
Christ – Supreme & Sufficient *in preview*

Colossians 1:1-14

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Introduction Have you ever thought about yourself as a “second-class citizen” of God’s kingdom? You know, as you compare yourself to others and look at your faith you begin to think that your trust and understanding of the gospel is second rate. Your stature in Christ is miniature. Your testimony of Christ is weak. People challenge your understanding of life as parochial.

The effects of this thinking become obvious. You imagine that you are lacking in resources when it comes to the Christian life. You notice other so called believers seem to have a secret to the victorious life. You become like the man across the street from the Chapel who told me last year about his only hope. (Describe the man who thought his only hope was to listen to and obey Joyce Meyer; the popular televangelist who has published over 50 books.)

He apparently was unaware that... “After receiving criticism for the financial perks obtained from her \$95 million-a-year television ministry, charismatic televangelist and bestselling author Joyce Meyer announced plans to take a reduced salary in 2004 and personally use more of the income derived from her outside book sales...While Meyer's previous salary is unknown, a recent series of investigative [articles](#) in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch revealed Meyer's ministry purchased for Joyce and Dave a \$2 million home, a \$10 million private jet, and houses worth another \$2 million for the couple's children, who also work for the ministry. The articles also outlined Meyer's recent personal purchases, including a \$500,000 vacation home. (*Source – Christianity Today 1/19/2004*)

The man next door saw that the new teachers of the day look successful. They look painless. They look good. And he, well, he simply was a second-class citizen of God’s kingdom.

How do you react to this outlook? Well for some, they move into depression and dejection. They think that they are assigned to a lower social order. They will never change, never be a champion, and never have success. They will always be a second-class citizen of God’s kingdom. For others, they resolutely move toward the latest remedy. Whether it is the newest book or the newest look, whether they adopt the fullness trend or the freedom trend, whether they take up the most up-to-date

breakthroughs in technology, psychiatry, psychology or philosophy – whatever the strategy is they know that Christ is good but they need a little extra from another source.

Is this madness or misery describing someone you know – maybe know all too well? At the heart of it all is the idea that Jesus Christ and the gospel are not enough. One must add something to Jesus Christ and his finished work if (s)he expects to become forgiven, full and free. You must have some special experience. You must engage in some particular religious activities. You must attend certain conferences if you are really going to be a spiritual person. In order to achieve certain levels of intellectual discernment or enjoy heights of joy one must experience the secrets of the Christian life found only through the “new teachers of the day”.

Beloved, it was in this environment that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossian believers. In his letter he focuses on reassuring them that they are genuine Christians and that they have the genuine message. This young church was susceptible to the newest teachings in the day; a blend of Judaism, Christianity, pre-Gnosticism, mystical superstitions and basic traditions of man. (see 2:8,16-19)

The Apostle Paul would not stand for any of this. He longed for God’s people to mature and not be drawn off into deviant and destructive teachings. He knew that to unveil the wonder and supremacy of Christ for them to see and savor would be the remedy for the church. Paul knew that to proclaim and apply Christ as supreme over all would help these believers to see that Christ is sufficient for all. Paul throws open the shutters before their eyes to show them once again the overwhelming beauty of Jesus Christ.

Every Christian finds himself encouraged when seeing afresh the glory of Christ and his gospel with its full and final effects upon believers. It is just such a look that Paul provides. We need to join him in the month of October in seeing the matchless wonder of the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

For the next five weeks we will give ourselves to one of the Apostle Paul’s most attractive and powerful letters he ever wrote. We are devoting ourselves to the study of the letter to the Colossians because of the need of keeping the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ up front and on center stage.

To set out to accomplish this, we will...

