

Colossians 1

December 15, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Colossians 1

Session Outline

1. Gospel Transformation (Colossians 1:1-14)
2. Preeminence of Jesus (Colossians 1:15-23)
3. Hope in Him (Colossians 1:24-29)

Theological Theme

Christ is our hope, and we have the privilege and responsibility to share this hope with the world, to the glory of God.

Call to Action

Encourage followers of Jesus Christ to acknowledge the presence of God and the involvement of God in daily life. Seek His will, His wisdom, and the leadership of the Holy Spirit in every matter and relationship of life.



Leader Guide

Colossians 1

Introduction

Think about what refreshes you when life is tough, and you feel down. Although it is tempting to stall in sorrow, the hope of a brighter future can sustain us. Some believe the absence of hope is one of the main contributors to the high suicide rates in our country.

Psychology Today has identified a pattern that shows people with higher levels of hope live stronger mental and physical lives. People with hope respond to the world differently and have more passion and zest for life.¹ Some of the most important questions then become: Where does a person find hope, and how do they keep hope alive? Today, we will study where Scripture tells us to find our hope.

- ❓ Name some places, other than Jesus, where people try to find hope.
- ❓ What is the danger in looking for hope in things outside of Christ?


Session Summary

Paul wrote the letter of Colossians to the church in Colossae, which is in modern day Turkey and was on the trade route between the Aegean Sea and the Euphrates River. It was a prosperous city that had a diverse ethnic and religious climate. It appears that Paul never visited the city personally but heard about the growing church community and was committed to supporting and encouraging them.

There was concern about the body of Christ in Colossae because of false teachings that threatened to lead the believers astray. These false teachings undermined the authority of Jesus, and Paul wanted to make it clear that Jesus is the supreme authority. He addressed these issues and emphasized that Jesus is supreme over all creation while also reminding his readers that Jesus dwells within Christians and is the only true source of living hope for the world.

1. Gospel Transformation (Colossians 1:1-14)

Paul's letter to the Colossians begins as many of his other letters—with a greeting. After identifying himself, he encouraged the Colossians by referring to them as faithful saints. Paul may not have met the Colossians in person, but he took seriously his opportunity to encourage, bless, and teach these believers. Notice that Paul described himself as an apostle. As an apostle, he was qualified to address the church with authority, and they would receive it with due respect.

 Paul called the Colossians faithful. What spiritual identifiers might people use about you from looking at your daily life?


Paul said it was by the will of God that he was addressing the Colossians, giving more weight to the contents of the letter. A message from the Lord takes on more meaning than a message from a person. Paul wanted to be clear what followed in this letter was to be taken seriously and respectfully because it was from a representative of the Lord and inspired by God Himself.

Paul spoke words of blessing and love over these believers he had never met in person. Though not physically face to face, because of their common love and faith in Jesus, Paul loved the Colossians. His love for them and the way that they lived out their faith put them on Paul's prayer list. He wanted them to know he prayed for them and was thankful for their partnership of faithfulness in the gospel.

 Why are all believers bonded together in love, even if we've never met one another?

Paul prayed that as the Colossians believers increased in knowledge of the Lord, they would bear even more fruit as they sought to walk worthy of Christ. Paul asked that they be strengthened with all power by God's glorious might. Any time you start to rely on your own strength instead of being strengthened in the Lord, you will find that your power falls short, but His power is unlimited and never fails. This was Paul's reminder to the Colossians that they needed to continually surrender their own will to God's, so that they could continually live in the mighty power of the Holy Spirit.

When the gospel changes a person, transformation takes place and yet the transformation process is not complete in that moment. We are always being transformed, as Paul prayed for these believers. Verses 9-14 contain a familiar prayer that we can still pray over others that they might be strengthened by and continually grow in the knowledge and power of the Lord and the gospel message. This is how we can walk worthy of Him each day.


-  Application: What are some things we are tempted to focus on instead of the things of God? How does a lost focus hinder our spiritual growth?

Firstborn

The title firstborn does not mean that Jesus was created (v. 16), but indicates his priority of rank as supreme over all the created order.


2. Preeminence of Jesus (Colossians 1:15-23)

In this passage we read that Christ is “the image of the invisible God,” and we know from Genesis 1 that man was created in the image of God. We were made in God’s image but once sin entered the world, God’s image was marred, though not lost, in His creation. Humans continued in the image of God but imperfectly so. When Jesus arrived, He alone reflected the perfect image of the invisible God. He came as the exact representation of God Himself. Verse 15 goes on to say that Christ is “the firstborn over all creation.” Through His resurrection and ascension, Christ leads the way for all of creation to be restored to God as it was originally intended.

