



EPISODE 7: COLOSSIANS FEBRUARY 28/29

CONTEXT

- a. Colossae, a city on the Lycus River in southeastern Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), had been a prosperous and large city, enjoying a thriving wool industry and a strategic location. In Paul's day, Colossae was a fairly unimportant market town, easily the least significant city to which any of Paul's surviving letters were addressed.

Colossians	Paul	62	Church in Colossae	Rome
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I. WHAT IS THE PURPOSE?

- a. Paul never visited Colossae (2:1). The church there was founded by a Colossian named Epaphras, apparently in the wake of Paul's ministry in Ephesus (A.D. 53–55). Five to seven years later, the founder of the Colossian church joined Paul in prison at Rome (Col. 4:12, 13; cf. Acts 28) to tell the apostle of a strange teaching threatening the health of his home church and to remain with Paul to pray for the churches of the Lycus Valley.
- b. The young Church was under external pressure to conform 'to the beliefs and practices of their pagan and Jewish neighbours'.
- c. The Colossians appear to have come under a type of "Shamanism" (folk religion) combining Jewish and pagan piety presenting itself as a philosophical system (2:8) and insisting on submission to various astral or cosmic powers.

II. WHAT IS POWERFUL (DOCTRINE)?

- a. **CHRISTOLOGY—THE SUFFICIENCY OF CHRIST-- Knowing the Truth—The Real Thing (Not a counterfeit)**
 - i. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him

all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20)

- ii. **Christ's Mission**-- Paul's emphasis on the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ's work in creation and redemption is therefore to be seen as a reminder that they had no need to look elsewhere for completion of salvation outside of Christ:
*²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,²² he has now reconciled **in his body of flesh by his death**, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Col 1:21-23)*
- iii. Paul overwhelmingly emphasizes the sole sufficiency of Christ for salvation.

Key Themes

1. Jesus Christ is preeminent over all creation, Lord over all human rulers and cosmic powers.	1:15–20; 2:9–10; 3:1
2. God has worked through Christ to secure redemption and reconciliation for all who put their faith in him.	1:13–14, 20–22
3. Believers are in Christ and thus participate in a relationship of solidarity with Christ in his death on the cross, his resurrection from the dead, his new life, and his fullness.	2:9–14; 3:1–4
4. Christ has defeated the powers of darkness on the cross, and Christians share in his power and authority over that realm.	2:10, 15; see also 2:8, 20
5. Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish expectation, and Christians now share in the heritage of the old covenant people of God through their union with him.	1:12, 21–22, 27
6. Believers are called to grow in maturity in Christ by getting rid of sinful practices and cultivating Christian virtues.	1:10–12, 28; 3:1–4:6 ¹

III. WHAT IS PROBLEMATIC (CONTROVERSIAL)?

- a. *¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. (Col 3:18-25)*

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 2290). Crossway Bibles.

- b. *Masters, treat your bondservants (slaves) justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Col 4:1)*

IV. **WHAT IS POETIC (THE RHETORICIAN-- JUST BEAUTIFUL)?**

- a. **The Preeminence of Christ:** ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Col 1:15-23)*
- b. **Chiastic Parallel** (See additional notes)

V. **WHAT IS PERSONAL?**

- a. ¹⁸ *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. (Col 4:18)*

VI. **WHAT IS PRACTICAL?**

- a. **Epaphras:** ⁷ *just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. (Col 1:7)*
- b. **The “Three Open Prayer”:** ² *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak. (Col 4:2-4)*
- c. **Walk in Wisdom:** ⁵ *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. (Col 4:5-6)*
- d. **“Who’s Who” of the Pauline Church** (Col 4:7-17).

VII. **WHAT IS PRAYERFUL (THE PART HE PRAYS TO GOD)?:** ⁹ *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (Col 1:9-10).*

VIII. **PASTORAL SUMMARY**

- a. **UNION WITH CHRIST:** ¹¹ [May you be] strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom* we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col 1:11-14)
- b. ⁶ *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk **in him**, ⁷ rooted and built up **in him** and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For **in him** the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled **in him**, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ **In him** also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried **with him in baptism**, in which **you were***

also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, ***God made alive together with him***, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them ***in him***. (Col 2:6-15)

- c. The Christian life begins with the realization that we are united to Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection (Col 3:1-17).

A CHIASTIC PARALLEL: Colossians 1:24-29.

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

It can be outlined thus:

- I. ²⁴ Now I rejoice in my **sufferings for your sake**, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions (*I am glad to be suffering more and more like Christ suffered...*)
- II. **for the sake of his body**, that is, the **church**, (*Why is Paul suffering? It is not meaningless suffering. It is for the sake of the church...Christ's body*)
- a. A ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the **stewardship** from God
- i. B that was **given to me for you**, to make the **word of God** fully known,
- a. C ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations
- i. D but now revealed to his saints. (*First revealed to his saints...*)
1. E ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which **is Christ**
- ii. D' in you, the hope of glory. (*...now revealed in his saints*)
- b. C' ²⁸ **Him** we proclaim,
- ii. B' warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, **that** we may present everyone mature in Christ.
- b. A' ²⁹ **For this I** toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

This outline exposes one of the Apostle Paul's favorite (and most sophisticated) ways of presenting an argument. It is called a *Chiastic Parallel* and was very popular in the Greek rhetoric of Paul's day. By analyzing this structure, Paul's main point is revealed:

1. **Paul exists and therefore suffers for the church to proclaim the gospel to her;**
2. **The Church then exists and suffers for the sake of sharing and embodying the gospel to the gentiles (the world).**