

## Bible Survey – NT Epistles 3.7 - Colossians

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### 1. INTRODUCTION:

- a. **Author & Background** – internal and external evidence as well as long standing church history accepts Paul as the author. There is no credible alternative.
  - i. Colossians has long been accepted as a companion letter with Philemon; note the similarity to Philemon 1:1.
  - ii. Colossae was an ancient city in the district of Phrygia on the southern bank of the River Lycus in modern day Turkey.
  - iii. Ephesus was in close proximity to Colossae in the Lycus Valley, as was Hierapolis and Laodicea... all cities that had established Christian churches. Colossae had been a prominent city in the late last century BC, but by the time of Paul it had declined into essentially a small town having been bypassed by Hierapolis and Laodicea in terms of prominence and importance.
  - iv. Where the church in Ephesus was clearly founded by Paul, it is believed that the church in Colossae was most likely founded by Epaphras (1:7; 4:12f) as part of the Ephesian church's evangelistic thrust into the region.
  - v. Colossians is one of the "prison epistles" Paul wrote while in Rome, and it shares many background and thematic similarities to Ephesians and also to Philemon; and all are understood to have been written from the same place and about the same time... around 60-62 AD.
- b. **Purpose [occasion] of the epistle** – all epistles and Scripture in general are considered to be "occasional writings" meaning it was written to specific people in an historical timeline to speak God's Truth to prophetically keep God's people aligned with God's will and purpose within redemptive history.
  - i. To properly interpret Paul's epistle to Colossae, it is crucial to understand that there was opposition to the gospel promoted by false teachers, and to understand the nature of this false teaching.
  - ii. From the text, it is clear this false teaching had several elements:
    1. There was a sort of "proto-Gnosticism" going on. Gnosticism did not gain a strong foothold until late in the 1<sup>st</sup> and well into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The early form evident in Colossians held some of the concepts of what would later develop into a full-fledged heresy.
    2. The basis of such heretical teaching held that there were "intimate spiritual secrets of God and heaven" that were revealed to some, but not to all. This "secret knowledge" was often sold within small circles which then became "secret fellowships" within the church.
    3. Gnostic writings proliferated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and into the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, before the church consolidated opposition to it. These Gnostic writings remain a distraction even today.
    4. There was also some sort of Jewish heresy going on involving the worship or at least veneration of angels. Essentially this group was mistakenly placing their faith in created things, rather than the Creator – 2:18.
    5. There was also the continuing problem of the "Judaizers" who were Jewish leaders who promoted the notion that vestiges of the Mosaic Law... such as the continuance in observing circumcision, adherence to ceremonial food laws, and

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the observation of separation practiced by devout Jews in their interaction with the material world into clean and unclean objects still were enforced under the Grace of Christ. This group also taught that works were as important as faith, something that Paul consistently repudiated.

- iii. In response to these false teaching elements, Paul taught clearly that:
  - 1. The Gospel is God's Truth which is revealed to all by the Holy Spirit; it is not secret or hidden, and definitely not for sale or meant only for a select few. It is the "free Gift" of Grace purchased by Jesus for all of humanity that would accept it.
  - 2. The "other things" promoted by this Jewish heresy may have had the appearance of truth, but actually were of no value whatsoever – 2:23.
  - 3. Paul taught not to pay attention to these "outward things" that so many get caught up with. Instead, we are encouraged to seek the "inward things" which have great value to God and are derived by Grace alone and appropriated only through faith in Jesus.

