

Colossians Overview

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

J.B. Phillips, in his book, *Your God is Too Small*, writes this. Many men and women today are living often with inner dissatisfaction without any faith in God at all.

This is not because they are particularly wicked or selfish or, as the old-fashioned would say, quote-unquote, godless, but because they have not found with their adult mind, a god big enough to account for life, big enough to, quote, fit in with the new scientific age, big enough to command their highest admiration and respect, and consequently, their willing cooperation.

Phillips wrote this in 1952, but I think it speaks to our age today as well. Certainly, discussion of God, and particularly the God of Christianity in public square, is unfailingly characterized as a God whose weakness and insufficiency are on display in various ways.

The hypocrisy of believers. The growth of naturalistic materialism. Increasing ignorance in what the Bible actually says about who God is.

[1 : 53] The conflation of Christianity with social or political movements have all weakened our understanding of who God truly is.

And have undermined the perception of God in the public square. Maybe you're here this morning, and you feel this acutely.

You wonder about the God of Christianity. Perhaps you're here exploring. We're welcoming you. We're glad you're here. But, you know, I don't think this weakness is simply something that's outside of the church.

In fact, I think it's prevalent within the church just as much. In our own hearts, we struggle. We struggle to think, is God big enough for our modern world?

Is God big enough for the complexity that I face every day? So often, we find ourselves excluding God and thinking He is too small in areas of modern expertise like medicine or psychology or management.

[3 : 04] We question God's ability to be big enough in the face of natural and human disasters. We're in the face of personal pain and suffering.

In our modern world, our increasing sense of our own control makes us doubt whether God is actually in control. And as we face the ongoing and insistent gnawing of our soul that we were making for something more in this life than what we're experiencing, yet we still doubt whether God could be the answer, whether God could be the direction we could go to find the satisfaction that our souls crave and long for.

And so, Phillips poses a question to us, our society and our church. Is God actually big enough for the complexity of the lives that you face?

Is He big enough to command your highest admiration and respect? Is He big enough to command your willing cooperation with Him in His plans for your life and for the world?

Is He big enough to command your life and for the world? This brings us to our new preaching series for the fall. We are preaching through the book of Colossians. If you want to look there, you can turn there.

[4 : 34] We're going to be dipping in and looking at a number of different passages rather than simply reading one. So, I would recommend if you can pull one of those pew Bibles out, it's page 984.

And we're looking at the book of Colossians because in it, God speaks to us about this very question. In it, God tells us who He is.

And in it, we are able to see the greatness of the God of the Bible and the God of Christianity. As you're turning there, let me just give you a brief introduction to the book of Colossians.

It is a letter from the Apostle Paul. It was probably written in about 72 AD, which would be near the end of his life. It was written to a church that he had never been to.

Seemingly, what happened was there was a man named Epaphras, who you see in chapter 4, verse 12, who had probably come to Ephesus where Paul had lived and ministered for a number of years and had returned back to this town of Colossae and had proclaimed about the good news about Jesus that he had heard from Paul.

[5 : 48] So, Paul is in some ways the grandfather of this church. But it seems, as we see clearly, he had never actually met them or been with them. We see that in the beginning of chapter 2.

And so, this letter is a letter taken by two men, Tychicus and Philemon, to this church, along with a couple of other letters, to be passed along to encourage the church and to remind them.

And it was written to encourage this new church about Christ. Paul talks about his thankfulness, about the gospel work that he's heard about in them.

But he also writes with some concern. Concerned that in the milieu of both Judaism and folk religion of the day, that perhaps the Colossians were starting to think that Jesus was good, but not quite good enough.

That maybe Jesus was, as one commentator, Doug Moo says, that Christ was most important, but most important among others who were pretty much like him.

[6 : 56] In terms of spiritual options and in terms of their salvation. Paul says, I want to remind you of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I want to remind you that Jesus is great and he is sufficient. You don't need to turn to other rituals, other spiritual practices, other spiritual powers in your life.

For Christ actually is enough. The hinge verse and the central exhortation is in chapter 2. And if you want to turn there with me. Chapter 2, verses 6 and 7 is the key exhortation that Paul is giving to this church.

He says, Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him. Rooted and built up in him.

And established in the faith, just as you were taught. Abounding in thanksgiving. Paul's heart is that they would be encouraged.

[8 : 04] And his means of doing so is he's going to lift up Jesus Christ before them. And that's what we're going to talk about this morning. Jesus Christ, the exalted one.

