

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF

COLOSSIANS



The tell (hill) of Colossae: All that is left of the ancient city.

(See last page for map)

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COLOSSIANS

AN INTRODUCTION

1. Colossae was a city in the province of Phrygia in Asia Minor.
 - a. It lay in the valley of the Lycus River which is in the western part of modern Turkey.
 - b. It was situated on a trade route from Ephesus to the East, a main highway which ran all the way to the Euphrates River.
 - c. It was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus.
 - d. Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea were geographically close to one another.
 - e. It was a commercial city in its early days but because of earthquakes and changes in routes, Laodicea and Hierapolis grew and replaced Colossae in importance.
 - f. Today it is just a mound of dirt with rubble.
2. The gospel was introduced to Colossae during Paul's Ephesian ministry.
 - a. Paul did not know many of the church members personally, Col. 1:4; 2:1.
 - b. The work most likely grew out of Paul's extended ministry during his third missionary tour, Acts 19:10.
 - c. The most likely person to have carried the message of Christ to Colossae was Epaphras who was a native of the city, Col. 4:14.
3. During one of Paul's imprisonments, news came to him of a threat to the Colossian church.
4. It is believed that the letter was written in A.D. 60-62 during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome.

I. **Background to the Book of Colossians.**

- A. While Paul worked at Ephesus (A.D. 52-55) he and his co laborers in the ministry evangelized the entire province of Asia, "...all they that lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord," Acts 19:10.
- B. Five or six years later he received a report about the activities of the church in Colossae.
 1. He was told of the church's life and vitality Col. 1:7-8.

2. Much of the report was encouraging.
 3. He also learned that the church had been exposed to a dangerous error, Col. 2:8.
- C. A certain cultic heresy had invaded the church at Colossae.
1. It was a fusion of pagan and Judaic speculation which resulted in a syncretism, (combining of diverse religious thoughts and theories), Col. 2:16.
 2. It was also the combined elements of Greek philosophy and myth with Jewish legalism, 2:14-22.
 3. It was also an involvement in angel worship and a pride in superior wisdom and knowledge (Greek, *gnosis* = knowledge).
 - a. This flowered into a full blown heresy in the 2nd century.
 - b. The *gnostics* implied that they had secret knowledge and enlightenment that others didn't have, and therefore were superior to others.
 - c. They claimed that there were spirit powers which controlled the natural world and which were to be revered as mediators between God and His creation.
 - d. The person and work of Christ were underrated by this system.
 - e. In Greek mythology the star-gods (angels, eons, spirits) in astrology controlled the lives of men leaving them with few choices for their lives having fallen under the doom of fate.
 - (1) They offered escape by the path of mysticism, occultism and ascetic practices.
 - (2) They offered a special way to salvation by seeking fellowship with angelic powers.
 - (3) They offered a bridge between man and God's presence by paying reverence to these "elemental spirits."
 - (4) They offered a bridge across "the fullness" (inter-stellar space) which would bring them in union with God.
 - (5) They gloried in alleged visions, Col. 2:18b, 23a.
 4. It was also involved in the error of "dualism."
 - a. God was seen as too remote and alien to man.
 - b. To get in touch with God a person must deny the material, which is the cause of evil.
 - (1) One path was asceticism (abstinence and self-punishment).

(2) Another path was toward libertinism (the body has no relation to the spiritual, therefore, indulge without restraint or conscience).

D. Judaism + Gnosticism + Christianity = Heresy = Darkness = Deadly Danger.

II. Message of the Book of Colossians.

- A. Paul gives an explanation of Tychicus' mission to Colossae, Col. 4:7-8
- B. Paul makes several appeals about how Christians ought to live before the world, Col. 3:5-4:4.
- C. Paul warns the Colossians about the false teaching that was beginning to grow.
- D. Paul warns the Colossians against heretical doctrine of perfection through human wisdom, asceticism, and ritual.
- E. Paul warns the Colossians to not allow themselves to be exploited by powerful leaders.
 - 1. We have examples of this today: Unification Church ("Moonies"), Church of Scientology, Children of God, The Way, The former Crossroads/Boston Movement.
 - 2. There are millions of Americans who are involved in various cults (estimated at over 330 groups with a total of 2,000 + subgroups).
 - 3. People, who are lonely, disoriented by a personal crisis, or who are in desperate need of friends find it difficult to resist.
- F. Paul proclaims the all-sufficiency of Christ as our Savior.
 - 1. The solution to the problem at Colossae was to teach the proper doctrine of Christ.
 - 2. The Christ embodies the fullness of deity; not angels, men, spirits, or anyone or anything else.
 - 3. The wisdom of God is available to all through the word, not just a few elite.
 - 4. The Christian does not place his "fate" in astrology or other superstitions.
 - 5. The self-abasement of the body, asceticism, and human taboos have no connection with godliness.
 - a. Living under the Lordship of Jesus in one's daily life creates holiness.
 - b. Submitting to carnal asceticism and cultic slavery creates pious fraud.
- G. Paul appeals to them to live genuine Christian lives.
 - 1. They are reminded that they put off the old man and put on the new when they were buried with Christ in baptism and were afterwards raised with Him.