-  What does it mean practically that all people are made in God’s image, but we don’t reflect Him perfectly due to sin? How should this affect the way we interact with every person we meet, believer or not?


Jesus is not just important; He is the central figure in God’s redemptive plan for the world and He sustains the world in accordance with God’s purpose. Christ is the head of the church, and the church is an extension of Him. We live in the world as His body.

Jesus Christ is the fullness of God in human flesh. He walked in the flesh as we walk and experienced the same challenges we face. He felt temptations like us and yet He did not sin at any time. Jesus revealed the fullness of God and even more, He defeated death on the cross never to die again. This gives us hope we would not have without Him.

-  What made Christ uniquely able to pay the penalty for our sin? Why is it impossible for us, or anyone else, to do this apart from Christ?


Jesus came to reconcile everything to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross. When humans sinned, all of creation was affected. It became less than what it was created to be. We look at creation and see beauty in the sunsets, rainbows, mountains, and ocean waves just as God intended. But we also see pain and destruction that God did not originally intend. Violent deaths come from storms, earthquakes, hurricanes and more; animals are extinct due to human abuse and neglect; pollution permeates all parts of our planet; and in general, our world is in disharmony. Everything was affected, but Jesus will reconcile it all.

Because of who Christ is, Paul encouraged the Colossians to live out the truth and not drift from the faith. These words are just as applicable to us today as they were for the Colossians. He instructed them to remain grounded and steadfast in the faith. He also told them to anchor their hope in the gospel. To prevent drifting, we must drop anchor in the firm foundation of Jesus and establish our lives in the unwavering truth of the gospel.


 Application: Where do you currently need to remain steadfast in your way? What threatens this faithfulness in your life?

3. Hope in Him (Colossians 1:24-29)

Paul's claim of completing "what is lacking" in Christ seems at first to be audacious. But Paul was not saying Christ's atoning act was insufficient or incomplete; rather, Paul emphasized that the redemption of creation required followers of Christ to follow in His example of suffering too. In this way, Paul was faithful to complete this work.

 How might we be called to follow Jesus in suffering today? What makes this difficult? What makes it easy to avoid this call in our context?

In faithful suffering, we testify to the suffering love of Christ. Paul's suffering "completed" the suffering of Christ by replicating it and making it known to others. He saw such suffering as being a servant of the gospel and of Christ's church. Those outside of the church see how believers handle tough times in life and the gospel is displayed through faithfulness when difficulties come our way.

 How does our response in suffering show others what we believe to be true about God, our lives, and the whole world?

The biblical sense of mystery is not a riddle to be deciphered but Truth that is revealed by the Spirit of God. Paul stated this mystery is for all the saints, meaning both Jews and Gentiles—all people—were granted access. Christ is our hope in every moment and every situation. In our own strength, we fail repeatedly, but we don't have to rely on our own strength. We rely on the presence of Christ within us to strengthen us in the faith. Such a strengthening power is not always rational or logical—and often feels like a mystery. But we have access to that power through the presence of Christ in us.

The central message of Paul's preaching was Jesus. He unapologetically preached Jesus and what it meant to follow Him and live for Him. Paul's goal was to evangelize the lost and help believers mature in their faith so that they too would have an impact on the lost around them. Paul gave his full effort to pursuing Christ and becoming more like Him. We are to do the same.

- Application: In what situation do you need God's power to work through you? How will you seek His strength this week?

Conclusion

Colossians says Christ is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the central figure of the gospel, and we are called to represent Him to the world in the way we live out our faith daily, just like Paul. Paul sought to strengthen the church in their faith and understanding. Because they were threatened by false teaching, it was imperative that they stand firm on the foundation of truth.

Christ followers today are faced with the same challenges, and we have the same solution. Christians must be grounded in the Word of God and stand firm on what we know to be true about Jesus. He is the rock on which we can anchor our lives and resist the drift of the world. As we rely less on ourselves and more on the Holy Spirit, we more deeply experience Christ in us, the hope of glory.

- Where does spiritual drift threaten you regularly? How can you seek to be strengthened in Christ to draw nearer to Him?
- How can we encourage one another as a group toward steadfastness in Jesus?
- Who can you share with about Jesus as the central figure of the whole world?