Jesus Christ in all of his greatness. Jesus Christ who is sufficient for all of our needs. So that's what we're going to look at this morning. Let's pray before we dive in.

Lord, we thank you for this book and we thank you for this word. Lord, we thank you that you have not left us to grope and to grasp about who you are.

But you have in fact made us able to know who you are by your word. Lord, we thank you for this book and we pray that today and in the coming weeks and months, as we preach through it, Lord, that you will bless us individually and as a community.

Lord, that we might see more clearly the greatness of the Savior that we have in Christ. Lord, help us. Lord, we confess our need to be instructed by you, to be reminded by you.

[9 : 21] Lord, I pray for your help this morning that as we look at your word together, that I might speak clearly and that my words would be useful in your hands, Lord, so that we might all be encouraged to worship you.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. If you're following along, my outline this morning will be very simple. As we're looking at the book of Colossians and thinking about his greatness, we are going to look at Christ the preeminent one and Christ the sufficient one.

Those two things, and we'll break those down. And as we do this, we'll start the first one. Turn with me to chapter 1, verse 15. We're going to see that Christ is the preeminent one.

You see that word preeminent in verse 20. In other translations, you might see it being supremacy or having the first place. Preeminence isn't always a word that we talk about today, but it means taking the highest and the most central place among a community, in our own hearts, in our lives.

And part of what Paul says here to this early church is that there is a God, and we can know him fully, completely, because of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 44] So look with me in verse 15 of chapter 1. He's talking about Jesus. You can see that from verse 13. He says, he, that is Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

And if you skip down to verse 19, it's helpful to see this too. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. These are striking, staggering statements.

We could spend all day simply camping out on this one truth, that Jesus himself is the image of God and the fullness of God. And the reason why we need to be reminded of this is because in our humanness, because Jesus Christ became a human being and took on human flesh, we often think less of him.

We often think of him as simply a good moral teacher. We think of one who commends to us a better ethic for our world. We might think of him as one who is a revolutionary to bring social change.

But in doing all those things, we see him as merely a better human being, a greater human being than others around us. And Paul speaks to this and says, no, no, no.

[12 : 03] Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. And in him, the fullness, all of who God is, dwells.

And friends, what good news this is for us. If we want to know God, we don't need to guess. If we want to know God, we don't need to think, well, what do I think he might be like?

God has come to us in Jesus Christ. Christ and the very center and the very core of what Christianity is all about. Of what the Bible is all about.

What the Bible is all about is that Jesus Christ is the one we can look to to know everything we need to know about who God is.

Everything is in there. So we need not look further. Not only is Christ preeminent because he is the fullness of deity expressed in human form so we can know what he's like, but he's also the preeminent one over all of the world.

[13 : 16] Look with me in verses 16 and 17 of chapter 1 for a minute. It says, For by him, that is Christ, for by him 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, and he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

For those of you who are English majors, these two verses are a cornucopia, a banquet of prepositions about Jesus.

Did you see them all? By him. That is, he is the means by which everything was created in the whole world. Not only by him was everything created, but we see at the end of verse 16 that all things were created through him, the instrument, and for him.

That is, he is the goal. Everything in this world was made for Jesus Christ. Not only that, but verse 17, he is before all things, which means that he was eternally present before the created, and therefore distinct from the created world in which we live, and in him all things hold together.

Jesus not only formed all this, not only was he the one by whom it came into existence, but today, every day, he is the one who holds it together.

[14 : 55] He is the one who holds the gravitational constant so the world doesn't fall apart. He is the one who makes molecules hold together. I'm not a scientist.

I'm about to get way in over my head here. But you keep going into the complexities of the physical and material world, the biological world, and you realize Jesus is the sustaining power by which all of those things happen.

And it gives us as believers the joy to be a scientist, those who explore the creative and sustaining work of God in the physical world.

The 19th century theologian Abraham Kuyper, well-known quote that you should know, and it's one of the quotes that, by the way, Tim Keller uses in the book, Every Good Endeavor, which is the basis of the Sunday School.

So this is a good sort of plug for that. There is not a square inch in the whole domain of human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, You ride to the bus, you ride on the bus in the morning, your days in the classroom, on the playing fields and in the labs, Christ says, Mine.

[16 : 25] In the lecture halls, in the departmental offices, in the seminar rooms, Christ says, Mine. In your morning commute, your office desk space, your boardrooms, Christ says, Mine.

