

# Christ Is All: Introduction

by J. Glyn Owen

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*The Colossian Epistle presents a Savior who stands alone as the only true God, and who is the fullness of revelation and salvation.*

**Duration:** 39:31

**Scripture:** Acts 19:8

**Topics:** "Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the message of the Epistle to the Colossians. The central theme of the Epistle is that Jesus Christ is everything and is sufficient for all our needs. The speaker encourages the audience to read and memorize the Epistle, as it contains the Gospel message and can be used to address various challenges in the Christian life. The speaker also expresses personal appreciation for the depth and impact of the Epistle to the Colossians.

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## Transcript

We propose to be examining the message that we find enshrined in the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church at Colossae, the Colossian Epistle. And this morning I want to confine myself to some kind of introduction to this remarkable document, which I trust the Lord will make a means of saving and sanctifying and confirming grace to us during these cold winter months as we move toward the springtime and the summer. Now I have, I do not therefore have a particular text that I'm going to speak on this morning.

I suppose the heart of what I have to say is summed up in the title we have given to the message or to the introduction, Christ is all. And that comes from the 11th verse in chapter 3. Jesus Christ is everything. If you ask us to put in a word the message of this epistle, I believe it comes down to that.

It expounds the soul sufficiency and adequacy of Jesus Christ, to be the Savior of his people through life into eternity, to do everything that needs to be done, to be to us everything that we can possibly need, and at last to present us faultless and blameless before his heavenly Father as his bride. Jesus Christ is all. Now you may well pose the question as to why we have chosen this epistle.

And I want to suggest to you that there are a number of reasons, and I'm bringing these forward because I'd like you to be thinking of some of these as you read the epistle. Indeed I would like to suggest to the congregation that we all try to memorize this epistle to the Galatians. I've never asked the congregation to

try anything like this before.

There are only four chapters here. Why not decide on your version of scripture and get down to this and see to it that before we're through with this epistle, which will take us three months or so, that you really know this letter to the Colossians, and you will have it in your memory. You can tell out the gospel in the words of Colossians.

You can use it for dealing with certain problems that you meet in the Christian life. You can use it in a pastoral way to help other people. There is no end to the use you can make of it, if only you can memorize this gem of a letter.

Well, see what we can do. But now, why should we turn to the letter written by Paul to the Colossians? Well, there are many reasons really. I have found this a very moving epistle of late.

Of course, it falls into the same category as certain others in this respect. What I was going to say was this, it was written in prison. And I think we need again to recapture a sense of the sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with us in the grimmest circumstances, and not simply to keep us, but to make us a means of blessing to others, irrespective of our circumstances.

And we have a classical example of that in the very writing of this letter. You see, Paul was incarcerated in Rome, probably in Rome. Not everybody agrees with that.

Never mind. He was incarcerated somewhere, probably in Rome. And whether he was in an ordinary Roman jail, or whether he was simply under house arrest, makes very little difference.

If you listen carefully, you will hear the clink of the chains that were around his arms and his legs. Every word that was written by him, I don't know whether he wrote these letters altogether on his own, or whether he had an amanuensis. Parts of them he wrote, certainly the greetings at the close.

Wherever he wrote, you can almost hear the clink of the chains to which he was chained as a prisoner. His life was in, apparently, at the mercy of an emperor, a pagan emperor, but far from becoming a person given to self-pity. Far from just licking his own wounds, and thinking of himself, and himself alone.

The grace of God is so mighty in this man that he's thinking of other people. Now that's not all. Who on earth could an apostle be thinking of when he was in prison? Awaiting at any time the summons to come out, and probably to be headed, to be beheaded.

Well, let me, let me, let me not pause with this, but the marvel of it here is this. He's writing to a people he's never seen in the flesh. The Colossians have never seen Paul.

Paul has never seen the Colossians. He tells us that in the body of the letter. Well, why on earth is he writing to them then? Well, he has heard that there is a problem emerging in the church in Colossae.

A young man and a young Christian by the name of Epaphras, who was probably the evangelist responsible for founding the church. We'll come to that in a moment. He has come either to visit Paul in Rome, or he is a fellow prisoner with him.

We don't know quite which. He could well have been arrested with the apostle Paul, and they're together in the same prison cell, or he went to visit Paul and had permission to stay with him whilst he was in prison. But the point is, Epaphras has brought him news of what's going on in Colossae.

