

LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS



Toward the year 62 A.D., Paul, a prisoner in Rome, writes to the Christians of Colossae, who, without being aware of it, belittle Christ. They do not feel assured with only faith in Christ and they want to add some practices from the Old Testament. Or they try to include Christ in a board of celestial persons, or “angels” who are supposed to have the key to our destiny in hand.

Something was lacking in them and in the majority of their contemporaries. They were caught in the Roman Empire which had imposed its peace on the known world at that time, but also prevented them from living a life of their own. They fell back on the “spiritual.” Secret doctrines offered to lead their “perfect ones” to a higher state and theories called “gnosis” (that is, knowledge) were drawn up on the origin of the human and the world. According to them, all comes from a cosmic soup that had been boiling for ages, with impressive celestial families of angels or “eons,” male and female, who devour each other, couple and finally imprison sparks of spirit in material bodies. So people are manufactured who, after “putting on” a series of successive existences, may return to the kingdom of light.

Caught in the wind of these fine discourses, the Colossians went the way of certain Christians today who trust in their devotion to souls or who allow their life to be led by spiritualism, astrology, and horoscopes. They no longer consider Christ as the only savior since they give the priority to others or to practices that are not of the Church.

This crisis in the Church of the first century gave us this letter of Paul where he establishes the absolute supremacy of Christ. As in other letters of Paul, the letter to the Colossians mentions that Timothy is with him (1:1). Paul chose him as assistant and looked on him as “his true Son in Christ.” Perhaps it was Timothy who wrote a fair part of this letter; it would explain the difference in style from the more authentic of Paul’s letters while its content—exceptionally rich—is constantly faithful to the inspiration of the apostle. On this subject, see the Letter to the Ephesians which has the same themes as the one to the Colossians, but in a more developed way. In several passages of Colossians, relevant commentaries in Ephesians will be indicated.

LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS



1 ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

²to the saints in Colossae, our faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Receive grace and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus, our Lord.

³Thanks be to God, the Father of Christ Jesus, our Lord!

We constantly pray for you, ⁴for we have known of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of your love for all the saints. Indeed, you await in hope the inheritance reserved for you in heaven, ⁵of which you have heard through the word of truth. This gospel, ⁶already present among you, is bearing fruit and growing throughout the world as it did among you from the day you accepted it and understood the gift of God in all its truth.

⁷He who taught you, Epaphras, our dear companion in the service of Christ, faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸has reminded me of the love you have for me in the Spirit. ⁹Because of this, from the day we received news of you, we have not ceased praying to God for you, that you may attain the full knowledge of his will through all the gifts of wisdom and spiritual understanding.

¹⁰May your lifestyle be worthy of the Lord and completely pleasing to him. May you bear fruit in every good work and grow in the knowledge of God.

¹¹May you become strong in everything by a sharing of the glory of God, so that you may have great endurance and persevere in joy.

¹²Constantly give thanks to the Father who has empowered us to receive our share in the inheritance of the saints in his kingdom of light.

¹³He rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son. ¹⁴In him, we are redeemed and forgiven.

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Read: The Colossian Christians are known for living lives of faith hope and love. To these virtues Paul wants to add wisdom, strength and gratitude.

Reflect: How do you evidence faith, hope and love in your life? Does one come more easily, which is more difficult?

Pray: Allow gratitude to be the heart of your prayer. Give thanks for the faith you have received. Ask that your works always manifest the love of God, and feed with prayer the hope of being one day in heaven.

Act: As you give thanks to God for a favor received, give thanks also to someone who has been generous to you. Accompany in prayer, or in person if possible, those people in your community who are having difficult times.

Christ is the beginning of everything

¹⁵He is the image of the unseen God,
and for all creation, he is the firstborn,

¹⁶for, in him, all things were created,
in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible:

thrones, rulers, authorities, powers...

All was made through him and for him.

¹⁷He is before all

and all things hold together in him.

¹⁸And he is the head of the body that is the Church,
for he is the first, the first raised from the dead,
that he may be the first in everything,

¹⁹for God was pleased to let fullness dwell in him.

²⁰Through him, God willed to reconcile all things to himself,
and through him, through his blood shed on the cross,
God establishes peace
on earth as in heaven.

²¹You, yourselves, were once estranged and opposed to God because of your evil deeds, ²²but now, God has reconciled you in the human body of his Son, through his death, so that you may be without fault, holy and

blameless before him. ²³Only stand firm upon the foundation of your faith, and be steadfast in hope. Keep in mind the gospel you have heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Read: This passage contains probably an ancient Christian hymn. It celebrates the Christ as holding together all of creation. The fullness of God dwells within him, and he has reconciled a lost humanity to God's love, and as a result people reject evil in their lives.

Reflect: Slowly read this hymn which present the Christ as the image of God for all creation. Which of these images have meaning in your spiritual life?

Pray: Ask God the grace to be an instrument of peace and reconciliation in your family and in your community.

