

**Malvern Christian Assembly  
Wednesday Bible Study – April 2021**

**Study on Colossians**

**Notes taken from Warren Wiersbe - New Testament Commentary**

**OUTLINE for Chapters 1 & 2**

**Key theme: Jesus Christ is preeminent**

**Key verse: Colossians 1:18**

**DOCTRINE: CHRIST'S PREMINENCE DECLARED (1)**

In the gospel message—1:1–12

In redemption—1:13–14

In creation—1:15–17

In the church—1:18–23

In Paul's ministry—1:24–29

**DANGER: CHRIST'S PREMINENCE DEFENDED (2)**

Beware of empty philosophies—2:1–10

Beware of religious legalism—2:11–17

Beware of man-made disciplines—2:18–23

## Colossians 1:1-2

We need this important letter today just as they needed it back in AD 60 when Paul wrote it.

### The City

**Colosse was one of three cities located about one hundred miles inland from Ephesus.** The other two cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13, 16). This area was a meeting point of East and West because an important trade route passed through there.

All kinds of philosophies mingled in this cosmopolitan city. There was a large Jewish colony in Colosse, and there was also a constant influx of new ideas and doctrines from the East. It was fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies!

### The Church

Paul did not start the Colossian church, nor did he ever visit it. Paul had *heard* of their faith (Col. 1:4, 9), but he had never seen these believers personally (Col. 2:1).

How did the Colossian church begin?

During Paul's ministry in Ephesus, at least two men from Colosse were brought to faith in Jesus Christ— Epaphras and Philemon (see Philem. 19). **Epaphras apparently was one of the key founders of the church in Colosse, for he shared the gospel with his friends there (Col. 1:7).** The church was probably about five years old when Paul wrote this letter.

**There is a good lesson for us here: God does not always need an apostle, or a “full-time Christian worker” to get a ministry established.**

### The Crisis

Why did Paul write this letter to the church in Colosse? Because a crisis had occurred that was about to destroy the ministry of the church.

It was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, with elements of what Bible scholars call gnosticism (NOS-ti-cism). This term comes from the Greek word *gnosis* (KNOW-sis), which means “to know.” (An *agnostic* is one who does not know.) The gnostics were the people who were “in the know” when it came to the deep things of God. They were the “spiritual aristocracy” in the church.

**It is easy to see how this kind of teaching undermined the very foundations of the Christian faith. To begin with, these heretics attacked the person and work of Jesus Christ.**

### The Correspondence

Paul used the vocabulary of the **false teachers**, but he did not use their definitions. He used these words in their true Christian meaning. As we study Colossians, we will find words such as *fullness*, *perfect*, and *complete*, all of which were used by the gnostic heretics. Over thirty times Paul used the little **word all**. He also wrote about *wisdom*, which was a key term in the gnostic vocabulary; he had a great deal to say about angels and spirit powers too.

His main theme was **the preeminence of Jesus Christ** (Col. 1:18; 3:11). God has sent His Son to die for us! Every person who believes on Jesus Christ is saved and is a part of His body, the church, of which He is the Head (Col. 1:18). We are united to Christ in a wonderful living relationship!

As we study this exciting letter, we must heed **Paul’s warnings**: “Lest any man should beguile you” (Col. 2:4), “Lest any man spoil you” (Col. 2:8), “Let no man therefore judge you” (Col. 2:16).

### Colossians 1:3–8

#### MIRACLES AT COLOSSE

#### They Heard the Gospel (1:5b–7)

Once Epaphras had been saved, he shared this thrilling news with his relatives and friends back home. Perhaps it would have been exciting for Epaphras to stay with Paul in Ephesus, where so many wonderful things were taking place. **But his first responsibility was to take the gospel to his own home city (see Mark 5:19).**

## Colossians 2

Paul reviews the characteristics of this exciting gospel message.

**It centers in a Person—Jesus Christ.** The theme of this epistle is the preeminence of Jesus Christ, and He is certainly preeminent in the gospel.

