

Preview of Colossians

The church at Colossae resulted from Paul's missionary labours in Asia Minor, although Paul himself had apparently never preached there (2:1). Epaphras, a native of Colossae (4:12), was likely converted during Paul's lengthy stay in Ephesus, during which time "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:10). Both he and Archippus (1:7; 4:17) apparently served in the ministry at Colossae. Philemon and Apphia (his wife?) were members of this church (Philemon 1-2). Onesimus was their slave (Philemon 10, 16).

The city of Colossae lay about one hundred miles east of Ephesus along a trade route connecting Ephesus and the Euphrates River. Both Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13) were situated in the same general area. Paul directed that this letter to the Colossians and the one that the Laodiceans had received (possibly the Ephesians' letter) be mutually shared (4:16).

The great theme of this epistle is that Jesus Christ, as the preeminent, divine one, provides redemption from sin and power to live above sin. The key verses of the epistle are 2:9-10. The apostle opens his epistle with a customary salutation, followed by some general expressions of thanksgiving and prayers (1:1-14). In contrast to most of his epistles, Paul moved from the introduction to the main treatise without making a clear break. Within the introduction, the apostle declared his twofold desire for the Colossian believers (1:9-10). The first part of this desire—"that ye might walk worthy of the Lord"—suggests the second main division of the book: the practical teachings concerning Christian living (2:4-4:6).

The apostle then closed his letter with personal commendations and a salutation (4:7-18). The Colossians faced a philosophy that would rob Christ of His preeminent place in human experience (2:8). Judaism threatened them (2:16-17), and asceticism and angel worship posed their respective threats (2:18-23). Perhaps a strange mixture of all these errors was gaining the Colossians' attention. In any case, Paul directed their attention to Jesus Christ, who was their life, and to the eternal, spiritual blessings that the believer experiences through Him (3:1-4). The message of this epistle richly encourages the 21st century church. Satan continues to viciously attack the person of Jesus Christ. Self still seeks to rebel against a worthy, Christlike walk. But the great truth abides that "in [Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."

The Pre-eminence of Christ

Lesson Scope: [Colossians 1](#)

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus:

The Book of Colossians opens by presenting Jesus as preeminent. His work of redemption is central to our faith. Along with describing Christ's exalted position, Paul shows the Colossians that the believers' standing before God is founded on Christ's work and His exalted position. Like the believers at Colossae, the Christian today will encounter many mixtures of truth and error. John wrote, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him" (1 John 4:15). The place people give to Jesus is an indicator of how sound their faith is. If Jesus is preeminent in our lives, we will be "delivered . . . from the power of darkness" and will "continue in the faith grounded and settled" (1:13, 23). The exalted Son of God is the only Creator; the sole provider of salvation, and the Head of the church. "He that believeth on him shall not be confounded."

The question Jesus raised to the Pharisees, "What think ye of Christ?" (Matthew 22:42), is especially important. Christ has been "highly exalted" (Philippians 2:9) by God because of His role in redemption. He is the Head of the church because He purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). When we emphasize a faith that works, we must not forget that our redemption is based on the work of Christ. In our daily lives, we need to follow the example of the believers at Antioch who were called Christians because they followed Christ. When our life is patterned after Christ, we are acknowledging His pre-eminence.

Lesson Aim: To teach truths about the pre-eminence of Christ.

Theme Verses: [Ephesians 1:21-22](#). Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.

Lesson Text:

Man's Need

Colossians 1:1-13^(KJV) Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother, ²To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love *which ye have* to all the saints, ⁵For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; ⁶Which is come unto you, as *it is* in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as *it doth* also in you, since the day ye heard *of it*, and knew the grace of God in truth: ⁷As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; ⁸Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit. ⁹For this cause we also, since the day we heard *it*, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; ¹²Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: ¹³Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated *us* into the kingdom of his dear Son:

Christ's Sufficiency

Philippians 1:14-22^(KJV) And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. ¹⁵Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: ¹⁶The one preaches Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: ¹⁷But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. ¹⁸What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice. ¹⁹For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, ²⁰According to my earnest expectation and *my* hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but *that* with all boldness, as always, *so* now also

Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether *it be* by life, or by death.
²¹ For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. ²² But if I live in the flesh, this *is* the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.

