

Bird's Eye View of Colossians The Lordship or Headship of Christ

Versus the philosophy of man, of
the mind

The first of the four books of the heart of the divine revelation

- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians

Why does Colossians occur right after Philipians?

- A look at the sequence of the books of the heart of the divine revelation
- Galatians shows us that Christ is versus the law, religion and tradition. Paul combatted the pervasive influence of Judaism and the keeping of the law, or another gospel, which threatened to sever the believers from the enjoyment of the grace of Christ
- If Romans defines the gospel of God to show is what Christ has done and is doing for us and in us, and the result of His work, Galatians shows us the damaging effect that another gospel can have on our church life. Galatians shows us the work of Christ, not in a detailed way like Romans, but as a response to our tendency to cling to a different gospel. Galatians always brings us back to Christ and the experience of grace and the Spirit
- Galatians is the groundwork for the advancement of the divine revelation. Without Galatians, there is no possibility to know the heart's desire of God, the church, which is revealed in Ephesians

- It is when we are rescued from the present, evil, religious age, from doing spiritual things without faith, that is, without contacting the Lord, that we are living in the reality of justification by faith
- Otherwise, we are merely good, religious, law keepers, with the shell of a good church life, but actually under a curse
- When we grow in life, from children or slaves to sons, and enjoy the freedom of sonship, we are in a position to know what has been in the Father's heart from eternity past

Ephesians

- The mystery of Christ
- The church
- The mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Himself (1:9)
- God's eternal purpose
- Christ and the church
- The church, not from the point of view of 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians
- But from a heavenly point of view
- Every spiritual blessing is the heavenlies, not on this earth
- When we are free from the religious age (Galatians), we are able to enter into the heart of God, and enjoy what God has wrought for us in the heavenlies in Christ (Ephesians)

Philippians

- When, in our church life, Christ is unique, without anything extra, and we are able to enter into His heart and apprehend His mystery, which is the church, we are in a position to have fellowship with the apostle unto the furtherance of the gospel
- Philippians brings us into a sweet and joyful experience of the very Christ unadulterated by anything extra, and what is on His heart
- Philippians is the practical outworking of Ephesians
- Ephesians presents the source, producing, building up, and functioning of the church, as well as the multifaceted angles of the church such as the Body, the household, the kingdom, God's dwelling place, the Bride, the new man and the warrior
- Philippians brings us into the experience of the church life of a local church in sweet fellowship with the apostle who had raised them up, and who was being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of their faith
- Philippians brings us into the pursuing and gaining of the Christ in Galatians
- Philippians brings us into the experience of the Body revealed in Ephesians, through the thinking of the same thing among the believers, and through the supplying of the apostle's need by the believers

What more is needed?

- We might think that Philippians should be the pinnacle of the divine revelation. What more is needed?
- Yet Colossians is needed to complete the cycle
- Galatians began with the need to see only Christ, not Christ plus something else
- Then two books, Ephesians and Philippians, bring us into God's heart and how to experience what is in God's heart
- Then Colossians brings us back again to Christ, but this time in a different way

Colossians

- Colossians, like no other book, shows us who Christ is, item after item
- The person of Christ, more than the work of Christ
- With the experience of Christ, there is also the danger of that very experience becoming a replacement of Christ
- Many times, we may focus on our experience of Christ, or our experience of the church, rather than on Christ alone
- Eventually, our experience can become a substitute for Christ
- We may even form a philosophy of our experience
- In our effort and desire to have the experience of gaining and pursuing Christ, we may be susceptible to the different philosophies concerning Christ and the church life
- Instead of pursuing a living person, and instead of knowing who Christ is, we may instead pursue a good philosophy of Christ
- We need to know who Christ is, not just in a general way
- Not just what Christ has done for us
- Not just our need to pursue Him and gain Him
- Not just our need to live the church life
- Not just our need to be related to the apostle in the fellowship unto the furtherance of the gospel