**It is the “Word of truth” (v. 5 niv).** This means that it came from God and can be trusted. “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

**It is the message of God's grace (v. 6b).** Two words in the Christian vocabulary are often confused: *grace* and *mercy*. God in His grace gives me what I do not deserve. Yet God in His mercy does not give me what I do deserve.

**It is for the whole world (v. 6).**

**He came to the logical conclusion that only the gospel, with its gift of eternal life, was suitable for the whole world, and he was right.**

### **They Believed in Jesus Christ (1:4)**

It is possible to hear and not believe, even though the Word of God has the power to generate faith in those who hear (Rom. 10:17).

### **They Were Discipled (1:7)**

Epaphras did not simply lead the Colossians to Christ and then abandon them.

### **They Became Faithful in Christ (1:6, 8)**

The Word of God is seed (Luke 8:11). When it is planted in the heart, it can produce fruit. “All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing” (Col. 1:6 niv)

## **Colossians 1:9–12**

### **A PRISONER'S PRAYER**

The prayers in Paul's prison letters are certainly unique. To begin with, he prayed for others and not for himself.

### **He Prayed for Spiritual Intelligence (1:9)**

Words like *knowledge*, *wisdom*, and *spiritual understanding* were a part of their religious vocabulary, so Paul used these words in his prayer.

**He Prayed for Practical Obedience (1:10)**

God must make the worker before He can do the work.

**He Prayed for Moral Excellence (1:11–12)**

Wisdom and conduct should always be related to moral character.

**Colossians 1:13–20****Crown Him Lord of All**

**Probably no paragraph in the New Testament contains more concentrated doctrine about Jesus Christ than this one.** We can keep ourselves from going on a detour if we remember that Paul wrote to prove the preeminence of Christ, and he did so by using four unanswerable arguments.

**Christ Is the Savior (1:13–14)**

Man's greatest problem is sin—a problem that can never be solved by a philosopher or a religious teacher. Sinners need a Savior. These two verses present a vivid picture of the four saving actions of Christ on our behalf.

**He delivered us (v. 13a).** This word means “rescued from danger.”

**He translated us (v. 13b).** This word was used to describe the deportation of a population from one

**He redeemed us (v. 14a).** This word means “to release a prisoner by the payment of a ransom.” But the ransom has been paid on Calvary, and through faith in Jesus Christ, we have been set free.

**He has forgiven us (v. 14b).** Redemption and forgiveness go together (Eph. 1:7). The word translated “forgiveness” means “to send away” or “to cancel a debt.”

**Christ Is the Creator (1:15–17)**

The false teachers were very confused about creation.

In this section, Paul explained the fourfold relationship of Jesus Christ to creation.

**He existed before creation (v. 15).** “Firstborn of every creature” means “prior to all Creation.” Jesus Christ is not a created being; He is eternal God.

**He created all things (v. 16a).** Jesus Christ is the Firstborn of all because He created all things. It is no wonder that the winds and waves obeyed Him, and diseases and death fled from Him, for He is Master over all. "All things were made by him" (John 1:3)

**All things exist for Him (v. 16b).** Everything exists *in* Him, *for* Him, and *through* Him.

**He holds all things together (v. 17).** "In him all things hold together" (niv)

### **Christ Is the Head of the Church (1:18)**

Each Christian is a member of this spiritual body, and Jesus Christ is the Head. Jesus Christ is the Source of the church, His body, and the Leader.

### **He Is the Beloved of the Father (1:19–20)**

Paul had already called Jesus Christ "his [God's] dear Son" (Col. 1:13). Those who have trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior are "accepted in the beloved" (Eph. 1:6).

## **Colossians 1:21—2:3**

### **ONE MAN'S MINISTRY**

If you received a letter from a man you had never met, a man who was a prisoner, accused of being a troublemaker, how would you respond?