In your friendships, your marriage, your leisure, and your bedroom, Christ says, Mine. In your homes, in your laundry piles, your playrooms, and minivans, and preschools, Christ says, Mine.

In your apartments, in your shelters, your tent cities, in your food kitchens, in your hospitals, Christ says, Mine. In our neighborhoods, in our state, in our city, in the countries that span the globe, Christ says, Mine.

The political powers, and the societal structures, and the economic markets, Christ says, Mine. There is nothing in this world that was not made by Christ, and sustained by Christ.

And will, in the end, show that it was made for Christ, for His glory. Every part of your existence, Christ rules over.

[17 : 44] He claims the place of preeminence, first place in all of them. But He doesn't just rule it over creation.

If you look further on, in verses 18 through 20 of chapter 1, He says, And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.

For in Him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him, to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

So not only is God, is Jesus Christ, claiming a place of preeminence over all of creation, but He's claiming preeminence over all of His new creation work as well.

For we might wonder, how is it that Christ could be preeminent in this broken, fallen world that is full of pain, and sorrow, sickness, and evil?

[18 : 45] Well, His preeminence is demonstrated in this new creation work that He has begun, and that He has started. And it is based on His work of His life and death and resurrection.

And His goal is to redeem individual people from the death of the world into the life that is being joined with Him. But it is not only that.

Did you see the end of verse 20? It is also to reconcile all things to Himself. That is, everything will be brought in and under His rule and His reign. And one day the world again will be remade in a new creation, a new heavens and a new earth, where everything will display His glory and His goodness and His beauty and His majesty and His power.

So Christ is redeeming people today, and He is redeeming the world for an eternity that is yet to come. Again, for those of you who are linguists, look at the number of time that all and every was mentioned in these verses.

As a matter of fact, I want to encourage you, read through the book of Colossians. Commit to reading through it once a week for the next three months as we preach through it. And one of the questions I want you to ask is, look for how many times do you see all and every in your translation?

[20 : 15] Because this Christ that Paul has proclaimed, this Christ that we are proclaiming to you today, is a Christ over all.

Over all creation, and in His saving, redeeming work, He is over His people, the church. Friends, one of the implications of this today is that we must see that Christ is not merely a tribal God.

He is not merely the God of the Christians who can be compared and honored in the same way with all other gods of the world.

We have the privilege of proclaiming a God who says, this is all mine and I am the Savior of all the world.

And this has a sharp edge to it because the Christ of Colossians, there is no room for other Saviors. There are no other paths to know God. There is no other way out of sin.

[21 : 25] Christ alone can do that. And yet it also gives us the ability to interact with the whole world with graciousness.

We may never hate people because of their religion, but we may point them to the one who claims over all, mine.

The central act of this, as we'll see, the way that this work is being done, the way that Christ is showing His preeminence, is through the preaching of the good news of Jesus Christ, this message of the gospel.

This is what He's doing in the church. This is what He's doing in the world. Friends, is your Christ too small to save the whole world and to redeem it?

Is your gospel too small to save you from the depths of your sin and brokenness? Is your Savior big enough to be able to save even this world?

[22 : 40] Christ has come to redeem all things so that all things He might be preeminent.

Friends, as we see that this is what Colossians is telling us about who Jesus is, J.B. Phillips' questions come back to us. Is He worthy of our loyalty?

Do we give Him the esteem and honor that He deserves? Do we trust Him? Do we give Him our affection and our love?

Jesus Christ is claiming the gravitational center of your life such that everything you do and everything that you are is meant to revolve around Him.

Him is the creator. Him is the sustainer. Him is the redeemer. This is what it means to be rooted and grounded in Christ.

[23 : 49] This is what it means to know Christ. Not only is Christ, however, in Colossians, lifted up as the preeminent one who says to all of the world, mine, and who has worked His saving work so that it might be so.

But it is also, as we see the rest of the book unfold, we see that Paul is encouraging the Colossians and encouraging us to recognize that Christ is sufficient. That is, He is enough for us to know God and to walk with Him and to walk in Him.

There are three different ways in which He is sufficient. First, He is sufficient for our salvation. Turn with me in chapter 2 to verses 13 through 15.

Verse 13 of chapter 2 reads this, And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.

[25 : 20] Again, friends, this is a passage worthy of a whole sermon. We'll get there. That's why we're doing series and we'll go through it more slowly. But to see that what Paul is reminding the Colossians about is that when Christ died on the cross, He did all that was necessary to take care of sin.

