

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “Introduction To Colossians”

Colossians 1:1-2

2004

### Introduction

As we begin our study of the Book of Colossians, I am amazed at how contemporary its message is – especially for those of us who live on Kauai! Many of the issues that Paul addresses in this short book are the same questions we face today:

1. Was Jesus just a prophet, a moral teacher, an ascended master – or is He God?
2. Can a Vegan diet heighten a person’s spiritual awareness? Or can you be an on-fire follower of God and still eat pork hash and lau lau?
3. Does it matter what day you worship on? Or is any day as good as another?
4. Is it alright to pursue contact with angels? Are they really mediators between God and man or are they demons in disguise?
5. Can harsh treatment of the body empower a person to overcome the flesh?
6. Is it OK to mix the teachings of Christ with the teachings of Eastern mysticism?
7. Aren’t all religions equally valid – just different paths to the same God?

Paul’s answer to each of these questions is quite simple: “**Christ is all-Sufficient**”

### I The People Of Colossians

A. The **author** of the book [Verse 1]

1. Paul: An **apostle** - 1 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:1

Paul repeatedly identified himself as the author of Colossians (1:1; 1:23; 4:18)

*Apostle* = Apostolos = “One who is sent or commissioned by another”

Our term “ambassador” gives the basic meaning.

#### Application:

While we will never be capital “A-postles” in the sense that Paul was, all believers in Christ are to live and function as ambassadors of Christ.

John 17:18 “As you sent (apesteilas, same root as that of *apostle*) me into the world, I have sent (apesteila) them into the world.”

2 Cor 5:20 “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.”

a. Of Christ Jesus

*Of Christ* = “Belonging to” (poss. genitive) or “sent by” (gen. of source).

And in this case, both meanings apply:

1. Paul belonged to Christ
2. Paul was sent by Christ

**Application:** To whom do you belong? And who do you serve?

1 Cor 6:19-20 “You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

b. By the will of God

Paul didn't appoint himself, nor was he appointed by any man. His apostleship wasn't the result of “paying his dues” or “climbing the apostolic ladder”. He was appointed to his position by the will of God.

2. Timothy: Our brother

Timothy was Paul's son in the faith, his disciple, his companion in ministry. By mentioning Timothy, Paul accomplished several things:

1. He recognized the partnership of those who served with him.
2. He promoted the gifts and abilities of those who served with him.
3. He demonstrated his interdependence on those who served with him.

Most scholars believe that Paul wrote Colossians early in his (first) Roman imprisonment (AD 60-61) while he was under house arrest (Col 4:3, 10, 18).

B. The recipients of the book

1. The city of Colosse

- a. Located on the west side of modern-day Turkey.
- b. Once a large and prosperous city, but changes in the trade routes led to its decline until it was reduced to a rest stop on the way to somewhere else.
- d. Like most Roman cities at that time, it was a pagan city.
- c. Though there was a large Jewish population, the makeup of the church was primarily Gentile, which explains some of the problems the church was having -- problems of both pagan and Jewish origin.

2. The church at Colosse

The church was not founded by Paul. In fact, Paul had never even met the believers in Colosse. Most likely, the church was founded by Epaphras (cf. 1:7; 4:12-13) who came to know the Lord through Paul's ministry in Ephesus when Paul taught in the lecture hall of Tyrannus (Acts 19:10). Evidently, Paul not only shared the gospel with Epaphras, but also disciplined and equipped him to go back and plant a church in his hometown of Colosse (1:7; 4:12-13).

**Application:**

Epaphras' call to plant a church in Colosse illustrates an important truth: God does not need an “A-postle”, or even a ‘full-time Christian worker’ to get a ministry established. He simply needs someone who loves Him, loves people and has the heart to reach the lost.

3. The members of the Colossian church

a. Epaphras

1. He was a native of Colosse - Co 4:12

2. He was a servant of Christ - Co 4:12
3. He was fervent in praying for others - Co 4:12
4. He was a "fellow-prisoner" with Paul at this time - Phile 23
5. According to tradition he was suffered martyrdom for Christ.

b. Archippus

1. He was an elder at Colosse
2. He was a "fellow soldier" of Paul - Philem 1-2
3. He was exhorted by Paul to complete his mission - Col 4:17
4. He also suffered as a martyr for Christ

c. Philemon

1. He was converted to Christ through Paul's ministry - Philem 19
2. He was a slave owner in Colosse - Philem
3. He was commended by Paul as a man of faith, love, generosity, hospitality, mercy and forgiveness - Philem
4. He also suffered martyrdom for Christ

d. Onesimus

1. He was a native of Colosse - Col 4:9
2. He was Philemon's run-away slave
3. He was found by Paul in Rome, and was converted - Philem 10-17
4. He was described by Paul as useful in his ministry
5. He was sent back to Philemon by Paul - Philemon 10
6. He was the courier who brought Paul's letter to the Colossians - Co 4:9

