

COLOSSIANS

Outlined Bible

Introduction: The Colossian letter is unique in that Paul never visited that church personally. (cf. Colossians 2:1) However, it likely was founded as an outgrowth of Paul's extended ministry at Ephesus. In the letter, Paul addressed a cultic heresy that had erupted in the church there. He sent the letter to Colossae by Tychicus. (Colossians 4:7-8)

Name -The book is named for the church that received the letter. (i.e. - Colossae)

Author — Paul (Colossians 1:1) from house arrest in Rome. (AD 61)

Purpose — The letter was written primarily to stabilize the church doctrinally. The church was being affected by subtle but heretical teaching which Paul wrote to combat.

I. Background of the book.

A. The city of Colossae.

1. The city was located in the Lycus Valley about 100 miles east of Ephesus.
 - a. Laodicea and Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13) were located nearby.
 - b. Colossae was in the district of Phrygia, a part of the Roman province of Asia.
2. In the Persian period (500-400 BC), Colossae was on a major trade route.
 - a. Xerxes, the Persian king, had camped there while on his way to invade Greece in 480 BC.
 - b. Cyrus also camped there when marching against Artaxerxes in 401 BC.
3. By the first century AD Laodicea and Hierapolis had outclassed Colossae as a commercial center.
 - a. By the time of Paul's writing, the city was primarily known for the production of a dark glossy black wool called *colussinus*.
 - b. The city had no political significance and was considered the least important city to which Paul addressed a letter.

B. The church at Colossae.

1. Paul stayed in Ephesus for about a three-year period ca. AD 52-55. (cf. Acts 19:1—20:1)
 - a. From there, he and his colleagues conducted evangelistic efforts throughout the entire province of Asia. (Acts 19:10)
 - b. Apparently on one of these, the church was founded.
2. Five or six years later, Paul was informed about the Colossian church through Epaphras. (1:7-8)
 - a. In general, the report was positive and encouraging. (1:3-6; 2:5)
 - b. But there was also cause for serious concern. (2:8)
3. A unique heresy had invaded the church at Colossae.
 - a. It seems to have been a bizarre mixture of asceticism (strict self-denial like a hermit), Jewish legalism, and some kind of philosophic mysticism.
 - b. The heresy combined elements of Greek philosophy and mythology (2:8) with Jewish legalism. (2:16)
 - c. It called for the worship of angels. (2:18)
 - d. It had elements of Gnosticism. (2:9)
 - e. This heresy boasted of visions and superior knowledge. (2:18b, 23a)
4. Paul's letter was primarily designed to combat this false teaching and call the church back to a solid faith.

II. The main message of the book.

A. As stated in the "Background" section, the primary goal of the epistle was to rebut and rebuke the false teaching the Colossians had been exposed to.

- B. Against that heresy, the apostle presents the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ.
- C. "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority." (Colossians 2:9-11)

III. Outline of the book.

- A. Introduction. (Colossians 1:1-14)
 - 1. The letter opens with a brief salutation (1:1-2) and a word of thanksgiving for the church at Colossae. (1:3-8)
 - 2. Paul commends their spiritual progress. (1:9-12)
 - 3. He praises the saving power of Christ. (1:13-14)
- B. The supremacy of Christ. (Colossians 1:15-29)
 - 1. Paul declares that Christ is preeminent in all things:
 - a. In creation. (1:15-17)
 - b. In the church. (1:18)
 - c. In the work of reconciliation. (1:19-23)
 - 2. Paul affirms his mission as preaching this "mystery" to the Gentiles. (1:24-29)
- C. Warnings about heresy. (Colossians 2:1-23)
 - 1. Paul expresses a personal concern about the Colossians. (1-7)
 - 2. He declares that Christ is what they need. (8-15)
 - 3. He condemns specific tenets in the false teaching they are receiving. (16-23)
- D. The apostle appeals for holy living. (Colossians 3:1—4:6)
 - 1. Since we have been "raised with Christ" following our death to sin and burial in the water grave of baptism our affections should be centered on things above. (3:1-4)
 - 2. Christians should put off evil things (3:5-11) and put on holy things. (3:12-17)
 - 3. Paul appeals for proper domestic relationships:
 - a. In marriage. (3:18-19)
 - b. Between parents and children. (3:20-21)
 - c. Between masters and servants. (3:22—4:1)
 - 4. Each Christian should be watchful and prayerful. (4:2-6)
- E. Conclusions. (Colossians 4:7-18)