Put to death: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness, and idolatry.

Put off: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, lying, and evil deeds.

Put on: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, forgiveness, love, peace of God, unity, thankfulness, doing all by the authority of Jesus Christ.

2. They are encouraged to set their affections on the things above where Christ is reigning since they were raised with Christ after having been buried into His death.

Major Outline of Colossians

Part One: The Preeminence of the Christ (1:1- 3:4)

I. Paul Gives Praise for the Redemption We Have In Christ, 1:1-1:29

- A. Paul gives his greetings, 1:1-2.
- B. Paul gives thanks for their faith and love, 1:3-4.
 1. This came because of their hope in heaven.
 2. This resulted because they heard the word of the truth of the gospel.
 3. This resulted in bringing forth fruit.
 4. This was learned from the preaching of Epaphras, a minister of Christ.
- C. Paul describes their knowledge and declares the preeminence of Christ, 1:9-12.
 1. Paul prays that they will be filled with the knowledge of Jesus Christ.
 - a. They should know of Christ's will.
 - b. They should understand Christ's will.
 - c. They should walk worthily in Christ's will.
 - d. They should fully please Him.
 2. Paul describes the results of knowing and walking in Christ's will.
 - a. They will be fruitful.
 - b. They will be strengthened.
 - c. They will have patience and longsuffering with joy.

- d. They will give thanks for their inheritance.
- D. Paul declares the preeminence **of** Christ, 1:12-22.
- 1. Christ has given us an inheritance.
 - 2. Christ has delivered us from the power of darkness.
 - 3. Christ has conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.
 - 4. Christ is the image of the invisible God.
 - 5. Christ is the first born over all creation.
 - 6. Christ is the creator of all things (by Him, through Him, and for Him) visible and invisible.
 - 7. Christ is the reconciler of all things to Himself and by Him making peace.
 - a. This was done in the body of His flesh.
 - b. This was done through the blood of His cross.
 - c. This was done through His death.
- E. Paul declares the preeminence **in** Christ, 1:13-23
- 1. In Him we have deliverance from the power of darkness.
 - 2. In Him we have redemption through his blood.
 - 3. In Him we have forgiveness of sins.
 - 4. In Him all the fullness dwells.
 - 5. In Him we are reconciled.
 - 6. In Him we are presented holy and blameless in His sight.
- F. Paul describes our sacrificial service **for** Christ, 1:24-29.
- 1. He rejoices that he can suffer afflictions for Christ for the sake of Christ's body, which is the church.
 - 2. He has been given a stewardship from God to fulfill the word of God.
 - 3. He is to reveal the mystery hidden through the ages, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.
 - 4. He is to preach, teach, and warn every man.
 - a. This is to be done in all wisdom.
 - b. This is to be done so that all men may be made perfect (full grown) in Christ Jesus.
 - 5. He is to labor to this end as Christ works in him.

II. Paul Gives Warnings Against False Philosophy and Teaching, 2:1-23.

- A. Paul expresses his personal concern, 2:1-2:2.
 - 1. He wants their hearts to be encouraged.
 - 2. He wants them to be knit together in love.
 - 3. He wants them to attain to a full assurance of understanding through the knowledge of the Father and the Christ.
- B. Paul pleads for them to hold fast to the faith, 2:3-7.
 - 1. He doesn't want them to be deceived with persuasive words.
 - 2. He does rejoice to see their good faith in Christ.
 - a. Christ holds all the treasures of wisdom.
 - b. Christ holds all the treasures of knowledge.
 - 3. He does want them to walk according to what they have been taught in truth.
 - 4. He does want them to abound in the truth with thanksgiving.
- C. Paul warns them of those who would steal (cheat, plunder) from them through **false philosophy** (false teachings about Christ), **deceit** (claiming to hold a secret knowledge about life and truth), **traditions** (false teaching and practices), and **worldly principles** (astrology, nature worship, and superstitions), 2:8-10.
 - 1. It is in Christ's body that deity continues to live and where God expresses Himself fully, which was in the limits of a human body.
 - 2. It is in Christ that we are made complete.
 - a. Christ is the authority over all authorities.
 - b. Christ is the highest ruler over every other power.
- D. Paul reminds them of their status in Christ, 2:11-23.
 - 1. Christ cut off their body of sin when they were buried with Christ in baptism.
 - 2. God's power raised them with Christ through their faith in God's plan.
 - a. They have been made alive with Christ.
 - b. They have been forgiven of their sins.
 - c. They have been placed under a new covenant.
 - (1) The old requirements were taken out of the way and nailed to the cross
 - (2) The old beliefs of cosmic powers and authorities were triumphed over.
 - 3. Christ is the real thing and reality is found only in him and his word.

