

## COLOSSIANS

All quotes and comments by Andrew Lincoln unless otherwise noted.

- 1) -- “Perhaps what makes Colossians distinctive is its combination of wisdom theology and a polemical theology of grace.”
  - Wisdom -- 1:28, 2:2-3, 2:23, 3:16, 4:5  
Christ embodies wisdom, Paul supremely, but also all other believers. It is universal in scope.
  - Polemical -- 1:5-6, 1:3, 2:7, 3:15-17, 4:2  
It will not allow God’s gracious activity in Christ to be undermined with new practices or regulations -- grace is not a separate theme -- the gospel **is** grace. Lincoln believes that the “new age” spirituality is akin to “the philosophy” warned against throughout Colossians, with its spirit guardians, out-of-body experience brought on by drugs, meditation, ritualized dance, needing help from shamans, sorcerers, and mediums.
- 2) 1:1 – If written by Paul, probably written from prison in Rome c 62 AD. Paul never visited Colossae, 125 miles east of Ephesus. But there is no overwhelming proof of authorship by Paul, Timothy, or anyone else. However, the cumulative argument (style, vocabulary, theological emphasis, etc) is that it was **not** Paul, but one of his pseudonymous disciples who tried to be faithful to the Pauline traditions and teachings..
- 3) 1:7 – Probably founded the church and may have been in prison with Paul -- see Philemon 1:23.
- 4) 1:15,16. Paul has gotten news, possibly from Epaphras, that the Colossians were falling under the influence of Gnosticism, the doctrine that claimed God was only a spirit and had nothing to do with material things. Between God and man was a hierarchy of angels: thrones, dominions, virtues, powers, and principalities, in ascending order of importance. The highest angels were the cherubim and seraphim, the lowest were archangels and angels. The latter were of OT belief and not denounced by Paul. In the centuries after Paul, mystical thought did invade Christianity and hierarchies of angels were adopted in profusion, with Jesus transcending them all. /// An apparent paradox: Christ as creator along with God, and Christ the first born of creation. Not a problem for the early Christians of Paul’s time.
- 5) 1:20 -- This verse teaches a universal reconciliation in which every human being will be saved -- a loving God would not consign the majority of humans to perdition (those who had never heard of Jesus or did not accept him as their savior).
- 6) 1:24 -- Several scholarly explanations of “what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions,” NIB p 612-614. Lincoln asserts that it was not Christ who lacked afflictions, but **Paul’s** subsequent afflictions that can be called the afflictions of Christ in the sense that Paul actively participates in the same pattern of suffering that Christ experienced by continuing his role as servant.
- 7) 2:11 -- The circumcision Jesus underwent is his death -- a cutting away of his whole body. Just as believers’ dying with Christ is not a physical death, but a spiritual dying to sin, so also their being circumcised with Christ is not a cutting off of their physical existence but a spiritual circumcision that also has particular ethical consequences -- “a circumcision made without hands” -- which will be spelled out in 3:8-9. \\\\ Baptism represents being buried with Christ and being dead to the sins of the past. See also Romans 6:4. Lincoln notes that the original Greek does **not** explicitly connect baptism with union with Christ.
- 8) 2:13-15 -- The combination of “trespasses” and “uncircumcision of the flesh” indicates: 1) They

were Gentiles, 2) They were also spiritually uncircumcized, that is, alienated from God. But God has already given them full forgiveness. This is not the Mosaic Law, but rather the apocalyptic book of good and bad deeds -- the book of indictment -- which God has now erased. /// Lincoln suggests that these metaphors are not very realistic in today's world, but there are forces beyond our direct control: refugees, homelessness, tribal conflicts, consumerism, sexism, nationalism, materialism, nuclear and chemical armaments. We need to take this gospel and apply it to "the powers of evil."

- 9) 2:16 -- The celebration of feasts, new moons, and Sabbaths is described in 1 Chr 23:31, 2 Chr 2:3, and elsewhere, but in this case "there is no hint that such special days are being observed because of desire to obey Torah...a mark of Jewish identity."
- 10) 2:19 -- Holding fast to Christ the head means that spiritual growth is not a private preoccupation but a corporate matter. Genuine "church growth that is a result of authentic adherence to Christ as head is recognized by the way in which the whole body functions healthily as its members work together..."
- 11) 3:1 -- "Raised with Christ," like "dying with Christ," has a close association with baptism.
- 12) 3:11 -- The Scythian tribes around the Black Sea were considered the lowest kind of barbarian -- "little better than wild beasts" (Josephus). Also see 2 Macc 4:47.
- 13) 3:18-4:1 -- The "household code," adapted from Stoic moral philosophy, derived from attempts of Philo and Josephus to show the links between the social duties of Judaism and Hellenistic moral philosophy. Proper household management was a matter of crucial and even political concern. The writer is trying to convince Greco-Roman critics that Christianity was not intent on destabilizing society, but was upholding its traditions. Andrew Lincoln: "Those who consider love and justice to be the central thrust of the Bible's ethical teaching will...want to work out a view of marriage in which both partners are held in equal regard...that male domination not be tolerated."
- 14) 4:1 -- Paul may have had Philemon in mind. See Philemon v. 7
- 15) 4:10 -- Aristarchus was with Paul at the silversmiths' riot (Acts 19:29). Also see Acts 20:4, 27:2. /// In Acts 15:38, Paul's negative assessment of Mark is given as the reason for the split with Barnabas. The rift was apparently temporary. See also Philemon 24.
- 16) 4:12 -- Epaphras must have been with Paul when this letter was written, possibly even in prison. See 1:7
- 17) 4:14 -- Demas eventually left Paul and Christianity -- 2 Tim 4:10.