

Introduction to Colossians

Paul's letter to the Colossians stands out in the New Testament. This letter contains some of the highest Christology of the New Testament. This is its heaviest contribution to the collection of New Testament writings. Paul does a masterful job showing Christ's supremacy and unrivaled nature over all things. The main focus in Colossians: Christ is central. Scholars note that the reference to prison links Colossians with Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians, making these letters known as "letters from prison."¹

It's helpful to see the deep, Christ-centered themes for this young church. In terms of why Paul wrote the letter to this young church, scholars know of a brewing "philosophy" that threatened the faithfulness of these young believers. The nature of this philosophy is unknown, however. But it seems the nature of this false teaching came against the identity and divinity of Christ. The city of Colossae itself was about 120 miles east of Ephesus and like many cities of the time, it boasted a variety of religious practices.

Keep in mind, Paul himself did not bring the Gospel to the people in Colossae. We know from Paul's letters that the servant Epaphras was the key evangelist for these new Christians. Because of Epaphras's connection to the city, it seems he made Paul aware of the "hollow" false teaching that was taking place there. In the reading of this letter, it appears the Colossians had not yet fallen away or been deceived, so Paul's message throughout this letter was mainly precautionary.² Paul took time to center on the supremacy of Christ to combat any doubt of His preeminence and rule. The driving force for the entire letter comes from 1:5–20.

Date and Place of the Letter

As mentioned, it is possible Paul wrote Philemon, Philippians, Ephesians and Colossians at the same time and from the same prison. However, the date of the letter is not an easy question to answer. Scholars continue to be divided on this subject. As made evident through the letter itself, we know Paul was in prison during the time of writing. The book of Acts directly records three imprisonments of Paul: Ephesus (AD 52–55), Caesarea (AD 57–59), and Rome (AD 60–62). The traditional thought is that Paul wrote Colossians while in Rome. The evidence for Paul's writing this collection of letters at the same time is this:³

- Each of these letters is addressed to Christians living in the same general area.
- Paul's servant Tychicus delivered both Colossians and Ephesians to their respective churches.

¹ N. T. Wright, *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: Colossians and Philemon*. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986], p. 37.

² Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians - Philemon*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006], p. 267.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008], p. 42.

- The lists of companions that Paul delineates are almost identical in Colossians and Philemon.
- There are significant vocabulary and theological themes overlapping between Colossians and Ephesians.