The Colossian believers faced that exact problem. They knew that Paul had been instrumental in leading their pastor, Epaphras, to saving faith in Christ. They also knew that Epaphras had gone to Rome to consult with Paul and had not yet returned. The church members had received Paul's letter, brought to them by Tychicus and Onesimus. But the false teachers in Colosse had been discrediting Paul and causing doubts in the people's minds.

"Why listen to a man who is a political prisoner?" they asked. "Can you trust him?"

Paul no doubt realized that this would be the situation, so he paused in the first part of this letter to give some words of explanation.

### **Sharing the Gospel (1:21–23)**

Even though Paul had not personally evangelized Colosse, it was his ministry in Ephesus that led to the founding of the Colossian church.

**Their past alienation (v. 21a).** The word translated “alienated” means “estranged.” These Gentiles in Colosse were estranged from God and separated from the spiritual blessings of Israel (Eph. 2:11ff.).

**Their present reconciliation (vv. 21b–22).** They did not reconcile themselves to God; it was God who took the initiative in His love and grace. He died for us “while we were yet sinners” and “when we were enemies” (Rom. 5:8, 10).

**Their future glorification (v. 23).** “The hope of the gospel” means that blessed hope of our Lord’s return (Titus 2:13).

### **Suffering for the Gentiles (1:24–27)**

Paul’s rejoicing (v. 24). “Instead of being ashamed of my suffering, I am rejoicing in it!”

Paul’s responsibility (vv. 25–27). But he could not abandon his calling just for personal safety and comfort.

### **Striving for the Saints (1:28—2:3)**

Now we meet Paul the prayer warrior, striving in prayer for the individual saints that they might mature in the faith.

The **words *striving* (Col. 1:29)** and *conflict* (Col. 2:1) are athletic terms. Our English word *agony* comes from this Greek word.

**Paul’s instruction (v. 28a).** The false teachers exalted themselves and their great “spiritual” attainments. They preached a system of teaching, but Paul preached a Person.

Paul’s intent (v. 28b; 2:2–3). He wanted to present every believer “perfect in Christ Jesus.”

**Paul’s intercession (1:29—2:1).** What a picture of prayer! Paul exerted his spiritual muscles the way a Greek runner would exert himself in the Olympic Games. He also taught Epaphras to pray the same way (Col. 4:12).



## Chapter 2- DANGER: CHRIST'S PREMINENCE DEFENDED (2)

1. **Beware of empty philosophies—2:1–10**
2. **Beware of religious legalism—2:11–17**
3. **Beware of man-made disciplines—2:18–23**

### *Colossians 2:4–15*

#### **SAINTS ALIVE—AND ALERT**

I recall a story about a pastor who was concerned about some unsavory businesses that had opened near a school. His protests finally led to a court case, and the defense attorney did all he could to embarrass the gospel minister.

“Are you not a pastor?” the lawyer asked. “And doesn't the word pastor mean 'shepherd'?” To this definition the minister agreed. “Well, if you are a shepherd, why aren't you out taking care of the sheep?”

**“Because today I'm fighting the wolves!” was the pastor's quick reply, and a good answer it was.**

Knowing that there were enemies already attacking the church in Colosse, Paul offered encouragement. By heeding his admonitions, the Colossians would overcome their enemies.

#### **1. Keep Making Spiritual Progress (2:4–7)**

In the Christian life, we never stand still: we either go forward or gradually slip backward. **“Let us go on to maturity.**

**The need for progress (v. 4).** Satan is deceptive. He wants to lead believers astray, and to do this, he uses deceptive words

**The nature of progress (vv. 5–7).** In order to emphasize his admonition, Paul used several vivid pictures to illustrate spiritual progress.

**The army (v. 5).** Christians ought to make progress in discipline and obedience, just as soldiers on the battlefield.

**The pilgrim (v. 6).** The Christian life is compared to a pilgrimage, and believers must learn to walk. Paul had already encouraged his readers to “walk worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:10)

**The tree (v. 7a). Rooted is an agricultural word.** The tense of the Greek word means “once and for all having been rooted.”

