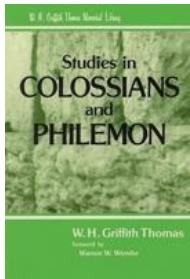


COLOSSIANS: CHRIST OVER ALL AND IN ALL (study 1)

Christ's Centrality

Christ ... who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

ROM.9:4 (NASB)



Ephesians and Colossians represent the highest, fullest, richest presentation of Christianity. Just as Romans tells us how to enter into fellowship with Christ through the Gospel, so Ephesians and Colossians tell us how to abide therein. First we come out of bondage and then we are brought into the banqueting-house ... There seems no doubt that the dominating thought of the Epistle is "Christ is all." Dr. Caldwell says that the well-known lines of Charles Wesley's hymn express the central idea:

— *Thou, O Christ, art all I want, More than all in Thee I find.*
[Thomas 7,11]

Study 1a: INTRODUCTION and GREETING (1:1-8)

1:1,2 What have scholars deduced from the unusual form of this greeting?

[1:2] This is the only instance in the salutations of Paul's epistles, where the Father's name stands alone, not being associated with that of Christ. Remembering what was said in the preceding chapter concerning the Gnostic heresy, which relegated the Supreme Being to so infinite a remove from any communication with sinful men, and which attempted to supply His place with intermediate angels or emanations, it will seem to us, I think, that the apostle here strikes that heresy in this particular form of salutation. He uses the Father's name alone, that, in its singleness and majesty, the Colossians might be the more emphatically impressed with the loving interest of even the Almighty and Supreme toward sinners. [Nicholson 25,26]

1:3-5 Identify Paul's usual method of approach to congregations, even when controversy must follow! (Eph.1:15,16; Phil.1:3 – and note a familiar triad, cf. 1 Cor.13)

[1:3] With the exception of the Epistle to the Galatians, St. Paul's letters always commence with thanksgiving. This seems to indicate a prominent feature of his religious life. He rejoiced to see every sign of the work of grace in the various communities of Christians, and had equal joy in acknowledging this in thanksgiving to God. It would be well for all Christians if the note of thanksgiving were made more definitely a part of our life. [Thomas 17]

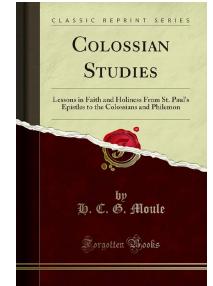
[1:3] Moreover, "the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ" is the *Gospel* name of God; for while that name is founded in the very nature of Deity, yet is it the name under which He revealed Himself to us as the Pardoner of sin and the Saviour of

sinners, as having "so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." It is the completed name of God's self-revelation to us. A fuller and richer name than "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob". [Nicholson 29,30]

[1:4] They moved about Colossae "in Christ." They worked, served, kept the house, followed the business, met the neighbours, entered into their sorrows and joys, "walked in wisdom towards them," suffered their abuse and insults when such things came -- all "in Christ." They carried about with them a "private atmosphere," which was not of Asia but of heaven. To them Christ was the inner home, the dear invisible but real resting-place. He was "the strong City" of refuge and strength. He was the Paradise, with its deep shades, and golden flowers, and living streams ... He was the blessed Head, "in" whom they now found themselves the limbs. [Moule 28]

[1:4,5] ... we have the three graces of faith, love and hope. Faith rests on the past, love works in the present, and hope looks towards the future. These three constitute the true Christian life, and not one should be omitted (1 Thess. 1:3,9,10). We are only too apt to emphasise faith and love and forget hope, but inasmuch as hope is invariably connected with the coming of the Lord, it is a vital part of our Christian life. [Thomas 19]

[1:4] "Christ Jesus" appears here to be viewed not so much as the object of their faith as the living environment within which their faith is exercised; that is to say, the faith which the apostle speaks is the faith which they have as men and women who are "in Christ Jesus." [Bruce 180]



