

Preaching Colossians - Introduction & Chapter 1

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1. Introduction.

Colossians appears in:

- A. NT Letters
- B. Pauline Letters
- C. Pauline Prison Letters – (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon)

Authorship - Paul

Paul's Imprisonment – 3 possibilities:

- A. Ephesus (Fall 52 – 56)
- B. Caesarea (Spring 57 – Fall 59)
- C. Rome (Winter 60 – early 62)

Date - Depends upon where Paul was in Prison.
Likely date – (60 – 62 A. D.)

Occasions & Purpose –

When Paul wrote Colossians, he had not visited the church.

“While Paul was imprisoned in Rome, he was visited by Epaphras (Phlm 23), who informed him of the spiritual state of the Colossians church (Col 1:3-8; 2:5) and of a twofold danger confronting the Colossians: relapse into pagan ways of thinking and acting (3:5-11; the church was predominately Gentile, 1:27; 2:13) and acceptance of unorthodox teaching (1:23; 2:1-23). Paul's aim in writing, therefore, was to provide the Christian antidote to error in doctrine and practice. He commissioned Tychicus, accompanied by Onesimus, to carry the letter to Colossae (4:7-9) because Epaphras had chosen to remain with Paul (4:12-13; Phlm 23).” (Murray Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, in *Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013], 5).

Structure

1:1 – 4:18	Epistle
1:1 – 2	Salutation
1:3 – 4:6	Part 1
4:7 – 18	Part 2

1:1 – 2 Salutation

1:3 – 4:6 Part 1

 1:3 – 12

 1:3 – 8
 1:9 – 12

 1:13 – 3:17

 1:13 – 2:5

 1:13 – 23

 1:13 – 20
 1:21 – 23

 1:24 – 2:5

 1:24 – 29
 2:1 – 5

 2:6 – 3:17

 2:6 – 7
 2:8 – 23

 2:8 – 15
 2:16 – 19
 2:20 – 23

 3:1 – 16

 3:1 – 4
 3:5 – 11
 3:12 – 14
 3:15 – 16

3:17

3:18 – 4:6

3:18 – 4:1

3:18 – 19

3:20 – 21

3:22 – 4:1

4:2 – 6

4:2 – 4

4:5 – 6

4:7 – 18 Part 2 (Conclusion)

4:7 – 9

4:10 – 14

4:15 – 17

4:18

Sermon Series on Colossians:

1:1-2

1:3-12 (or 1:3-8 and 1:9-12)

1:13-23 (or 1:13-20 and 1:21-23)

1:24-2:5 (or 1:24-29 and 2:1-5)

2:6-23 (or 2:6-7; 2:8-15; 2:16-19; 2:20-23)

3:1-16 (or 3:1-4; 3:5-11; 3:12-14; 3:15-16; or 3:15-17)

3:17

3:18-4:1 (or 3:18-19; 3:20-21; 3:22-4:1)

4:2-6

4:7-18 (or 4:7-9; 4:10-14; 4:15-18)

COMMENTARIES AND STUDIES ON COLOSSIANS

Exegetical Commentaries:

Beale, G. K. *Colossians and Philemon*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019. (Probably my first go to exegetical commentary at this point. Scholarly, in-depth, exegetical, theological, and practical help for pastors. Beale pays attention to Old Testament allusions in Colossians. He provides statements of the exegetical ideas at the beginning of each section which assist the preacher in sermon preparation. Highly recommended. See the “Works Cited” section on pp. 459-475 for up-to-date bibliography on sources.)

Callow, John. *A Semantic and Structural Analysis of Colossians*. 2nd ed. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2002. (I recommend all of the volumes in this series to pastors who want to do genuine text-driven preaching. Callow provides the paragraph divisions of Colossians based on the semantic analysis of the text. He then provides a careful discourse analysis of each paragraph within Colossians. Indispensable.)

Dunn, James. *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. (Dunn was for many years the Lightfoot Professor of Divinity at the University of Durham. Known for his support of the so called “New Perspective” on Paul. Harris says of this volume: “. . . characteristic attention to detail, mastery of ancient parallels and modern scholarship, and grasp of theological issues.” The exegesis is geared towards a theological interpretation of the book.)

Eadie, John. *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957. (This 19th century commentator always is informative. Based on the Greek text, but rich in exposition.)

Harris, Murray. *Colossians & Philemon*. EGGNT. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013. (First published in 1991, Harris delivers beautifully. All volumes in this series have a brief introduction, list of recommended commentaries, extensive exegetical notes, translation and expanded paraphrase of the book, comprehensive exegetical outline, homiletical outlines, and a glossary of grammatical and rhetorical terms. Extremely helpful. Harris is Professor Emeritus of New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Trinity, and former warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge.)

Lightfoot, J. B. *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959. (Based on the Greek text. The third of the great Greek 19th century triumvirate Hort and Westcott, Lightfoot’s work is dated, yet not antiquated. Erudite and insightful, according to Bauer.)

O’Brien, Peter. *Colossians, Philemon*. WBC. Waco: Word, 1982. (O’Brien has established himself as one of the premier NT commentators. His work is generally thorough, judicious, and conservative in outlook. However, some of his commentaries have been pulled by publishers for issues of plagiarism. Well considers the history of interpretation but also synthesizes the

theology of each passage. “The explanation section synthesizes the theology of the passage and explores its significance for the religious experience of the original readers” – Bauer. I always try to read O’Brien if I can.)

Pao, David. *Colossians & Philemon*. ZEC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012. (Written for pastors, but makes serious use of the Greek text. Pao succeeds in meeting the series goal: exegete each passage succinctly in its grammatical, literary, and historical context.)

Expository Commentaries:

Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Revised ed. DSB. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975. (See below on Hebrews. Word studies and illustrations galore!)

Bruce, F. F. *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*. NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984. (See above on Ephesians.)

Garland, David. *Colossians, Philemon*. NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998. (Garland treats Colossians in 250 pages and Philemon in just over 80 pages. He presents a good balance between exposition and application, as the series intends.)

Gromacki, Robert. *Stand Perfect in Wisdom: an Exposition of Colossians and Philemon*. (See above on Galatians.)

Moo, Douglas. *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. PNTC. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008. (Moo interacts with the Greek text but explains the English text in a clear way. Blomberg says this book should be the first choice of most pastors and teachers because it is not unnecessarily long.)

Moule, H. C. G. *Colossians and Philemon Studies: Lessons in Faith and Holiness*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d. [1877]. (A minor classic by a major exegete. Excellent exposition and application couched in a devotional style.)

Sumney, J. L. *Colossians*. New Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008.

Vaughan, Curtis. “Colossians.” EBC. Vol. 11. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978. (See above on Romans. See also Vaughan’s *Colossians and Philemon* in the BSC series, 1981. Anything Vaughan writes is worth reading. He taught Greek at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary for many years, and was my favorite professor when I was a student there.)

Wright, N. T. *Colossians and Philemon*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 1986.

Sermons:

Maclaren, Alexander. *The Epistles of St. Paul to the Colossians and Philemon*. EB. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1903. (Considered one of Maclaren's best and one of the best volumes in the Expositor's Bible series. "A masterpiece of scholarship and exposition" – Wiersbe.)

Nicholson, W. R. *Oneness with Christ: Popular Studies in Colossians*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, n.d. [1903]. (Nicholson was a bishop in the Reformed Episcopal Church and Dean and Professor of Exegesis and Pastoral Theology until his death in 1901. He was a remarkable biblical expositor and preacher of the last part of the 19th century. This work does not cover the entire letter, but what is covered is pure gold.)