IV. Key themes of the book.

- A. The "Colossian heresy."
 - 1. We have already taken a quick, broad look at the strange heresy that threatened the church at Colossae.
 - 2. One of the key components of this false doctrine appears to have been a strange Jewish form of Gnosticism.¹⁸
 - a. The Greek word *gnosis* means knowledge.
 - b. The Gnostics were a cultic group that claimed special enlightenment.
 - c. They developed a pride-based religion by teaching that divine mysteries could be understood by superior intellect.
 - d. Gnostics taught that spirit was good and matter was evil, hence the ascetic practices.
 - e. Because of their doctrine about the good/evil of spirit/matter, they believed that the two could not truly be mixed, thus denying the full deity of Jesus Christ.
 - [1] They believed in a hierarchy of deities.
 - [2] By the 2nd century AD the Gnostics believed that there were fourteen steps between God and man.
 - 3. While many questions remain unanswered about the specifics of this strange cult, Paul's letter makes certain facets of it clear:
 - a. It was seductive. (2:4)
 - b. It appealed to intellectual elitism. (2:8)

- c. It was based on human tradition. (2:8)
 - d. It was legalistic. (2:16-20)
 - e. The heresy ascetic (strict self-denial, and austere in appearance, manner, or attitude) in nature. (2:23)
 - f. It involved the worship of other beings. (2:18)
 - g. It attacked the sufficiency of Christ.
4. Amazingly, throughout the ages, thousands of cults have come and gone, each characterized by most or all of the above.
- B. The all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ.
1. To combat the Colossian heresy, Paul simply presented the all-sufficiency of Christ.
 2. Jesus Christ embodies the fullness of deity. (1:19; 2:9)
 3. The "fullness" or sense of purpose we seek is not from:
 - a. Human wisdom. (2:8)
 - b. Circumcision at the hands of men. (2:11)
 - c. What we eat or drink. (2:16)
 - d. Observance of special days. (2:16)
 - e. The worship of angels or other beings. (2:18)
 - f. Asceticism. (2:23)
 4. We have fullness when we have Jesus Christ in us! (2:13-15)

COLOSSIANS

“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse. We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant.”

Prayer

“We have been asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. We pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.” (Col 1:9-11)

“He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” (Col 1:13-14; 16-20)

“Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without

blemish and free from accusation— if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.” (Col 1:21-23)

Comment: If you do not continue in the faith there will not be a reconciliation with God.

Purpose of Letter

“My purpose is that they (all who have not met Paul personally) 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. I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.” (Col 2:2-5; 8)

“In him you were buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” (Col 2:11-15)

“Do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow (the Covenant with Israel) of the things that were to come (the New Covenant with all mankind established by Christ); the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.” (Col 2:16-19)

“Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: - "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” (Col 2:20-23)

“Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

- Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.
- Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.
- You must rid yourselves of all such things as
 - Anger
 - Rage
 - Malice
 - Slander
 - Filthy language.
 - Lying to each other
- You must put on

- Compassion
- Kindness
- Humility
- Gentleness
- patience.
- Bear with each other
- Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.
- Over all these virtues put on
 - Love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.
 - Peace of Christ to rule in your hearts
 - Be thankful.
 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.
 - Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Col 3:1-2; 5-10; 12-17)

Relationships

- Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
- Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.
- Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
- Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
- Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.
- Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord.
- Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair because you know that you also have a Master. (Col 3:18-23; 4:1)

Key Points from Colossians

- Reconciliation with God is negated by not continuing in faith.
- Daily living pleasing to God is continually in faith.

Question - What are the keys to unity in relationships between person to person and man to God?