

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

## JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

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### JESUS OVER EVERYTHING

*COLOSSIANS*

The late news tycoon and cultural critic, Malcolm Muggeridge, once commented “All new news is old news happening to old people.” And that’s true. Before Mr. Muggeridge came on the scene, the great King Solomon told us not to be bothered by things that look new, problems that feel new, or ideas that sound new, because “... there is nothing new under the sun.” But sometimes not being bothered by these kinds of outside influences is easier said than done. We don’t want it to be that way, but it is that way.

This is what makes the letter to the Colossians so important. In it, Paul tells us how to handle these false, outside influences that try to wedge their way into our faith. But before we get into that, let’s cover some background information.

What is fascinating about this church is that it appears to be a second-generation work that started during Paul’s third missionary journey while establishing Christians in Ephesus (Acts 19). Colosse was a city located in Phrygia, which is now part of modern-day Turkey. At the time it was part of a tri-city area consisting of Colosse, Hieropolis, and Laodicea.

In most of the letters Paul writes, he writes to churches that he had founded. However, he did not found the church in Rome, and he did not found this church. No one knows for sure, but it appears that it was started by a man named Epaphroditus who is mentioned a few times in Paul’s other writings. It even appears that this man was with Paul when the letter was written. In any case, what you’re reading here is the exciting beginnings of the spread of the Gospel in God’s early churches.

But swirling around the pulpit and the pews were some dangerous teachings that began to threaten the young Christians who made up the membership of this church. There was a mixture of philosophical, spiritual, ritualistic, and intellectual ideas that began prying their way into the minds of the people here and they simply did not know what to do about it.

That’s when the experience of Paul came into play. He knew exactly what to do. He had come directly out of that kind of life, had grappled with some of the same issues, and was well-equipped to explain how to deal with anything that threatened to steal the power of God and the truth of God.

Let’s watch how this letter unfolds:

#### ***How to Think About Colossians***

You’ll notice that in the introductory comments Paul begins with a prayer which sets the tone for the entire letter:

*“That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long suffering with joyfulness; giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints:”  
Col. 1:10-12*

What a prayer! And along with this prayer, this is how its work is accomplished:

**The Preeminence of Christ (Chapter 1)**— This is where Paul makes it clear that Jesus is over everything, period. You should notice that before Paul makes a move to answer any concerns, he starts right here to let them know that Christ reigns supreme.

**Christ is Over All Creation (Chapter 1:15-17):** In this section you’ll read of the portions of Christ— that He is the “image of the invisible God,” that He is the firstborn of every creature. These are not titles to suggest that He is like God and was created first, but to state that Jesus is God and is the owner or master over all creation. All of creation is His property. Paul also points out that is by the power of Jesus that all that is created, was created by Him and is upheld by Him.

**Christ is Over All of His Churches (Chapter 1:18-24):** Here we learn that Jesus is the Ruler over the Church.

**Christ is Over All of His People (Chapter 1:25-29):** Paul said that his goal was to instruct and preach God’s Word in such a way that people would not only be saved but that Paul would be able to present each believer perfect in Christ Jesus.

**The Presumptions of Man (Chapter 2)**—In this portion of the letter, Paul answers specific questions about some of the teachings these Colossian Christians were entertaining.

**A Defense Against Intellectualism (Chapter 2:1-10):** One of the rising philosophies being sown into Christianity was a belief called Gnosticism. It came from a Greek word meaning “to know” and that is exactly what the goal was— knowledge. Except their knowledge wasn’t a readily available knowledge. It was a ‘secret knowledge’ that you had to learn from the inside. One of their favorite words to use was the word ‘mystery’ as they described the little secret things that made their pitch. They said there were ‘secret’ things about Christianity that you could only learn through them. But you’ll notice that Paul also used the word “mystery” in this writing. What he did is he stole their word and applied it to the true Christian faith. He used their vocabulary, but he didn’t use their dictionary. He said the mystery of God has already been revealed. God had a plan that He kept secret through the ages, but once Christ came, this mystery was revealed and the secret has now been revealed. You don’t have to go searching for it, and you don’t need a society to tell you about it— Christ came to save you; that’s the secret.