- ◆ Today look at Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency in preview (1:1-14)
- ◆ 10/8 we will notice Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency in full view (1:15-2:7)
- ◆ 10/15 we will see Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency under attack (2:8-23)
- ◆ 10/22 we will observe Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency in daily living (3:1-4:6)
- ◆ 10/29 we will finish by taking note of Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency in fellowship (4:7-18)

Christ's Supremacy and Sufficiency in preview

1.1-14

To begin our study of the letter to the Colossians please take your Bibles and turn with me to Colossians 1:1-14 (pray).

Paul begins his letter in a friendly yet focused way. In vv.1-14 we have Christ as supreme and sufficient in preview. His preview of the themes of the letter was written in a customary format having the predictable greeting and thanksgiving sections. Paul writes this letter from prison to a young church in the province of Asia (modern Turkey).

This small church in the Lycus valley was planted as a result of the missionary activity associated with Paul's Ephesian ministry around AD 52-55. (You are able to read about this in Acts 19:8-10). As a result of his teaching, Paul saw many who were converted and then trained to go out and evangelize and plant churches. Likely the man Epaphras came out of this type of ministry and went back to plant a church in the town of Colossae.

Epaphras was a hard worker (cf. 4:13), a praying and caring man (1:7; 4:12) and one who likely planted other churches in nearby towns (i.e. Laodicea and Hierapolis; 2:1; 4:13). The results of his praying and working was a biblical church whose characteristics were notable (1:3-8) yet vulnerable (2:20).

The church at Colossae was around 8 years old. It had a great start. But now as we will see in the letter, it was threatened by false teaching. And so, to combat false teaching and to encourage true living, Paul makes plain the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

In his greeting

v.1, 2

First we see Paul placing Christ's supremacy and sufficiency on display in his greeting; vv.1-2.

The sender v.1

In verse one we come across the sender – the Apostle Paul. He immediately identifies himself as an authoritative messenger of the risen and reigning Christ Jesus. Due to attacks upon his authority from the false teachers, Paul states up front his credentials. Teaming up with Timothy and carrying out God's will was the result of and in response to the preeminent One; Jesus Christ.

The recipients v.2a

In the first part of v.2 we come to the recipients. These are saints and faithful brothers in Christ who lived in Colossae. The descriptions we come to in this verse of the church in Colossae are theological terms. The first one "saints" was taken from the O.T. and relates to God's chosen people who are set apart for His purposes (cf. Ex.19:6; Lev.11:44; etc.) Having been brought (and bought) into a covenant relationship with him, Israel was to be a holy nation. Christians are "saints" because of the new relationship they have been brought

into by God through Jesus Christ. The accent of this positional truth falls on Jesus Christ – the preeminent One of the Universe.

The saints in Colossae are also designated “faithful brothers”. As a result of the positional truth these believers were known for their faithfulness (cf. 1:7). They were reliable and consistent. This observation, as we will see in the next paragraph, was to help reassure them that they are genuine due to Christ Jesus.

The greeting v.2b:

To round off his salutation, Paul desires grace and peace to them. The term “grace” generally was used by Paul to point to Christ’s work of salvation (cf. Rom.3:23, 24). Paul’s message of “the gospel of the grace of God” was taking root and growing at Colossae (see 1:6). This pardon and power from God our Father (known as grace) is introduced in the letter here due to the false teachers who wanted to add to Christ’s work (cf.2:20ff). For Paul and the entire Bible the basis of the whole work of salvation is grace. Grace and peace from the Father found in Christ draws attention to the centrality and indispensability of Jesus Christ.

In his thanksgiving

v.3-8

Having greeted them, Paul now moves into a thanksgiving and prayer typical of the letter-writing convention of his day (v.3-8). Notice, however, that Paul is not mainly concerned with adhering to a certain form of letter writing. He has an intention with his introduction. And this intention is shaped by the circumstances the saints at Colossae faced. As we will notice throughout the letter, the new teachers were trying to persuade these believers that they had a good start but much needed to be added to their faith. These common folks making up the church at Colossae were hardly complete. They needed the false teachers to enhance their experience of the Christian life. It appears that these teachers challenged the believers faith (are you really genuine Christians), their message (is the gospel all that is needed?) and their pastor (he doesn’t seem too colorful and charismatic).