**Apostle Paul's
Second Missionary Journey
49 - 52 A.D.**



Background of Colossians

- Gnostic philosophy
- a religion that regards this world as the creation of a series of evil archons/powers who wish to keep the human soul trapped in an evil physical body, a religion that preaches a hidden wisdom or knowledge only to a select group as necessary for salvation or escape from this world.
- The term "gnostic" derives from "gnosis," which means "knowledge" in Greek. The Gnostics believed that they were privy to a secret knowledge about the divine, hence the name.
- The teaching that physical elements were sinful
- Therefore, Jesus Christ could not have been completely human, since humanity is necessarily sinful
- Consequently, Jesus Christ did not really come in the flesh
- Neither was He completely God (divine)
- Rather, Jesus Christ was an intermediary or agent of God, undoubtedly the highest and most supreme
- Close to Docetism, which claims that Jesus Christ did not really come in the flesh, but was rather a phantom (John deals with this philosophy in his first epistle, calling such people who teach that antichrist
- Philosophy and empty deceit according to traditions of men (2:8)

- The Gnostics taught a dualism which held to "a distinction between the purity of the immaterial world and the corruptibility of the material world."
- They held that the God of creation was not the pure God, that there was a distinction between Jesus who suffered on the cross and the Christ who was the transcendent Savior.
- They held that the direct revelation they received gave them unique insight and superiority over any other Christian writings. This revelation provided the initiated with access to gnosis, or knowledge about the true God.
- The word "secret" highlights the internal emphasis of the ancient Gnostic texts of the second and third centuries

- « Basically the heresy was Jewish; this seems clear from the place which it gave to legal ordinances, circumcision, food regulations, the Sabbath, new moon and other prescriptions of the Jewish calendar. But on the Jewish foundation there had been erected a philosophical superstructure which was non-Jewish in origin—an early and simple form of what later came to be known as Gnosticism. In this part of Asia Minor the barriers between the Jewish communities and their pagan neighbors were not very effective. Social intermingling led to religious fusion, and the Colossian heresy may be described as a Jewish–Hellenistic syncretism which had made room for some Christian elements in its system so as to attract the young churches of the area » (F. F. Bruce)

- A. T. Robertson describes this incipient Gnosticism which was threatening early Christianity as those who were especially concerned about the origin of the material universe, holding that matter was essentially evil
- "God is good and hence could not touch matter. Therefore they believed that the world was created by intermediate agencies called aeons (emanations from God) who came in between God and matter. On accepting Christianity they at once had trouble with the person of Christ. Where would He come in their system? They solved the problem by making Him one of the subordinate aeons.
- Paul insisted, in reply, that Jesus is head over all creation visible and invisible, the creator of the universe (Col. 1:15-17), and the head of the Church, His body (1:18). In Him all the Godhead dwelleth bodily (2:9) and He is above all angels (2:18). Some of the Gnostics said that Jesus and the Messiah were distinct and that only the Messiah was an aeon, descending on Jesus at his baptism and leaving him at the crucifixion, but Paul identifies Christ with Jesus (2:6). Others held that Jesus was only apparently a man and really an aeon (Docetic Gnostics), but Paul replied that He reconciled us to God by the blood of His cross (1:20) and hence was a real man as well as God.
- In practical morals the Gnostics had two tendencies. On the one hand some went to license with the idea that sin of the body could not touch the soul (3:5f). Others reached to asceticism (2:20-23)." (The Student's Chronological New Testament, pp. xxxix-xl).

- Belief that matter is evil also lead to a distorted view of the Christian life.
- Some Gnostics turned to asceticism, others to libertinism.
- The ascetics felt that they had to free themselves from the influence of matter (the body) by inflicting punishment on their bodies (2:20).
- Those who gave in to license assumed an attitude of indifference to things physical and material, the idea being that only the soul is important and therefore the body may do what it pleases (3:5)

- Again, according to F. F. Bruce, gnosticism appealed « to a certain religious temperament, the more so as it was presented as a form of advanced teaching for a spiritual elite. Christians were urged to go in for this higher wisdom, to explore the hidden mysteries by a series of successive initiations until they achieved perfection. Baptism was only a preliminary initiation”