Act: Look around you and be amazed by the work of God. Let your actions contribute to the perfection of everything created.

²⁴At present, I rejoice when I suffer for you; I complete, in my own flesh, what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church. ²⁵For I am serving the church since God entrusted to me the ministry to make the word of God fully known. ²⁶I mean that mysterious plan that for centuries and generations remained secret, and which God has now revealed to his holy ones.

²⁷God willed to make known to them the riches, and even the glory, that his mysterious plan reserved for the pagan nations: Christ is in you, the hope for glory.

²⁸This Christ, we preach. We warn and teach everyone true wisdom, aiming to make everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹For this cause, I labor and struggle with the energy of Christ working powerfully in me.

Let Christ Jesus, the Lord, be your doctrine

2¹I want you to know how I strive for you, for those of Laodicea, and for so many who have not met me personally. ²I pray that all may be encouraged. May you be established in love, that you may obtain all the riches of a full understanding, and know the mystery of God, Christ

himself. ³For, in him, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

⁴So, let no one deceive you with persuasive arguments. ⁵Although I am far from you, my spirit is with you, and I rejoice in recalling how well-disciplined you are and how firm in the faith of Christ.

COLOSSIANS 1:24—2:5

Read: Paul presents himself as minister of the Gospel and of the Church to fulfill the plan of God: salvation is universal and is within the reach of all who accept Christ. That is why he warns the Colossians not to fall for seductive arguments that claim otherwise.

Reflect: For Paul trust in Christ is the most valuable thing in life. It is not just an idea, it is a relationship with the God who loves us, for this he is willing to suffer. What do you commit to in your daily life? In your opinion, What part of the Christian message does the secular world reject?

Pray: Pray to deepen your trust in Christ. Pray that your heart may be encouraged, and your faith community united in love, especially in difficult days.

Act: Pray for all the people who minister in your parish, and give them words of encouragement from time to time.

⁶If you have accepted Christ Jesus as Lord, let him be your doctrine. ⁷Be rooted and built up in him; let faith be your principle, as you were taught, and your thanksgiving, overflowing.

⁸See that no one deceives you with philosophy or any hollow discourse; these are merely human doctrines not inspired by Christ, but by the wisdom of this world. ⁹For in him, dwells the fullness of God in bodily form. ¹⁰He is the head of all cosmic power and authority, and, in him, you have everything.

Baptized and risen

¹¹In Christ Jesus you were given a circumcision, but not by human hands, which removed completely from you the carnal body: ¹²I refer to baptism. On receiving it, you were buried with Christ; and you also rose with him for having believed in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³You were dead. You were in sin and uncircumcised at the same time. But God gave you life with Christ. He forgave all our sins. ¹⁴He canceled the record of our debts, those regulations which accused us. He did away with all that and nailed it to the cross. ¹⁵Victorious through the cross he stripped the rulers and authorities of their power, humbled them before the eyes of the whole world, and dragged them behind him as prisoners.

Useless doctrines

¹⁶So then, let no one criticize you in matters of food or drink, or about the observance of animal festivals, new moons or the Sabbath. ¹⁷These things were only shadows of what was to come, whereas the reality is the person of Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on humbling practices and worship of angels. In fact, they are only good to satisfy self-indulgence, ¹⁹instead of holding firmly to the head, Christ. It is he who nourishes and gives unity to the whole body by a complex system of nerves and ligaments, making it grow according to the plan of God.

²⁰If you have really died with Christ, and are rid of the principles of the world, why do you now let yourselves be taught as if you belonged to the world? ²¹“Do not eat this, do not taste that, do not touch that...” ²²these are human rules and teachings referring to things that are perishable that wear out and disappear. ²³These doctrines may seem to be profound because they speak of religious observance and humility and of disregarding the body. In fact, they are useless as soon as the flesh rebels.

Seek the things that are above

3¹So then, if you are risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on the things that are above, not on earthly things. ³For you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, reveals himself, you also will be revealed with him in glory.

COLOSSIANS 2:6—3:4

Read: Being a Christian is not about rules and regulations, it is living united to Christ Jesus, reconciled, forgiven and free of any superstition or idolatry. Paul exhorts: “If you have been

raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”

Reflect: What does it mean for you to live one with Christ? What does “seek the things that are above” mean to you? What distracts you from your relationship with Christ?

Pray: Prayer is not magic. Praying is not pronouncing spells to control human destiny, it is trusting yourself and your concerns to God’s hands; lifting up your needs and the needs of those around you to God in a spirit of trust.

Act: Prepare a special place in your room, light a candle, as a sign of the divine presence, and surrender in prayer to the will of God by repeating the following sentence: “Lord, you are my strength, my rock, and salvation.”

⁵Therefore, put to death what is earthly in your life, that is, immorality, impurity, inordinate passions, wicked desires and greed, which is a way of worshipping idols. ⁶These are the things that arouse the wrath of God.

⁷For a time, you followed this way and lived in such disorders. ⁸Well then, reject all that: anger, evil intentions, malice; and let no abusive words be heard from your lips.