Man's Response

Colossians 1:23-29 ^(KJV) If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; ²⁴ Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church: ²⁵ Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; ²⁶ *Even* the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: ²⁷ To whom God would make known what *is* the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: ²⁸ Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus: ²⁹ Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Questions for Study:

Man's Need

1. What are the involvements of being “filled with the knowledge of his will” (1:9)?
2. Do knowledge and fruitfulness always go together (1:10)?
3. What are some virtues that go along with divine strength (1 :1 1-12)?

Christ's Sufficiency

4. What is the basis for our redemption (1:14)?
5. In what ways is Christ the image of God (1:15)?
6. How can we give Christ the pre-eminence (1:18)?

Man's Response

7. What is needed so Christ can present us “unblameable and unreprou-able in his sight” (1:22-23)?
8. What are the “riches of the glory” of the mystery now available to us (1:27)?

9. What is involved in presenting “every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (1:28)?

Analysing the Passage:

Paul prayed that the believers would experience increasing spiritual growth and fulfillment, which is found not in special knowledge but by being “translated . . . into the kingdom of his dear Son” (1:13). The word firstborn can mean the one born first or it can refer to a privileged position, as seen in Deuteronomy 21:16-17. In verse 15 it is used to show Christ’s pre-eminence over creation. In verse 18 it is addressing His being the first to rise from the dead, which also places Him in the exalted position of the firstborn. Dispensation in verse 25 means “stewardship.” In this case it is the responsibility entrusted to Paul to make the Word of God fully known. The mystery in verse 26 is not a secret knowledge but something previously hid that is now revealed. This refers to the work of Christ, who brought the Gentiles into the family of God and opened the way to glory.

Principles and Applications:

Man’s Need

1. Christ graciously provides for our spiritual filling (1:1 -2, 9-10). The spiritual filling needed to produce fruit in our lives comes from Christ’s indwelling presence. We receive this filling by becoming students of the Word, by exposing ourselves to sound preaching and teaching, and by reading sound literature. While God may use others as channels through which we receive filling, Christ is the source. Because Christ is the source, there will always be sufficient to meet our needs.

2. Christ provides for spiritual strength and victory (1:11-13). The day-to-day tests and temptations can wear away our spiritual strength. We are used to living in a wicked world and may not realize the spiritual drain it can be. Christ provides strength to go on. Strength is given not only according to our need but according to His power, which is infinite. We have the resources to live in victory even though the world is increasingly wicked.

Christ’s Sufficiency

3. Christ is preeminent in redemption (1:14). The whole plan of salvation is founded on Christ’s perfect, sinless sacrifice: “Without shedding of

blood is no remission” of sin (Hebrews 9:22). No one else could make this sacrifice. It is because of this that God has “given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9).

4. Christ is preeminent in revelation (1:15). “God is a Spirit” (John 4:24). Jesus, however, came as a man and became a visible image of the invisible God. Because Jesus is God, He accurately portrayed God to man. As Christians, we are called to represent God to the world, but we will never do it as well as Jesus did.

5. Christ is preeminent in Creation (1:16-17). As God, Christ is Creator, even though He lived in a human body and died as a man. He is above all creation. Even though He died to redeem this sin-cursed creation, “all things were created . . . for him” (1:16). Christ’s pre-eminence in Creation lifts Him far above being simply a good man.

6. Christ is preeminent in the church (1:18-21). Christ is the Head of the church. Even though people fill the offices of the church and without people there is no church, Christ is the Head. Through His Spirit He leads His church as “the Shepherd and Bishop” (1 Peter 2:25). He is the only one who can bridge the gap between God and man and give divine wisdom to the church. We need to be careful to seek divine guidance as the church faces new issues. To depend on our logic and wisdom in facing the issues of life can rob Christ of His pre-eminence.

Man’s Response

7. Christ needs to be preeminent in our faith (1:23). While fellow believers are an important source of encouragement and guidance, if our focus is on them, we will be unstable. A proper focus on Christ will not lead us away from His body but will lift our sights above human problems and weaknesses to the One who embodies the perfection we look for.