Much of it is praiseworthy, causing the apostle to dance with joy that the grace of God has reached that far, and that there are two other churches. They form a kind of triangle together, Hierapolis and Laodicea. That the grace of God has been, has been so large and so free and so great, three churches have been founded in that part of the world, in what we would call Western Turkey.

Now, nevertheless, Epaphras had something to say about present trends in the church, and there were certain people who were coming into the church who had notions that all the Colossians were all right, they were Christians, they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, but they needed something extra to what they had. They had the Lord Jesus Christ, and they had the Holy Spirit indwelling them, and they knew God as their Father, but these folk were coming in and they were suggesting, you in Colossae, you need something else to be full Christians, to be complete Christians. So you'll find there are many references here to fullness, as if, you see, as if to answer, these folk could come in with their false teaching and would say to the Christians, yes, yes, you've got something, you've got a little, but you haven't got the fullness.

In order to have the fullness, we've got a prescription for you, and you need something else, you need something extra. Don't you meet that kind of thing in the world of today? How many people who come to Christian folk, especially young converts, who come to Christ, perhaps here in Oxford, perhaps somewhere else, and then after a while, there are folk who will come to you and whisper down your neck, if not into your ears, oh, it's all right, but, but, but, you know, you need something extra. Be very careful.

Jesus Christ is all, says Paul. In him is the fullness of the Godhead, dwelling in bodily form, there's nothing missing in him, and in him, if you're in him, you too have the fullness, and you only have to possess what is yours. But now let me go on.

There are many, many other reasons for taking this epistle at this time. One of the evident features of our age is the resurgence of older religions, for example, Islam. We're meeting this in many areas of life, as well as the mushrooming of a whole variety of new cults that some of us have never heard of before, and they bear such names that I could hardly pronounce some of them from the pulpit.

I was reading an article, I believe it was from Time magazine, just a matter of two, three, four weeks ago, and I saw references there to things that I certainly have never heard of before. And the point is, you see, and this is what I'm coming to, though I have no time to expound it in any detail, most of these give some place to Jesus Christ. In my brief excursus in this field, I have not discovered one of them.

Now there may be, you may be able to tell me, but I've not discovered one of them that doesn't think highly of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the point is, you see, they want to put the Lord Jesus Christ alongside of someone, something else. The Apostle Paul insists that you can't do that.

Jesus Christ is all. He stands alone. And to bring anybody else alongside of Him and the teaching of anybody else alongside of His is really not to add to Him, but to take away from Him.

Now I think this is exceedingly relevant in this particular context. It is not enough to have people who will salute Jesus Christ as a great prophet, as a good teacher, as a marvelous example of what it means to live the godly life. It is not enough, my dear friends.

Our Christian faith requires that you and I see in Him no one less than God incarnate, very God of very God, having taken our humanity to His deity, so that we must also say He is very man of very man. God incarnate. Who brings to us all the truth we need to know about God, who is the revealer of the Father and

the total redeemer of His people.

That's another reason why we turn to it. It's so relevant. Let me give you yet another.

The phenomenal growth of interest in astrology and in kindred subjects is another feature of our times. I have been appalled, and I'm sure many of you have, in learning of how many Christians are being beguiled into consulting fortune-tellers and astrologers of one kind or another and necromancers and whatever name you give them. The Bible gives them a whole string of names.

It really is uncanny that we should be so duped and ensnared by Satan as to think that it is necessary for our well-being to consult a horoscope before we go out into a new year or a new month or a new week or a new day and feel that they can add anything to what God gives us in His Word and in His Son and by His Spirit. It's a veritable denial of our faith, but there are many Christians who do it. Let me read to you something I came across only a few days ago.

One of the strangest paradoxes of history is that the nation with the highest standard of living, the leading scientific and industrial technology, and one of the highest literacy rates in the world should be experiencing a rebirth of interest in astrology and fortune-telling. The same newspaper that announces spacewalks and advances in cancer research probably carries the daily horoscope. Every day, over 50 million Americans consult readings in 1,200 newspapers.

For that day, now this is the point, for that day, they will find a prediction that is determined solely by the arrangements of the planets on the day of their birth, and they believe that what is told them on the basis of the planets and their positions on the day of their birth, they believe that such and such a thing must happen today, and they take their cue from there. In 1966, sales of Ouija boards tripled in the United States of America. Abrams and Strauss department stores in New York made the news in 1969 by hiring Lloyd Cope as astrologer consultant.

