

## Colossians: Christ Over All Introduction

Who or what takes priority in life? In this letter to the church at Colossae, the answer to that question is made unmistakably clear. Christ is to take priority in life. **"He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together"** (Col. 1:17).

Exactly why the Colossian Christians needed to be reminded of the important truth that Christ is over all and that there should be no rival to him, either in ideas or practices, is not clear. Various suggestions have been given about the nature of what is sometimes called the "Colossian heresy." Perhaps some in the church had been affected by some of the religious and philosophical ideas that swirled about in the first-century world and that would have been found in the Greco-Roman culture of Colossae. Perhaps the challenge came from the Jews in Colossae. They may have insisted that keeping the Jewish laws and rituals was important and had thus drawn some Christians into—or back into—such practices. Perhaps what was misleading the Colossian Christians was a mixture of these influences.

Colossae was located in the Roman province of Asia. This ancient area was in the western portion of what we know as modern-day Turkey. Although we don't know for sure whether Paul ever went there, we have pretty strong evidence that his influence reached there even prior to this letter. When Paul preached in Ephesus for two years, **"all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord"** (Acts 19:10). **"All the residents of Asia"** would have included the Colossians. Too, in addition to Paul's contacts with Ephesus and likely with Colossae too, Paul also had close contacts with the neighboring town of Laodicea, only ten miles away. Laodicea is referred to in 2:1 and 4:13, 15-16. So Paul knew the Colossians well and cared deeply for them (1:3-4; 2:1). The Letter to the Colossians may have come near the middle of Paul's missionary ministry or it may have come toward the end. If Paul wrote Colossians toward the end of his ministry, the time would have been in the early 60s during his imprisonment in Rome.

Whatever the exact nature of the problem the Colossian Christians faced, the Letter to the Colossians gave pointed instructions about how to deal with it. We will see the main lines of these instructions in the sessions to be studied. The letter called on the Colossian Christians to put Christ first rather than to follow competing ideas. The letter also called these first-century Christians to stop trying to find life in keeping rituals and rules. The letter further challenged them to focus on their life in Christ and live up to their Christian commitment in their daily living. Look back at the previous sentences, which capsule the three sessions to be studied in Colossians. Any chance we might need the same instructions?

## Unit 48: Giving Everything to Jesus

20-48-00-en	Colossians: Christ over All -- Introduction	
20-48-01-en	Who's Number One?	Colossians 1:1-23
20-48-02-en	Lose the Rules	Colossians 2:6-23
20-48-03-en	Live It Up!	Colossians 3:1—4:1