## II The Problems Of Colossians

Several years after the church was established, Epaphras brought Paul an update on how the ministry was going. For the most part, it was very favorable:

1. They evidenced true faith in Christ Jesus - Col 1:4-5
2. They had a love for all the saints and a love in the Spirit - Col 1:4-5, 8
3. They were fruitful and the gospel was spreading through them - Col 1:6
4. They were orderly in their worship and firm in their faith - Col 2:5

But Epaphras also informed Paul of some problems that were endangering the church:

A. The danger of **paganism**

They were beginning to return to some of their old habits:

Col 3:5 "Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed ..."

B. The danger of syncretism

**Syncretism** = "The mixing or blending of different beliefs or religious practices"

We live in an age of syncretism! Even here on Kauai, it is increasingly common to hear about Christian churches hosting ecumenical services that include Christians, Buddhists, Mormons, Unitarians, Hindus, and Muslims to worship

God. I'm not sure exactly what God they're worshipping – but evidently that's not as important as evidencing religious tolerance and unity. They're not denying Christ, but they are dethroning. They allow him a place in history, but not the supreme place.

1. It denied the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ
  - a. For **salvation**
  - b. For overcoming flesh
  - c. For true wisdom and **knowledge**

2. It is called the "Colossian Heresy"

**Heresy** = "A doctrine or practice contrary to the truth of God's Word"

The heresy confronting the Colossian church has many similarities to the New Age movement of today. It was an odd mixture of Eastern religion, the Human Potential Movement, and Psychology all rolled into one neat package. The problem is that the package isn't Christian at all.

It's simply a retread of the second oldest religion in the world – pantheism – believing that we are all One and therefore all gods. This, of course, was the ancient teaching of Satan himself when he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden.

The "Colossian Heresy" was Christianity sprinkled with elements of Judaism, and early Gnosticism. It involved:

- a. **False** philosophy - Col 2:8

As with all heresy, the Colossian Heresy denied the all-sufficiency and pre-eminence of Jesus Christ and *detracted* from His finished work on the cross by requiring something more than simple faith in Christ.

That's one of the clear signs of heresy, by the way -- it is always Christ "plus" something else.

So as believers in Jesus Christ we must beware of mixing our faith with other teachings or practices like yoga, transcendental meditation, Eastern mysticism, and even unbiblical teachings of Catholicism.

- b. Judaistic ceremonialism - Col 2:16-17

1. Circumcision - Col 2:11; 3:11

2. Certain dietary restrictions - Col 2:16

3. The observance of special days including the Sabbath - Co 2:16-17

- c. Angel **worship** - Col 2:18

Angels are God servants sent to do His will. But the Bible never instructs us to cultivate relationships with angels or to worship them.

To the contrary, when the Apostle John attempted to worship an angel in Revelation 22:8-9, the angel immediately rebuked John.

**Application:**

There is a great fascination with angels today. Now people may not be actually worshipping angels, but quite a few people are advocating angels as spirit guides and mediators through whom we can contact God.

But any angel that allows this kind of false worship is not a servant of God but a fallen angel under the service of Satan himself.

No one is to be worshipped except God alone!

1 Tim 2:5 “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

#### d. Asceticism

The harsh treatment of the body in order to control its lusts.

Col 2:20-23 “Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

**Application:** How to overcome the flesh

Rom 6:22 “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life.”

### III The Purpose Of Colossians

A. To **encourage** the believers at Colosse [Verse 2a]

1. Paul informed them of their high standing:

a. He called them **holy** brothers

**Holy** = Hoi hagioi = “Saints, or those set apart or consecrated to God”

This is not a reference to a special class of elite Christians who have been inducted into the “Church’s Hall Of Fame.”

The term *saints* simply described:

1. Who they were in Christ: **Made holy by the finished work of Christ.**

We are saints not because of our conduct (good or bad), but because of our relationship to Christ.

2. Who they were to become: **Set apart for the purposes of God**

b. He called them **faithful** brothers

**Faithful** = Pistos = “Faithful or believing”

While every believer is a saint by virtue of new birth in Jesus Christ, not every believer is faithful to God. Yet Paul identifies the believers in Colosse as faithful – faithful to Christ and faithful to His Word.