He doesn't spell it out here, but He's putting the application on the logic of the gospel, which is that all of us, all men and women, have rejected God and therefore are under sin.

And the wages of that sin, the result of that rejection of God is death itself, physical and spiritual death, separation from God, and experiencing His judgment upon our sin and our rebellion.

But that what Christ has now come is that He has come and in our place died for us. And in doing so, He has paid the debt.

Did you see that language? He has canceled the record of debt that stood against us. We owed God our lives for our sin. Christ said, I will pay that for you.

[26 : 33] The sin that we bore, Christ took it and He nailed it to the cross so that by the public display of it, the world might see His triumph over sin and death.

He has conquered through sacrifice and suffering and He has taken away what would be ours, that is condemnation and death.

And He has freed us from what enslaves and controls us, triumphed over the power of sin and the spiritual powers in the world that align themselves against God and His kingdom.

Friends, we often have a tendency to slip into the desire to think that we must atone for our own sins. But somehow it's up to us to try to fix the problem that we've created by our sin.

And I tell you that this is a lie. We will never be able to do it. No religious rites and rituals.

[27 : 45] No spiritual calendars and holidays. No moral improvement and being a better person. And no serving the world and even sacrificially trying to make the world a better place.

No being a good boy or a good girl. No personal success. Not even church involvement and activities have the power to save us from our sin.

All of those things, which may be good in and of themselves, find themselves unable to bear the weight of saving us from our sin.

And we love to turn to them to save us because when we can be in control and we can measure them and we can say, look, I've done this.

I've jumped this high. I've been this good. Isn't that good enough? And we avoid facing the fear that in fact, in the face of our sin, we are completely unable and helpless.

[28 : 52] And we don't want to acknowledge how enslaved we are to sin and how much we love it rather than God. But Christ comes and Christ says, I will do for you what you can't do for yourself.

I will die in your place. I will do all that is necessary to nail that to the cross so that you might be free from its power, so that you might know the joy of salvation, so that you might know the power of being forgiven of that sin and welcomed and accepted in love, being fully known and fully loved by the God of the universe.

This is what Christ has opened up for us and He is sufficient for all that is needed for that. And He calls us to come and believe.

And that's really what chapter 2 of Colossians is about, is just unpacking the sufficiency of Christ and the insufficiency of some of these other patterns. But it's not merely that Christ is sufficient for entering into that life with God, but it's that He is sufficient for the ongoing growth in and experience of our life with God.

Look at chapter 3, verses 9 through 11. Basically what Paul does at the end of chapter 2, he warns them, hey, don't believe that there are other things out there, other philosophies, other rituals, other spiritual experiences that you really need.

[30 : 22] You don't need those things. In chapter 3, he basically says, instead what you need is Christ. He says, set your mind on Christ.

Seek the things above where Christ is. And then in this great description of how to, of what the Christian life looks like, it's not these other things.

it's putting off sin and putting on Christ. So verse 9 says, do not lie to one another seeing that you have put off the old self with this practice and have put on the new self which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.

Here there is no Jew, or no Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but all. Christ is all and in all.

You see, friends, we often live in a world where just like for our salvation, we think we need to add something to what Christ has done.

[31 : 29] So in the church, how easy is it for us to think that we need a Christ plus something else in order to live a faithful life with God?

Right? We need Christ plus really good spiritual disciplines or really hardcore ascetic practices or social activism and serving the poor or serving in the church and finding ourselves busy in those things.

We need Christ plus deeper theological understanding and a knowledge of the original languages and a deep understanding of systematic theology and historical theology and biblical theology to really know.

As a church, often we think we need Christ plus some good marketing, some sleek leadership strategy or better counseling techniques.

friends, in all of these things, we are prone to say that Christ is not enough. And we often deny what chapter, or verse 4 of chapter 3 says that Christ is our life and we also then pursue life outside of Christ as well as within Christ.

[32 : 54] We think Christ, life with Christ is good but we really need more than that and so we live our lives for the praise of our peers, our parents or our professors. We need Christ plus good grades or a successful career or achievements.

We need Christ plus a date, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a happy marriage, kids who grow up and do well. Christ plus a lot of money and some really sweet hobbies to keep us going in our later years.

Christ plus freedom from poverty or physical suffering. And look friends, there is nothing wrong with any of those things.

They are all good things if they flow from Christ and are done in Christ and are done for Christ.

But when we think these things are going to replace Christ or somehow add on to Christ Himself, they get warped, they get twisted, they become idols in our hearts.