### 2. STRUCTURE:

- a. Introduction – 1:1-14
- b. The Person and Work of Jesus – Doctrinal Statement – 1:15-2:19
  - i. The supremacy of Jesus and the Gospel – 1:15-2:6
  - ii. Warnings to False Doctrine – 2:7-19
- c. Identity in Christ – 2:20-4:6
  - i. A Believer's New Position – 2:20-3:4
  - ii. A Believer's New Practice – 3:5-4:6
- d. Concluding Thoughts – 4:7-18

### 3. THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT:

- a. While Ephesians was an epistle that was "ecclesiastical" in nature – meaning it was intended to help affirm what constituted proper personal faith exhibited within the community of the church; Colossians instead was "theological" in nature – focused on revealing a "High Christology" meaning the redemptive work and Godly-Kingship of Jesus.
  - i. The Ephesian church was much better grounded than the Colossian church in terms of who Christ was:
    - 1. His eternity as God – God and man.
    - 2. His mission to save & restore humanity as the promised "Messiah" of Scripture.
    - 3. Both meaning He is Lord and King, and He deserves complete loyalty and obedience from His disciples.
  - ii. The climax of Jesus' 1<sup>st</sup> advent [coming] was His death and resurrection. This resolved the sin-nature problem inherent in humanity, clarified God's will and purpose in redemptive history, and opened the door for all to become properly related to God:
    - 1. If you have died with Christ – you are now Spiritual children of God, so why are you living in the world? – 2:20
    - 2. If you have been raised with Christ – you now need to set your mind on the things from above – 3:1
    - 3. Keep on seeking the heavenly things – because that is where our Messiah is.

4. If your life is hidden with Christ in God – heaven is your rightful home – 3:3-5
- iii. The climax of Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> advent at the end of the age is:
    1. Judgment against the wicked unrepentant.
    2. Restoring Jesus followers [God's people] to their rightful role in the Kingdom of God.
    3. Ushering in the new heaven and earth where God and humanity will live forever in Paradise.
  - b. The Colossian church was comprised of believers who were immature and less grounded in faith and doctrine than the Ephesian church, and far more vulnerable to predatory preacher-teachers who taught this early type of "syncretism" [proto-Gnosticism] blending Christian, Jewish, and Pagan faith concepts elements into a toxic Christian heretical stew. "Syncretism" according to the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, means the general "replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the Gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements." This refers to adding cultural or socially relevant concepts and/or beliefs from other faiths that render the Gospel as other than the Scripture presents it. Essentially, it ceases to be truly "Christian" and becomes something resembling worldly religion. Some of these elements in the case of the Colossians can be surmised from the text:
    - i. Because God was "distant" some taught that "spirit-guides" were a necessary component to reveal truth. This "spirit-guided secret truth" revelation was available through some human teachers and also through angelic [demonic] mediator/mentors. This "Secret Truth" was an early form of Gnosticism.
    - ii. Astrology and Pagan rituals were added as a necessary component for spiritual connection with these angelic mediator/mentors. Through careful use of these secret practices and rituals one could properly interpret and even influence these spiritual beings.
    - iii. Some Jewish ritual and dietary rules were taught as being necessary to maintain an individual's personal purity, and were taught as being extremely important as these pure angelic beings were unable to connect with impure physical beings.
    - iv. The result was a "cultic faith" that bore no relationship with the Scriptural Gospel of Christ. Some cults continue to confuse true Christianity with some or all of these tactics.
  - c. Paul's antidote to this syncretism-heresy was in presenting "a High Christology" – meaning clearly teaching the deity, supremacy, and sufficiency of Jesus; and the complete provision of the salvation of humanity through the Gospel of Grace because of the Cross. Faith is in Jesus alone brings salvation and right standing with God. The syncretism of Jesus plus this, that, or another is clearly false. Paul's clarification:
    - i. Earthly religion is based on knowledge and performance... it is a human works-based system where salvation is based upon what you do.
    - ii. Heavenly religion is based on the achievement of Christ alone... Grace is complete in itself. Appropriating such Grace ultimately must change my values and character, and result in transformational discipleship where Jesus' character and nature are formed within each disciple. Ultimately it is God who is at work within me that brings such life about, not the specific things I say or do... though there should be integration and conformance in what I say I believe and how I live my life, it is the result of Grace working in me.