Common sign of heresy – Christ NOT centre

One thing is certain as to "the Colossian Heresy." It was a doctrine of God, and of salvation, which cast a cloud over the glory of Jesus Christ ... whatever else it did, did this -- it put Jesus Christ into the background. It found the Pauline converts, we may safely assume, acting upon the Pauline Gospel: "worshipping by God's Spirit, exulting in Christ Jesus, and confident -- but not in the flesh" (Phil. iii. 3). They had heard a message which was, first and last, JESUS CHRIST -- "who died for our sins, and rose again for our justification," and lives to be our life, by His all-sufficient grace. ... The new voices at Colossae would have many things to discourse upon; and among those many things would be Jesus Christ. But He would not be the magnetic Centre of their discourses. They would not gravitate to Him, and be as if they could never have done with setting forth His holy greatness, and His vital necessity, and His "all-sufficiency in all things." His dying love would not set the speakers' hearts and words on fire, nor would they dilate upon His rising power, and the double blessedness of His presence, for His disciples upon the Throne, and in His disciples in the heart. The wonder of His Incarnation would be little spoken of, and the solemn joy of the hope of His Return as little. The favourite topics of conversation and of preaching would be of a very different kind. Circumcision, a calendar of obligatory holidays, a code of ceremonial abstinence, a philosophy of unseen powers, and secret ways and rules for approach to them in adoration; these would be the congenial and really characteristic themes of this "other Gospel." [Moule 9,11]

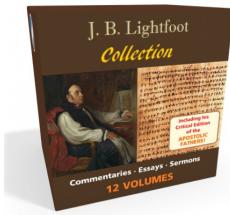
1:6 Note the gospel HOPE (v.5) which is *in all the world ... constantly bearing fruit and increasing*. Though heaven is its hope, what is its emphasis? (note Paul's emphasis on the TRUTH of the gospel, vv.5,6)

1:7,8 How was Paul connected to the congregation at Colossae? (Acts 19:1,8-10)

[1:7] How distinctly stands out Epaphras in contrast with the speculative thinkers of Colossae. He taught simply the grace of God. [Nicholson 36]

[1:8] Doctrinal correctness will never atone for lack of brotherly love. It is far more to God who is Himself love, in His very nature, that His people walk in love one toward another, than that they contend valiantly for set forms of truth, however scriptural. "Truthing in love" (which would correctly convey the thought of Eph. 4:15) is more than contending for formulas. It is the manifestation of the truth in a life of love to God and to those who are His, as well as for poor lost sinners for whom Christ died. [Ironside 27]

[1:7] Without a doubt Colossae was the least important church to which any epistle of St Paul was addressed. ... Not a single event in Christian history is connected



with its name; and its very existence is only rescued from oblivion, when at long intervals some bishop of Colossae attaches his signature to the decree of an ecclesiastical synod. ... The Turkish conquest pressed with more than common severity on these districts. When the day of visitation came, the Church was taken by surprise. Occupied with ignoble quarrels and selfish interests, she had no ear for the voice of the knock unheeded. The long-impending doom overtook her, and the golden candlestick was removed for ever from the Eternal Presence. [Lightfoot 16,70,72]

Study 1b: PAUL'S PRAYER (1:9-14)

1:9,10 The Spirit is mentioned but *once* in this letter. What is His chief work? (Eph.1:16-18; Phil.1:9-11)

[1:8,9] This, by the way, is the only explicit reference to the Spirit of God in this epistle. The absence of reference to Him elsewhere is the more striking as there are several places where His work might have been naturally introduced, especially His role in baptizing believers into the unity of the body of Christ. ... on the other hand, this epistle (like that to the Ephesians) has much to say about "knowledge" as a means of promoting Christian life. But the "knowledge" of which the apostle speaks is no merely intellectual exercise, no theosophical *gnosis* such as was affected by the teachers who were leading the Colossians astray. He wishes to impress his readers with the character and importance of true knowledge before drawing their attention to the dangers of that "knowledge falsely so called" which was being pressed upon them. True knowledge is founded in practical religion; it is that knowledge which, according to the OT, starts with a proper attitude towards God: "the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7; cf. Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10). [Bruce 182-185]

It has been observed by others, but will bear repeating, that so intent is the Spirit upon glorifying Christ in this wonderful epistle that He ever hides Himself. In Ephesians, where it is the truth of the one Body that is being unfolded, the Holy

Spirit is mentioned many times, and we have clear teaching as to His personality and operations. In Colossians He is never mentioned doctrinally, and only once incidentally, if I may so say where I recognize divine design throughout, and that is in verse 8 of chapter 1, where the writer speaks of having heard through Epaphras of the Colossians' "love in the Spirit." This is surely most significant; even the Holy Spirit Himself, eternally co-equal with the Father and Son, who all together constitute one God, would nevertheless hide Himself if men belittle or lose sight of the Lord Jesus as Head of the new creation. The blessed Paraclete speaks not from or of Himself but He takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us. He would not even risk (to speak after the manner of men) being put in as one coming between the believer and Christ. [Ironside 12,13]

