

"COLOSSIANS, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

Rev. Robert T. Woodyard

First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

August 16, 2026, 6:00 pm

Text for Sermon: Colossians 1:1-2; 2:8-10, 13-15; 3:1-4, 12-14

Introduction.

We continue to make our way through Paul's thirteen letters, arranged in the NT not chronologically but from longest to shortest. These are not the only letters Paul wrote. We know of two others written to the church in Corinth and another to the church in Laodicea, though it is possible that reference may be to the letter to the Ephesians.

Colossae was about 100 miles inland to the east of Ephesus, near Laodicea and Hierapolis. None of the churches in these areas were founded by Paul.

A native from Colossae, Epaphras, first preached the Gospel there and labored diligently in the Lord for them and for Laodicea and Hierapolis.

Colossians 1:6—8 ... since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from *Epaphras* our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

He probably heard the Gospel from Paul during Paul's three years in Ephesus.

Acts 19:10 This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

While Paul had never been to these cities, he had a strong pastoral connection and personal interest in them.

One other personal connection. Philemon is a wealthy slave owner and a member of this church which probably met in his house (Philemon 1:2). Paul had sent his runaway slave, Onesimus, back to him. So Philemon

and Onesimus are sitting in the church hearing this letter which Onesimus may have carried back from Paul to the church.

We are reminded by these personal references that this is real human history, real people in real places. Real people in real churches living ordinary Christian lives like you and me.

Book

The letters to the churches in Ephesus, Philippi and Colossae were all written about the same time while Paul was in prison in Rome. He never stopped ministering and loving and caring for the churches God used him to plant. He thinks nothing of his own personal suffering or restraints.

While there are a lot of commendable things going on in the church, we can read between the lines to hear Paul has some serious concerns about the church.

Epaphras has apparently come to find Paul in Rome in prison and share with him what was going on in Colossae and how the Gospel was being compromised by false teaching.

Paul uses this occasion to make some wonderfully clear statements about Christ and His gospel.

This letter is both strong encouragement and strong warning. They needed both, we need both. It is loving, faithful pastoral ministry to receive both with grace and humility.

Purpose, theme

The theme of this letter is the absolute supremacy of Jesus Christ over all things. Paul declares the superiority of Christ and His Gospel over all other human philosophies and traditions. Paul affirms Christ's deity and the salvation He has secured in His blood.

The Colossians Heresy.

Paul is troubled by the news of false teachers in their midst and that they aren't being discerning. The Gospel was being obscured under a veneer of syncretism and false teaching.

They mixed a little Christianity, a little Judaism, plus a little mystery religion to create a new religion which looked so deceptively familiar that Christians in Colossae might have wondered if this new system was not simply a more insightful way of understanding the old teaching; a new take on the old-time religion.

Paul counters their empty philosophy with three profound answers. To the first, he answers Christ. To the second, he answers Christ. To the third, he answers Christ.

Jewish teachers pushed for strict dietary laws about food, drink, and festival calendar observances, and the Sabbath. Legalists insisted on circumcision.

Paul asks, do you think stricter adherence to rules will enhance your spiritual life?

How about trusting in Him who fulfilled all laws.

Colossians 2:16-17 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. 17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

People looked to worshipping angels and spiritual powers instead of keeping their focus on Jesus.

Paul asks, are you interested in powerful spiritual, heavenly beings? How about contemplating the one who is seated at the right hand of the Father in glory (3:1).

People practiced harsh physical self-denial and fake humility to feel spiritually superior. Religious asceticism found in do not handle, taste or touch.

Teachers claimed believers needed extra hidden wisdom beyond Christ to reach full maturity.

Paul asks, do you want to contemplate deep spiritual mysteries? Do you want to advance in spiritual wisdom?

Then contemplate the mystery of Christ.

Colossians 1:25-26 ...the word of God fully known, 26 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Colossians 2:3 Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

All of this reveals an inadequate and very low view of Christ and what He has accomplished for us. Christians did not have to struggle to achieve or be worthy of or earn entrance into the inheritance of the saints, God had already accomplished everything for us in His Son.

