

the letter to

Colos-
sians

introduction

There are some reasons why I thought it would be interesting for our church to go through the letter of Colossians:

1. This letter is sometimes “forgotten” in terms of its use in sermon series and so on. Sometimes, it feels as if Colossians lives in the shadow of Philippians.
2. This was a letter written to a very young church that was founded by a man who heard the gospel preached by the apostle Paul. Since our congregation is also pretty young, it would be exciting to see that some of the challenges faced by our early brothers and sisters may be the same ones we face today 2 or More.
3. The goal of our church is to make disciples who make disciples. Though we believe in the importance of gathering the body of Christ on Sundays (for example), we also encourage believers to go to their neighborhoods and build relationships that can promote the advancement of the Kingdom through preaching the gospel.

The goal of 2 or More is not to become a mega-church with thousands of people attending every Sunday. Our goal is to equip the people we have now so that they can equip others. If that's going to look like them opening a church in their homes or holding Bible studies weekly in a coffee shop, it's not up to us. What matters is the transmission of the good news we once have heard.

I say all that because I see this pattern in the letter to the Colossians. The new church was founded by Epaphras, a man who came to Christ through the preaching of the apostle Paul, went back to his town, and just shared with others what he had heard. Doesn't that look like what we envision for 2 or More?

With that in mind, I went ahead and outlined the letter and gave some possible names for each section. The names don't necessarily need to be the names of the sermons, but they can probably help understanding what I see in the section.

For Bible Commentaries, I would recommend:

- The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians (2nd Revised edition) by F F Bruce
- Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary (Volume 12) (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by N. T. Wright
- James D. G. Dunn, New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC), Eerdmans, 1996, 405 pp.
- Colossians: Anchor Yale Bible Commentary by Markus Barth, Helmut Blanke.

Outline

Epaphras got it (ch. 1:1-8)

Paul expresses his deep appreciation for the young believers in Colossae, highlighting his gratitude for their faithfulness in following Christ. What stands out is how Epaphras, having been transformed by the gospel, felt compelled to initiate a gathering in his hometown. His response to the gospel is both inspiring and challenging, showing the power of a life changed by Christ.

Moreover, it's remarkable to think that just months before receiving Paul's letter, these believers likely had no knowledge of who Christ was. Yet now, they had become devoted followers, committed to walking in the Way. This transformation is a testament to the life-changing power of the gospel.

Paul's heart towards the Colossians (ch. 1:9-14)

Although Paul likely never visited Colossae, his love for the young church is undeniable. His words reveal a deep devotion to prayer on their behalf, expressing his longing for them to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Just as the Colossians were called to live lives that honor Christ, so too are we invited to do the same today.

As this section closes, Paul begins transitioning into the next, where he will present a powerful hymn exalting the person of Christ—an eloquent expression of His supremacy and majesty.

Jesus (ch. 1:15-20)

In this section, Paul calls the believers to full obedience to Christ. He reminds them that, through their faith, they have been spiritually circumcised and baptized into Christ.

Paul also emphasizes the forgiveness of sins they've received through the death and resurrection of Jesus, highlighting the profound grace of God. In Christ, they have been raised to new life, sharing in His resurrection and the transformative power it brings.

Paul, the servant (ch. 1:21 - 2:5)

In this section, Paul once again intercedes for the believers, urging them to remain steadfast in their faith. His pastoral heart is evident as he encourages them to hold firm in their devotion to Christ.

Paul then transitions to one of the central themes of the letter—the Colossian heresy, often thought to be Gnosticism. He counters this false teaching by emphasizing that the true mystery, which so many seek, is fully revealed in Jesus, the Messiah. In Him, all wisdom and knowledge are found.

Jesus > Human philosophy (ch. 2:6-15)

In this section, Paul calls the believers to full obedience to Christ, reminding them that through their faith, they have been spiritually circumcised and baptized into Christ.

He also teaches them about the forgiveness of sins they have received through the death and resurrection of Jesus, underscoring the significance of their redemption. In Christ, they have been resurrected to new life, sharing in His victory and the transformative power of His resurrection.

Adding up to Christ (ch. 2:16-23)

As he concludes the previous section, Paul exposes and critiques the false beliefs of those attempting to lead the new believers astray.

In rebuking these teachings—whether intentionally or not—that sought to add to what Christ had already accomplished on the cross, Paul reassures the believers that true newness of life is found solely in Jesus, not in human regulations or traditions. Though he will later encourage them to live above reproach and give a good testimony through their earthly conduct, Paul emphasizes that their salvation is rooted in Christ alone.

Newness of life pt.1 (ch. 3:1-17)

In this section, Paul calls the new believers to shed their old selves and put on the new self, a life now hidden in Christ. He urges them to focus on things above, reflecting the transformative power of their union with Christ.

An interesting point for deeper study in this passage is the meaning of "the things above" or "that which is on high." If these things are heavenly and not earthly, why are we called to live them out here on earth? While it may seem like a simple question, it's worth considering how Paul's original audience would have understood this call to heavenly living in their daily, earthly context.

Newness of life pt.2 (ch. 3:18 - 4:6)

Though Paul has been emphasizing the deep, inner transformation that takes place when someone comes to Christ, it's striking how he shifts in this section to address the personal relationships of believers. In the previous section, Paul called for godly behavior among the Colossians in a more general sense. But here, he becomes more specific, focusing on key relationships—husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters—demonstrating how Christ's lordship should permeate every aspect of their lives.

Paul also asks for prayers for his ministry, inviting the believers to actively participate in it. Just as Paul is redeeming the time by sharing the mystery of Christ, he encourages the Colossians to be ready at all times to share the hope they have, seizing every opportunity to proclaim the gospel.

You can't do it alone (ch. 4:7-18)

In the letter's final section, Paul acknowledges several of his fellow workers who have supported him in ministry. Many of us tend to gloss over the endings of Paul's letters, assuming they contain little to no teaching. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth.

The conclusion of the letter to the Colossians offers a profound lesson: the Christian life is not meant to be lived in isolation. Even the great apostle Paul surrounded himself with faithful, God-fearing friends who walked alongside him in the work of the gospel. If Paul, with all his wisdom and spiritual strength, needed community, how much more do we?