Just think of it. Apparently, their example was followed by many, many others, and now there are supposed to be 10,000 full-time astrologers in America, with 175,000 working part-time. The most popular one of them makes his home, of course, in Hollywood, and his daily column appears in 306 newspapers and reaches 40 million homes every day.

Now, this letter to the Colossians deals with some such sinister spirit as that, a worship of angels, and the gods who inhabit the planets, the elemental things of the universe. And if you want to know the answer to this problem, you read this epistle and you will find it. This epistle tells us that our lives are determined not by the planets and their positions on the date of our birth, but by the Lord God of the universe, and by his co-equal son, by whom all things were made, through whom all things are held together, and to and for whom all things were made.

He's Lord of the universe. Can I add one other thing? I do this because I want to prove to you that this is a most relevant, inspired epistle for our day and age. We are living in an age of syncretism, in which the tendency is to believe that there is some element of truth in every kind of teaching.

And really, there are Christian people, who bear the name of Jesus Christ, whose whole attitude toward the religious scene today is this, let's get the good in every religion, anything that crops up, and let's make a potpourri, let's pour it all into the bag and mix it all up, and then we've got something good. Let's get the best out of everything. You know, it sounds so plausible, doesn't it? Marvelous! In your liberal age, this is

the thing to do.

You don't need to be narrow-minded. You don't need to check up an authority and see whether this is so. This is a special appeal to the intellectual, to the liberal.

I have before me a magazine, which came to my hand this week. Now, whether this is true or not, I don't know. But it refers to the enthronement of the present new Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Robert Runcie, on March the 25th.

Now, if these comments are accurate, then it raises a very serious issue. If they're not, and I've never found this particular editor to be making statements that are not true to fact, and that's why I quote it. If I had no faith in him, I would not quote this.

He spoke of the... Oh, let me read. Secondly, he says, I don't want to refer to his first point, there was the entire absence of anything resembling clear-cut doctrinal convictions in the enthronement of the Archbishop. Runcie has professed his desire, quote, to try to push the church in a more charitable direction, unquote.

And the way to do that, he believes, is to disclaim any possession of authoritative standards of truth. Doctrinal certainties, if they existed, would only, and now we quote from Runcie again, would only confirm others in their suspicion and hostility. The church must give a firm lead against rigid thinking.

End of quote from Runcie. The commentator proceeds. And he tells us that a commentator on Runcie's enthronement in the Times London wrote, and here is the quote from him.

The articles, that is the 39 articles of the Church of England, have been virtually unusable as a norm of faith for many years. The only thing which binds members of the Church of England together is the habit of spending an hour on Sunday mornings in certain religious buildings. Now, the point I'm getting at is this.

If this is true, then it tells us that there is a trend, even in the Anglican community, of trying to bring together all kinds of beliefs into some form of synthesis, which is nothing short of syncretism. What is the answer to that? Well, I would be closing this morning, but I'm going to depart from what I had thought to do. I would be quoting at the end this morning, words from a very renowned Anglican scholar, who has written a new commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians.

And at the end of his introduction, he says this. For me, he says, it has been the road back to a new loyalty to evangelical Christianity. What has been the way back? Studying the Epistle to the Colossians.

He goes on. In the course of my life, I have been influenced in various directions, away from my evangelical foundations, by Christian men of great spiritual devotion and zeal. By contrast, my commitment to New Testament faith has been immeasurably deepened by the study and the teaching of this letter over the last four years, when he's been writing this epistle.

What am I getting at? What I'm getting at is this. There is a movement in the world. Look for the best in everything and mix the whole thing up together, and that should be your religion.

This Colossian letter tells us that God, the one and only true God, has revealed himself in his one and only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. In him is the fullness of revelation. In him is an adequate and a total salvation, and he stands alone.

And we are coming to this Epistle to the Colossians because it presents us with such a Savior, with such a revealer of the Father, such a redeemer of man. And it does so with considerable expertise, a kind of expertise that belongs not a man but to a truly inspired apostle. Now, can I say just a word about this place, Colossae, and about the message before I close, its main message? Colossae was a city in the valley of the Lycus River, which was a tributary and is a tributary of the meander, a much larger river in the southern part of ancient Phrygia, which we would locate in the west of modern Turkey.

In early days, it was a very important place. It was on the main highway from Ephesus in the west going all the way to the east, and it was a very important landmark. Xenophon, for example, tells us of generals halting their armies there, and it was on that main highway.

It was important for trade. It was in touch with a whole of the world, east and west. It was a great center of thought, and it was alive to the issues of the day in east and west.