[34 : 07] And in taking them on and giving them that place in our lives, we deny that Christ is sufficient, that Christ is all for us.

friends, pursue many things that God has called you in this life, but pursue Christ first. Believe that knowing Christ first is going to be the one thing that you can't give up, the one thing that you can't lose, the one thing without which nothing else matters.

when we do this, then we can live out what he says at the end of chapter 2, verse 17, when he talks about doing all things for the glory of Christ.

Friends, we're prone to hedge our bets, to think Christ is good, but maybe we need these extra things too. Paul tells us in the book of Colossians, no, Christ is all, Christ is enough, Christ is everything.

Not only is sufficient for our salvation, not only is sufficient for our life with him on this earth, but he is sufficient as well for the purpose of your life and the purpose of the church.

[35 : 29] Chapter 4, verses 2 through 6, we see Paul moving ahead, thinking about having proclaimed these things.

He then, he's sharing out of his own life a bit. He says, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it and thankful. In the same time, pray for us, 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, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

Walk in wisdom towards outsiders, making the best use of time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

Friends, as Paul holds up the greatness of Christ and he says, as you, as God's people, are to be caught up in him and to see his greatness, he then says, people who know the greatness of Christ want others to know how great he is as well.

People who know the greatness of Christ will proclaim to the world that they ought to turn and come to him to find him to be preeminent and sufficient for them.

[36 : 51] This is the mission of the church. This is why we are here, to display the glory of Christ in our broken vessels, in our feeble little lives, but to do so so that the greatness of who Christ is can be seen and not only be seen, but that we might give verbal testimony, that we might talk about how great Christ is, that your prayers would be for God to open doors, that your lives would be salty, that people would want to know, what is it about you that I don't understand?

That I want to know more about, that your words would be full of Christ and of his goodness, that you would be ready to speak boldly.

This is what Paul then talks about at the end of the... for the rest of the chapter. He talks about his friends who are doing ministry with him. He's talking about his partnership in the gospel with these other men and women.

friends, this is what God has called us to. This is God's plan that Christ, the preeminent one, might be made known through the weakness and the frailty, but the reality of Christ being that for us as church.

And this is Trinity's plan as well, to know Christ and to make him known. And we're not going to do it through super slick marketing programs, through great mass outreaches.

[38 : 31] There's nothing wrong with that. I just want you to know if you're coming to Trinity, this is the reality. This is how we do it. Through people who know Christ and live for Christ in their everyday lives and invite others to come and see the glory of Christ in our midst.

Christ. This is what God has called us to. He's called us to do it on Prospect Hill and over in the Hill District, from Southern Connecticut State to Fairhaven Heights, the suburbs and the shoreline and the inner city, to the scholar and to the tradesman, to the gown and to the town, men and women, boys and girls from every tongue and tribe and nation who come within our purview into our area.

We want to make this Christ known so that in all things Christ might be preeminent. Let me just say briefly, as a pastor, as we have seen God grow our church and as we're facing potentially some new challenges, thinking about our space, thinking about our services, thinking about changes that may come in the future.

It will be so easy for us as a church to get distracted by those things, so easy for those things to become the things that fill our conversations after church and our online discussions and our emails.

And we may spend far too much time worrying, fearing, complaining, griping, exhorting, encouraging.

[40 : 12] Who knows? I don't know how good it's going to go, but we're going to have to wrestle through these things. But the reason why we picked the book of Colossians to preach on in the midst of this is because this is what Trinity is really about.

The buildings and the services are merely means for us to potentially, by God's grace, lift up Christ so that He might be seen as preeminent, as glorious, and that this nation, this country, this county, this city, this neighborhood would see the greatness of Christ and would turn and give Him the honor and the worship that He is due.

Friends, this is my hope for our church, is that we would give Christ such esteem, such loyalty, such faith, that we would give Him so much admiration and willing cooperation that through us He might use us to extend His kingdom, to make us a place where Christ is known and proclaimed to His glory.

Let's pray. Lord, we ask this morning that You would help us.

Lord, help us to face, Lord, the inadequacies of our view of who Christ is and the fears of our hearts that He won't be sufficient, that He's not trustworthy.

[41 : 57] Lord, we pray You would help us to see how great Christ is so that our God might not be too small for the complexities of our world and the realities of our lives.

That as Christ claims His preeminence and says to the whole world, mine, Lord, that we would say to Him, yes, we are Yours. let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.