



## **Colossians: A Message to Christians About to Lose Everything**

by Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Dear Friends,

As I write this, nations are in panic over the effects of a microscopic virus that is spreading across the globe, infecting millions of people. Governments are spending trillions of dollars to fight its effects, not only on public health but also on the world economy.

Much of what is being done to combat the coronavirus seems ineffectual. Some fear that the solutions implemented by the world's governments will bring worse results in the long term than the disease itself. Stock prices have dropped dramatically and unemployment has suddenly risen ten-fold in many places as governments declare various restrictions and closures. Constitutional rights, such as the freedom to assemble for the public worship of God, have vanished for the time being. Fear is widespread, even among Christians.

How must believers in Christ view these troubling times? We must look to the Word of God for answers – and we do indeed find them there.

If you knew that your fellow Christians in a certain city were about to experience sudden physical and economic disaster, even loss of life, and you were going to write a letter to them, what would you say? What in your mind would be most important?

That is exactly the situation we find in the book of Colossians. The Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the believers at Colosse around the year 57 A.D. Just three years later their city was suddenly destroyed by a massive earthquake.



Former site of the city of Colossae  
(photo credit: Bibleplaces.com)

Buildings and homes were leveled. Structures that withstood the earthquake were destroyed by the fires that spread as a result. Most of Colosse's inhabitants lost their homes and livelihoods. Many were killed. No doubt the Christians of Colosse were as severely affected as the rest of the population.

This once-thriving city, a center of commerce and pagan worship in the time of Christ on earth, was eventually abandoned. After a few centuries there was scant physical evidence that Colosse had ever existed. Archaeologists did not rediscover Colosse's exact location until the 1830s. The former site of the city is a wilderness area in present-day Turkey.

### **A Demonstration of Divine Authorship**

The Apostle Paul did not know that this calamity would occur just three years after he wrote his letter. But this gives us a striking example of why it is so important to keep in mind the ultimate authorship of the Bible. Second Timothy 3:16 tells us that all of Scripture consists of the breathed-out words of God. He used human instruments to communicate His words.

Second Peter chapter one tells us that holy men of God wrote as they were moved, or more literally driven, by the Holy Spirit. Peter also tells us that on many occasions God's penmen did not fully understand the significance of what they were writing, because it was for a future time. In some cases, as in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, that time was far distant.

But the significance of Paul's letter to the Colossians was very soon to be realized. Paul did not know disaster was coming, but God did. It was His plan that it should happen. Under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote God's words to Christians who were about to lose everything in terms of this material world – in some cases, no doubt, even their lives.

### **An Unexpected Message**

What did God the Holy Spirit write to these believers through the Apostle Paul? Did He tell them, "You must leave your city, because it is going to be destroyed"? Did the Holy Spirit tell them, "Save up, buy up a year's worth of food, and accumulate enough money so that you can by those means more comfortably survive the coming catastrophe"?

Did the Holy Spirit tell them, "Go to your local membership warehouse and buy an emergency food kit that will feed a family of four for one year"? (You can do that these days.) Did the Spirit tell the church at Colossae what investments they should make, to ensure their financial

assets against the coming calamity? Do we find anything along these lines in the book of Colossians?

Not at all. We find this, at the beginning of chapter 3: **"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God"** – the ultimate place of safety for this life and for eternity.

This entire letter to Christians about to experience disaster focuses on the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 1 we find His preeminence *declared*. In chapter 2 we find His preeminence *defended*. In chapters 3 and 4 we find instruction in how the preeminence of our Lord is to be *demonstrated* – exhortations and commands to the church, and to the individual believer, to shine forth “Christ above all” to our fellow believers and to the unsaved world in every area of our lives, under every circumstance, in every situation.

### **Why Write Such a Letter?**

Why write a letter packed with theology to Christians who were about to lose everything? Why write detailed instructions on Christian living to people who would soon struggle for their very survival?

