

A Study of Colossians Study Guide

Introduction and Background to Colossians

Brief review...who is St. Paul? Read **Galatians 1:13 – 24 (NT pg 183)** for Paul's own summary. What do we learn about Paul from these verses?

See the timeline for Paul's life and the books of the Bible he wrote. Some "liberal scholars" have tried to assert that **Colossians** was not written by St. Paul. Within the circle of these "scholars" there is a ranking of books most likely written by Paul. Among these scholars, **Romans, Galatians, and 1-2 Corinthians** are the four undisputed letters of Paul and make up what is called the *Hauptbriefe*, a German word for "main letters". The *Hauptbriefe* position is one the most extreme and was developed in the 19th century by a German named F.C. Baur of Tubingen, Germany. In wider scholarly circles **Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon** are more commonly accepted as being authored by Paul than **Colossians** but in general, the authorship of Paul for **Colossians** was not seriously questioned until the 19th Century. The letters that are the most frequently disputed for Pauline authorship are **Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, and Titus**. It is the position of LCMS and the vast majority of scholars that all of these books were authored by St. Paul. As we go through **Colossians** we will look at a few of the reasons **Colossians** has been disputed and address those criticisms.

Why would we care if Paul is the author of **Colossians** and what is the usual motivation of the "liberal scholars" in challenging his authorship?

To help us provide part of the argument that Paul wrote Colossians compare **Colossians 4:7 – 9 (NT pg 198)**, **Ephesians 6:21 – 22 (NT pg 192)**, and **Philemon 10 – 12 (NT pg 212)**. What relationship do you see among these three letters of Paul?

Also compare **Philemon 1 – 2, 23 – 24 (NT pg 212)** and **Colossians 4:12 – 17 (NT pg 198)**. What does this tell us about Philemon and Colossians?

The Bible includes these personal greetings in the epistles of Paul and other apostles. Of what value are these greetings to us?

Note that Paul references a letter to the Laodiceans in **Colossians 4:16 (NT pg 198)**. The Bible does not have “Paul’s Epistle to the Laodiceans” and there is no letter to the Laodiceans that has ever been found. “Liberal Scholars” will point to these types of references and claim that there are lost books of the Bible. How would you respond to that?

If a reliable text of the Letter to the Laodiceans were discovered, do you think it should be included in the Bible? Why or why not?

As we read **Colossians 1:1 – 9 (NT pg 196)** and **Colossians 2:1** what do we learn about how the Colossian church was established?

Let’s look at how Paul’s missionary journeys interface with Colossae and how Epaphras could have established the Colossian church. While referencing the map of Paul’s Missionary Journeys and the map of Early Churches in Asia, read about the founding of the church at Ephesus in **Acts 18:18 – 19:1a, 8 – 10 (NT pg 135)**. Note the location of Colossae in relation to Ephesus. What do we learn from these verses about the church at Ephesus and the influences of preaching in the area, including Colossae?

Look again at **Philemon 23 (NT pg 212)** and **Colossians 1:3 – 9 (NT pg 196)**. What is the likely way that Paul has been informed of the issues at Colossae and Laodicea?

The Colossian Heresy

There are two major categories of heresy in **Colossians**. In order to interpret what God wants us to understand in **Colossians** it is important to understand and be aware of these two heresies. Briefly stated the heresies are:

1. An extreme form of Judaism that emphasized festivals, dietary restrictions, and other Jewish practices that were meant to add to justification by grace through faith in Christ as a means of salvation.
2. An early (incipient) form of Gnosticism. Gnosticism grew out of pagan influences in the Mediterranean region. “Liberal scholars” argue that **Colossians** and other books of the New Testament that address this early Gnosticism had to have been written long after the Apostles had died because Gnosticism did not occur until well into the second century A.D. However, the Gnosticism they are referencing was a much more intricate, well developed, and more elaborate form with multiple variations. See the separate handout on Gnosticism.

Opening Salutation

Let’s read the Salutation, **Colossians 1:1 – 2 (NT pg 196)**.

What point or tone is Paul setting with this initial description of himself?

How does verse 1 apply to us? _____

Who is Timothy and what was his main role in relationship to Paul? See **Acts 16:1 – 3 (NT pg 132)**, **Acts 17:14 – 15**, **Acts 19:21 – 22**, **1 Corinthians 4:14 – 17 (NT pg 164)**, **1 Timothy 6:20 – 21 (NT pg 207)**.

Of what significance is it that Timothy was a co-author of Colossians with Paul?

What does it mean to be “in Christ”? _____

The Overture (Colossians 1:3 – 20)

“As the overture of a symphony or opera introduces musical themes that will be taken up later in the work, so this portion of the letter (especially the Christ hymn of 1:15 – 20) serves to introduce themes that will be developed further in the epistle, particularly in the main exposition and refutation of the heresy (1:21 – 2:23).”

(Deterding: *Concordia Commentary on Colossians*)

Read Colossians 1:3 – 6 (NT pg 198)

What example is there for us each and every day of our lives in these verses?

For us as a congregation? _____

What is the difference between faith and hope (verse 5)? _____

How does verse 5 shed light on **1 Corinthians 13:13** (NT pg 171)?

How does this whole discussion on faith, hope, and love help us in answering the first two questions of this section about the example of the Colossians for us and our congregation?

How does **Colossians 1:5 – 6** (NT pg 198) begin to set the stage for the heresy of Gnosticism?

Read **Colossians 1:9 – 14**. What is the difference between knowledge, wisdom, and understanding?

What do these verses say is the purpose of gaining knowledge and wisdom?

How do we achieve this? _____

In verse 11, for what do we need “endurance”? “and patience”?

Read **Colossians 1:15 – 20**. These verses are believed to be an early Christian hymn, probably written by Paul, that was probably well known to the Colossians. What are some of the key words in this hymn that counter some of the teachings of the Gnostics?

What does it mean that Jesus is “the firstborn over all creation” and how might this verse be misinterpreted?

What does this hymn allude to or sound like in our own order of worship?

The Ministry of Reconciliation (1:21 – 29)

The Ministry of Reconciliation is the doctrine which states that mankind lives in a fallen state and therefore cannot come into the presence of God. We are therefore “alienated” from God. The way that we are restored or brought back into God’s presence is through faith in Christ’s sacrifice of His body and blood on the cross.

Read **Colossians 1:21 – 29** and look for words and phrases that address the Gnostic heresy.

Verse 21 is translated in the *Amplified Bible* (as well as other translations) as:

“And although you at one time were estranged and alienated from Him and were of hostile attitude of mind in your wicked activities,” AMP

What does this say about our state before being reconciled to God in Christ?

What does verse 22 reveal about our state after being reconciled to God in Christ?

What does the “Devil, the World, and our own Flesh” do to disrupt or negate the truth of verse 22?

Similarly the *Amplified Bible* translates verse 23 as:

[And this He will do] provided that you continue to stay with and in the faith [in Christ], well-grounded and settled and steadfast, not shifting or moving away from the hope [which rests on and is inspired by] the glad tidings (the Gospel), which you heard and which has been preached [as being designed for and offered without restrictions] to every person under heaven, and of which [Gospel] I, Paul, became a minister.” AMP

What are the implications of this verse for us as individuals? As a congregation?

What are your main challenges in staying “well grounded”, “settled”, and “steadfast”?