Paul desires in v.3-14 to accomplish two things; 1) reassure the saints at Colossae and 2) remind them of important truths.

By reassuring the saints that they are genuine Christians v. 3-5a

Paul underscores Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency in his thanksgiving by first reassuring the saints that they are genuine Christians (v.3-5a). Pointing out the hallmarks of Christianity: faith, love and hope, Paul desires these precious believers to be reassured that they are for real. They are true believers in Christ Jesus. The object of their faith was Jesus Christ. The scope of their love was for every believer; not just a small group. And their hope was powerfully transforming their present lives. All this pointed to the authenticity of their Christianity. They needed nothing more than the supreme and sufficient Jesus Christ and his message.

By reassuring the saints that they have the genuine message v. 5b-6

Secondly, Paul makes much of Christ in his thanksgiving by reassuring the saints that they have the genuine message. The false teachers tried to show the gospel out to be inferior. In v.5b-6, Paul points out the effects of the gospel on the Colossians as well as the entire world. This was to demonstrate that the gospel was all-powerful and all-trustworthy. Nothing – absolutely nothing could be taken away or added to the gospel to make it better. The message they heard 8 yrs. ago (and each day afterwards) was the real thing. Jesus Christ portrayed as supreme and sufficient was (and is) plainly seen in the genuine message; the gospel.

By reassuring the saints that they have a genuine pastor v. 7-8

Finally, Paul highlights Christ in his thanksgiving by reassuring the saints that they have a genuine pastor (v.7-8). Pointing out the traits of faithfulness and love in Epaphras was Paul's way of saying, "Don't be tricked by the smooth and powerful teachers of the day. Epaphras, though not slick like the new teachers, is the real deal. He is genuine. You don't need anyone else to shepherd and teach and counsel you. He loves you with the Word".

In this Christ-focused thanksgiving, the believers at Colossae were to come away with reassurance – that they were true Christians, that the gospel was enough and that their leadership was authentic. All this was to garrison them against the false teaching of the day that brought Christ and the gospel into question.

In his prayer

v.9-14

Paul continues his desire to put Christ on display by describing his prayer life for them. This description was to remind them of two basic truths; their provision for fullness and their position of fullness.

By reminding the saints of their provision for fullness (i.e. "not yet")v.9-11

The first truth has to do with what is *not yet* theirs (v.9-11). This intentional and well crafted description of his prayer life demonstrates his awareness of what the Church was up against. Commentators have agreed that this thanksgiving reveals Paul's knowledge of what the false teachers were likely teaching.

The characteristic of this erroneous teaching was connected to spiritual fullness and freedom. It appears that these teachers thought about their counsel as much more valuable than the "elementary teachings" of Epaphras. They were attempting to convince them that Christ is good...but He is not enough. One needs to heed their counsel if (s)he was to truly be full and free.

In the realm of knowledge

(v.9-10)

In v.9-10 we come to the realm of knowledge. Paul prays that "they may be filled with the knowledge of his will". As we will notice in vv.12-14, Paul understands that those in Christ are full already. They are complete in Christ and so the false teachers had nothing to add to the gospel. But it is precisely due to the fact that they are already full that Paul prays for their fullness. That is, he yearns for the church to experience all the knowledge they have in

Christ. This knowledge is a deeper and clearer perception of what God wants from their lives (i.e. God's will). This knowledge was no mere speculative knowledge. It was "all spiritual wisdom and understanding" in order to practically apply the will of God to their daily living.

We can plainly see how important this knowledge is as we notice v.11 and the type and quality of true Christian living.

Worthy

The first characteristic of Christian living is seen in the term "worthy". We need His full knowledge of His will so that we will live a life that shows the world how awesome Christ truly is.

Pleasing

Secondly, Christian living is first and foremost about God. Our lives are to be pleasing all the time to our glorious Lord. Obeying Him by faith pleases Him which is the essence of Christian living.