Prayer of Response

Thank God for sending Jesus and bringing reconciliation through Him. Ask for wisdom and strength to not drift but grow firm and established in your faith. Acknowledge that it is the Lord's strength you need and praise Him for giving you hope in Jesus no matter what.

Memory Verse

*He is before all things, and by him all things hold together. —
Colossians 1:17*

Additional Resources

- *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* by D. A. Carson
- *Philippians, Colossians & Philemon* by Richard Melick
- *Be Complete* by Warren Wiersbe

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Colossians

Purpose

Colossians provides one of the Bible's fullest expressions of the deity and supremacy of Christ. This is most evident in the magnificent hymn of praise (1:15–20) that sets forth Christ as the image of the invisible God, the Creator and sustainer of the universe, and the head of his body, the church. In Christ are all the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3), because in him “the entire fullness of God’s nature dwells bodily” (2:9). The supremacy of Christ also has implication for believers’ salvation (2:10, 13, 20; 3:1, 11–12, 17) and conduct (3:5–4:6). Colossians contributes to Scripture a high Christology and a presentation of its implications for the believer’s conduct.

Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

Extended Commentary

Colossians 1:1-29

Introduction (1:1–14)

Paul followed a standard form of salutation, thanksgiving, and prayer in the first part of the letter. It is perhaps longer than some of his other letters because Paul was not personally acquainted with the people of Colosse. The salutation carried greetings from both Paul and Timothy. Words of high commendation and thanksgiving follow for the well-being and spiritual health of the Christian community at Colosse.

These opening words are followed by Paul's prayer for their knowledge and godly conduct. The prayer centered on spiritual blessings, not on physical or material things. He prayed for spiritual insight, genuine obedience, and moral excellence. The prayer went right to the heart of the false teaching invading the church.

The false teachers promised a special insight and a superior spirituality. Terms like knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding were a part of the false teachers' vocabulary. So Paul employed these types of words in his prayer. The prayer requested that God "fill" them "with the knowledge of his will." The term "filled" is a key word in Colossians. It was likewise an important term for the false teachers. Paul used it here and in 1:19, 25; 2:2, 9–10; 4:12, 17. It carries the idea of being fully equipped or controlled. Paul's prayer then was for the Colossians to be controlled by the full knowledge of God's will, which would lead to obedience and moral excellence.

Christ's Supremacy (1:15–23)

The false teachers challenged the true nature and deity of Jesus Christ. Their teaching possibly involved the worship of angels or some other beings (2:15, 18, 20) who negated or minimized the supremacy of Christ. The false teachers declared that salvation was achieved by knowledge rather than faith. Paul's answer to these matters begins in this important section.

Many think that 1:15–20 was a pre-Pauline hymn that Paul used and applied for the Colossian situation. Regardless, whether reworked or original, Paul presented Christ as preeminent in relation to the entire creation and in relation to humanity and the church because of His resurrection. This hymn or early creed celebrated Christ as the sovereign Creator and Redeemer of all things.

Paul described Jesus as Lord of creation, the "firstborn." The term "firstborn" stresses uniqueness and sovereignty rather than priority in time. Jesus is the "firstborn" because He is the agent of creation and the heir of creation.

Paul developed a physiological metaphor to establish the relationship of head over the body. As the head Christ sends life into the whole body. The church responds in humble adoration, acknowledging that Christ is head over all. God was pleased for His fullness to dwell in Christ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself. The reconciliation spoken of in verses 19–20 is discussed with reference to humankind. Through Christ's physical death they have been reconciled

to God. The purpose of Christ's reconciliation is to achieve a new creation in which estranged people may know and approach God.

Ministry for the Church (1:24–2:5)

The second major part of the letter described Paul's apostolic ministry for the church. Paul's ministry task involved making known the mystery of God concerning Christ to the Gentiles in general and to the churches of Colosse in particular. Paul's service was to make known to Gentiles the "mystery" that God had kept hidden from the world but has now revealed to people like Paul. Paul worked to bring about the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church so he could "present everyone perfect in Christ".

Paul's efforts on behalf of the Gentiles were intended to help them know the meaning of God's "mystery" about Christ. By mystery Paul meant that God has now revealed something formerly concealed. The mystery is the fact that Gentiles are now made fellow members with Jewish Christians.²

References

1. Dan J. Tomasulo, "7 Habits of the Most Hopeful People," *Psychology Today*, January 31, 2023, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-healing-crowd/202301/the-7-thinking-habits-of-high-hope-people-1?eml>.
2. David Dockery, *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998).