

Introduction

Colossians, Key Verse: 1:15-20

I. Author, Date & Place Written

Apostle Paul¹ wrote Colossians, circa AD 60 or 61, at the beginning of his first imprisonment in Rome.

II. Type of Book/Place in Scripture

Colossians is one of the Epistles (letters) in the New Testament. It is one of the four "prison epistles," along with Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon. Colossians is closely associated with Philemon because the church in Colosse met in his home, and because Onesimus, mentioned in Colossians, was Philemon's slave.

III. Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis

Colosse was located about 160 km (100 miles) east of Ephesus. It was the capital city of Phrygia and was a center of east/west transportation of the time. Nearby was the Lycus River. On the north side of the river was Hierapolis, on the south side was Laodicea, and to the east was Colosse. Colosse was about 19 km (12 miles) north of the river. Hierapolis and Laodicea were about 13 km (9 miles) apart.

Laodicea became a center of transportation between Ephesus in the west and Mesopotamia in the east. It was located on the main intersection which connected Pergamum and Pisidia in the south and Pamphylia. Laodicea was famous as a military and economic center, and especially for stock and cotton farming and wool production. It had the best clothes at that time. Roman Senators shopped there.

Hierapolis was at a high altitude and was famous for its hot springs. Its water contained lime and was used for dying, so it developed a dying industry. Waste water from the dying process flowed down to Laodicea, so its people suffered from eye and ear diseases, and they developed medications for these diseases there. So in Revelation 3:18 the Laodiceans are told to buy "salve to put on their eyes." Laodicea experienced earthquakes in AD 17 and 60 and it was reconstructed both times without outside help, which is indicative of its wealth. So Revelation 3:17 describes it: "I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing." Once, Colosse was the capital of Phrygia and the center of transportation, but as Laodicea and Hierapolis

prospered, Colosse was reduced to a small town in the New Testament period.

IV. The church at Colosse

Paul did not pioneer the church at Colosse; his disciple, Epaphras, did. Epaphras also pioneered churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis. Paul stayed in Ephesus and had daily discussions for two years in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Through this, "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord." During this time Epaphras and Philemon from Colosse and Nympha from Laodicea also heard Paul's message, returned home and pioneered new churches. In Colosse there were Greeks, Romans, Jews and immigrants from other parts of the Roman Empire. There were slaves and free people, rich and poor, educated and uneducated. There were worldly-wise business people and a dominant godless culture, in which people were immoral and dark, violent and cruel. Asia Minor had many kinds of religions. They worshipped various gods and goddesses. Each city seemed to think that its god or goddess was superior to all the others. Mystery religions were becoming especially popular. These religions didn't focus so much on a god or goddess, but on having some kind of mysterious knowledge. Paul was writing primarily to the church at Colosse, but he also wanted his letter to be circulated in Laodicea.

V. Heresies threatening the church at Colosse

In Colosse, false teachers were attacking the uniqueness and supremacy of Christ and were making Christ relative. They were denying the truth that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation and that he alone is enough for salvation. These false teachings were: deceptive philosophies, the basic principles of this world, Judaistic legalism, the worship of angels, and asceticism.

A. Hollow and deceptive philosophy

At that time philosophers traveled here and there trying to prove their false teachings. They used many beautiful words and expressions. But these were nothing more than hollow and deceptive theories trying to take people captive.

B. The basic principles of this world

At that time people followed a certain basic worldview. They thought the world was ruled by earth, wind, fire and water and by the signs of the zodiac. The Jews thought the world was ruled by angels and demons.

Astrologers believed man's happiness depended on the stars. Some became slaves of the stars. Some thought they could change their future determined by the stars through memorizing some secret formulas.

C. Judaistic legalism

In 2:16, "eat or drink" refers to the Jewish laws of clean and unclean foods. "A religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day" refers to all the sacred days of the Jews. Religious festivals were held almost every month. Among them, Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles were the major ones that all Jews had to keep. Of course, they also kept the Sabbath day. They believed they could please God by keeping these rules meticulously. But these festivals and rules were only a shadow of the things to come; the reality was Christ. After Christ had come, these things were voided. But Judaizers were twisting the gospel, insisting that even Gentile Christians keep these rules; otherwise, they could not be saved. It was too burdensome for them. Paul, on the other hand, had taught them only the core of the gospel: that only believing in Jesus is enough.

D. Worship of angels

Those who worshipped angels claimed that man could not approach God, who is holy and the Almighty Creator; he needed angels as a mediator. These people were nullifying Christ's role as the mediator. It seemed that they were humble, but it was false humility.

E. Asceticism

Ascetics made all kinds of rules and regulations to control their bodily desires, saying, "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" Asceticism is man-made.

V. Paul's Motive and Purpose in Writing

When the Apostle Paul was imprisoned in Rome, Epaphras visited him and told him how the church in Colosse was suffering from these heretical threats, and he asked Paul's help. For this reason Paul wrote Colossians to protect Christianity from heresies and to reveal who Jesus is. Paul makes his purpose in writing explicit in 2:1--3: "I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

VI. Theme

The theme of this letter is the supremacy of Christ. His death is all we need to save us from our sins, and through him we are free from all kinds of man-made rules. Paul wanted to make it clear that Christ alone is fully sufficient for every believer. We need nothing and no one else. We need to meditate deeply on who Christ really is.

VII. The purpose of studying Colossians

We are living in the post-modern era. Post-modernism claims that there is no absolute truth, and it tries to make all truth relative. So today, many religious forms have become popular, including materialism and hedonism, angel worship, demon worship, "New Age" philosophy, and "Kabala." Many people develop a kind of "smorgasbord" religion, taking ideas they like from here and there and calling the end product their own. In this environment many young people are confused and wandering. Even many Christian young people become confused, wondering if Jesus really is the only way of salvation. It seems too boring only to believe in Jesus. People want to be entertained. But Colossians proclaims that all the fullness of God dwells in Jesus. We can gain everything in him. We can receive love, joy, peace, and happiness, and all the things we really want. It is a mystery. Through this study we pray that we may have a new desire to really know Christ until we are fully satisfied in him.

Outline:

Introduction:

1:1,2--Greetings

1:3-8--thanks

1:9-12--prayer

Christology:

1:13,14--Redeemer

1:15--Image of God

1:15b-17--Creator

1:18--Head of the Church

1:19--Fullness of God

1:20-23--Reconciler

Paul, a servant of Christ:

1:24-29--Paul's servanthship of the church
2:1-5--Paul's purpose in struggling

Living in Christ:

2:6,7--continue to live in him
2:8--warning against false teaching
2:9--Christ's Deity
2:10--believer's fullness in Christ
2:11--circumcision by Christ
2:12--baptism with Christ
2:13--alive with Christ
2:14,15--triumph of the cross

Heresies:

2:16,17--Jewish legalism
2:18,19--angel worship
2:20-23--asceticism

Christian lifestyle:

3:1-4--new life in Christ
3:5-11--put to death the earthly nature
3:12-17--Christian virtues
3:18-21--Christian households
3:22-4:1--Christian work ethics
4:2-4--Christian prayer life
4:5,6--attitude toward outsiders

Conclusion:

4:7-9--introduction of messengers
4:10-18--greetings and benediction