There were no radios, no televisions, but here there were people coming and going all the time, so that this was a center of knowledge and understanding of what was going on in the world. By Roman times, it had fallen upon bad days, the reason being that the two other places to which I mentioned earlier, Hierapolis and Laodicea, had developed their woolen trade to an extent that this one time great city of Colossa had not been able to do. Also, there is reason to believe that this route from west to east had been moved upwards at that point, and so Colossa was a little bit out of the way now in Roman times.

In that way, being out of the way, not on the main trade routes, it lost touch with people, whilst Hierapolis and Laodicea gained eminence, so much so that the late Bishop Lightfoot in his great commentary on this letter says, Colossa was then the least important church to which any epistle of St. Paul is addressed. There is no present site of Colossa, nothing stands there. It has fallen into ruins, it has gone and vanished into history, but all the wonder of the grace of God.

He wrote and caused a letter to be written, and such a letter to a people that were living in days of political and social degeneracy, and when things were slipping away and the times were very difficult, he had a letter for them, and a message for them, and he cared for them, and the apostle cared for them. He wasn't simply concerned for Rome and Athens, center of power and of culture, he was concerned for a city that was on the down, and for a people living there. Now, how was this church founded? Just a word about it.

We have to read between the lines, but I want to refer to it because it's so precious and has something to tell us, something to say to us. It is almost certain that somebody evangelized this area, founding these three churches to which I've referred, when Paul spent two years in Ephesus. Now, if you want the details of that, you have to turn to Acts 19, verses 8 to 10.

Let me just read to you those verses. Paul is in Ephesus, about 80 miles, 90 miles to the west. Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, that was in Ephesus, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God.

But some of them became obstinate. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the way. So Paul left them.

There comes a point when the people who will not believe have to be left where they are. It's a serious thing to do that. And you need to be sure that the Lord is in the choice.

But Paul did that. He argued with them, he reasoned with them from the scriptures. He preached to them the Christ of God.

They refused, they became obstinate, and Paul sensed that the Spirit of God was telling him, right, they've had their opportunity, move out. Out he went. And somehow or other, well, let me read.

He took the disciples with him and had discussions, daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Now, this is the very relevant point. This went on for two years.

So Paul was in Ephesus for two years and three months. So that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord. Now, how did that happen? Paul was in Ephesus, lecturing in the place that belonged to Tyrannus.

How did everybody, Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia, extending as far as Laodicea and Colossa and Hierapolis, how did everybody there hear the gospel when Paul was located in Ephesus? Oh, my friends, this is the marvel of the grace of God. And this is where we are so out of touch with things. This is where modern Christianity, you see, has lost its touch and its contact with biblical Christianity.

These men came to hear Paul expound the scriptures and declare the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And they were brought under conviction of sin and of righteousness and of judgment, and they were converted. And they owe their allegiance to Jesus Christ.

What then, period? That's what happens, isn't it? Join the gang, sit in the pew, come to church, stay put. That's what happens today, all too often. But when these folk got converted, they got going.

And they began to go everywhere throughout the province to declare the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to Jews and to Gentiles. And the wonder of it is that they went as far east as Hierapolis and Laodicea, and Colossa. Now, it is almost certain, but it is not quite certain, that this dear man, referred to in the body of the epistle by the name of Epaphras, somehow or other gravitated to Ephesus, and heard Paul preach and expound the scriptures, and caught the fire and saw the vision, and experienced the grace of God to transform him, and went back home and began to evangelize.

And the Lord used him to found three churches. Perhaps there were others with him, we cannot doubt. And it is into this church that now some strange teachers are coming.

I have to draw to a close. I cannot tell you all the elements in the strange teaching. It's a very difficult thing to summarize.

Those of you who are doing theology, and there are many of you here this morning that could speak about this better than I can, you know how difficult it has been. There are people who try to piece it together. There is a kind of identikit that we have in the epistle itself, I believe.

There are bones here indicating the kind of thing that went on. Let me refer to three or four. The Apostle Paul is evidently answering a problem when he says, for example, in Colossians 1:19, for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

In him and in him alone, in Jesus Christ. Or again, in Colossians 2:18, do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions, says Paul.

Beware of these people. See, he's dealing with something, but he doesn't make it very clear. Later on, in Colossians 2:21, we have an echo of what these people were probably saying.

They're kind of shibboleth, and it was something like this. Do not handle, do not touch, do not taste. In other words, they were ascetics.