- d. In every generation Christians are subjected to new ways of understanding Scripture along with the pull to submit to the philosophy of the age. Paul's message is that God's revelation is constant and consistent... and while it is renewed age to age, it is not reinvented age to age. Paul teaches we should listen for and avoid the temptations toward faith practices that are a distortion of the Gospel of Grace in Jesus:
- i. Observance of practices from previous eras are unworthy – 2:16.
  - ii. Avoid practices that present a false humility – 2:18.
  - iii. Losing direct connection with Jesus – 2:19.
  - iv. Reliance on adherence to rules and regulations as proof of faith – 2:20-21.

#### 4. MESSAGE OF COLOSSIANS:

- a. Faith, Hope, & Love – are the Spiritual Triad of the Gospel – 1:4-5 [CR 1 Corinarian 13:13]:
- i. Our object of faith is Jesus – maintain a high Christology.
  - ii. Jesus' mission is in sanctifying and justifying believers through their personal faith in Jesus.
  - iii. Faith thus resides completely in Christ – there is no other component we need... neither secret or veiled.
  - iv. Our hope is laid up for us in Heaven – hence, our focus is eternity and not worldly or immediate.
  - v. The result is to develop a proper appreciation and love for God – this results in love for all the saints who comprise the family of God who are co-heirs to His Kingdom with whom we'll spend eternity together loving and worshiping and enjoying God.
- b. Christians should focus on knowing Jesus which should be evidenced in maturing as disciples – 1:9-14:
- i. Being filled with the knowledge of His will.
  - ii. Knowing what He likes and wants, and voluntarily cooperating with the Spirit in allowing His life to manifest our Lord through me.
  - iii. Bearing fruit with a Kingdom of God focus.
  - iv. Increasing in the knowledge of God personally is to be strengthened with His power.
  - v. The result is being qualified to share in the inheritance promised as saints in light.
  - vi. 1:12 – I am qualified by God.
  - vii. 1:13 – I am rescued from darkness.
  - viii. 1:14 – I am free because I'm forgiven.
  - ix. Therefore, Christians have been rescued from the kingdom of darkness, and transferred into the Kingdom of Light – this is redemption through the forgiveness of sins – 1:13-14.
- c. The Greatness and Supremacy of Christ is undoubtedly the key part of this letter, with an imperative that Christians should have a proper understanding of the Nature of Jesus as the Personification of God 1:15-20:
- i. 1:15 – Jesus is the revealer of God, and His perfect representation. He is the image of the invisible God.
  - ii. 1:16 – By Him all things were created, and they were created for Him.
  - iii. 1:17 – Jesus is the integrating agent and He is before all things; in Him all things hold together and find their meaning.
  - iv. 1:18 – Jesus is the leader of the living and the dead... being Supreme over all.

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- v. 1:19-20 – Because of Jesus’ greatness and sufficiency, God made Him the reconciling agent over everything... He is the perfect bridge between Fallen humanity and God.
- d. The Reconciling Work of Jesus... the result of Jesus’ Grace is that the Spirit is alive and at work in each believer – 1:21-23.
  - i. As a result of Jesus in me, I am reconciled to God, and am made holy and without blemish, and I’m free from any/all accusations.
  - ii. Living in Grace is trusting in what God has already done and continues to accomplish in the “inner-man” [or woman] of my life.
  - iii. I “have been” reconciled... it is past tense... a done deal.
  - iv. I’m without blemish... free of accusation... it is past tense... a done deal.
  - v. Reconciliation is through Christ alone, salvation is to hold firmly onto the Truth of the Gospel.
- e. The Truth of Christ has been made abundantly clear... so don’t be confused – 1:24-27. Because Christ is in you, you can look forward to sharing in God’s glory as a partner in the Gospel.
- f. The role of the Church is to proclaim Christ [evangelism] and to edify the body [discipleship] for preparing disciples in their work as ambassadors of the Gospel – 1:28-29
  - i. 1:28a – our message is to proclaim Christ.
  - ii. 1:28b – our audience is everyone... admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom.
  - iii. 1:28c – the goal is to become mature in Christ... not some extraneous knowledge that can’t deliver the Grace of God. Therefore “clothe yourself” – meaning to deliberately put on goodness, kindness, and righteousness.
  - iv. 1:29 – with God working within, I cannot help but labor toward this end because His energy is so powerfully at work in me.
- g. The source of all Eternal Wisdom and Knowledge is Jesus – not some secret mystery revelation from unknown and false teachers – 2:1-5.
- h. Disciples should continue to live in Christ [hold on to what you already possess], and not be taken captive by an obviously hollow and deceptive worldly philosophy posing as Heavenly Theological Wisdom – 2:6-8.
  - i. 2:6-7a – continue to live out Grace... trust in what God has already done in your life, and continues to do.
  - ii. 2:7b – therefore living out the New reality of my new position in Christ as a child of God, is of greatest importance.
  - iii. 2:8 – therefore the deceptive philosophies that focus on human tradition and elemental spiritual forces [angels/demons] are nothing before the glory that is Christ.
- i. The Gospel Message of Christocentric Theology explained – 2:9-15:
  - i. 2:9 – Jesus is the Living God... the fullness of Deity in bodily form.
  - ii. 2:10 – Jesus has power and complete authority over everything – and through Him we have complete fullness of being.
  - iii. 2:11 – the circumcision that matters is not physical, but rather it is the spiritual work of cutting off the sin nature.
  - iv. 2:12-13a – the sacrament of emersion Baptism is a picture of our dying to the fleshly nature and being raised as purified beings... the physical proof of Jesus resurrection is similarly aligned to the spiritual proof of this change in me. By faith in Jesus, His physical

