[16 : 40] Everybody say Pleroma. Pleroma. The Pleroma is kind of like a heaven. The word means fullness, right? So this God, and there's several myths, I guess you could say, about how this happened, but one of them goes like this, that as he descended into the abyss of the waters, now why was he doing that?

I don't know. He saw his reflection in the water and that reflection became a divine being that they called an aeon. And then that divine being saw his reflection and it became a divine being.

And this happened infinite number of times. So you get down here pretty close to this spot here where one of them, one of them who was really bad dude, decided that he wanted to create something and they already knew that matter was evil and spirit good, which is why none of them had created anything.

But this one decided he's going to create things. So he says, let there be light. Yes, that's right. In the Gnostics view, the God who said let there be light is the evil God who trapped all of the cosmos into matter.

Okay? So these different aeons began to be trapped into matter and the Gnostics believing that spirit is good and matter is evil, the goal is to escape from matter and just be spirit and return back to the pleroma from which they came.

[18 : 14] And for them, since the body was evil because it's matter, then you could either indulge it in whatever you wanted to do because it didn't matter because it was matter or I'm on a roll here.

Okay. Or you had to beat it into submission. You had to be aesthetic. Okay? You had to treat it with asceticism. I'm going to come back to that word here in a little bit.

It's another word we'll define. And that is to self-deny, right? To do things to... And by doing that and then learning the secret knowledge, you could escape matter and go back to the pleroma.

They believed as they looked at the Christians then, you have started down the right path. Jesus is a good guy. He's one of us.

He's an aeon who's discovered the secret knowledge. And now that you've started with Jesus, we will finish your training. We will help you come to more fullness.

[19 : 20] We will help you arrive at the pleroma by learning the secret knowledge that we have. As a matter of fact, they had developed secret societies that they kept secret from the public, their views in order to hold sway over people so that they could do with them what they wanted to.

And you had to come to the spiritual elites to be able to get the information that you wanted. The Colossians were facing this spiritual elitism of Judaism on one side, this spiritual elitist Gnosticism on another side.

And now we come to our word, syncretism. Syncretism. It comes from two parts. It comes from sin, which means together or to join together.

And Cretans. You know what a Cretan is, right? Somebody from the island of Crete. The Greeks used to use this word, syncretism, to define somebody who was a Greek who was becoming a traitor and going to work with the Cretans.

They were syncretists. They joined the Cretans. It began to be used in philosophy then to say, taking different viewpoints and marrying them together.

[20 : 38] A good example of that would be if you believe that Jesus is real and Zeus is real, you could end up having juice. Or Zesus.

Either one, right? And so your whole worldview just gets all messed up because you're pulling from all these things and you have your own bespoke worldview. You know what bespoke means?

That's an English term for you people. Like, that's custom. Why don't they just say custom instead of bespoke? Anyway, that's a whole other thing. So it's your own custom worldview that you pull together from, and that's what's happening there at Colossae.

There are these false teachers that are coming in and they're pulling from the Judaism, they're pulling from the Gnosticism, Gnosticism, and they're putting Christian garb all around it and coming up with a whole new thing. And that's why Paul had to write to the Colossians to help them to fight against these things.

As a matter of fact, let me give you one good example of where Paul is really hitting at this. Look at Colossians 2, verse 8. He says, See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.

[21 : 51] So you can kind of see he's starting to take aim at these things, right? The next verse says, For in him all the pleroma of deity dwells in bodily form.

The Gnostics said you can get back to pleroma. The Bible says Jesus is the pleroma. You don't have to go to the fullness of deity.

He is the fullness. Of deity. It goes even further. It says, I think in verse 9, And in him you have been made Anybody want to take a guess what the word complete is?

Pleroma. You have been made complete. You have been made pleroma in the sense that you are complete and full in Christ.

So you don't lack anything. That's what Paul is telling these Colossians. Listen, all these people around you telling you that they'll finish off what you've started.

[23 : 01] They'll give you secret knowledge to help you mature. These people are leading you astray trying to take you captive. And the truth of the matter is is that Christ is the fullness.

And since you're in Christ you have all that you need. Jesus is enough. He is enough. I mean, you could say it this way.

The world around us is Darth Vader. And it's telling us turn to the dark side and I will finish your training that Master Yoda started.

Do you understand what I'm saying? You get what I'm laying down? Like that's just it. The world around us is constantly after us wanting to finish off what Jesus has started in us. I'll give you an example.

There's a lot of things that come at the church. There's a lot of people that write books. A lot of people that say things. In one heretical book by Sarah Young called Jesus Calling she says this.