**A Defense Against Ritualism (Chapter 2:11-17):** In these verses, you’ll find references to circumcision. It was claimed that you needed to be circumcised in addition to trusting Christ. It’s been said that for our day, you just need to replace the word circumcision in the passage with baptism, and you’ll see that ritualism is alive and well today. But Paul makes it clear that it is not a ritual that we perform that will save us. It is because we are buried with Christ in baptism, and are risen with Christ in faith that makes us alive in salvation.

**A Defense Against Spiritualism (Chapter 2:18-19):** Here you can read of people holding up the teaching to worship angels. Again, an attractive and provocative idea to this day. However, once again, Paul lays out that God is to increase, who is the Head of all things supernatural and spiritual.

**A Defense Against Legalism (Chapter 2:22-23):** As always, there are those who try to add rules to following Christ. In this case, it was rules about the evil of your flesh and that your body needed to be punished and placed under control. But Christ is our victory in deliverance, not a rigorous punishment.

**The Practicals of Christianity (Chapters 3-4)**— Paul closes the letter with how a life lived in Christ affects all other areas of your life. There are also some striking similarities between the information in the structure and information presented in this letter and in the letters to the Ephesians and to the Philippians.

**Christ is Sufficient for Our Spiritual Life (Chapter 3:1-17):** This section is all about pleasing God— not pleasing men— pleasing God. He is our motivation. And you should be continually getting better and better as you move along.

**Christ is Sufficient for Our Social Life (Chapter 3:18-4:1):** Here, family and work life are covered. Christians should have the best-run families and the best work habits out of anyone else on the planet. Why? God is your motivation, just as before.

**Christ is Sufficient for Our Soul-Winning Life (Chapter 4:2-6):** Paul then asks for prayer that God would give him more opportunities to witness to people right where he is. After this, Paul closes out the letter by giving a list of names and greetings.

### *What to Look for in Colossians*

**References to the Preeminence of Jesus**— If it was not already obvious, Paul was overtly exalting Jesus to these struggling believers. He lifted up the power of Christ. He lifted up the life of Christ. He lifted up the position of Christ. He lifted up the plan of Christ. Everything was and is about Jesus.

We cannot claim His purpose too much. We cannot claim His name in prayer too much. We cannot hear His name in preaching too much. We cannot talk about Him to others too much. We'll get there later on, but Jesus tells us Himself in Revelation that He is the "Alpha and Omega. The beginning and the end." He really is!

That is the preeminence of Christ. He is before your opinions. He is before your hopes. He is before your dreams. He is before your family, your greatest fears, your strongest desires, your deepest longings, your very life. He is before all things! And one day, He will demand acknowledgment from all people and all creatures— great and small.

**References to the Error of Man**— This point is confined to the second chapter of this letter, but it is an important point to make because it is a continual problem that surfaces. Many of the problems we face, as was stated in the beginning of this chapter are not new; they just have new names and new people dealing with them. But watch carefully what Paul does:

**Chapter 2:4** "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words."

**Chapter 2:8** "Beware lest any man spoil you..."

**Chapter 2:16** "Let no man..."

**Chapter 2:18** "Let no man..."

The trend here is obvious. There will always be people out there claiming to have a new answer, a more complete knowledge, or a better way of worship. But friends, the Bible DOES NOT CHANGE! We make mistakes; God never does. The Bible doesn't need to be improved upon; it just needs to be studied and obeyed.

### *What to Gain from Colossians*

**Jesus Is First**— "Jesus over everything!" is Paul's cry in this letter. You see, once we get Jesus right, then everything else falls into place. When we get Jesus right, we'll get worship right. When we get Jesus right, we'll get our identity right. When we get Jesus right, we'll get our living right. When we get Jesus right, we'll get our focus right. If you put Jesus first, then you'll never go wrong.

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