**The building (v. 7b).** When we trust Christ to save us, we are put on the foundation; from then on, we grow in grace.

**The school (v. 7c).** It is the Word of God that builds and strengthens the Christian. Epaphras had faithfully taught the Colossian believers the truth of the Word (Col. 1:7).

**The river (v. 7d).** The word abounding is often used by Paul. It suggests the picture of a river overflowing its banks. Living water.

## 2. Watch Out for Spiritual Perils (2:8–10)

Paul continued the military image with this warning: “**Beware** lest any man carry you off as a captive” (literal translation).

How is it possible for false teachers to capture people? The answer is simple: **These “captives” are ignorant of the truths of the Word of God.** They become fascinated by the philosophy and empty delusion of the false teachers. (This is not to say that *all* philosophy is wrong, because there is a Christian philosophy of life. The word simply means “to love wisdom.”) When a person does not know the doctrines of the Christian faith, he can easily be captured by false religions.

This philosophy of the false teachers is “hollow and deceptive” (Col. 2:8 niv) for several reasons.

### **Beware of religious legalism—2:11–17**

#### **Draw on Your Spiritual Provisions (2:11–15)**

Remember that the false teaching that threatened the Colossian church was made up of several elements: Eastern mysticism, astrology, philosophy, and Jewish legalism. It is the latter element that Paul dealt with in this section of his letter. **Apparently, the false teachers insisted that their converts submit to circumcision and obey the Old Testament law.**

**Paul made it clear that the Christian is not subject in any way to the Old Testament legal system, nor can it do him any good spiritually. Jesus Christ alone is sufficient for our every spiritual need, for all of God’s fullness is in Him.**

**1. Circumcised in Him (v. 11).** Circumcision was a sign of God's covenant with the Jewish people (Gen. 17:9–14). Though it was a physical operation, it had a spiritual significance. The trouble was that the Jewish people depended on the physical and not the spiritual. **A mere physical operation could never convey spiritual grace (Rom. 2:25–29).**

**2. Alive in Him (vv. 12–13).**

Paul used the word *baptism* in a figurative sense in this section of his letter—for no amount of material water could bury a person with Christ or make him alive in Christ. Water baptism by immersion is a picture of this spiritual experience. When a person is saved, he is immediately baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:12–13) and identified with the Head, Jesus Christ.

**3. Free from the law in Him (v. 14).** Jesus not only took our sins to the cross (1 Peter 2:24), but He also took the law to the cross and nailed it there, forever out of the way.

When Jesus Christ died and rose again, He won a complete and final victory over sin. He not only died *for* our sins (salvation), but He “died *unto* sin” (sanctification; see Rom. 6:10ff). What the law could not do, Jesus Christ accomplished for us.

**4. Victorious in Him (v. 15).** Jesus not only dealt with sin and the law on the cross, but He also dealt with Satan.

**First, He “disarmed the powers and authorities”** (Col. 2:15 niv), stripping Satan and his army of whatever weapons they held.

**Second, Jesus “made a public spectacle”** (Col. 2:15 niv) of the enemy, exposing Satan's deceit and vileness.

**His third victory is found in the word *triumph*.**

Whenever a Roman general won a great victory on foreign soil, took many captives and much loot, and gained new territory for Rome, he was honored by an official parade known as “the Roman Triumph.” In this, He disgraced and defeated Satan. You and I share in His victory over the devil.

## Colossians 2:16–23

### BELIEVER, BEWARE!

## Beware of man-made disciplines—2:16–23

Children must be taught to heed warnings, and adults must be reminded not to get too accustomed to them. Warnings are a matter of life or death.

The spiritual life also has its dangers and its warnings. Moses warned the Israelites to beware of forgetting the Lord once they got settled in the Promised Land (Deut. 6:12).

**The Lord Jesus often used the word beware** (Matt. 7:15; Mark 12:38; Luke 12:15).

Paul **gave three warnings** for us to heed if we are to enjoy our fullness in Jesus Christ.

