

Colossians

UNIT

1

LESSON 1

Setting

Bible Reference: Colossians 1:1–14

Setting of Colosse

The town of Colosse was located on the Lycus River in Asia Minor. The city lay on the great east-west trade route leading from Ephesus on the Aegean Sea to the Euphrates River. During Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus, Epaphras had been converted and had carried the gospel to Colosse. The Colossian church had become the target of heretical attack, prompting Epaphras's visit to Rome to seek Paul's advice.

LESSON 2

Paul's Ministry

Bible Reference:
Colossians 1:24–2:5

Paul Comes to Relationship with Jesus Christ

Paul, at the time he wrote these words in his letter to the Colossians, was in prison in Rome. By the time he had arrived in Rome he had already been beaten, imprisoned, whipped, pelted



The Conversion of St. Paul
by Michaelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564)

with stones, and chased out of towns. He had been persecuted for his efforts to advance the gospel.

Paul had grown up as a very religious Jew (a Pharisee). He had known every rule that needed to be followed. But not until his radical conversion on the road to Damascus did Paul truly begin his personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. There is a huge difference between religion (rule) and relationship (intimate communication with God).

LESSON 4 **Freedom in Christ**

Bible Reference: Colossians 2:6–23

Freedom in Christ

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul stresses knowledge. Paul was refuting the heresy of Gnosticism, which emphasized a secret, special knowledge of salvation beyond that which we have in Christ. In Christ, Paul insists, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Paul was counteracting Gnostic heresy that taught, in part, that for salvation one needed to combine faith in Christ not only with such secret knowledge but also with humanly devised regulations, such as circumcision and the mandatory observance of certain religious festivals.

Colossians is a book of connections. Writing from prison in Rome, Paul combated the false teachings that had infiltrated the Colossian church. The problem was syncretism, the combining of ideas from other philosophies and religions (such as paganism, certain strains of Judaism, and Greek thought) with Christian truth. The resulting heresy only later became known as Gnosticism, which not only emphasized this special knowledge but denied Christ as God and Savior. To combat this devious error, Paul stressed Christ's deity—his connection with the Father—and his sacrificial death on the cross for sin.

Only by being connected with Christ through faith can anyone have eternal life, and only by a continuing connection with him can we experience powerful Christian living. Jesus Christ is God incarnate, and he is the only way to forgiveness and peace with the Father. Paul also emphasized believers' connections with each other as members of Christ's body on Earth. Our love for Christ should translate into love

for others—friends, fellow believers, spouses, children, parents, and others. We should continuously communicate with God through prayer and take every opportunity to tell others the good news of the gospel. In Christ, and Christ alone, we have everything we need for salvation and for living an effective Christian life.

LESSON 5

Living as Christ's Chosen People

Bible Reference: Colossians 3:1—4:1

How Far Did Epaphras Travel to Seek Paul's Advice?

Because of Epaphras's concerns over Gnosticism, he made a dangerous and exhausting 1,000-mile trip from Colosse to Rome to seek Paul's advice.

LESSON 6

Final Instructions

Bible Reference: Colossians 4:2–18

Who Are All These Men?

Paul mentions many names in Colossians 4. Below is a brief description of their role in the early church.

Tychicus was a disciple of Jesus Christ and a companion of Paul. He was a native of the Roman province of Asia and had probably been born in Ephesus. Tychicus joined Paul toward the end of his third missionary journey.

Onesimus was the slave who had fled from his master to Rome and had there met the apostle Paul, who was instrumental in his conversion to Christianity. Onesimus is the subject of Paul's letter to Philemon, the runaway slave's master.

Aristarchus was an early Christian who accompanied Paul on his third missionary journey.