- death has put to death the sinful nature that had been alive in me. As a result of Jesus' resurrection, I have now become alive in Him physically and spiritually.
- v. 2:13b-14 – not only has our inherited sin nature lost control over me, but all the implications of the Law in regard to sin have been expunged completely.
  - vi. 2:15 – the public spectacle of Jesus' crucifixion by the fact of Jesus' resurrection has now made a public spectacle of Jesus' triumph over all earthly and heavenly powers and authority.
  - vii. 2:16 – the Jews followed a “Lunar Calendar” hence the New Moon was a big deal for practicing Jews. The “Jewish Sabbath” began at sun-down Friday through sun-down Saturday. The obligations inherent to the Jews under the Mosaic Law, have no claim or importance for the believer in Christ.
  - viii. 2:17 – the Jewish Laws and observances were “merely a shadow” of the amazing new reality made known in Christ.
  - ix. 2:18-23 – these “works” expected are the now obviously ineffective and improper demands of the false teachers who are attempting to lead Christians astray. Hold true to Christ.
- j. Christians have a new identity in Christ... therefore there are things we should attend to and things we should avoid – 3:1-17
- i. 3:1-4 – focus on the Heavenly things, because your life is hidden with Christ in God... and when He appears again, we will be like Him! This is amazingly great news!
  - ii. 3:5-10 – having set aside the ‘earthly nature’ by taking off the ‘old self’ and putting on the new... I am continually being renewed both “in knowledge” and “in the image” of my Creator! Therefore look for and make the most out of every opportunity to allow God's life flow into others.
  - iii. 3:11 – the “Old man” – meaning my old life before the cross has been crucified with Jesus. The “New man” – meaning my new life that was raised with Jesus the result of which is “Renewal” – Christ is all and in all.
  - iv. 3:12-14 – because we have been chosen by God, we should consciously put on a new heart [clothe ourselves in this new nature] – the result of which is the Jesus' nature/character demonstrations of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, forgiveness. As a result of this new life, “Love” is demonstrated by the bond of unity among believers.
  - v. 3:15 – The peace of Christ – should rule in our hearts and in our life.
  - vi. 3:16 – instead of offering animal sacrifices or any other such works, my “Love Offering” is to be a “Living Sacrifice” that chooses to follow Christ and the Spiritual life He has already placed within me.
  - vii. 3:17 – such a life is inherently grateful... what does an ambassador of King Jesus look like? They are loving, peaceful, living in community and sacrificially giving of themselves, and characterized by gratitude and thankfulness – does that look like me?
  - viii. Bottom Line – As a result of all of what Christ has accomplished on my behalf, I can live in gratitude – 1:3; 1:12; 3:15; 3:17; 4:2.
- k. Christians demonstrate their new life by showing Grace and love in three crucial relationships. Too many people operate from a perspective of exercising what they think is their “rightful authority”... but this is not leadership and it certainly is not the example of “Servant Leadership”

that Jesus demonstrated. Note the reciprocal nature inherent in each of these relationships... and it is important to think of these relationship pairings more as a “Dance of mutual submission” rather than a “Wrestling match of ascribed authority” – 3:18-4:1