In view of what happened to the church at Colosse three years later, it seems on the surface to have been utterly impractical. Many in today's evangelical church would not hesitate to even call such an approach sinful. I think it is accurate to say that many pastors and Christian leaders who knew a disaster was coming would focus on telling people what they must do to protect themselves in earthly terms. That would be their main focus, and perhaps their only focus. But that, in the eyes of God, would be a real tragedy.

The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul did not instruct the Colossian believers in physical survival. He did not counsel them on how to protect their finances and worldly possessions. He did not even tell them to evacuate their city. No – "Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

## No More Relevant Message

No message was more relevant for the church at Colosse, three years before catastrophe. And no message could be more relevant for Christians in our time.

We live in days of uncertainty and calamity. But how does God tell us to face it? Religious stores and websites are filled with books and videos telling us how to have "peace" by accumulating and protecting the wealth of this world.

God's Word says that there is nothing wrong with making a living, saving for the future, and providing for our families. God commands us to do those things. But God repeatedly warns us in the pages of Scripture that these things are not the source of true peace. Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

What is the source of that peace? We need only look at the preceding verse in John 14: "But the Helper [the Comforter], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I have said to you."

God's true peace is to be found in salvation through Jesus Christ, and through the comfort that is thereby brought to us by the indwelling Holy Spirit, who lives within us to tell us how to live and think according to His inspired Word. This was Apostle Paul's fervent, Spirit-inspired prayer for believers who were about to experience disaster:

...that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and long-suffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.  
(Colossians 1:9-14)

It is by this knowledge and by this growth in Christ that the Christian may have peace, and be prepared for every circumstance of life, whatever it may be.

Dear friends, our problem is not what some people, even in the church, tell us it is – that we are in danger of “becoming so heavenly-minded that we will be no earthly good.” *The real danger is that we will be so earthly-minded that we will forget the greatness of our Savior.* How easily we can become so preoccupied with the things of earth that we forget that we are the temples of the living God, that the Holy Spirit lives within us. We can grieve the Spirit and quench the Spirit by thinking and living in a way that gives ultimate priority to the things of this world, and not to the world to come and to its coming King.

### **What Are the "Things Which Are Above"?**

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above." What are those things? They are the things that are "where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God."

In fact, they are things that are in Christ Himself. That is why we are to focus our minds on Him. All the wondrous attributes of the Lord Jesus Christ are seated at the right hand of God in His person. And as Paul tells the Ephesian church, we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies even now (Ephesians 2:6).

**His eternity** is seated there. The One we are to seek had no beginning, will have no ending, and is our High Priest forever before the heavenly altar. "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost [more literally, completely and forever] those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

**His holiness** is seated there. The One we are to seek, the One who is above, is the Holy God who says, "Be holy, for I am holy." We are to pursue that holiness. We are to seek to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ. We are to seek to be not conformed to this world (Romans 12:1) but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, literally the renovation of our minds, the conformity of our minds to the mind of Christ, in order that our thinking may be in conformity to the will of God, in every circumstance of life – no matter what happens.

Not only are Christ's eternity and holiness seated there, but also **His immutability**. The One we are to seek at the throne of Heaven is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Hebrews 13:8). He is not moved or affected by the events of this world. He is the Lord of all events. He is in charge of them. Who better can we seek than the One who has never changed and will never change, and is in control of it all?

**The omnipotence of Christ** is seated in the heavenlies in His person. He possesses all power, all authority in Heaven and in Earth. Paul tells us in Colossians chapter one that the

Lord Jesus who is seated at the right hand of the majesty on high sustains the entire universe by His power. Who can we seek on Earth to exercise such power on our behalf? No one.

Furthermore, **the omniscience of Christ** is seated in the heavenlies in His person. We are to seek the One who is not only all-powerful but also all-knowing. He knows every moment of our future perfectly. Where on this sin-cursed earth, in the things of this world, in the philosophies of this age, among its governments and universities, can we find such knowledge?

And further yet, **infinite wisdom** is seated in the heavenlies in the person of Christ. The One we are to seek not only possesses all power and all knowledge, He also possesses all wisdom to employ that power and knowledge for His glory and thus for our good, both now and forever. Go to the ends of the earth, collect all the knowledge, power, and wisdom man possesses, and it does not begin to compare with the knowledge, power, and wisdom that we find in Heaven in the person of Christ.