Increasing in good deeds

Lastly, Christian living so influenced by the supremacy of sufficiency of Christ shows itself through good deeds. Doing acts of kindness by faith is evidence of true Christianity.

Paul wants to remind the church of their provision for fullness. They do not have to look elsewhere. They mustn't give ear to other teachings on fullness. They have it all in Christ. They are to experience the fullness of knowledge over His will in daily living. But knowledge over God's will is not enough. The church needs the ability to carry out His will. And this is exactly what we find in v.11.

In the realm of power

(v.11)

The second area that seems to be an issue springing from the false teachers is in the realm of power. In v.11 we come to this topic. "May you be strengthened with all power" is the request of his prayer. This request is for the ordinary Christians who seem to be tempted by the new teaching of the day. They were to experience all power – fullness of power. And this power was to be experienced and seen in the daily grind of life.

For all endurance and patience with joy

This glorious might provided by God in Christ for His people was to help them in the hard times. "Endurance and patience" are characteristics of Christian living when times are tough. The church does not need to and must not go to other promises of energy and power. All we need we have in Christ.

And this persistence in difficulty is not "the grim strength of gritting your teeth" (E. Peterson). When God's people are tested and pressured God's power provides patience with joy. A well-known commentator (i.e. Lohse)

put it this way; “Joy under pressure and through trial is one of the marvels of God’s work in his people”.

The point of this passage is plain. Christ is supreme and sufficient. Look to him for all knowledge and power needed to walk worthy of and be pleasing to Him. Never succumb to other counsel and teachers who would say they have a secret for triumphant living; greater knowledge / more energy. If we look any where for wisdom and strength but to Christ we demonstrate disloyalty and displease the One who is supreme and sufficient. Christ is all we ever need.

By reminding the saints of their position of fullness (i.e. “already”)v.12-14

Paul continues his reminder of truth found in Christ for the church in vv.12-14. His passion for the church not to give way to novel teaching was clear. He longed for them not only to remember their provision for fullness but now in v.12-14 to remember their position of fullness.

If vv.9-11 are about what they not yet have, vv.12-14 is about what they already have. This small paragraph can be organized around the two truths Christian already have.

As already qualified

(v.12)

First, their position of fullness as already qualified; v.12. Genuine Christians are already qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Full and forever qualification to stand before the holy one without dread but with delight is a staggering reality! The significance of this truth will come back to us in 2:18 where it will become evident that the false teachers wanted to make them feel disqualified. Thus, providing an occasion in which the church might be inclined to look elsewhere for their hope.

If they began to believe that they were not qualified as of yet, the so called new teachers could help these “poor second-class citizens”. They could supply the added boost for this small congregation.

Paul will not stand for any of this. He makes clear that the Christian does not have to wait until (s)he gets to heaven in order to be qualified for heaven. In Christ (s)he is already qualified. No purgatory and no new perspective are needed to enjoy the standing of fully qualified for God in heaven.

As already delivered

(v.13-14)

Secondly, in Paul’s description of his prayer, he reminds the church of their position of fullness by talking about their deliverance. These false teachers of the day had a novel teaching regarding freedom.

Paul reminds the church that God “has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins”. This remarkable description of our salvation indicates the realm from which the church was delivered. From the powers of darkness there is no escape apart from Jesus Christ. This deliverance was achieved through the cross of Christ (as seen in 2:15). From this cross work every true believer shares in this deliverance from the

darkness, from the power of sin, from the old realm, from the very wrath of God (cf. 3:6).

This deliverance according to v.14 is seen as redemption. Note that forgiveness of sins is talked about using the term redemption. This means that forgiveness is more than mere pardon. Forgiveness means liberation! All believers have already been set free, unshackled, released – redeemed.

This is why the new teachers had nothing to offer the Colossians. Nothing can surpass or supplement the gospel of Jesus Christ. Their position of fullness was to be remembered as a means of protection against the influence of the false teachers.

