



PAUL'S LIFE AND MINISTRY

Date: 10.12.25 | Paul's Letters While Under House Arrest: Colossians and Philemon
Scripture: Colossians and Philemon

LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING

MIDDLE SCHOOL:

- God values all people and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost with the gospel.
- God continues to work in the world, and people are invited to join Him in His work.
- We are to be involved in reaching the nations through prayer, giving resources, acting with love, and sharing the gospel.
- The church is a fellowship of believers, and we are called to meet together regularly.
- The church is not a place or a building, but rather a community of people who belong to the family of God.

HIGH SCHOOL:

- God values all people---born and unborn, young and old, male and female, all ethnicities, those of opposing faiths---and calls Christians to live on mission for the sake of reaching the lost through prayer, giving resources, acting with love, and sharing the gospel.
- God continues to work in the world, and as we join Him in His work, He uses people to accomplish His eternal purposes.
- We demonstrate honor for God when we respect the earthly authorities God has placed in our lives.
- The church is a community of believers called to gather regularly to study Scripture, pray, worship, serve, encourage one another, and proclaim the gospel to the world.
- The church is called to train and equip its members for works of ministry.



MEMORY VERSE

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. - Romans 1:16a

16 F l a n a o t g, f i i t p o G f s t e w b, - use this first letter memorization tool that aids in remembering text by using the first letter of each word as a cue.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

Ask the kids in your group, “Who likes to be first?” Likely, everyone will raise their hand. Talk through some things you like to be first at: sports, games, in line, for a prize, etc. We all enjoy being first because first place means being the most important or the best.

What are some things that can take first place in your life? Good grades in school, new friendships, gaming, sports, hobbies, and more. Say: The Bible tells us in Colossians that only one person deserves first place in our lives- Jesus! He is the image of the invisible God, the creator of everything, and the one who holds it all together. He is not just part of our lives, He is the most important part and deserves to be first!

Today, we will learn from Paul’s letter to the Colossians about how Jesus is first in everything and how we can put Him first in our lives.

BACKGROUND INFO FOR LEADERS

Last week, we studied Paul’s letters to the Ephesians and Philippians, both of which were written while he was confined to house arrest in Rome. In Ephesians, Paul lifted our eyes to see the big picture of God’s plan—His eternal purpose to unite Jew and Gentile into one body in Christ, the church. In Philippians, Paul wrote with warmth and joy, encouraging believers to rejoice in the Lord, to press on toward the goal of knowing Christ more fully, and to persevere in faith even in the midst of suffering. Both letters remind us that the gospel is not only the way into salvation but the power that transforms how we live together as God’s people.

Today, we turn to another letter written in this same period, the letter to the Colossians. Unlike Ephesians and Philippians, Paul wrote this letter to a church he had never personally visited. Yet he cared deeply for them. During Paul’s ministry in nearby Ephesus, Acts 19:10 tells us that “all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.” Probably during this time (around AD 52–55), churches were planted in Colossae as well as Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13). Epaphras, one of Paul’s faithful co-workers, had brought the gospel to Colossae (1:7), and now he reported to Paul about their faith, love, and hope (1:4–5) but also about troubling influences that threatened the young church.

Paul rejoiced to hear of their good discipline and stability of faith in Christ (2:5), yet he was concerned about dangerous teachings. He warned them: “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ” (2:8). He asked them pointedly, “Why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees...such as ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’?” (2:20–21). These verses

indicate that the Colossians encountered a false teaching that combined several streams of thought. It contained elements of Judaism, such as concern for Sabbaths and feast days (2:16), as well as aspects of early or proto-Gnosticism, which emphasized asceticism, harsh treatment of the body (2:23), secret wisdom, and spiritual experiences such as visions or angel worship (2:18). This teaching sounded spiritual and offered a “deeper” knowledge of God, but it was deceptive. It diminished Christ by making Him only part of the picture rather than the supreme center.

Paul’s response was to remind the Colossians of the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. In one of the most exalted passages in all of Scripture, Paul declared that Christ is “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible...all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together” (1:15–17). Not only is Jesus supreme over creation, but He is also “the head of the body, the church” and “the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything” (1:18). In Him “all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (2:9). Paul’s answer to false religion was not simply a list of corrections but a glorious presentation of Christ Himself—the Creator, the Sustainer, the Lord of the church, the reconciler of sinners, and the fullness of God revealed.