And they tried to get people to sever completely from the world, not just spiritually to abandon worldly principles, but to get away from the world. And again, in Colossians 2:23, we have some segment which indicates the kind of thing they taught. Such regulations, referring to what they taught, such regulations, indeed, says Paul, have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body.

But they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Now, can I say two things on the basis of that, and I'm through? From this short list, we are able to see that the threat to apostolic faith and life was both academic and practical. Part of the teaching was related to a theological matter that centered on the big question, where is God's true presence to be found? And how can mortal man gain access to that presence? The most vital question that we can pose.

Now, the answer came back from these Colossian teachers, these heretics. God's fullness, they said, is distributed throughout a series of emanations of the deity. Stretching from heaven to earth.

These eons, as they called them, or offshoots of the deity, must be venerated, and homage must be paid to them, because they are the elemental spirits of the universe. Or they are angels or gods inhabiting the stars. That's what the people said.

They rule men's destiny and control human life, and hold the entrance into the divine realm in their keeping. If you're not right with these vast array of elemental spirits, then you can never know God. You can never know the fullness of God.

You're always outside the pair. Alexander McLaren, whom I often like to turn to for his comments, says this about them. To establish some necessary contact between creation and God, they spanned the void gulf with a bridge of cobwebs.

A chain of intermediaries, emanations, abstractions, which were pure fabrications of their own imaginings. There is no reason to believe that these eons exist. But they talked about them as if they did, and they said to the folk at Colossa, you have Christ, but Christ is only the last of these.

He's the one that came down to earth, but behind Christ there is someone else, and then someone else, and then someone else in the chain, and it goes on ad infinitum until you ultimately come to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The other question was immensely practical. How could a person prepare himself to have the knowledge of God, and to be right with God, and to have what we would call fellowship with God? The reply was given by these folk in terms of a rigorous discipline of asceticism and self-denial, abstinence, especially from food and drink, observance of holy seasons and fasting, and affliction of the soul, chapter 2, verse 16.

Possibly a life of celibacy, and mortification of the human body, chapter 2, verses 21 and 23. All these exercises and taboos were prescribed as part of what was necessary for us to do to gain acceptance with God, which is back to the old anathematized teaching of justification by human merit. And what is Paul's answer to all this? My dear friends, here it is in the terms of our title this morning.

Jesus Christ is everything. I remember some years ago meeting a young person, young man who had been converted from a certain branch of the professing Christian church. I won't tell you where it is, no point.

And he told me what had happened to him after his conversion. Now he was a very religious boy before he was converted. He attended his church regularly.

And when he came to an experience of the saving grace of God, some of the folk from the church told him, look man, what on earth has happened to you? We admire your new way of living, but what's it all about? Well, he said, I have, in the terms that many of us use, I have accepted Jesus Christ as my savior and my Lord. Well, said this person to him that was now investigating, where did you learn about Jesus Christ as savior and Lord? Was it not in our church? Well, he said, I heard a lot about Jesus Christ as savior and Lord in our church. But he said, in our church, there are so many things put alongside of the Lord Jesus Christ that I could only think of Jesus Christ as one of many things or one of many people that I had to get right with and do something about.

When I read the letter of Paul to the Colossians, I came across these priceless words that he's everything. Everything. My friends, that is biblical Christianity.

So that Paul goes on later on to say, as you have received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so stand in him and remain in him as a tree in its own soil. He is our estate. He is everything and there is everything in him that we can ever conceivably need.

I invite you to read this great epistle over and over again until you have memorized it. When we come together on the Lord's Day mornings, if the Lord should tarry, I trust that as we try to expound it little by little, that the truth will come and lay new hold upon us, leave its mark upon us, that we shall be exhibits of the grace of God and exponents of the gospel in a far worthier way than we ever have been. And to his name be the glory and the praise forever.

Let us pray. Our Father and our God, we worship you with the Son and the Spirit, one God. We thank you for the revelation of yourself.

We ask you to forgive us, our Lord, that some of us have at best only been half believers. And the glories of your Son have never really mastered us. We have seen some Buddha yonder or some prophet over there or some philosopher in some new age who has been almost up to his shoulders, if not quite.

And in our hearts, our devotion has been divided and our sense of pride in the gospel has been broken. Has been emasculated. Oh God, reveal yourself afresh to us and to this congregation and to those who will join us on the Lord's Day morning, if you should tarry.

Reveal yourself to us as you are revealed here. And by the Spirit, emboss this message upon us that we may become the embodiment of it as well as the exponents of it. In Jesus name.

Amen.

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