

## Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians

### Chapter One

# When is Jesus Lord?

“<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus *our* brother, <sup>2</sup> To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace *be* unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>3</sup> We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you” (Colossians 1:1-3).

**The phrase “Jesus is Lord” was the earliest and simplest confession of faith.** When someone was asked for their doctrinal position, they could simply reply, Jesus is Lord. The testimony that Jesus is Lord is the **DISTINCTIVE CONVICTION** of the New Testament faith. Yet, what the phrase means has certain lost its distinctiveness in today’s world of relativism.

To the lost world of early Christianity, a Christian was distinguished as a person who had submitted to the authority of the words of a Nazarene peasant who had been executed as a political criminal. These early Christians rejected all the philosophies of their day to live under the sovereign Lordship of Jesus as revealed to them by His Word.

**It is very important for us to understand the historical setting of the time of the writing of the Colossian Epistle.** It was during the late part of the Greco-Roman period (approx. 60 A. D.). The religious atmosphere was extensively pluralistic. There was enormous social pressure on the early Christians to become pluralistic.

The early church was under attack by the surrounding culture. As soon as any church became pluralistic in philosophy it was essentially absorbed by the surrounding culture and that church lost its distinctiveness as being truly Christian in that it lost its testimony to the reality of the Lordship of Jesus. Even though the testimony to the Lordship of Jesus continued to be proclaimed, the reality of that testimony was a sham.

**There are FOUR CHARACTERISTICS that stand out as significant background for the letter to Colosse establishing the religious scene of the day.** We only need to read Acts 19:8-41 to note the similarities to our age. In this short text of church history we find Jewish exorcists casting out demons, we witchcraft and books of magic charms and we find pagan, licentious idolatry and all the crafts and trades capitalizing on people’s preoccupation with these things.

**First:** the area of Colosse was marked by a deeply **MYSTICAL ATMOSPHERE**. They worshipped Artemis, the great *Mother Goddess*. This was a sexual cult with great emphasis on human sexuality and body worship. There was a strong desire to tap into occult power much as the New Age movement today. This was done through the use of drugs, astrology, sorcery, mysticism and mediums. Presently, in our societies’ great quest for pleasure through the satisfaction of desires and emotions, people often become involved in a number of variations of these things.

**Second:** the religious life in Asia at this time was highly **SYNCRETISTIC**. At this period in history syncretism involved the combination of three major religious systems: Apostate Judaism, Christianity and the eastern occult mystery religions. The historical culmination of this syncretism was Roman Catholicism (by 300 A. D.). We can only imagine the enormous sociological pressure this sort of atmosphere put upon anyone wanting to maintain a distinctively Biblical position (much like the theological Inclusivism of modern times).

The epistle to the Colossians offers a simple solution to this syncretism. The epistle to the Colossians demands **EXCLUSIVE ALLEGIANCE** to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It requires that the individual believer maintain his Biblical distinctiveness and not allow the pressures of society to manipulate him into abandoning the purity of his allegiance to Jesus Christ.

The American society is a *melting pot* culture. Therefore, it presents similar pressures upon believers being dealt with by the epistle to the Colossians. Critical to the continuation of a Biblical New Testament Christianity is the necessity to maintain a distinctively Biblical belief system.

**Third:** (THE PROBLEM) any resistance to society's syncretistic pressure brought social ostracizing on those resisting and great conflict to the believer trying to maintain his distinctive New Testament beliefs. There were (and are) two dimensions of this conflict.

1. The practice of Biblical evangelism by the believer often brought rejection and criticism from the dominant culture upon him.
2. The believer had to deal with his inner temptations in a desire for social acceptance in order to live according to the Word of God to be approved of Him.

“<sup>15</sup> Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. <sup>16</sup> But shun profane *and* vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. <sup>17</sup> And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; <sup>18</sup> Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. <sup>19</sup> Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. <sup>20</sup> But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. <sup>21</sup> If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, *and* prepared unto every good work” (II Timothy 2:15-21).

This would be the test that would prove if Jesus was really Lord of that believer's life. It would also be the test to see if that believer's faith saw beyond the temporal existence of this life.

**Fourth:** in order for the believer to stand against the social pressure to compromise his distinctive New Covenant beliefs, he needed to focus upon the **power of God** in the indwelling Holy Spirit. The proper response to the social pressure of a syncretistic society is the exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord in every practice of life regardless of the cost to the believer personally.

Real faith will put the will of the Lord first in every decision. Submission to the Lordship of Christ needed to be understood intellectually, accepted and acted upon voluntarily, and reverently represented by a Biblical and separated lifestyle. If not, a testimony to the Lordship of Christ was a sham.

**The Colossian epistle is both a warning and instruction about the necessary response to the danger from the pressure of syncretism.** It establishes the necessity of a pre-eminent relationship of submission to the revealed will of Jesus Christ and His full sufficiency as our personal representative. The heart of the epistle is the heart of the gospel. We are complete in Christ. (Col. 2:9-10; paraphrase of 2:9: “For in Jesus the divine essence of the Godhead has taken permanent residence in a body of humanity.”)

Jesus has identified Himself with humanity for all eternity by becoming human. He will continue as a glorified human (divinity united with humanity) throughout eternity. Since the Son of God is willing to make this sacrifice for us, it seems a “reasonable service” that we should be willing to make any necessary sacrifice to maintain our distinct identity with Him.

The resolution of a genuine believer proclaiming Jesus to be his Lord must be a resolution that holds exclusively to the Word of Jesus, resisting all pressure toward syncretism and compromise. Although this may be viewed as a narrow minded prejudice towards other socially accepted religious beliefs, the truths of John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 still reflect the mind of Christ in the matter. If Jesus truly is Lord in one's life, what the Lord says about these issues will take preeminence over public opinion or social pressures to compromise.

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6).

“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Central to the testimony that Jesus is Lord is the willingness to maintain a distinctive identity with the “narrow way” gospel of Jesus Christ. Any movement away from that gospel is the first step away from the Lordship of Christ and an identity with His sacrifice for our sin. If we abandon the “narrow way” gospel of Christ, we also abandon the Lordship of Christ in our lives and contradict that testimony (see Col. 1:23)

“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

“<sup>13</sup> Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for *so* I am. <sup>14</sup> If I then, *your* Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. <sup>17</sup> If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them” (John 13:13-17).

The reality of a true testimony to the Lordship of Jesus is manifested by trying to live what Jesus taught. We will fail often. We will fall frequently, but we will continue in the effort with every ounce of our being. That is when Jesus is Lord!

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Chapter One

**When is Jesus Lord?**

1. What was the earliest and simplest confession of faith? \_\_\_\_\_  
A. What did that testimony mean? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
B. What does that testimony mean to you (personally)? \_\_\_\_\_  
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2. What were the historical and cultural influences on the believers at the time of the writing of the epistle of Colossians? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
A. Do you think the same types of influence effect believers today? \_\_\_\_\_  
B. If so, in what way is the truths of this epistle beneficial for our time period? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3. Define the four given characteristic influences on the believer at the time of the writing of the Colossians epistle?**  
A. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
B. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
C. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
D. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is **syncretism**? \_\_\_\_\_  
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5. Why is the heart of the epistle the heart of the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_  
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6. Paraphrase Colossians 2:9 and explain what it means? \_\_\_\_\_  
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7. What decision(s) do you think you need to make in regard to these truths? \_\_\_\_\_  
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