What is now clear is only a preview of what is to come in this magnificent letter. The church in Colossae and the church in Springboro have all they need in Christ. Supreme and sufficient are two ways of talking about Jesus Christ (as we will be made fully aware of next week). Paul wants to make this plain in his thanksgiving and in his prayer. He wants the small and young church of Colossae confident of the riches found in Christ (cf. 2:3) Perhaps they were susceptible to the smooth and alluring attractions of new teaching. They started to succumb to the fascinating and false promises made by the teachers. Paul starts his letter off in v.1-14 by reassuring them that they are genuine Christians, that the gospel is the genuine message, that their leadership is genuine, that their provision for knowledge and power is available, that their position as qualified and delivered is guaranteed. Not anything or anybody could add to what they have in Christ.

Jesus Christ is the best over everything and thus he is enough for everything.

To take this message to heart listen as I close with lessons gleaned from Colossians 1:1-14. **Lessons**

1. Everything we need comes from God.

Remember, today's text is a description of Paul's thanksgiving and requests to God. He attributes everything he sees in the Colossians to Him. This makes plain that everything we need for life and godliness comes from Him.

2. There is assurance of salvation for those in Christ.

In vv.3-8, Paul points out the evidence of God's work in the church's life. Are you relying upon Jesus Christ for your salvation? Do you see your love for all of God's people increasing? Do your faith in Christ Jesus and love shown toward Christians around you come from a hope that is kept

for you in heaven? If so, then be reassured from the text of the awesome reality of your salvation. (If you do not see this evidence in your life...[preach the gospel])

3. *The discernment of God's will and the ability to carry it out comes from the LORD.*

We see this lesson in vv.9-11. Are you frustrated with not knowing what is pleasing to the LORD in your daily decisions? Do you sense little capacity to carry out obedience to His will? Look no further than your prayer life. Are you asking for insight into how to love your spouse? What parenting your teens looks like? How to work under an unreasonable boss? What attitude you need when facing pressures of the day? How to handle your paycheck?

Secondly, are you asking for power to carry out His will in daily living? The discernment of God's will and the ability to carry it out come from the LORD. Pray and pray often.

4. *Be informed of and stay clear of the novel teachings of the day.*

Religious television and radio stations are loaded with flawed teaching and counsel. Religious book stores are filled with Christianized pop psychology and self-help strategies that will weaken your faith. Learn the pure gospel. Grow in discernment. Stay away from the Norman Vincent Peels and the Joel Olsteens of self-help heretical doctrine. The mixture of Scripture and psychologies and philosophies of the day is smooth poison. Don't drink. Turn off the radio if you must. Stop watching TV if that helps. Do what you must to be informed and stay clear of the novel teachings of the day.

5. *Rest in and relish much the accomplished work of Jesus Christ.*

Vv.12-14 tell us that redemption; the liberation of imprisonment and bondage, is not simply the object of hope. It is an existing reality. Do you think much about the rich reality of your salvation in Christ? Do you meditate on the complete and unassailable work of Christ on the Cross? Full and forever forgiveness of all sins is striking. Totally qualified to stand in the presence of the holiness of God for all eternity is remarkable. Complete deliverance from His just wrath and the power of sin and Satan is for today. Oh, beloved, rest in his finished work. Relish Him in his finished work. And readily appropriate his finished work day by day.

6. *The unveiling of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ is coming next week.*

Paul sets up his readers to view the breathtaking majesty of Jesus in vv.15-2:7. Reflect on this passage throughout this week. Pray often this week for each other that Clearcreek Chapel will enjoy clear sight of Christ in this passage. Get good sleep next Saturday night. Come with heightened

anticipation of the unveiling of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ next Sunday.

Nobody here today who is united to Christ by faith is a second-class citizen in God's kingdom. He is all we will ever need because He is all there ever will be. Let's pray.