Because Christ is supreme, believers are already complete in Him. The false teachers claimed that the Colossians needed something more—more rituals, more visions, more rules. Paul countered, “In Him you have been made complete” (2:10). Through union with Christ, believers had already died with Him (2:20), been raised with Him (3:1), and now their lives were hidden with Christ in God (3:3). Paul emphasized what scholars call “realized eschatology”: rather than focusing on what is still to come, he stressed what Christ has already accomplished for us. Believers are not waiting for fullness; they already possess it in Christ. They are not enslaved to spiritual forces or bound to worldly traditions; they have already been set free by Christ’s death and resurrection.

Because all wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ (2:3), the Colossians did not need the “secret knowledge” the false teachers offered. Instead, Paul urged them to walk in Christ, rooted and built up in Him, established in the faith, and overflowing with gratitude (2:6–7). This truth was to shape their daily lives. They were to put off the old self with its sinful practices (3:5–11) and put on the new self, renewed in knowledge according to the image of Christ (3:10). They were to clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and above all love (3:12–14). The peace of Christ was to rule in their hearts, and the word of Christ was to dwell richly among them, shaping their worship and their relationships (3:15–17). Even their households and work relationships were to be transformed: wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, and masters were all called to live in light of Christ’s lordship (3:18–4:1). The supremacy of Christ was not just a doctrine to affirm but a life to live out.

The connection with the letter to Philemon brings these truths into sharper focus. Colossians and Philemon were written and delivered together by Tychicus and Onesimus (Col. 4:7-9; Philemon 12). Colossians addressed the whole church, while Philemon was a personal letter

to a believer in that church who hosted gatherings in his home. The link between the two is Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave who had come to faith in Christ through Paul's ministry. In Colossians 4:9, Paul calls Onesimus "our faithful and beloved brother," and in Philemon, Paul appeals for him to be welcomed back "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother" (Philemon 16). The theology of Christ's supremacy in Colossians finds its practical application in Philemon. If Christ is Lord over all, then He must also be Lord over how we view one another. Social categories, earthly divisions, and human hierarchies are transformed in Christ.

At the heart of Colossians is the gospel. Paul reminded the Colossians that God had qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints, delivered them from the domain of darkness, and transferred them to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom they have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (1:12-14). Through Christ's death, they had been reconciled to God (1:21-22). On the cross, Christ canceled the record of debt against them and disarmed the rulers and authorities, triumphing over them (2:1-15). They had been raised to new life with Christ, and their hope was secure because their life was hidden with Him in God (3:1-4). This is why Paul urged them to keep their eyes fixed on Christ rather than being distracted or deceived.

The message of Colossians is as urgent for the church today as it was in Paul's day. We, too, are tempted to look for "something more"—whether through legalism, mystical experiences, secret wisdom, cultural philosophies, or worldly traditions. Satan often takes biblical terms like wisdom, knowledge, or spirituality and twists them to draw people away from Christ. However, Paul reminds us that in Christ alone are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3). We need nothing beyond Him. He is supreme and sufficient.

Therefore, the gospel calls us to know who Jesus truly is, to keep Him first in every part of life, and to let His lordship transform our relationships, our households, and our daily choices. If Christ is supreme in the universe, then He must be supreme in our marriages, families, work, friendships, and even in our private hearts. Just as Philemon was called to receive Onesimus not as a slave but as a brother, so we are called to live out the reality of Christ's supremacy in our everyday relationships. Colossians proclaims that Christ is Lord of all, and Philemon shows what that looks like in practice. Together, they remind us to keep Christ at the absolute center of everything, because He is everything, and nothing in this life matters as much as He does.

LOCATE THE SCRIPTURE & TELL THE STORY



TELL THE STORY - Colossians and Philemon

Last week, we learned about Paul's letters to the Ephesians and Philippians. Paul wrote these while he was under house arrest in Rome. In Ephesians, Paul reminded the church that God's big plan was to bring Jews and Gentiles together into one family, the church. In Philippians, Paul encouraged believers to rejoice in the Lord and persevere in their faith, even when life was difficult. Both letters show us that the gospel—the good news about Jesus—changes the way we live with each other as God's people.

Today, we are examining another letter Paul wrote at the same time, the letter to the Colossians. Paul had never been to the city of Colossae, but he cared deeply for the church there. One of Paul's friends, Epaphras, had gone there and told the people about Jesus (Colossians 1:7). Because of that, a church began in Colossae, and also in the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13). Even though Paul was in prison, he wanted to encourage these believers and help them stay strong in their faith.

The Colossians had started with strong faith in Jesus, but some people were trying to lead them astray. These false teachers told them they needed to follow additional rules and perform special acts to be close to God. They said the Colossians had to keep certain religious days and festivals (2:16), follow strict rules like "Don't touch, don't taste" (2:20–21), and even worship angels (2:18). They also made it seem like they had "secret wisdom" that only certain people could know. The problem was that all these things pushed Jesus to the side instead of keeping Him at the center.