[24 : 06] I knew that God communicated with me through the Bible but I yearned for more. The Bible is not enough.

I want more knowledge. I want some knowledge that doesn't come from the Bible but just comes directly from God. You mean the Holy Spirit of God who in perfection inspired over 40 men to write the very thoughts of God the very actions of God the very truths that God wanted us to know the Holy Spirit who took Moses and who took King David the Holy Spirit who took Peter and Paul and John and James and moved them by his power and they wrote that which is inerrant.

They wrote that which is infallible. They wrote that which is irresistible. They wrote that which is sufficient. They wrote that which was authoritative.

They wrote that which was clear. They wrote that which was powerful and living and active. A sharp two-edged sword. It is God who promises that this word would not return void.

He's the one who says that his word would outlast creation because as the grass withers the word of God stands forever. It's the word of God that Jeremiah calls a fire and a hammer to destroy false prophets.

[25 : 50] It is the word of God by which Jesus Christ sanctifies and washes his bride to ready her for eternity. And this is what we're saying is not enough for us.

You see what I'm saying? The Colossian heresy is still with us today. That we need more than just Jesus. We need more than just his word.

We need more than what he's given us. Another example I've been to Tanzania twice and both times talking to the pastors that were there did a Michelle went with me the second time we did a pastor's conference there and one of the things that I got into conversations with them about is sort of how things took place and how churches were planted there and a Protestant church would make inroads into a community which in some of these communities where there had been no

church to make inroads into a community is a big deal.

I mean it takes a lot of work. And so a Protestant church would get there and they would begin and they wouldn't really have a lot of backing because Protestant churches just generally historically don't have a lot of money behind them as they do missions compared to the Catholic church. And that's one of the things that would happen is Catholic churches would come in to these communities and they would meet up with these Protestant Christians in these communities and they would say it's great that you've started with Jesus now let us help you come to more full faith in Jesus and what it's all about.

[27 : 19] Beloved we need to study Colossians. We need to study Colossians because there are people out there constantly who want to finish out our training when Jesus is enough be they Mormons Jehovah's Witness Catholics prosperity gospel pagans atheists it doesn't matter who they are we have all we need in Christ and that's why we need to study Colossians to understand who he is and what we have.

Let me get to my third point then. Third point is this we still struggle with sin. these groups when they come in they begin to teach you have to understand that fighting sin has everything to do with having right theology as well.

You know Paul talks about how that all of these sins are contrary to sound doctrine. He says that in several places like Titus and Timothy and so as he comes here at the beginning and so what you got to do when you read Colossians you understand that chapter 1-2 is roughly all theology. Chapter 3-4 is roughly all practical stuff. And at the very beginning his first thing he's coming to them with is the practical stuff of how they need to fight against sin.

And listen to what he says in chapter 3 beginning in verse 1. Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ keep seeking the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your mind on the things above and not on the things that are on earth.

[28 : 56] For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. He goes on from there to talk about how they need to fight sin. He gives lists of sins. He talks about how they need to count themselves as dead to sin and alive to God.

He talks about how they need to replace the sin. That the way the fight is with sin is that you have to first get your mind upon Christ.

You have to have your mind flooded with thoughts of Jesus Christ and the triune God. You have to think where he is. You have to get your mind in heaven and off of earth.

And of course I know somebody's going to say to me well you know you can be so heavenly minded you can be of no earthly good. But I've never seen anybody like that. I've just seen a lot of people who have their minds so fixed upon earth that heaven doesn't want to use them.

Right. We need to be so heavenly minded that we are of earthly good. You can't fight sin. You can't preach the gospel unless your mind is consumed with Christ.

[30 : 08] The false teachers would encourage them to indulge the flesh or practice asceticism. Let's go back to asceticism for just a second. Do I have that word up there? Look at that.

Asceticism. Asceticism is the practice of strict self-denial as a measure for spiritual gain. It's a practice of strict self-denial for a measure of spiritual gain.

You do something to yourself in order to stop that. Now Paul doesn't start there. Right. Paul talks about how you fight sin but these other groups are talking about it too.

And they're saying you live in self-denial. You see the fruit of the spirit is self-control not self-denial. Too often we've lived in this land that we've got to deny it in such a way as to live this ascetic life where we're constantly berating ourselves somehow, denying ourselves somehow in order to fight against sin.

As a matter of fact this is their teaching. Colossians chapter 2 verse 20 and 21. He says, Paul says, if you've died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why as if you were living in the world do you submit yourself to decrees such as do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

[31 : 35] So these false teachers, that's their phrase. That's their motto. Their motto is do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. It's a little bit like the movie The Village.