- i. 3:18-19 [Eph 5:21, 25, 33] – Husbands and Wives:
    1. Wives “Submit” to your husbands – In the original language this actually means “respect.” The context is that we exemplify respect out of love as an outgrowth of respecting and loving God.
    2. Husbands “Love” your wives – this is Grace filled love on the order of what Christ has for the Church. This is not the “theology of headship” – this is mutual submission, love and dependence.
  - ii. 3:20-21 – Parents and Children:
    1. Children be “Obedient” – as a way of pleasing our Lord.
    2. Parents “encourage” and don’t exasperate or irritate your children.
    3. Over discipline and over protection are both potentially harmful... children are our gift to the future; they must be raised up to be sent out as peers, not perennial dependents.
    4. Being stern, distant, and never satisfied will frustrate your children, and confuse them when it comes time for them to raise their own children.
  - iii. 3:22-4:1 – Bosses and workers:
    1. Workers should do what’s right whether they are being watched or not... your work should be such that you demonstrate God’s love for you by how you do things all the time. Character is what you do when no one is watching.
    2. Bosses be fair with and treat your workers with justice and genuine concern... for this is how God treats you and it is your model of treating others.
    3. The worker-employer relationship is a form of the Christian family along with husband-wife and parent-child.
  - iv. Through these relational interactions we demonstrate that there is an absolute truth of what is relational and ethically right or wrong, and that God is displayed through our life and interactions. This is an integrated mutually responsive and mutually dependent collective.
- I. Christians should devote themselves to a new type of life that begins with prayer – 4:2-13:
- i. Prayer is not only about taking our petitions to God... it is communing with God, spending intimate time with God which plays out in three ways:
    1. 4:2a – becoming devoted to the habit of making time for prayer a special and regular occasion.
    2. 4:2b – becoming more aware to what God is revealing to you in prayer.
    3. 4:2c – becoming more aware of how God moves in prayer which makes us more thankful people... developing an attitude of gratitude.
  - ii. 4:3-4 – we pray because prayer always makes a difference – Paul says:
    1. I covet your prayers for me.
    2. Look to God always; and talk to God always.
    3. God’s people pray... not just for themselves, but also for everything that is aligned with advancing the Kingdom of God.

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4. Prayer is private communion with God – heart to Heart. The Word of God [Biblical literacy] strengthens the mind, while prayer strengthens the heart [Spiritual formation].

m. Christians need to look at their place in society with a new frame of mind – 4:5-15

- i. 4:5-6 – become strategic in advancing the Kingdom of God... both how that plays out in daily interactions as well as long-term relationships.
- ii. 4:7-15 – be aware that we are involved and interconnected with other Christian communities... we should support one another and have our leadership interact for our mutual benefit.

### 5. PRACTICAL THEOLOGICAL APPLICATION – PASTORAL LEADERSHIP PRAYER – Colossians 1:9-14

This passage is a wonderful demonstration of how a pastor should pray for the leaders of a congregation. Especially when these leaders understand the needs of their congregation... that it is still immature and under pressure from cultural influences that seek to undermine the Gospel message.