- a. They are not to let anyone condemn them for what they eat or drink in regards to the laws of the old covenant.
- b. They are not to let anyone condemn them for not observing holy days, new moon feasts, or sabbath days of the old covenant; for, they were but shadows of the real thing, which is Christ.
- c. They were not to let anyone lay down their own rules of qualification with false humility and worship of angels.
 - (1) Those who do, intrude on things they have not seen or know about.
 - (2) Those who do, claim false visions which come from human speculation.
 - (3) Those who do have an inflated pride brought on by a worldly mind.
 - (4) Those who do, fail to keep their hold on Christ, the Head.
 - (5) Those who do fail to experience the growth that God produces.
 - (6) Those who do subject themselves to rules and regulations that are not from God, but are after the doctrines and commandments of men.
 - (7) Those who do have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed (self-inspired) efforts at worship.
 - (8) Those who do engage in a so-called *humility* and harsh treatment of the body which are of no value to check the indulgence of fleshly passions.
- E. Paul reminds them that because they were buried with Christ they are raised with Him, 3:1-2.
 - 1. They should seek those things that are above.
 - 2. Their thoughts should dwell on that higher realm where Christ is rather than the passing things of earth.
- F. Paul reminds them that because they were buried with Christ they are dead as far as the world is concerned, 3:3.
- G. Paul reminds them that their lives are hid in Christ, 3:3.
- H. Paul reminds them that Christ is coming again, and they will appear with Him in glory, 3:4.

Part Two: The Practice of the Christian (3:5-4:18)

I. Paul Appeals For Genuine Christian Living, 3:5-4:6

- A. Christians must put off evil things, 3:5-11.
 - 1. Because they do not want the wrath of God to come upon them as disobedient children.
 - 2. Because they once practiced those things, but now they are to put them to death.
 - 3. Because they have put on a new man.
 - 4. Because Christ is in us all and he is all that matters.
- B. Christians are to put on righteous things, 3:12-15.
 - 1. Because they are God's chosen people and are dear to Him.
 - 2. Because they have been call by God to be members of the one Body.
 - 3. Because they should be thankful.
- C. Christians are to allow Christ's teachings to live in their hearts to make them wise, 3:16
- D. Christians are to teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, 3:16.
 - 1. They do this by singing to one another.
 - 2. They do this by singing to the Lord with grateful hearts.
- E. Christians are to do whatever they do by the authority of Jesus Christ, 3:17.
- F. Christians are to give thanks to God the Father through Him (Christ), 3:17.
- G. Christian wives are to submit themselves to their husbands, 3:18.
- H. Christian husbands are to love their wives and not treat them harshly, 3:19.
- I. Christian children are to obey their parents in all things, 3:20.
- J. Christian fathers are not to rouse their children to resentment, lest they become discouraged and quit trying, 3:21.
- K. Christian servants are to obey their masters, 3:22-25.
 - 1. They are to do this at all times.
 - 2. They are to do this with sincerity.
 - 3. They are to do this as an expression of their devotion to the Lord.
 - 4. They are to do whatever they do with all of their heart as if working for the Master.
 - 5. They are to remind themselves that they will receive a great inheritance from the Master and Owner of all things.

- 6. They are reminded that God plays no favorites when it comes to doing right or wrong.
- L. Christian masters are to do what is right and fair with their bondservants for they have a Master in heaven, 4:1.
- M. Christians are to guard themselves through watchfulness and prayer, 4:2.
- N. Christians are asked to pray for him and an open door for the word to be taught, 4:3-4.
- O. Christians are to conduct themselves with wisdom toward non-Christians, 4:5.
- P. Christians are to frame their words with graciousness and pleasantness, 4:6.
- Q. Christians are to learn how to answer any question put to them, 4:6.

II. Paul Closes With A Number of Personal Remarks and a Final Greeting, 4:7-18.

- A. He refers to his fellow servants and ministers in Christ; Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas, 4:7-14.
- B. He refers to sister congregations in Laodicea and Hierapolis, 4:13.
- C. He request that the letter be read to the Christians at Colossae and then taken and read to the church in Laodicea, 4:16.
- D. He request that the letter he sent to Laodicea (possibly the letter to the Ephesians) be read to the brethren in Colossae, 4:16.
- E. He reminds Archippus to fulfill his service to the Lord, 4:17.
- F. He requested that the brethren remember him in their prayers while he is in prison, 4:18. "Grace be with you. Amen."



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