Paul reminded the Colossians of the truth: Jesus is the most important person in the whole universe. In Colossians 1:15-17, Paul wrote that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" and that "all things were created by Him and for Him." Jesus holds everything together and is the head of the church (1:18). In Jesus, all of God's fullness dwells (2:9). This means that Jesus is entirely God, and He is sufficient for us.

Paul told the Colossians that because they belong to Jesus, they don't need to add anything else. He said, "You have been made complete in Him" (2:10). They had already died with Christ (2:20), been raised with Christ (3:1), and their lives were now hidden with Christ in God (3:3). They didn't need secret wisdom or extra rules—they already had everything in Jesus. Paul wanted them to walk with Christ, stay rooted in Him, and grow in faith with thankful hearts (2:6–7).

Paul also explained how this changes everyday life. Since they had new life in Christ, they needed to put away sinful behaviors such as lying, anger, and greed (3:5–11). Instead, they were to adopt new behaviors, such as kindness, patience, forgiveness, and love (3:12–14). They were to let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts and let the word of Christ fill their minds (3:15–16). Their families and work relationships were to show that Jesus was their Lord (3:18–4:1).

The letter to Philemon, which was sent at the same time, illustrates how this truth was put into practice in real life. Philemon was a man in the Colossian church who hosted believers in his home. He had a slave named Onesimus who ran away but later came to faith in Jesus through Paul. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon and told him to welcome him “no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother” (Philemon 16). In Colossians 4:9, Paul even calls Onesimus “our faithful and beloved brother.” This shows us that when Jesus is Lord, our relationships change, too. We see others not just the way the world does, but as brothers and sisters in Christ.

At the center of Colossians is the gospel—the good news that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again. Paul said that through Christ, God “rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son” (1:13–14). On the cross, Jesus canceled our debt of sin and defeated the spiritual powers that held us captive (2:13–15). Because of this, we are forgiven, made new, and given everything we need in Christ.

Paul’s message to the Colossians is the same message we need today: Jesus is enough. We don’t need to chase after secret wisdom, new rules, or special experiences to be close to God. Everything we need is already found in Him. Because Jesus is supreme over all creation and the head of the church, He must also be first in our daily lives—our families, our friendships, our choices, and our hearts. Colossians reminds us to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, because He is everything, and nothing matters more than Him.



RETELL THE STORY

Have students re-tell the story as best they can.



SHARE THE GOSPEL

The book of Colossians provides one of the clearest pictures in all of Scripture of who Jesus truly is. Paul wrote to a church that was being pulled in different directions by false teachers. Some promoted strict Jewish rules, others offered secret wisdom or spiritual experiences, but both groups missed the most important truth: that Jesus Christ is supreme over everything. Paul’s answer was not to give the Colossians new rules to follow, but to lift their eyes to see Jesus as the preeminent one—the One above all.

Paul declared that Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). Everything we cannot see about God has been revealed perfectly in Him. He is “the firstborn over all creation,” not meaning He was created, but showing that He has first place in all things. By Him all things were made—both the world we can see and the unseen spiritual world.

Every star, every planet, every person, and every power in heaven or on earth was made by Him, through Him, and for Him. Not only that, but He holds everything together. The whole universe stays in perfect balance because Christ sustains it.

Why does this matter? Because if Jesus is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, then He is also worthy of being Lord of our lives. Paul said that God's purpose was "that in everything He might be preeminent" (1:18). Jesus must come first, not only in the universe, but in our hearts, our homes, and our daily choices. The gospel reminds us that this supreme Christ, the eternal Son of God, took on flesh, died on the cross to pay for our sins, and rose again to reconcile us to God (1:21–22). The One who reigns above all laid down His life for us, so that we might share in His life forever.

This is why the gospel is good news. We don't need secret knowledge, empty traditions, or extra rules to make us right with God. Everything we need is found in Christ alone. He is preeminent—the most important person who has ever lived—and when we trust Him, we are forgiven, made new, and given a place in His kingdom. The call of Colossians is clear: give Jesus first place in everything, because He already has first place in the universe.

QUESTIONS TO REBUILD THE STORY

What was Paul thankful for when he heard about the Colossians? (Colossians 1:4–5).

Who is Jesus, according to Colossians 1:15?

What did Paul say Jesus created? (Colossians 1:16).

What holds the whole world together? (Colossians 1:17).