- The worship of angels:
 - « Let no one defraud you by judging you unworthy of your prize, in self-chosen lowliness and the worship of the angels, dwelling on the things which he has seen, vainly puffed up by his mind set on the flesh » (2:18)
- When we lose sight of who Christ is, we may live by a false sense of humility, not considering ourselves worthy to approach God directly
- This may be the result of much dealing with the self, the result being self-condemnation and introspection
- It is at these times that we are most susceptible to being defrauded of Christ as our prize
- The Colossians were thus apt to appreciate Christ as an intermediary or an agent between them and God, rather than approaching Christ directly as God
- Paul brings the Colossian believers back to the truth concerning Christ's person
- Excessive subjectivity can defraud us and cause us to miss Christ

- Wisdom in self-imposed worship and lowliness
- Severe treatment of the body (ascetism):
« Such things indeed have a reputation of wisdom in self-imposed worship and lowliness and severe treatment of the body, but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh » (2:23)
- The authority of darkness (1:13)

Today's situation

- Living by philosophy
- Living by culture
- Living by our refined culture
- Not living Christ
- Our culture replacing the knowledge of Christ
- It is so easy to develop a system of culture in the church life
- The situation of the Colossians was a mixture of Jewish traditions (as seen in Galatians), and Greek philosophy
- The result was an exclusive group of individuals who claimed to have access to the secret of the universe
- In our church life, who is Christ?
- Do I really know who Christ is, or do I take some aspect of who Christ is, and develop a philosophy?
- Eventually, this philosophy will become my way of life, my culture, that will replace Christ

The antidote

Filled with the full knowledge of His will

- « Therefore we also, since the day we heard of it, do not cease praying and asking on your behalf that you may be filled with the full knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and knowledge,
- To walk worthily of the Lord to please Him in all things, bearing fruit in every good work and growing by the full knowledge of God » (1:9-10)
- Influenced by gnostic philosophy, the Colossians boasted in the secret and exclusive knowledge that they had, the mystical knowledge of God
- Paul counters this philosophy with the prayer that we would be filled with the full knowledge of His will
- This is not the full knowledge of the universe, or the mysteries of the universe, or the mysteries of who God is, but rather the full knowledge of God's will

Christ, the portion of the saints in the light, not just of a select group with special knowledge

- :« Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you for a share of the allotted portion of the saints in the light » (1:12)
- Sometimes, the more we are in the church life, the more unqualified we feel
- The more we are exposed in our failures and shortcomings, the easier it is for us to lose our boldness
- Christ as our portion is the portion of all the saints.
- Christ is not unique to those with special knowledge or insight
- The one unique qualification is to be in the light, which is just Christ Himself

Transferring us into the kingdom of the Son of His love

- By delivering us out of the authority of darkness (compare Galatians where He gave Himself for our sins that He might rescue us from this present evil age)
- By transferring us into the kingdom of the Son of His (the Father's) love
- Into the authority of Christ
- Into the authority of the Son of the Father being the expression of the Father as the source of life
- When we love the Son, we are freed from philosophy, ethics, self-improvement
- We take Christ as our source
- The less freedom we have to live our own life
- The more freedom we enjoy in love, life and light

The image of the invisible God

- To counter the thought that God is so mysterious that we are unable to know Him, and that we need some kind of mediator, such as an angel
- In the church life, such a thought may influence us
- We may think that the Bible is so hard to understand, or God is so mysterious, that we may abandon any hope of knowing the Bible, or knowing God Himself
- This can even become a philosophy which will frustrate us from gaining Christ
- Therefore, Paul counters this thought with the truth that Christ is the image (Gk, eikon), or artistic representation, stamp, copy, embodiment, of the invisible God
- It is possible to know God
- Not through philosophy, not through mysticism, or secret rituals or rites, but through Jesus Christ

The firstborn of all creation (1:15)

- Christ is not only the Creator but also the creature
- As a creature, He was born, or created
- Firstborn refers to His preeminence
- He is the first among all creatures
- The firstborn here does not mean that there is a second, a third and so forth
- The firstborn, just like the firstborn of the Egyptians, or the first man (Adam), includes the entire creation, or the entire human race