If you've ever seen the movie The Village by M. Night Shyamala, it's this idea that these modern people wanted to escape from their own sin by finding some commune in the wilds of Florida and setting up a village that had zero modern conveniences, no way to contact the outside world.

And what the movie shows is that they actually take their sin with them into this village and they can't get rid of sin by denying stuff on the outside. You do not fight sin by just getting rid of things. You fight sin by a change of heart. You look at Christ, you love Christ, and you obey Christ. Paul says it this way.

He talks about putting off and putting on. I've often said Christians should never break sinful habits. Christians should change sinful habits to godly habits.

[32 : 47] Look at this. Colossians chapter 3, verse 5. Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, which amounts to idolatry.

So there's that put off, right? Consider yourself dead. Get rid of this. Don't have these things. Then, verse 10, and have put on the new self who is being renewed in a true knowledge according to the image of the one who created him.

So in other words, the image of God in us was ruined by sin, and when we become Christians, we now live with this image being renewed, right? We put on this new self, and look what happens in verse 12.

So as those who have been chosen by God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion and kindness and humility and gentleness and patience. In other words, you can't tell one of your children to stop doing a sinful thing without showing them the thing that they need to put on.

If they are in Christ, it's a put off and put on thing. Get your mind on Christ. And we as Christians, even though we've been saved, our biggest battle in life is with our own sin.

[34 : 02] That's the biggest battle we fight. We fight sin in our marriages as selfishness and callousness and harshness and disrespect.

We fight sin in our parenting as we judge our children with phrases like, I can't believe you would do that, or when I was your age. We sin against our coworkers as anger gets the better of us.

We sin with our bodies. We sin with our minds. We sin with our desires. And sometimes our sin is just with our desires. There would be people who would have us fight sin by telling us, do not handle, do not taste, and do not touch.

Think about drunkenness. Think about how drunkenness has been fought in the church.

Drunkenness has been fought in the church by saying, do not handle, do not taste, and do not touch.

I heard a sermon from a pastor preaching against alcohol using the Gnostic phrase, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch. You're never going to fight drunkenness.

[35 : 08] Everybody agrees drunkenness is a sin. What's not is taking a drink. That's not. And yet what we've done is we've said, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

Well, okay, so somebody abides by that. You still have someone who at heart, at heart's a drunk even if he never takes another drink. Because it is from the heart that sin comes.

Listen to this from Jesus in Matthew chapter 15. He says, are you still lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that everything that goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is eliminated?

But the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile a man. For out of the heart comes evil thoughts.

Out of the heart comes murderers, and adulteries, and fornications, and thefts, and false witness, and slanders, and drunkenness.

[36 : 10] These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man. The Colossians needed to understand the proper way to fight sin is to get to the root cause to look at the heart.

You get your eyes on Jesus, which helps you to understand what's going on with you. You put off the old thing. You put on the new thing. And for instance, with drunkenness, what is the put off, put on for drunkenness?

Ephesians chapter 5. Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. Lord, the overflow of our heart, the mouth speaks.

I want you to be able to fight against sin the way the Bible says, because you and I both know there's coming a day.

You see, here's the way it is right now. The way it is right now is that a lot of us, we know something's a sin, and we try to avoid it. And the way we try to avoid it is that we have certain social pressures, certain personal goals that we have upon ourselves.

[37 : 22] And by our sheer willpower, we do not submit to that sin. But you and I both know that there's coming a day as this body decays and this mind begins to decay, that I have less and less control over that sheer force of will.

And what I want is I want us to fight our sin the way God wants us to, so that on that day, what comes out of me is just Jesus. It's just Jesus.

And because of that, we need to study Colossians. We need to take a look at this book. And we need to really dive into it. And we need to take it apart to understand how do we fight sin.

And I'll just say one final thing. I'm going to read one final scripture. It's Colossians chapter 2, verse 13 and 14. And there's some of you that a lot of what I'm saying doesn't really make a lot of sense because maybe it's because you're really not a Christian.

And I just want you to know that we're going to study Colossians too because it speaks to those who aren't Christians and it says that there is hope for you. That you don't have to stay in that position forever.

[38 : 40] You don't have to live without God in this world and then die under his wrath. You can be set free. And this is what these verses talk about. In verse 13 it says, When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us.

And he's taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. What was against us? What showed our sinfulness?

What was the legal document? What was the indictment against us? Jesus took it and nailed it to the cross and paid for it.

And we can be set free because of what he's done. My prayer is that you will love Jesus more as we learn about him from Colossians.

Let's pray together. Well,