[1:9] Wisdom is a general term, involving what may be called the power of spiritual perception, while "understanding" is a definite application of wisdom to particular cases, "putting two and two together," and seeing the bearing of truth on life. [Thomas 26]

[1:10] Faith is not an intellectual assent, nor a sympathetic sentiment merely. It is the absolute surrender of self to the will of a Being who has a right to command this surrender. It is this which places men in personal relation to God, which (in St Paul's language) justifies them before God. [Lightfoot 121]

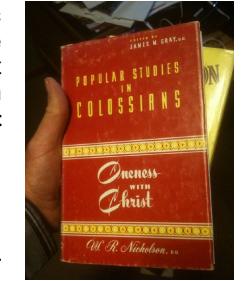
[1:10] Every Christian's habitual question should be, not, "What must I do to escape censure, or win wages?" But, "What will please God?" [Nicholson 42]

[1:10] Satan has nothing new to offer. Old heresies are redressed and brought forward as new conceptions of truth from age to age, but in this respect, "there is nothing new under the sun." Therefore, all the Christian needs to protect him from modern systems of an evil character is a better acquaintance with the Word of God, where the truth is taught in its purity and the lies of the adversary are brought out into the light and fully exposed. No one familiar with the teaching of Colossians, for instance, will ever be misled by the specious sophistries of the various occult systems now being foisted on a credulous public, such as Theosophy or Spiritualism, nor will he be deluded by the revived Gnostic religion of Eddyism, Unity School of Christianity, or other branches of the misnamed New Thought. [Ironside 15]

[1:10] According as he takes in the truth, both understanding and heart are expanded, and his moral power is multiplied (Deut. xxxii. 2; Hos. xiv. 5,6). At the same time, the bringing forth fruit in good works reacts upon us, helping to increase our spiritual wisdom and understanding; and this, in turn, increases ourselves personally. [Nicholson 45]

1:11 Note Paul's connection of knowledge with POWER? (Rom.1:16,17) But power for what?

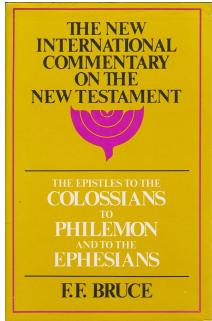
[1:11] Patience, longsuffering and joy should continually be accompanied by a thankful spirit. In Christianity, someone has said, theology is grace, and ethics is gratitude. [Bruce 188]



**Theology is grace,
ethics is gratitude.**

1:12-14 What do the saints *already* have, according to Paul? (Acts 19:8,9; 20:25)

[1:12-14] The three verses that follow are in marked contrast to those we have just been considering. We have now thanksgiving instead of prayer. Here all is positive and eternally settled. The blessings enumerated are ours from the moment we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and are absolutely non-forfeitable. To pray for these is to dishonor God by casting doubt upon His Word. Notice the three "hath" and the one "have" of the Authorized Version; words that speak of present possession. [Ironside 37]



ourselves. [Thomas 32]

[1:14] Let it always be borne in mind, however, that this prayer of the apostle for a worthy walk was offered in behalf of Christians; for those who were already pardoned and accepted, and saved in Christ (I. 4,5,21,22). Only those who have been reconciled to God through the blood of the cross can even start to lead a holy life; but all such are bound to do so, and are enabled therefor. The "thorough knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" never fails to fill the soul with the sense of this obligation, and supplies the spirit and power of obedience. [Nicholson 43,44]

Contra gnostic claims, the ONLY Mediator you need is Christ – fear no more!

In this teaching a decisive place was accorded to the angelic beings through whom the law was given. They were not only elemental spirits but dominant ones as well -- principalities and powers, lords of the planetary spheres, sharers in the plenitude of the divine essence. Since they controlled the lines of communication between God and man, all revelation from God to man and all prayer and worship from man to God could reach its goal only through their mediation and by their permission ... They had already been rescued from the sphere dominated by those principalities, and translated into the realm of the victorious Son of God. No longer was there any need for them to live in fear of those astral powers which were believed to control the destinies of men; their transference to the dominion of light had been accomplished once for all. [Bruce 167,189]

[on *gnosis*] This weird imitation of the divine mysteries pretended to great depth of spirituality, to remarkable fulness of knowledge, to great profundity of thought. It was therefore most attractive to the natural mind, ever delighting in speculation on sacred themes, but it was Satanic in origin, and deliberately planned by the enemy

to hide the glory shining in the face of Christ Jesus, concerning whom the Gnostics indulged in the wildest speculations. [Ironside 10]

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