In Him (Christ) all things were created (1:16)

- This is Paul's counter to the gnostic teaching that God put forth from himself a series of "aeons" or emanations, each a little more distant from him and each having a little less of deity.
- According to the gnostics, at the end of this chain of intermediate beings there is an emanation possessing enough of deity to make a world removed far enough from God so that his creative activities could not compromise the perfect purity of God. The world, they argued, was the creation of this lesser power, who being so far removed from God was both ignorant of and hostile to him. These "aeons" were thought to inhabit the stars and rule man's destiny. They therefore were to be placated and worshiped.
- In this verse, Paul's refers to "thrones...powers...rulers...authorities," alluding to these supposed intermediate beings.
- Who is Christ? He is the One in whom everything was created in the entire universe
- Christ is not an intermediary far removed from God, but is the very sphere in which everything was created

He is before all things (1:17)

- Christ is the means of creation, but He is also before all things
- He is preeminent
- All things cohere in Him
- All things are upheld by Him
- Without Him, everything would fall apart

He is the Head of the Body, the church

- He is the beginning
- He is the Firstborn from the dead
- That He Himself might have the first place in all things
- As the Head, Christ has the ultimate and only say
- In my church life, do I take Christ as my Head?
- Does He have the first place in all things?
- If I know Him as the Head, then my relationship with the other brothers and sisters will be different
- I will not hold on to things that elevate me

In Him all the fullness was pleased to dwell (1:19)

- Again, this is a strong antidote to the teaching that God was far removed from Christ, that God, being so pure, could have no direct contact with an intermediary through whom He eventually created the universe
- This verse strongly declares that all the fullness, or the expression of the riches of God, in creation and in the church, dwells in Christ, who is the expression of God, the image of the invisible God (v. 15)
- This verse counters the tendency on the part of the gnostics to minimize or deny the deity of Christ and to argue that Christ, at the most, was marginally divine
- This verse tells us that all who God was, the riches of God, the expression of God, was pleased to dwell in Christ

Through Him to reconcile all things to Himself...(1:20)

- Here it is not all people, but all things
- Again, this is a counter to the teaching that all material things were inherently evil and that the pure or holy God could not have anything to do with sinful matter or sinful creation
- Here Paul teaches that through Him, that is the the Son of His love (v. 13), all things were reconciled to Himself
- Having made peace through the blood of His cross. The emphasis here is on the fact that Christ was a genuine man with genuine blood. He died on the cross as a genuine man, a creature who was part of creation
- The things on the earth or the things in the heavens
- In the book of Colossians, time and time again, Paul alludes to the things in the heavens, the principalities and powers. The Colossians were distracted by such things and even worshipped such beings
- Paul is saying that all these were reconciled to Christ Himself

The obstacle: our mind: v. 21

- Alienated, removed from Christ
- Enemies in our mind
- Because of our evil works
- What are our evil works?
- The philosophy and the substitutes that replace Christ, that dethrone Christ from having the first place in the church life and in our daily life
- Our culture that causes us to live a church life without Christ as the content, without Christ as the means, without Christ as the goal

Reconciled in the body of His flesh

- Paul emphasizes the fact that the work of reconciling was done by Christ (the fullness in 1:19) in the body of His flesh
- All the work of the fullness was accomplished in the body, that is in His genuine humanity as a man
- The body that He had was the body of His flesh, something that the gnostics considered sinful and impossible for the creator God to join Himself to
- The purpose of the reconciling of the fullness to Himself is to present us holy and without blemish and without reproach before Him, that is, the fullness

In order to be the hope of the gospel

- This gospel was proclaimed
- Paul was a minister of this gospel
- Paul rejoiced in his sufferings on the behalf of the Colossians (1:24), to fill up on his part that which was lacking of the afflictions of Christ in his (Paul's) flesh for Christ's body
- Again, Paul stresses his flesh, in contrast with the demeaning attitude of the gnostic influence towards the flesh
- This became Paul's stewardship