As we seek Christ who is above we find **infinite love** and **infinite grace**. The One who knows our future perfectly also knows our past perfectly. At the throne in Heaven we find the grace that saves to the uttermost the deepest of sinners. We find the love that compelled our Lord to come into this world, to take on the form of a servant, and to die the death of the cross in our place. Where else can we find such self-sacrificial love? Certainly not anywhere in this present world. Indeed, we live in an age when men are above all "lovers of their own selves" (2 Timothy 3:2).

And further yet, the One we are to seek is **the Head of the Church**. Jesus Christ seated in the heavenlies "is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

This world is passing away. But Christ's church is eternal. And so, Ephesians chapter 5 tells us, He is now at work sanctifying us by the cleansing power of His Word, "that He might present [us] to Himself" – on that great day when this world passes away and the New Heavens and New Earth commence – "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish" for eternity.

## Crucial Questions

Dear friend, what are you accumulating in your life? What are you seeking? In what are you investing your time? In what are you investing your mind? What are you feeding to your spirit? To what are you exposing your spouse and your children?

What are you watching? What are you reading? To what are you listening? Are you focusing your affections on the things of this earth, the philosophies of this world, the thinking of those who are bound for Hell – or are you seeking those things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God? Do you desire Him – His person – His holiness – above all?

Now more than ever we must remind ourselves that this world's media are under the sway of Satan. He is the father of lies (John 8:44). Make no mistake: The television, radio and internet news organizations, and the talk radio pundits at every point on the spectrum from the political left to the political right, are unsaved people and therefore by nature are Satan's spokesmen. They are sowing fear and confusion of various kinds in order to profit financially, and in many cases to promote ungodly agendas.

You will only find absolute truth, of which you can be absolutely sure, and by which you can "test the spirits" (1 John 4:1), in Jesus Christ and His living, powerful Word. "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). Christian, it is Jesus Christ who has done, and will do, everything for you. He bought you with His own blood. He owns you. He is the only One in all the universe who consistently and unfailingly has your best interests at heart. He demands, and truly deserves, your undivided loyalty. "You are not your own. For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

"If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden" – in the ultimate place of safety for now and for eternity – "with Christ in God."

**"Thank you for the recent broadcast, 'Government Is Not God'. Absolute truth! We must 'put not our trust in princes' but in the Prince of Peace."** – An internet listener in Ghana, West Africa

## Bible Reading Kits Around the Globe

Every day, people from all over the world request TeachingTheWord's free Bible Reading Kit, which is available in English, Russian, and Spanish. Every year we mail thousands of them all across the United States and to virtually every country.

Recently some of the members of the congregation of Covenant Church in Hatboro, Pennsylvania (pictured at right) assembled thousands of kits for us in a great labor of love. Pastor Erwin Morrison (white shirt in the picture) is a member of TTW's Advisory Board. He has ministered to the Covenant congregation for over 40 years, and continually encourages a heart for missions and evangelism among the flock.



The Covenant congregation not only performed the physical labor of assembling kits for us, they also engage in the spiritual labor of prayer that as the Word goes forth, souls will come to saving faith in Christ and believers will be strengthened in their walk with the Savior. We are grateful for their labor of love, and we encourage you to join with them in those prayers!

## WDZY: Leaping Over Prison Walls With the Gospel

TTW's radio broadcast, *The Scripture-Driven Church*, airs twice each week on WDZY (1290 AM, 103.3 FM) in Richmond, Virginia. Within the listening area are three state prisons. We often receive letters from prisoners who listen to our broadcasts. Some are unsaved; some are Christians, but backsliding led to crime; still others have received Christ while incarcerated. Many request Bibles from us. The liberal United Church of Christ clergywoman who is in charge of "spiritual life" within the Virginia state prison system prevents ministries such as ours from sending Bibles and literature into those facilities. But twice each week the Gospel message goes "over the walls" by radio to reach men and women for Christ.