Put on the new self

⁹Do not lie to one another. You have been stripped of the old self and its way of thinking; ¹⁰to put on the new, which is being renewed, and is to reach perfect knowledge, and the likeness of its creator. ¹¹There is no room for distinction between Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, foreigner, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all.

¹²Clothe yourselves, then, as is fitting for God’s chosen people, holy and beloved of him. Put on compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience ¹³to bear with one another, and forgive whenever there is any occasion to do so. As the Lord has forgiven you, forgive one another. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵May the peace of Christ overflow in your hearts; for this end, you were called to be one body. And be thankful.

¹⁶Let the word of God dwell in you, in all its richness. Teach and

admonish one another with words of wisdom. With thankful hearts, sing to God psalms, hymns, and spontaneous praise. ¹⁷And whatever you do or say, do it in the Name of Jesus the Lord, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

COLOSSIANS 3:5-17

Read: Paul invites the Colossians to live a new life, one that reflects the image of Christ. To do this they must put aside all selfishness, recognize the equality of all people and live so the entire community is an image of Christ.

Reflect: What does the following text tell you: “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive”?

Pray: With the help of the Holy Spirit, recognize your sins and ask for forgiveness. And embrace living as Christ lived so you can find happiness.

Act: Express your faith by practicing works that renew the human condition in your neighborhood: compassion, patience, forgiveness, kindness.

On obedience

¹⁸Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as you should do in the Lord. ¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and do not get angry with them. ²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything because that pleases the Lord. ²¹Parents, do not be too demanding of your children, lest they become discouraged.

²²Servants, obey your masters in everything; not only while they are present to gain favor with them, but sincerely, because you fear the Lord. ²³Whatever you do, do it wholeheartedly, working for the Lord and not for humans. ²⁴You well know that the Lord will reward you with the inheritance. You are servants, but your Lord is Christ. ²⁵Every evildoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, for God does not make exceptions in favor of anyone.

4¹As for you, masters, give your servants what is fair and reasonable, knowing that you yourselves have a Master in heaven.

COLOSSIANS 3:18—4:1

Read: Living with Christ influences everyday life, in contrast to the prevailing social standards the relationship of husbands and wives and their children should be characterized by love not servility. Masters should even treat their slaves justly not with cruelty. But then, he adds a new shade to it: service to the Lord Jesus, Lord of everything and everyone.

Reflect: Relationships with family, friends, workers, our community, especially the neediest, are the ways in which we serve God. Do you experience God's presence in people?

Pray: Pray for married couples, especially those that are unhappy. Pray for parents everywhere. Pray for children who suffer abuse and human trafficking.

Act: Be the one serving the table today but do it as if you were serving the Lord himself. At the end of the meal, share that it is in serving others that makes our life with Christ real.

Further instructions

²Be steadfast in prayer, and even spend the night praying and giving thanks. ³Pray especially for us and our preaching: may the Lord open a door for us that we may announce the mystery of Christ. Because of this, I am in chains; ⁴pray then, that I may be able to reveal this mystery, as I should.

⁵Deal wisely with those who do not belong to the Church; take advantage of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be pleasing with a touch of wit. Know how to speak to everyone in the best way.

⁷Tychicus will give news of me. He is our dear brother and, for me, a faithful assistant and fellow worker for the Lord. ⁸I am purposely sending him to give you news of me, and to encourage you. ⁹With him, I am sending Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of yours. They will tell you about everything that is happening here.

¹⁰My companion in prison, Aristarchus, greets you, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas, about whom you have already received instructions.

If he calls on you, receive him warmly. ¹¹Jesus, called Justus, also greets you. They are the only Jewish people working with me for the kingdom of God, and because of that, they have been a comfort to me.

¹²Greetings from your countryman Epaphras, a good servant of Christ Jesus. He constantly battles for you through his prayer that you be perfect and firm in whatever God asks of you. ¹³I assure you that he has worked hard for you, as well as for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

¹⁴Greetings from Luke, our dear doctor and from Demas. ¹⁵Greet the brothers and sisters of Laodicea, and don't forget Nympha and the church that gathers in her house.

¹⁶After reading this letter, see that it is read in the Church of the Laodiceans, and have the letter they received, read in yours. ¹⁷And say to Archipus, "Do not forget the ministry given to you in the Lord."

¹⁸Greetings in my own hand, Paul. Remember, that I am in chains. Grace be with you.

COLOSSIANS 4:2-18

Read: The letter ends with Paul encouraging prayer and thanksgiving. Because he is in prison, he asks them to pray for him and he mentions many people he remembers in prayer.

Reflect: Think of all the friends you have found because of faith. What have they given you, what have you given them?

Pray: Pray for friends, living and deceased. Ask God for the grace on how to offer your friendship to everyone who approaches you.

Act: Invite your friends to your home this weekend. Share with them the Word of God and, if possible, a meal. Look for opportunities to thank people for the part they play in your life.

BLANK PAGE 540