



Paul's Letter to the Colossians

- Located in the Roman province of Asia Minor in the beautiful Lycus River Valley, whose fertile soil made it a prime place for sheep grazing. The region was known for its exceptional quality of wool and dyes from the chalky river deposits.
- Because it was situated along a prosperous trade route (the Via Sebaste) between Persia and seaport of Ephesus, it flourished in ancient times and became a sizable city of some significance, but the road was rerouted and the city declined in importance. It was the smallest city to which Paul addressed any of his letters.
- Along with several nearby cities, Colosse was destroyed by an earthquake in 60 AD but was rebuilt by citizens at their own expense without aid from the empire.
- The population was a mixture of native Phrygians, Greeks and Jews.

Biblical Background

- Colosse is not mentioned in Acts, although Paul did mission work nearby in central Asia.
- Paul's prison journey from Jerusalem to Rome (cf. Acts 23-28) (59-62 AD)
- The congregation was not founded by Paul. Internal evidence suggests that he was personally unknown to them (2:1). Along with Romans the only such church to which Paul writes a letter.
- Congregation begun by Epaphras—a Christian convert and associate of Paul during his Roman imprisonment. In Philemon 23 Paul refers to him as "my fellow prisoner in Jesus Christ." Epaphras informed the apostle of the congregation's love and the threat of false teachers.
- While under house arrest in Rome for two years, Paul wrote at least five letters, four of which are extant: Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, Philemon, (Laodiceans has been lost).

Occasion for Writing

- Good news: the growth of the gospel as evidenced by the faith and love of the Colossians.

- Bad news: the “Colossian heresy” that was threatening the believers there, which was a blend of Jewish, pagan, and “Christian” elements that is reflected in what Paul emphasizes and asserts.
 - Jewish emphasis on circumcision, dietary laws, and holy days
 - Pagan emphasis on salvation by secret “knowledge,” not faith, that was known only to the enlightened few (early Gnosticism). The prevailing philosophical assumption that matter is evil and spirit is good.

1.) How would this teaching effect the following...?

a.) The doctrine of creation –

b.) Angels –

c.) The incarnation and deity of Christ –

d.) The treatment/use of the body –

- These false teachers used Christian terms with different meanings with the result of diminishing Christ and overthrowing our salvation in him.

Overview

- Overall Theme: Christ is sufficient
 - Chapters 1-2: Doctrinal exposition
 - Chapters 3-4: Practical implications of this truth
- Many similarities to Ephesians, which was written at this same time, but each has a unique emphasis:
 - Colossians: Christ is the head of the body
 - Ephesians: The Church is the body of Christ

1:1-2 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Notes:

- Ancient letters had a stylized opening: Author, recipient, greeting
- Paul uses a variation of the traditional Greek (χάρις instead of χάριν) and Hebrew (εἰρήνη/shalom)

1.) What does it mean that Paul was an apostle of Christ? Why is this a critical detail, especially given the circumstances?

1:2-9 ² *To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.* ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— ⁵ 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 ⁶ that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Notes:

- “to fill” (v. 9): a Gnostic buzzword. Fullness was promised those who accepted the new “knowledge.” Paul is contending that “fullness” is found in Christ alone
- “Knowledge” (v. 9 and again in verse 10): “knowledge” (*gnosis*) was another key term in Gnosticism, Paul uses the strengthened form “*epignosis*”

1.) Why does Paul give thanks to God? What can we learn from his example?

2.) What are the manifold ways and expressions that Paul uses to express his fellowship and unity with these Christians whom he has never met? (v. 2-9)

3.) How are faith and love (ἀγάπην) related to the hope of heaven? (v. 5)

4.) What are some pictures/illustrations of the growth of the kingdom used in Scripture? (v. 6)
What do these communicate to us?

5.) What was Paul's estimation of Epaphras? What can we learn from his example?

1:9-14 ⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

¹⁰ And 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, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1.) What adjective is repeated in verses 9-11? What is the effect?

2.) What are the components and goals of our faith that Paul outlines in v. 9-12?

3.) What was our former condition? What is it now? How did this change take place? (v. 13-14)