WDZY's programming is also live streamed via the internet. The station manager tells us that in February there were 49,598 listening sessions within the United States, and 4,461 internationally. Listenership grows each month. We have heard from people as far away as Russia who listen to our broadcasts via WDZY's live stream. Please pray with us that the seed of the Word sown via WDZY will bear a rich harvest of eternal fruit.



**Harbour Light** of the Windwards  
*Distinctively Christian radio for the whole family*



## Now Broadcasting Daily to the Caribbean & Beyond

For over seven years *The Scripture-Driven Church* has aired as a once-a-week program on the Harbour Light Radio Network originating from Cariacou, Grenada in the Caribbean. In February, The Harbour Light began airing the broadcast as a daily program, twice each day, five days a week. Right now they are running our series *Christ Above All*, 46 programs covering the first chapter of Colossians. Next will come the series *Truth Above All*, 73 programs covering Colossians chapter 2.

The Harbour Light reaches most of the islands of the Caribbean as well as the north coast of South America. Station manager Randy Cornelius also receives listener reports from southeastern Europe, and from as far off as Norway.

We regularly receive correspondence from Harbour Light listeners thanking us for the programs. Many are Christians experiencing the same falling away from the authority of Scripture in their churches that is happening in much of North America. They appreciate programs like ours that teach the Scriptures systematically and apply them practically, upholding the Bible's supreme authority and encouraging people to search the Scriptures for themselves, seeking the illuminating power of the Holy Spirit.

Recently a Grenadan pastor telephoned the station to say that one of our broadcasts dealt with a spiritual question with which he was struggling at that very moment. Being such instruments of God's "grace to help in time of need" humbles us, and makes us keenly aware of our responsibility to handle God's Word faithfully. Brothers and sisters, please pray with us for this outreach – and pray for us that we may communicate Biblical truth clearly.

The Harbour Light's programming is also live streamed online 24 hours a day, and it is some of the best Christian radio available. We encourage you to tune in via their website, [www.harbourlightradio.org](http://www.harbourlightradio.org).

## **A Personal Note of Thanksgiving**

Seven years ago I suffered a massive brain hemorrhage after surgery to deal with a benign growth that was pressing on my brain stem and causing debilitating symptoms. While I was still in the intensive care unit my wife noticed that something seemed wrong. She told the ICU people and they said, “Oh, the monitors are just not reading properly. There’s really nothing wrong.”

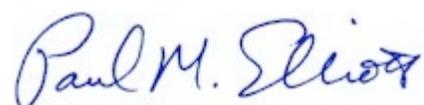
My neurosurgeon had given her his cell phone number, so my wife called him. He soon came to the ICU and after a brief examination he knew that I was minutes from death. He and another surgeon performed brain surgery immediately in the ICU hospital bed, because they did not think I would survive being moved to an operating room. During surgery I went into cardiac arrest and they had to perform CPR to revive me. ICU nurses were pressed into service to assist with the surgery, and later they said they had never seen anything like it.

The medical people expected that I would need to spend months in a rehabilitation facility just to learn to walk and talk properly again. Returning to the ministry was not even in the picture. I was in a coma for a week, but a week after that I left the hospital on a walker. In three weeks I was again writing material for TTW’s website. In seven weeks I was driving a car, and in four months was preaching again. I have only slight after-effects of the ordeal.

I praise God daily for His mercies. I am continually thankful for those who prayed for me during those difficult times and have continued to pray since then. By God’s grace I seek to “redeem the time” He has given me by pressing on in the work of the ministry, for His glory.

## **Thank You for Your Prayers & Gifts**

We appreciate, so very much, your prayers for TTW and financial gifts as the Lord leads and enables you. When we think of how this ministry has grown from a rather primitive internet portal in 1998 to a work that reaches across the globe by various means, it is marvelous in our eyes. And when we think of those who have been the Lord’s instruments to make this ministry possible by your prayer and financial support, we are overwhelmed. This is His work, and we are laborers together in it. To God be the glory. “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you” (Philippians 1:3).

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Paul M. Elliott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a small star-like mark at the end.