

Colossians

1. **Who was the writer? Who were the recipients? What was their relationship with the author?**

Paul wrote the book of Colossians (1:1) probably from a Roman prison about AD 62. Tychicus delivered this letter (4:7-8), probably on the same journey wherein he gave the Ephesian congregation their letter from Paul (Ephesians 6:21, 22). The recipients of this letter are named as "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae." In this greeting there is a reminder that Christians have been set apart as holy to the Lord. There is also an exhortation for Christians to remain faithful. The church at Colossae isn't particularly mentioned in the book of Acts, although Paul may have visited there on his third missionary journey. Colossae is in the region of Phrygia and was closely associated with Laodicea -- see Colossians 2:1, 4:13, 4:15-16. It seems apparent that Philemon and Onesimus were members of the Colossian congregation -- see Colossians 4:9. It also seems that the word of God was first preached at Colossae by Epaphras -- 1:7.

2. **What do we learn about the church in this letter?** The book of Colossians has a few good reminders about the Lord's church. Here are a few of them:

- Jesus is the head of the church -- 1:18
- The church is the body of Christ -- 1:18, 1:24, 2:19
- Paul was made a minister of the church -- 1:25
- The growth of the church comes from God -- 2:19
- The church is a name for local congregations -- 4:15-16

3. **Does this letter teach that the kingdom of God is yet to come or that it is already here?** The book of Colossians holds a key that opens up all both New Testament and Old Testament teaching concerning the kingdom of God. While there are other passages that validate that the kingdom of God is currently in existence as the church, Colossian 1:13 clearly establishes this fact. It says, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." Notice that both of the verbs "delivered" and "transferred" are in past tense. In other words, this has already taken place. We have been rescued and we have already been placed as citizens in this heavenly kingdom. Once it is recognized that the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of Christ are all synonymous terms for the church both on earth and in heaven, many other Scriptures suddenly make sense and come to life. The parables that Jesus tells about the kingdom match up perfectly with the work of the church. The Old Testament prophecies concerning the nation and the land also come to life as we understand that they speak of us. Our whole mindset changes, realizing that this world is not our home, but that we are currently members of a kingdom that endures forever. All praise to the King! Understanding this, it is no surprise that Paul sends greetings from some whom he describes as "fellow workers for the kingdom of God" -- Colossians 4:11.

4. **What does this letter have to say about the "mystery"?** There are three distinct contextual references to "the mystery" in the book of Colossians. The first case is in 1:25-27, the second is in 2:1-3, and the third is in 4:2-4. Here are some things that we learn about the mystery in these verses:

- To fully carry out the preaching of the word of God includes teaching of the mystery -- 1:25-26
- The mystery was previously hidden but has now been manifested to His saints -- 1:26
- The mystery has a special significance to the Gentiles -- 1:27
- The mystery is defined as "Christ in you" -- 1:27
- God's mystery is defined as "Christ" -- 2:2
- We need prayers for open doors and clarity in proclaiming the mystery of Christ -- 4:3-4

5. What does Colossians teach concerning immersion? One of the major misunderstandings concerning immersion is its relationship to faith and works. The predominant false teaching in "evangelical Christianity" is that baptism is a work. Since we are saved by grace through faith and not by works (see Ephesians 2:8-9), the conclusion is that immersion must have nothing to do with salvation. Something important to remember: if a person reasons correctly from a false assumption, they will arrive at a false conclusion. This is exactly the case here. The false assumption is that baptism is a work. Certainly work is done in immersion, but Colossians 2:9-12 establishes that immersion is a *work of God* that is done in accordance with *our faith*. Here are some key points brought forth in this passage:

- Immersion is a circumcision made without hands -- 2:11
- At our immersion, the body of the flesh is removed by the circumcision of Christ -- 2:11
- We are buried with Christ in immersion -- 2:12
- In immersion, we are raised up with Christ through faith -- 2:12
- All of this happens in the "working" or "operation" of God -- 2:12

6. Do negative decrees produce real change? The letter of Colossians addresses this topic in 2:20-23. Negative decrees cannot produce any real change because they are powerless to touch the desires of the heart. "Thou shalt not" didn't work throughout the Old Covenant and does not work today. "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" are all worldly decrees that are consistent with the "appearance of wisdom" and the "teachings of men." In the end, these decrees are of no value against fleshly indulgence. Real change is accomplished only with a change of identity. Christians have died with Christ (2:20), been buried and raised with Him (2:12), and hence set their minds on things above (3:1). We have a new life and that life is Christ -- 3:3-4. As we grow in this new identity, our habits are no longer from fleshly desires and sin, but are habits consistent with the Spirit and life.

7. What should the Christian put on according to this book? Throughout the New Testament, there is a constant exhortation for Christians to lay aside the old man and to put on the new man. Colossians is no exception; this book adds some particulars to this concept.

- We have put on the new self -- 3:10
- Christians should put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience -- 3:12
- We are to put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity -- 3:14

8. What does Colossians teach us about work? The book of Colossians makes many points on some different aspects of work. Here they are:

- Spiritual fruit is borne from every good work -- 1:10
- God's power mightily works within us -- 1:29
- God performs the work in immersion -- 2:12
- Christians are to work heartily as for the Lord, rather than for men -- 3:23
- God wants us to be fellow workers for the kingdom of God -- 4:11

9. What does this book exhort Christians to do with nonChristians? The book of Colossians has much subtle communication about our interaction with nonChristians as well as some direct teaching concerning this matter. Here are some of the main points:

- We are not to be taken captive to the teachings of the world -- 2:8, 2:22
- The world is not the judge of what we can and can't do -- 2:16
- Christians are to consider our bodies as dead to the deeds of the world -- 3:5-8
- We are to obey our earthly masters, fearing the Lord -- 3:22
- We should conduct ourselves with wisdom toward outsiders -- 4:5
- Our speech is to be with grace, that we may know how to respond to nonChristians -- 4:6