Paul's stewardship: to complete the word of God

- The word of God is the mystery which had been hidden from the ages and from the generations, but now has been manifested to His saints (1:26)
- To whom God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory
- Paul is fighting to unveil Christ, to tell the Colossians that the mystery is no longer a secret, accessible to only a select few
- No, Paul is a steward to unveil this mystery, which is actually inside us, Christ in us, Christ as our hope, to indwell us, spread in us, possess us, and eventually glorify us
- This is not some mystical or unattainable hope to be admired from afar, but right inside of every believer, a mystery that is among the Gentiles, and right inside every believer
- How accessible this mystery is

Paul's struggle (v. 28-29)

- Every man
- Every man is capable of knowing Christ, of being presented full grown in Christ
- Not just a few, not just the inside circle, but every man
- This was what Paul labored for, struggling according to His operation which operated in him in power
- The very fullness that dwelt in Him (Christ) operated in Paul to struggle to present every man full grown in Christ, that is to cause every man to be full in Christ

Key words in chapter 1: full, fullness

- Full knowledge of His will (v. 9)
- Full knowledge of God (v. 10)
- All the fullness was pleased to dwell in Him (v. 19)
- Present every man full grown in Christ (v. 28)

The mystery of God, Christ (2:2)

- A matter of our heart
- Our heart needs to be comforted
- Being knit together in love
- Unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding
- Unto the full knowledge
- Of the mystery of God, Christ
- God is a mystery
- But Christ is the revelation or unveiling of this mystery
- The Colossians were influenced by the teaching that only a select few were privileged to know the mystery
- Paul boldly asserts that Christ is the mystery of God
- The gnostics boasted in their knowledge of the secrets of the universe
- Paul struggled to bring the Colossians into the full assurance of understanding
- Into the full knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ
- Whatever knowledge I have is not enough. I must be brought into the full knowledge

What is hidden in the mystery of God?

- The treasures of wisdom and knowledge
- Wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ
- When our heart is comforted and warmed, and knit together with the saints, then we are brought into a certainty of what we have believed
- We are brought into the riches of the full assurance of understanding
- This is a matter of our mind
- When our heart is comforted, our mind is renewed to have the full assurance
- And to have the full knowledge of Christ
- In such a knowledge of Christ, we may be brought into His wisdom and knowledge concerning His economy concerning Christ and the church

Walking in the mystery of God, Christ, Jesus the Lord

- Not just to be brought into the full knowledge of the mystery of God, but to walk in Him
- Not just to walk in Christ, but to walk in Jesus the Lord
- Again, Paul is countering the gnostic heresy of denying the humanity and deity of Jesus
- Who is Christ? He is Jesus, Jesus the Lord

Rooted and built up in the mystery,
Christ, Jesus the Lord

In Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily

- All the fullness, or the expressions of all the riches, are to be found in Christ bodily, in His human body
- The gnostics claimed that only a few had access to the divine mysteries, and that to gain access, one had to go through various intermediaries (angels etc.)
- According to them, it was not possible to know God directly
- Paul counters this teaching with a strong assertion that everything of who God is dwells in Christ in bodily form
- Outside of Christ, there is no way to know God, no way to know the mystery of God, and His will

In Christ, the Head of all rule and authority, we have been made full

- We have no lack
- Many times, our false humility causes us to think that we lack this or that, and leads us into a philosophy that tries to make up that lack
- Paul declares that we have been made full
- In Christ as the Head of all rule and authority, we have been made full
- We have our own philosophy, which becomes our rule and even controls our living to become our authority
- But Christ is the Head of our rule, the Head of any philosophy that controls us
- In Christ as our Head, we are full, we have no lack, we do not need anything else