Modern Christians are just as susceptible to these errors.

We reformed types can easily fall into intellectual and theological pride and snobbery. Humility turns into looking down on others, forgetting our salvation is purely by grace alone.

In our desire for subjective experiences we are drawn to specific emotional highs during worship to feel close to God. We equate dramatic, intense loud worship with the presence or power of the Spirit. Faith becomes anchored in personal feelings.

Just as the Colossians blended local pagan philosophies with the Gospel, modern Evangelicals frequently blend partisan political loyalty with biblical faith.

Christian Nationalism blends or merges political loyalty with Christian faith, making political power and cultural dominance equal to the teachings of Jesus.

The Prosperity Gospel treats God like a vending machine. It combines faith with greed, claiming that physical wealth and perfect health are signs of true spiritual maturity.

In many Evangelical pulpits, preaching has shifted from Christ-centered biblical exposition to moralistic self-help. Sermons on "Seven steps to a better marriage," financial management, or emotional self-actualization, using Jesus merely as a life coach. The deep realities of sin, repentance, and redemption are ignored. The Gospel is minimized into a tool for achieving a comfortable, middle-class life.

Some modern movements enforce strict rules on dress, music, movie choices, or Bible translations. They teach that keeping these cultural standards proves your salvation.

Any reliance on external forms of godliness at the expense of a living, dynamic power of a personal faith-based relationship with Christ is heresy.

Your only hope in life is death, death to the flesh, death to the law, death to rule keeping, death to self and all that is earthly in us. And we must keep dying, dying to our besetting, continuing, secret sins.

Any time a ministry or teacher says, "Jesus is good, but you also need [X] to be a complete Christian," they are repeating the Colossian heresy. All cults to this, but it is also in the air we breathe, and it is in all our hearts.

Where do you seek your joy? Where do you want to find your satisfaction and fulfilment? Is there anything in this world that can compare to Christ?

More to the point, what would other people who know you say is where you seek satisfaction, or what would they say is the most important thing to you?

Family, money, career, possessions, beauty, fame, knowledge, friends, personal gratification.

Salvation by grace alone apart from any and all works, by faith in Jesus Christ is radical. It is always radical. We must constantly be on guard for any deviation that would diminish the centrality of Christ as Lord and Savior.

Jesus.

This is why Colossians is one of the most Christ-centered books in the Bible. This is why Paul's first, second and third answer to the Colossian heresy is Christ, Christ, Christ.

Paul is writing in chains in a first century prison in Rome. His body is in chains but his mind, heart, and soul are entirely free and in that freedom his soul soars to highest heights of spiritual understanding and glory. He sees Christ in greater glory than he had ever before and indeed, a greater glory than anyone had ever seen.

His pen paints a picture of Christ exalted far above the heavens and the earth. A vision every bit as great if not greater than John's vision on the island of Patmos. Listen to this exalted picture and revelation of the one and only God-Man, the Savior of sinners, the Lord of creation, the King and ruler over every human government and every spiritual authority.

All that God has ever done and is doing and will ever do for the world has happened in and through and for Christ.

For two thousand years these words have given courage and boldness and inspiration to countless millions of saints and servants of Christ, countless generations of sufferers for Christ who because of the strength gained from these words endured to the glory of God.

Listen again to the power of the truth of what Paul saw in his suffering in prison:

Colossians 1:15-20 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ...19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Colossians 2:9-10 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.

Colossians 2:13-15 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

Colossians 3:3-4 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Colossians 3:17 Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Philippians 1:21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Implications and application.

Anything plus Christ is not Christ, its either Christ or nothing. When you encounter false teaching, when you encounter the lies of our culture tearing down Christianity you can do no better than to read Colossians. Read this letter this week and:

Colossians 1:23 Continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven.

Colossians 3:1-2 If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Philippians 4:19-20 My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. 20 To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Prayer:

Colossians 1:9-14 ... that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so as to walk in a

manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. 13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.