8. The pre-eminence of Christ gives the Christian hope (1:24-27). The Gentiles were “strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope” (Ephesians 2: 12). Christ is the hope available to all who accept Him. He not only deals with our past sins and gives us victory for today, but He has also promised us a place with Him in glory. Our only passport to the glories awaiting us is the blood of Christ.

9. The pre-eminence of Christ gives the Christian a glorious message (1:28-29). The message of the Christian is a message of warning to the sinner. This message not only brings salvation to the repentant sinner but also leads him to higher ground. It brings about growth, and its goal is to

lift us above the unstable tendencies of our humanity to where we can be mature and complete in Christ, a process that will only be finished when we see Him face to face.

Important Teachings

1. Christ graciously provides for our spiritual filling (1:1-2, 9-10).
2. Christ provides for spiritual strength and victory (1:11-13)
3. Christ is preeminent in redemption (1:14).
4. Christ is preeminent in revelation (1:15).
5. Christ is preeminent in Creation (1:16-17).
6. Christ is preeminent in the church (1:18-21).
7. Christ needs to be preeminent in our faith (1:23).
8. The pre-eminence of Christ gives the Christian hope (1:24-27).
9. The pre-eminence of Christ gives the Christian a glorious message (1:28-29).
10. Christ is preeminent in righteousness and holiness (1:22).

Answers to Questions:

1. What are the involvements of being “filled with the knowledge of his will” (1:9)?

We need to be filled with the Spirit, who teaches us all things (John 98 14:26). We need to regularly read and study the Word of God. We need to be growing, maturing Christians who do not seek after the world.

2. Do knowledge and fruitfulness always go together (1:10)?

It is possible to have a head knowledge without living in obedience. However, most times when people know but do not live what they know, the truth they understand is eventually lost. This is how people can end up in apostasy and not understand the truth they once believed.

3. What are some virtues that go along with divine strength (1 :11-12)?

Patience, long-suffering, and joyfulness are mentioned here. The strength is from God, but we do have a part to play in allowing that strength to fill and enable us.

4. What is the basis for our redemption (1:14)?

It is the blood which Christ shed on Calvary that provided release from the curse of sin. “Without shedding of blood is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22). A life of holiness is a product of our redemption, not the basis of it.

5. In what ways is Christ the image of God (1 :15)?

He is the image of God in His sinless perfection. He is the image of God in His ability to detect and rebuke sin and hypocrisy He is the image of God in His love for humanity and His willingness to suffer and die for fallen man. He is the image of God in that He accurately represented God to man in all things.

6. How can we give Christ the pre-eminence (1:18)?

We do it when we greet people in Jesus' name and when we pray to the Father in His name. We do it by unashamedly identifying as Christians. We do it when we help people realize that our lifestyle is not simply a cultural practice but comes from a desire to live out our faith.

7. What is needed so Christ can present us “unblameable and unproveable in his sight” (1:22-23)?

We need to be reconciled to God. We need to continue in the faith. We cannot allow our failures to overwhelm us but need to keep moving on with God. We need to accept the refining work of suffering and afflictions.

8. What are the “riches of the glory” of the mystery now available to us (1:27)?

Christ in us, the hope of glory. It was a mystery to the Jews that God could blend heathen Gentiles into the family of God. By giving His Spirit to the believer, God fits into His family all who Will. The power and gifts of the Spirit are spiritual riches that enable us to reach glory.

9. What is involved in presenting “every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (1:28)?

It involves preaching and teaching. It also involves the brotherly address, warning every man. The spiritual mentoring provided by church leaders, parents, and mature Christians holds this goal in mind. We cannot sit back and relax as soon as the next generation decides for Christ. We need to take seriously the responsibility of presenting “every man perfect in Christ Jesus.”

Summarizing the Lesson:

It is important that we keep Jesus preeminent not only in our doctrine and faith, but also in our life. If Jesus is preeminent in our life, it will affect the choices we make. It will be obvious to the world that someone other than the spirit of the world is directing our life.

Research Guide:

1. Read the chapter titled “God the Son” in *Doctrines of the Bible*.
2. Read the chapter “Christ—the Exalted One” in the booklet *The Doctrine of Christ*, from Eastern Mennonite Publications.