Buried with Him in baptism, and raised together with Him

- Here Paul brings us into what Christ has accomplished in His death
- In Him, we have been circumcised, the body of our flesh has been put off
- The Colossians despised the flesh, the material realm
- Paul says that Christ, as the embodiment of the fullness of the Godhead, a man of real flesh, put off the body of His flesh through death
- We, through the faith of the operation of God, share in same experience of Christ
- The body of our flesh is put off
- Who we are, in the uncircumcision of our flesh, our offenses, have been put to death in Christ
- All the handwriting in ordinances, which was against us, has been nailed to the cross
- Everything negative of the material realm, embodied in our flesh, has been dealt with by the One, Christ, who embodied the fullness of the Godhead, and died and resurrected as the embodiment of the Godhead
- Outside of Christ as the embodiment, there is no way to unlock the mystery of Christ, there is no salvation, there is no hope

- Christ stripped off the rulers and the authorities
- Making an open display of them
- Triumphant over them in the cross
- Indicating a public humiliation of all the principalities and powers, the angels, the invisible forces that the Colossians were being led away to worship and rely on
- All the agents, the things that we tend to rely on were stripped away, publicly humiliated, by Christ in His death on the cross

Christ as the body of all the shadows

- All the replacements of Christ, all the things that we rely on, are all shadows of the things to come
- The body, or substance, is of Christ
- Christ is our prize
- We must not be defrauded or cheated from such a prize by being judged unworthy, in false humility

Christ as the Head

- Holding to the Head
- Out from whom all the Body grows with the growth of God
- Richly supplied and knit together
- By means of the joints and sinews
- When we hold to the Head, we experience the growth of the Body and in the Body
- The holding onto the Head saves us from our individualistic experience of Christ, from the things that we have seen (2:18), and from the experiences that we boast in

Chapter 3: Our response; our life: Seek the things which are above

- Set your mind on the things which are above, not on the things which are on the earth
- Our life is hidden with Christ in God
- The things which are above are the things of Christ: everything that is hidden in Christ
- A life that is set on the things above is a life that is hidden with Christ in God
- It is a hidden life
- It is a life that does not boast in outward visions and revelations or experiences
- Rather, it is a life that boasts in a hidden Christ
- Our problem is that we like to be manifested
- Even if we have an experience of Christ, we quickly like to talk about it and boast about it
- We even like to boast in our false humility
- The genuine manifestation of Christ's life is a manifestation with Him in glory, not apart from Him (3:4)

The putting on of the new man

- Christ, the image of the invisible God, is the creator of the new man (3:10)
- The new man is being renewed unto full knowledge
- According to the image of Him who created him
- The new man does not live according to the human philosophy or concept of who Christ is
- Rather, the new man lives according to the image or expression of the divine attributes and human virtues of Christ the creator
- In this new man, with the personality of its Creator, Christ is all and in all

The peace of Christ in our hearts arbitrating

- Philosophy and ascetism and license to sin did not necessarily bring about division, as in the church in Corinth
- But there may have been dissension and dissatisfaction among the Colossian believers
- There was the need for an arbitrator or referee to rule in the hearts of the Colossians

By the word of Christ dwelling in us richly

- If Ephesians emphasizes the spirit, Colossians emphasizes the word
- Paul became a minister according to the stewardship of God, which was given to him to complete the word of God
- The word of God was completed in regard to the mystery of God (Christ), and in regard to the mystery of Christ (the church), the mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:25-27)
- Paul announced this Christ through the word of God in order to present every man full grown in Christ
- This word needs to dwell in us richly to bring us into the riches of Christ, into the riches of the full assurance of understanding and knowledge of Christ as the mystery of God
- To know the preeminence of Christ in the church life

Paul's prayer for the door to be opened for the word to him to speak the mystery of Christ

- The indwelling word of Christ eventually is spoken out to unveil the mystery of Christ, which is the church
- When we touch the mystery of God, Christ, and are brought to the person of Christ, we then are in a position to know the mystery of Christ

Paul's charge to Archippus

- Angel worship and the substitutes of Christ can cause us to lose our boldness and assurance to fulfill our ministry
- Who Christ is, through His indwelling and spoken word, causes us to fulfill our ministry
- The unveiling of the person of Christ, in contrast with philosophy, through the ministering of the indwelling word of Christ, results in our receiving a ministry in the Lord
- This ministry needs to be fulfilled or completed, just as Paul completed the word of God by unveiling the mystery of God, and the mystery of Christ