2. Paul gave them insight into their true **identity**: [Verse 2b]  
 a. They were **in Christ at Colosse**

Paul identified the believers in Colosse in two spheres of life:

1. He identified their position *spiritually*: “In Christ”
2. He identified their position *geographically*: “At Colosse”

**Illustration:** What does it mean to be “In Christ”?

Noah’s ark is a perfect illustration of what it means to be “in” Christ.

God provided the ark for Noah and his family to escape the impending judgment on the earth. Genesis tells us that when the rain came, God shut Noah and his family in the ark (Gen 7:16).

In the same way that God put Noah in the ark, He has put us in Christ.

How is a person put “in Christ?”

Eph 1:13-14 “And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory.”

**Application:**

As believers, we are always moving in two spheres:

1. Our true and ultimate identity is found in Christ.
2. But we live in a certain place in the world – Kauai

Where is your identity today? Kauai or in Christ?

Are you drawing your life, values, hope, and self image from the Savior or from the world around you?

3. Paul imparted to them the **blessing** of God: [Verse 2c]  
 a. Grace and peace to you

This a classic greeting found in all of Paul’s epistles.

**Grace** = Charis = “God’s unconditional love”

**Peace** = Eirene = “Quietness and rest”

**Application:**

True inner peace is always the result of knowing and appropriating the grace of God in Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:2-4). This order can never be reversed. If we ignore the grace of God, we will forfeit the peace of God. But the more we understand and experience the grace of God, the more capacity we have to experience the many wonderful aspects of God’s peace.

- B. To **warn** the believers at Colosse
1. Against **relapse** into paganism - Co 1:21-23
  2. Against syncretism- Co 2:8-10

- a. He warned the Colossians not to be deceived by such philosophy - Col 2:8
- b. He exposed the deception of the philosophy - Col 2:4, 8, 18, 22-23

C. To affirm the **supremacy** of Christ

The book of Colossians is really about the supremacy of the person of Jesus Christ. He has no equal among the religious leaders of the world religions.

John 14:6 "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Acts 4:12 "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

**Application:** What was Paul's solution to false teaching?

A better understanding of Jesus and His Word. Knowing the real Jesus helps us to stay away from the counterfeit, no matter how it comes packaged.

1. He is the Son of God

Col 1:13-15 "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."

2. He is the all-sufficient **Savior**

Paul countered the false teachings of the Colossian Heresy by:

- a. Proclaiming the universal nature of the gospel (Col 1:20, 23, 28; 3:11).
- b. Showing that all believers are complete in Christ (1:19-20; 2:9-10).

"If you have Christ, you have everything" is Paul's response. "Don't add anything else," the apostle warns, "lest you distort, diminish, or denigrate the superiority of Christ, his gospel, or the Christian life."

3. He is the pre-eminent Lord

He is God's Son (1:14), the Redeemer (1:14), the very image of God (1:15), the Lord of creation (1:15), the head of the church (1:18), the fullness of salvation (1:9), the Reconciler of the universe (1:20), the One who contains all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3), the standard by which all religious teaching is judged (2:8), the fullness of God, undiminished deity (2:9), the One under Whom all power and authority is subjected (2:10), the Victor over all the cosmic powers (2:15), the reality of the truth foreshadowed in Old Testament types and figures, regulations and rituals (2:17), the One exalted and enthroned at the right hand of God in heaven (3:1), the One in Whom we are complete and in Whom our life is hidden, protected, and kept (2:10; 3:3), the One by Whom our new life will be gloriously manifested at His coming again (3:4), and it is through Him and because of our new life in Him that we ought to put away our old manner of life from which we have been marvelously saved (3:5f).

## Conclusion

What have we learned so far?

1. False teaching is not new – it is as old as Satan’s lies in the Garden of Eden.  
False teaching must be refuted with the truth of God’s Word.
  
2. We must be on guard against syncretizing our faith by either:
  - a. Adding something to simple faith in Christ and the cross.
  - b. Blending the teachings of Christ with other religious teachings.  
Rev 22:18-19 “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”
  
3. We must remember that as saints, believers in Christ Jesus:
  - a. We belong to Christ: He paid the ultimate price for us!
  - b. We have been sent by Christ: To be His ambassadors!
  - c. We live in two worlds:
    1. We live on the island of Kauai
    2. But our true identity is “in Christ”!  
Col 3:1-4 “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

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