<sup>Col 1:9</sup> For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

<sup>Col 1:10</sup> And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,

<sup>Col 1:11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully

<sup>Col 1:12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

<sup>Col 1:13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,

<sup>Col 1:14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

#### a. Observations:

i. This prayer should be understood from a point of view that Paul deeply loved and was committed to this church and its leaders. Accordingly, Paul prayed:

1. 1:9 – Pray for a specific action – Paul prayed specifically for Knowledge, Spiritual wisdom & understanding. Paul knew these leaders and knew exactly what they needed, and what they needed to hear from him in both encouragement and guidance.
2. 1:10a – Pray for a specific purpose – Paul prayed that they would walk in a manner worthy of a representative of Christ in confidence and the knowledge of God’s will.
3. 1:10b-12 – Pray for a specific result – Paul prayed that they would:
  - a. For each to bear Spiritual fruit.
  - b. To be strengthened in power and joy.
  - c. For the endurance necessary for these leaders to stand firm against adversarial influences.
  - d. That through all of this, these leaders would be seen as grateful because they have been spiritually qualified to inherit the Kingdom of God.

4. **1:13-14 – Pray with a specific frame of reference – one of the best means to encourage people is to remind them where they were and how far they have come:**
  - a. Having been rescued from darkness where despair and confusion reigns.
  - b. Having been transferred into the Kingdom of Light where we have redemption and forgiveness.
- ii. This is a proactive prayer for church leaders who were doing well and needed to be encouraged and realigned – Paul is not merely reacting to their specific problems, but he is also rejoicing and urging them onward in their collective growth and maturity. This is what a good senior leader does... they see where the need is and express how to motivate leader/workers to accomplish what God desires for their own lives and for their congregation.
- b. **Application – as a Spiritual Leader we should understand that our words have much greater weight than we are often aware of or even intend, because people respect and trust God’s ministry in us and through us. Thus, we have the opportunity to really bring Grace to people, or we can become a source of Spiritual abuse... either intentionally or unintentionally. Spiritual leaders need to be circumspect in how we speak into another’s life. Some helpful Guidelines:**
  - i. Pray specifically for personal spiritual maturity. As leaders we need to have a vision of what spiritual maturity looks like so that we can properly describe it, encourage it, and help develop it in another life.
  - ii. To be bold enough and spiritually sensitive enough to properly assess people in your ministry – to understand where they are spiritually and what they can reasonably do. Common mistakes for spiritual leaders in their assessment of others is:
    1. They presume that where these leaders are is where they’ll remain.
    2. They fail to sense what God is up to in another, and thereby fail to think God’s thoughts for them.
    3. They presume these leaders already possess maturity because they need help through their leadership, or alternatively they want to see it in a particular person.
    4. By making a presumption of immaturity, they discourage individuals from reaching beyond where they are right now.
    5. Probably the most difficult part of developing leaders is to sense God’s desire for them, and breathe life into them to move them where the Spirit wants to take them... and to do this respectfully, without prejudice or presumption.
  - iii. Questions we should be asking God for discernment about:
    1. What does God desire to do in another’s life?
    2. What would it take to help move them to the next level?
    3. Are they ready to move forward?
  - iv. These questions require the leader to know the person intimately and to understand what maturity and spiritual growth looks like.
  - v. The goal is not going to be the same for each person – the challenge is to have a picture of what maturity is and allow God to shape each person into what God has for each of them personally. All leaders should understand that God has already prepared leaders through ‘Spiritual gifting’ [supernaturally given] and ‘natural ability’ [that they have been given from birth and life development].

- vi. God loves individuality evidenced that each of us has our own unique DNA, retina scan, and finger prints. He prepares individual leaders uniquely.
- vii. Because God loves each person and has an individual plan for their life, senior leaders should not force a “one-size-fits-all” form of discipleship. There are basics each needs to know, but have room for specific application based upon personal needs. Therefore we need to know our people well and dream big for them... encouraging them to reach out and engage their calling and potential.
- viii. Like Paul, leaders should pray both for ministry and people from a different perspective.
  - 1. Your walk with God has to be such that people see in you what you don't see in yourself.
  - 2. When they see these gifting's in us and speak this back into our life, it opens the door for us also to speak into their life as well... and then you can dream with them what God could be in them and through them.
  - 3. This is a mystery that is born in and through the Spirit.
- ix. Pray this for yourself as well as for others.