

# OVERVIEW OF COLOSSIANS

## AUTHOR:

The book of Colossians is one of the four books of the New Testament known as the “prison epistles.” The author is **Paul**, as claimed in **1:1**. As is usually the case, there are those who want to deny Pauline authorship, however there is no external evidence to suggest that the author was not the apostle Paul.

## DATE:

The date of the writing of Colossians is approximately **62-63 AD**, based on the established dates of Paul’s first Roman imprisonment. It is at this time that Paul is under house arrest in Rome, when he also wrote the other prison epistles (Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon).

## THEME:

The Supremacy of Christ. What’s at the center of your life (**3:17**)?

## PURPOSE:

To address and refute heresies that were confronting the Colossian brethren, and to show clearly that Christ is superior to *any* alternative (**John 14:6**).

## BACKGROUND:

The city of Colosse was located in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) and was part of a triad of cities (including Laodicea and Hierapolis – **4:13**). Apparently these three congregations were not established by Paul (at least not directly; but maybe as a result of his work locally; cf. **2:1**). Epaphras is typically the one credited with founding the Colossian congregation (**1:7-8**). It seems that he has brought Paul news and concerns about the congregation. Paul probably felt some paternal concern for them as well. Most of the commentators speak of what is known as the “*Colossian heresy*,” acknowledging that they’re not completely aware of what this heresy was, except for this letter. There was also the cult of Artemis (or Diana) there, who was believed to be the goddess of the hunt and of fertility.

Gnosticism, from the Greek work “gnosis” (meaning “knowledge”), was a heresy common at this time. It incorporated a number of schools of philosophy. Gnostics claimed they alone had true knowledge of Christianity. They claimed that the human spirit is good, but that the flesh is inherently evil. Sin occurs only in the flesh, not the spirit. The body is evil and nothing can be done about it, but the spirit doesn’t share in the body’s evil. Because of this belief, they had to deny Jesus’ humanity because he couldn’t be inherently evil. However, if Jesus was not physical, then we lose the “high priest who can relate to us” in **Hebrews 4:15**. It is this Gnostic view that John addresses in **1 John 4:2**, referencing those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh.

This view also lead the Gnostic to one of two extreme responses:

1. Apathy – my body is sinful, but my spirit is good; therefore my sin doesn’t affect me
2. Asceticism – strict or severe disciplinary religion; denying the body (**2:23**)

Another teaching of Gnosticism was that there was a great God (merciful, loving) who created many emanations, different beings, one of which was the God of the Old Testament, who was strict, harsh, and judgmental. The God of the New Testament is the Great God. However, this letter says that God is the Creator of the physical *and* spiritual, which eliminates this Gnostic view.

### **Specific heresies:**

1. Glorification
2. Denial of Christ's deity
3. Philosophies of men (**2:8**)
4. Traditions of men – Traditions that did not start with God (**2:8**)
5. Worship of angels (**2:18**)
6. Asceticism – punish and deny the body of what it needs (**2:23**)
7. Will-worship – worship oneself; *I* am the authority in worship (**2:23**)
8. Syncretism of Christianity with Greek and Jewish practices

### **KEY TERMS:**

- Christ (in Christ) (24 times)
- Knowledge (1:9; 1:10; 2:3; 3:10)
- Wisdom (1:9; 1:28; 2:3; 2:23; 3:16; 4:5)
- Understanding (1:9; 2:2)

### **KEY VERSES:**

**1:27** – Christ in you, the hope of glory

**2:8-10** – Christ is over all, and you are *complete* in Him. Don't let anyone convince you otherwise!

**3:17** – Everything must be done in the name (authority) of Christ

### **CHRIST IN COLOSSIANS (how he is presented):**

- Image of God; Firstborn (**1:15**)
- His supremacy (**1:15-23**)
- Christ in you, the hope of glory (**1:27**)
- You are complete in Christ (**2:10**)
- Christ is over all principalities and powers (**1:16; 2:10, 15**)
- No hope without his gospel (**1:5,6**)
- He is all, and in all (**3:11**)

### **STRUCTURE:**

- I. Christ is superior in spiritual and physical (chapter 1)
- II. Christ is superior to any alternative (chapter 2)
- III. Description of your life in Christ (chapter 3)
- IV. Final Entreaties, Exhortations, and Examples (chapter 4)