

Christ in you...

The message of Colossians



Part 1: *The Subversive Gospel*

INTRODUCTION – Seeing Ourselves in Context

Salvation is not only out of the “Egypt” of our own slavery to sin, but also out of the “Rome” of unloving societal norms and cultural expectations.

DINE IN – Learning The Text In Its Context

- **AUTHOR(S):** Written by the Apostle Paul (accompanied by Timothy). Paul apparently writes from prison (**4:3**).
- **AUDIENCE:** The church in Colossae was started by Epaphras, and was likely made up of mostly Pagan converts. (Note that Paul never quotes the Hebrew Bible in this letter.) They would have met in a collection of house churches.
- **TIMING:** Since Colossae is thought to have been destroyed by an earthquake in the early 60s CE, this letter must have been written before then.
- **OCCASION:** Paul had never visited the church in Colossae, but was motivated to write to them based on the report from Epaphras. Paul is encouraged by the solid strength of the Colossian church, but nevertheless wants to warn them about growing, deceptive philosophies (perhaps like those that had already overtaken some of the Galatian Christians).
- **EMPHASIS:** Paul's approach to combating false teaching is to super-saturate his teaching with Jesus and his Gospel message.
- **APOSTLE:** Paul is a “sent one” of Messiah Jesus, chosen by God for his task.
- **TIMOTHY:** Timothy is with Paul, and could be considered a secondary author (note Paul slips between “I” and “we” language throughout).
- **SAINTS/HOLY PEOPLE:** Not just a special class of Christian, but all Christ-followers, Jews and Gentiles together. Holiness is not a goal to be achieved, but a calling to be lived out.
- **BRETHREN IN CHRIST:** Where we got our name. The Greek, *adelphoi*, meant both men and woman.
- **GRACE & PEACE:** Combines Gentile and Jewish greetings.
- **FAITH, HOPE, & LOVE:** Faith (in Christ) and love (for other believers) is rooted in our sure hope of what lies ahead.
- **FRUITFULNESS:** When understood and embraced, the Gospel produces the fruit of changed, radically loving lives. We can be encouraged to know that what we experience personally and in our local church, God is doing around the world. Fruit was a common Roman symbol of the prosperity brought by Caesar and the *Pax Romana*. The claim that “the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world” must be heard as a challenge to the way of Rome and the kingdom of culture.

- **PRAYER:** Paul prays for the Colossians, that they might experience even more of the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that has already been at work in them. This, he anticipates, will lead to a life worthy of God and pleasing to him. This approach is far different than a religious prayer that the Colossians would memorize the rules and follow the right rituals. Instead, Christ-followers need wisdom and discernment.
- **GOOD WORKS:** The fruit Paul wants to see grow in his readers is that of “every good work”. This will include growing in knowledge, endurance, patience, joy, and gratitude. The emphasis of the idea of spiritual fruit is on a holistically transformed life.
- **THE GOSPEL:** The Good News of Jesus is that HE has qualified us to share in the blessings of God's people. HE has rescued us, HE has redeemed us, and HE has forgiven our sins.

TAKE OUT – Applying The Text To Our Context

TAKE OUT #1: What are the qualities of a Christian church that stand out to Paul as praiseworthy? Note, it is not a new strict religious code of conduct or a new theological attainment. The measure of genuine spiritual growth is Christ-centred faith and other-centred love, growing out of a future-focused hope. This is what Paul finds so encouraging.

TAKE OUT #2: Prayer and teaching should not just be reactionary, but preventative. Even healthy churches need ongoing prayer and Christ-centred teaching. The best preventative medicine for all spiritual ailments is becoming super-saturated with Jesus and his Good News message. We should pray for our church and other churches, while we keep our conversations and our lives focussed on Jesus.

TAKE OUT #3: As we focus on Jesus and his Good News message, joyful gratitude should grow as our basic disposition. If that is not our experience, it may be time to assess what our focus really is.

CONCLUSION – Joyful Gratitude

Colossians 1:12-14

For further research, see *Colossians Remixed*, by Brian J. Walsh & Sylvia C. Keesmaat.

HOME CHURCH QUESTIONS...

WARMING UP...

1. After briefly reviewing this week's message, share one thing that most challenged, puzzled, or encouraged you.

LOOK TO THE BOOK...

2. Re-read our central text, **Colossians 1:1-14**, preferably from multiple translations if possible. a) In what ways do the various translations help your grasp of the text? Talk about examples. b) What verse or idea stands out to you the most? Why? c) How is the imagery of being “in Christ” (**1:2**) different-yet-complimentary to the imagery of Christ being in us (**1:27**)? d) How is the Gospel message of Jesus different than the message behind any religion? Point out examples from this passage.

SO WHAT?...

3. How is the fruit of christ-centred faith and love for your brothers and sisters growing in your life? Talk about ways you could grow in these areas and pray for each other.

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