

THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

The Fullness of Deity Dwelling in Christ

Introduction to the Letter to the Colossians

Colossians & Philemon

Introduction: The Apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians around A.D.57 from his house arrest imprisonment in Rome. It was a city he had apparently not personally visited, although he had personal knowledge of some of the believers there, including Philemon whom he likely led to faith in Christ. He writes to them out of his concern that they be not led astray from the principles of the Gospel by “additives” and additional philosophies that sound good but depart from the pure Gospel.

I. The Place

- A. One of three cities in the Lycus River valley, on the trade route between Ephesus and Antioch.
- B. The smaller of the three and rather insignificant: no wealth, no unusual features or products, and eventually even the trade route moved north of the city.
- C. Affected greatly over time by the changing course of the Lycus River and occasional earthquakes that alternately destroyed and reshaped the town.

II. The People

- A. Colossae was made up of Greeks, Phrygians from Asia Minor, and a small contingent of Jews. Some of those Jews may have been present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost when the Church was born.
- B. While not a wealthy town, like many Greek cities of the day it boasted a university and took keen interest in philosophy and the deeper meaning of life. While this may have made them more open to the Gospel initially, it had predisposed them toward a susceptibility to new teachings and philosophies.
- C. The church at Colossae consisted of at least one house church (which met in Philemon’s home) and possibly two (the home of Nympha).

III. The Problem

- A. The Colossians had been deeply moved by the Gospel and appear to have been characterized by a sincere love for God as well as for each other. Passion and sincerity, however, are not enough to insure steadfast growth and maturity in Christ.
- B. Three historical cultures influenced the town, and therefore the church: (1) Greek philosophy, (2) Phrygian cultic paganism (3) Jewish ceremonial law.
- C. These three streams of spiritual influence combined into a kind of New Age mysticism and appealed as a means of becoming even more spiritual.
- D. Paul writes to give strong warning about the deception of all three of these ideologies, either singly or in concert, and appeals for a strong foundation in Jesus Christ and steadfast adherence to the purity of the Gospel message.

Key Verse: *And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. Colossians 1:28*

Conclusion: Colossians is very relevant for us today because we face the same kinds of pull toward a confused and polluted spirituality, and frequently believers are found to have zeal without knowledge, leading to spiritual disaster.

The Supremacy of Christ

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.) Based on Paul’s letter, who was thought to be the likely founder of the church at Colossae? Why?
- 2.) Although the Apostle Paul had not visited the church at Colossae, why do you think he was moved by the Holy Spirit to write to them? What were some of the characteristics of the believers at Colossae that attracted Paul to them?
- 3.) Considering that history teaches us that Colossae had a university, what influence might that have had upon the Christians there? What other factors may have had an influence upon the Colossian Christians?
- 4.) Take the time this week to read all four chapters of Colossians as a whole. Describe some of the problems (i.e., false teachings) that Paul addresses in his letter.
- 5.) One word that effectively describes the problem facing the church at Colossae is *syncretism*: the combination of teachings from various religions to create something new. To some, Jesus was seen as just one of several “deities” by which one approaches the Divine. What was the essence of Paul’s argument to combat this philosophy?
- 6.) As a Christian, what types of people are you attracted to within the church? Why?
- 7.) Why is Paul’s letter to the Colossians relevant to us today? Explain what similarities you find with the condition of the Church today.

NOTES
