

2. All the precepts and doctrines of men perish with the using or observance of them and are of no spiritual value.

Another phrase of this Gnostic heresy was that spirit is good and all fleshly things are bad. Their idea was fill your cup of pleasure full, gratify and fulfill all of your earthly desire, and you will be no worse off. Paul offsets this teaching in chapter 3 by emphasizing:

1. We have died to sin and our lives as Christians are hid with Christ in God, our affections, therefore, should be set upon things above (3:1-3).

2. Our members which are upon the earth (fleshly appetites and earthly desires) are to be put off or "put to death", and we are to "put on therefore as God's elect" the characteristics of righteousness that evidence the rule of Christ in our heart.

3. Paul further points out from chapter 3:18 though 4:6 that this necessity of submitting one's self in daily living to the will of Christ extends to all of the personal relationships in life. Whether in the family, in business, or any other, the Christian's obligation is to conduct himself always so completely in harmony with the will of Christ that we may "in word or deed do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (3:17).

## OUTLINE OF COLOSSIANS

*Theme: Christ is Preeminent*

### I. DOCTRINE -- CH. 1 -- CHRIST'S PREEMINENCE DECLARED

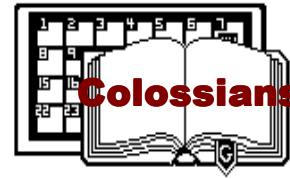
1. In the Gospel message -- 1:1-12
2. In redemption -- 1:13-14
3. In Creation -- 1:15-17
4. In the church -- 1:18-23
5. In Paul's ministry -- 1:24-29

### II. DANGER -- CH. 2 -- CHRIST'S PREEMINENCE DEFENDED

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

### III. DUTY -- CH. 3 & 4 -- CHRIST'S PREEMINENCE DEMONSTRATED

1. In personal purity -- 3:1-11
2. In Christian fellowship 3:12-17
3. In the home -- 3:18-21
4. In daily work -- 3:22 - 4:1
5. In Christian living -- 4:2-6
6. In Christian service -- 4:7-18



# COLOSSIANS

## Background Study Sheet

### I. THE CITY OF COLOSSAE

The city of Colossae was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus in the beautiful valley of the Lycus River. It was situated about 12 miles up the river from Hierapolis and Laodicea. The city of Colossae had once been a large city and an important one, but it had diminished considerably. In the New Testament time it was considered neither as large nor important as its neighboring cities.

Paul must have been in close proximity to the city on several occasions and may have passed through it on his travels. There is no indication, however, that he ever preached there or that he was responsible for the establishment of the church in that place. He learned of the faith of the Colossians by report (1:1). He was unknown by face to them (2:1).

Since Colosse was located in the Province of Asia, it is very likely that the evangelizing of the city took place during Paul's stay at Ephesus. We are told in the book of Acts that during this period, people throughout Asia heard the word (Acts 19:10). Epaphras was a native of the city of Colossae, but evidently heard Paul at Ephesus and returned to his home city to preach. He was responsible for the planting of the gospel in this community (1:7). He labored hard in the ministry (4:13), and continued to pray fervently for the saints there (4:12). He was called by Paul "a faithful minister of Christ on their behalf" (1:7).

### II. THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE

Apparently the church at Colossae was made up largely of Gentiles (1:27; 2:13). Paul uses the phrase in the letter, "aliens and enemies in your mind" (1:21). In 1:27 he speaks of making known the ministry of Christ among the Gentiles, referring evidently to the Colossians themselves. In 3:5-7 he gives a list of their sins before they became Christians and these sins were such as were characteristic of the Gentiles.

Despite lack of personal contact, the church was interested in Paul's affairs. Paul felt a responsibility toward the church in this community. Although he had not established it in person, it had been accomplished by a fellow worker.

The church was situated in a very wealthy area. The area was famous for two closely aligned trades. There were great flocks of sheep on its fertile pastures, and it was one of the greatest centers of the wool industry. Connected with this industry was the production of garments which was centered in Laodicia. An allied trade was

that of dyeing. There was a quality in the chalky waters of the Lycus River especially suitable for dyeing cloth. There was a certain dye named after the city, so the cities of this valley were very prosperous. In Rev. 3:17, Jesus said of Laodicea that in her own eyes she was rich and had need of nothing.