### 1. “Let No One Judge You” (2:16–17)

This warning exposes the danger of the *legalism* of the gnostic teachers in Colosse. In discussing this problem, Paul presented three important truths.

**The basis for our freedom (v. 16a).** The basis for our freedom **is the person and work of Jesus Christ**. All the fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily in Him (Col. 2:9). On the cross, He canceled the debt and the dominion of the Law (Col. 2:14).

**The bondage of legalism (v. 16).** Let no one tell you otherwise: legalism *is* bondage! Peter called it a “yoke upon the neck” (Acts 15:10). Paul used the same image when he warned the Galatians: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1).

**The blessing of grace (v. 17).** The law is but a shadow; but in Christ we have the reality, the substance. “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming” (Heb. 10:1 niv). Why go back into shadows when we have the reality in Jesus Christ?

## 2. “Let No Man Beguile You of Your Reward” (2:18–19)

The word translated “beguile” in the King James Version means “**to declare unworthy of a prize.**” It is an athletic term: the umpire disqualifies the contestant because he has not obeyed the rules.

A Christian who fails to obey God’s directions does not lose his salvation. But he **does lose the approval of the Lord and the rewards He has promised to those who are faithful (1 Cor. 3:8).**

True worship always humbles a person. The *mind* is awed by the greatness of God; the *heart* is filled with love for God; and the *will* is submitted to the purpose God has for the life.

But if a believer does not draw on the spiritual nourishment that comes from Christ and other Christians, he becomes weak.

## 3. “Let No One Enslave You!” (2:20–23)

Paul condemned legalism and mysticism; **next he attacked and condemned asceticism.** An ascetic practices rigorous self-denial and even self-mortification in order to become more spiritual.

**Ascetic practices were popular during the Middle Ages:** sleeping on hard beds, whipping one-self, not speaking for days (maybe years), going without food or sleep, and so forth.

There is a definite relationship between legalism and asceticism, for the ascetic often subjects himself to rules and regulations: “Touch not, taste not, handle not” (Col. 2:21).

**As Christians, we admit that physical discipline is needed in our lives.** Some of us eat too much and are overweight. Some of us drink too much coffee or cola drinks and are nervous and upset. We believe that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19–20), yet sometimes we do not care for our bodies as we should. “Physical training is of some value,” Paul wrote (1 Tim. 4:8 niv). Paul disciplined his own body and kept it under control (1 Cor. 9:27). So there is a place in our Christian lives for proper care of our bodies.

**But the ascetic hopes to sanctify the soul by his discipline of the body, and it is this heresy that Paul attacked.**

### **The Christian's spiritual position (v. 20).**

Paul was not counseling us to be rebels, but he was warning us not to think we are spiritual because we obey certain rules and regulations that pertain to the body.

**The futility of ascetic rules (vv. 21–22).** To begin with, these rules did not come from God; they were the inventions of men.

Paul taught: "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14).

**The deception of asceticism (v. 23).** The people who practice asceticism have a "reputation" for spirituality, but the product does not live up to the promotion. I am amazed at the way educated people in N. America flock to see and hear gurus and other Eastern spiritual leaders whose teachings cannot change the human heart.

**This section closes the second chapter of Colossians in which the emphasis was on danger. Paul defended the preeminence of Jesus Christ, and he refuted the false doctrines of legalism, mysticism, and asceticism. It now remains for us to believe what he wrote and practice these spiritual principles.**

**The answer to legalism is the spiritual reality we have in Christ. The answer to mysticism is the spiritual union with Christ, the Head of the church. The answer to asceticism is our position in Christ in death, burial, and resurrection.**

We put all of this into daily practice as we fellowship with Christ through worship, the Word, and prayer. As we yield to the indwelling Spirit, we receive the power we need for daily living. It is in our fellowship with other believers that we contribute spiritually to the growth of the body, the church, and the other members of the body contribute to us. What a wonderful way to live!

Is Christ preeminent in your life? Are you drawing on His spiritual power, or depending on some man-made "religious" substitute?