Who is the head (leader) of the church? (Colossians 1:18).

What false teachings were troubling the Colossians? (Colossians 2:8,16–18).

What has Jesus already done for believers? (Colossians 2:13–15)

If Jesus made everything and holds it all together, why should He also come first in your life?

What are some things that sometimes try to take “first place” in people’s lives instead of Jesus?

How does knowing Jesus has already forgiven you and made you complete (Colossians 2:10, 13–14) give you confidence when you mess up?

Colossians says we are “raised with Christ” (3:1). What does it look like for you to live a new life that shows Jesus is your King?

How can you encourage others to trust in God when they might be afraid?

What does this story teach me about God or the gospel?

What does the story teach me about myself?

Are there any commands in this story to obey? How are they for God’s glory and my good?

Are there any promises in this story to remember? How do they help me trust and love God?

How does this story help me live on mission?

PRAYER PROMPTS

God, thank You for sending Jesus, who made everything and holds everything together. Thank You that He died on the cross to forgive our sins and give us new life. Help us to put Jesus first in our hearts, in our families, at school, and with our friends. We want Him to be the most essential part of our lives every day. Amen.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

ATTENTIVE - God hears and responds to the needs of his children.

COMPASSIONATE - God cares for his children and acts on their behalf.

CREATOR - God made everything. He is uncreated.

DELIVERER - God rescues and saves his children.

ETERNAL - God is not limited by time. He exists outside of time.

FAITHFUL - God always keeps his promises.

GENEROUS - God gives what is best and beyond what is deserved.

GLORIOUS - God displays His greatness and worth.

GOOD - God is what is best and gives what is best. He is incapable of doing harm.

HOLY - God is perfect, pure, and without sin.

IMMUTABLE/UNCHANGING - God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

INCOMPREHENSIBLE - God is beyond our understanding. We can comprehend Him in part but not in whole.

INFINITE - God has not limits in His person or on His power.

JEALOUS - God will not share his glory with another. all glory rightfully belongs to him.

JUST - God is fair in all his actions and judgements. He cannot over-punish or under-punish.

LOVING - God feels and displays infinite, unconditional affection toward his children. His love for them does not depend on their worth, response, or merit.

MERCIFUL - God does not give his children the punishment they deserve.

OMNIPOTENT/ALMIGHTY - God holds all power. nothing is too hard for God. What He wills He can accomplish.

OMNIPRESENT - God is fully present everywhere.

OMNISCIENT - God knows everything, past, present, and future - all potential and real outcomes, all things micro and macro.

PATIENT/LONG-SUFFERING - God is untiring and bears with His children.

PROVIDER - God meets the needs of his children.

ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

REFUGE - God is a place of safety and protection for his children.

RIGHTEOUS - God is always good and right.

SELF-EXISTENT - God depends on nothing and no one to give him life or existence.

SELF-SUFFICIENT - God is not vulnerable. He has no needs.

SOVEREIGN - God does everything according to His plan and pleasure.

TRANSCENDENT - God is not like humans. He is infinitely higher in being and action.

TRUTHFUL - Whatever God speaks or does is truth and reality.

WISE - God knows what is best and acts accordingly. He cannot choose wrongly.

WORTHY - God deserves all glory and honor and praise.

WRATHFUL - God hates all unrighteousness.



Application Questions

LOOK UPWARD



- How does this story apply to your relationship with God?
- What does it teach you about Him- His will and His heart?
- What aspect of His character is He inviting you to experience and enjoy?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your relationship with God?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in your relationship with God?

LOOK INWARD



- How does this story apply to your heart and your own spiritual growth?
- What does it teach you about yourself, your needs, or your goals in life?
- In what aspects of your personal life is God inviting you to grow and mature?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story inwardly?
- How will those around you benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to allow these truths to help you grow spiritually?

LOOK AROUND



- How does this story apply to your relationship with others?
- What does it teach you about how to see others and relate to them?
- What is god inviting you to do differently in your relationships?



Application Questions

LOOK OUTWARD ➡

- How does this story apply to your ministry and mission in life- to your role in God's kingdom, in society, and the world?
- What does it teach you about God's purposes for the world?
- What part of His mission is He inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit by applying the truths of this story in your ministry?
- How will the world benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to live out these truths in the world?

LOOK FORWARD ➡➡

- How does this story apply to your future, both in this age and in eternity?
- What does it teach you about God's plan for your life, now and forever?
- What aspects of eternity is God inviting you to participate in?
- How will you benefit in the future by applying these truths now?
- How will God's kingdom benefit?
- What practical steps can you take to impact eternity now with these truths?