### III. THE CORRESPONDENCE TO COLOSSAE

On Paul's third preaching tour he spent a long period of time at Ephesus. Upon his return from the third journey he was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 21:30-36). He was taken to Caesarea and then to Rome. While he was in prison in Rome, Epaphras came to see him from Colossae and reported the condition of the church (Acts 28:30-31; Col. 1:8; 2:4 ff). The imprisonment at Rome is dated about AD 60-62. This letter to Colossae was written sometime during that period. It was probably sent to Colossae along with the letter to Philemon, by Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9).

### IV. THE CHARACTER OF THE CORRESPONDENCE

Paul not only wrote the Colossians to express his interest in their spiritual welfare and to assure them of his prayers in their behalf (1:9 ff), but there had arisen a serious threat to the church through the teaching of false doctrine, sometimes called "the Colossian heresy."

It is evident that Paul wrote primarily out of his desire to save the church from this heresy, for the heart of the epistle deals with it. The false doctrine denied the pre-eminence of Christ and His all sufficiency. Paul offsets this doctrine in the Colossian letter by setting forth what Christ is and what Christ has done in God's plan for human redemption. This is affirmed in the following points:

1. Christ is the image of the invisible God. (1:15).
2. He is the firstborn of all creation (1:15). This expression does not, as sometimes is supposed, teach that Christ was created. It refers to the fact that in God's plan from eternity, Christ was to be recognized as the "firstborn" and therefore, had preeminence in the Father's house and could exercise all authority of the Father.
3. That all things "were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or authorities, all things have been created through Him and for Him" (1:16).
4. Christ is "before all things and in Him all things hold together" (1:17).
5. He is also "head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; so that in all things he might have the preeminence." (1:18).
6. It was God's plan that "in him should all the fullness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself" (1:19).
7. In Him are had all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:2).
8. In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form (2:9).
9. Christ is our life (3:4).

No greater claims of the pre-eminence of Christ and His all sufficiency have ever been made than Paul affirms in this letter concerning Him. He reaches the climax in the affirmation that "Christ is all and in all" (3:11). This presentation of what Christ is, and that the fullness of God's grace can be found in Him and in Him alone, completely destroyed the false doctrine of the heretics that Christ was simply a heavenly messenger and that His ministry needs to be augmented by the ministry of other "angels" or "heavenly messengers" which the Gnostics claimed.

10. It is significant that while affirming the all sufficiency and preeminence of Christ in God's plan for man's redemption, Paul at the same time emphasizes emphatically the humanity of Christ, his flesh and blood existence. It was in his fleshly body that he did his redeeming work (1:22). All of the attributes of Divine power, wisdom, and grace were demonstrated by Him in bodily form (2:9). This was to offset the Gnostic doctrine that all flesh and things belonging to this material earth are evil.

Mixed in with this "Colossian heresy" was some Judaistic influence. Quite a colony of Jews, consisting of about 2,000 from Babylon and Mesopotamia had been brought many years before by Antiochus the Great into the regions of Lydia and Phrygia and had prospered there.

More of their fellow countrymen had come to share this prosperity. So Jewish influence made its effort to bind upon the Colossian Christians some of the external principles that were a part of Judaism. Paul deals with this by pointing out that by Jesus' death upon the cross He had taken the law (which excluded Gentiles) out of the way, nailing it to the cross, and that no Christian was to be judged or condemned for not keeping any of its ceremonies (2:13-17).

Because of this Jewish influence, Paul emphasizes that circumcision is no longer a circumcision of the flesh, but rather is a circumcising of the heart by the cutting off of our guilt of sin by Christ when we are buried with Him by baptism and raised up, from death to sin, to newness of life through faith (2:11-12).

Mixed in with other false aspects of this false teaching was a philosophical element to which Paul refers in Colossians 2:6-11. Concerning this human philosophy, he admonished that they are not to allow such to make spoil of them "through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." In the last part of this chapter, vv.22-23, Paul points out that all of the rules of self-inflicted punishment, extreme denial and privation, prescribed by human authority in the precepts and doctrines of men, were not to be observed for two reasons:

1. Christians have died with Christ from the rudiments of the world and should no longer subject themselves to human authority or teaching as though living in the world, but should live in subjection to Christ.