

# Colossians

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Colossians is a short letter that teaches some very big topics! First, Paul reminds the Colossians that although the Lord Jesus came into their world as a human during their lifetime, Jesus has always been God and always will be God. He has no beginning and no end. Paul also says, “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him” (1:16). With this understanding of who Jesus is, Paul teaches the Colossians believers to set their minds on Jesus Christ and live in a way that pleases him.

**Writer:** The Apostle Paul and Timothy

**Date of writing:** Around 60 AD

**Original Audience:** Followers of Jesus in the city of Colossae. Colossae was a small city about 160 kilometers east of Ephesus. Most of the believers in Colossae were not from a Jewish background.

**The Reason for the Letter:** Paul is in prison at the time of writing, and he is sending a coworker named Tychicus (4:7) with three letters: one for a man named Philemon, one for the churches in Ephesus, and one for the churches in Colossae. Paul’s coworker Epaphras started the church in Colossae (1:7), and Paul has heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and their love for all God’s people (1:4). So Paul is writing the Colossians to help them understand who Jesus is and what a believer must do to be a mature follower of Christ.



**The Main Message of the Letter:** We can divide Paul’s letter into two nearly equal sections. In chapters one and two, Paul teaches the foundational teaching about God the Father, Jesus the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This foundational teaching about God was necessary because the Colossian church may have brought outside ideas about Jesus, God, and this world from other religions and philosophies. The Colossians seem to have had a small view of who Jesus was, and Paul is giving them a huge picture. He says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God (1:15). All things visible and invisible were created by Jesus (1:16). Jesus existed before all things, and he holds all things together (1:17). Jesus is the head over every power and authority (2:10), and Christ Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God the Father, ruling in unity with him forever and ever (3:1).

With that understanding of Jesus established, Paul writes in chapters three and four about what we as believers must do and not do. Paul says it is like we have died to our old way of life and have now been given a new life in Christ. We must take off our old behaviors and practices like old dirty clothes and put on the new ways like new clean clothing. Paul says, “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” (3:12–14). Paul gives practical instructions in this section regarding our relationships with each other. He also gives a general guide to all of our actions, saying, “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17).

### **The Outline of Colossians:**

1. Greetings, thanksgiving, and prayer (1:1–14)
2. The poem about Jesus Christ (1:15–23)
3. The Mission God gave to Paul (1:24–2:5)
4. Jesus is more excellent than human wisdom (2:6–23)
5. Followers of Jesus transformed and renewed (3:1–17)
6. Christian relationships (3:18–4:1)
7. Prayer request, further instructions and greetings (4:2–18)

### **Final Greetings**

Paul begins each of his letters with greetings, thanksgiving, and prayer for the recipients. He ends each letter with his final greetings and greetings from his co-workers. Paul writes a long section of final greetings in his short letter to the Colossians. We might think these sections of his letters aren’t important to study, but we can learn much from them. Here are some things we learn from the final greetings to the Colossians: Tychicus is carrying the letter to the Colossians. Philemon’s former slave Onesimus is traveling with Tychicus. Read Paul’s letter to Philemon to learn more about Philemon and Onesimus.

The final greetings tell us which of Paul’s co-workers are with him while writing. For example, while writing Colossians, John Mark is working with Paul. John Mark wrote the Gospel of Mark and was Barnabas’ cousin. He traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their first journey but left halfway through. Paul didn’t want to take John Mark on his second journey, but Barnabas did, so they split up. So, Barnabas took John Mark, and Paul left with Silas (Acts 15:36-40). Now, John Mark is again working with Paul along with Luke, the writer of Luke and Acts.

Finally, we learn two important things about the churches in those days. First, most churches met in houses. In many of Paul’s final greetings, he says to greet a person and the church in their house (4:14). Second, we learn that Paul wanted some of his letters to be read and then given to another church. For example, in verse 16, Paul says, “After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.”

Take time to read Colossians all the way through. Then, go back and study each section from the outline above in detail, considering and discussing these questions:

1. What do we learn about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit?
2. What do we learn about the Church?
3. What do I, as a follower of Christ, need to do?
4. Is there a belief or action I need to change?
5. Who can I share these verse with?

### **Making Connections**

Some passages in Colossians are difficult to understand. This is because Paul uses some complicated ideas to communicate to the Colossians. However, other Scripture passages can help us understand Paul’s teaching in Colossians.

Here are other passages to read along with Colossians: Read Colossians 1:15-23 and John 1:1-18 together. Read Colossians 1:24-2:5 and Ephesians 3:1-13 together. Read Colossians 2:6-23 and Romans 14:1-23 together.