

"The Study of Colossians"

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"Introduction to Colossians"

Colossians 1:1-2

Introduction: Tonight, we begin a new journey into the letter which Paul wrote to the believers at Colossae. We are not going to dive directly into the text but instead we are going to look at several points first.

1. Why was this letter written?

First of all, let us understand that Paul did not start this church. He had heard about what was going on in the church from a man named Epaphras who was most likely the man who started the church.

Notice Colossians 1:4-7

They learned the Truth they had received from Epaphras. Therefore, it is believed that he started the church.

Notice Colossians 4:12

Here in 4:12 Paul identifies Epaphras as "one of you" which means he was from the church at Colossae.

So, Paul is in prison in Rome and Epaphras shows up to explain to Paul what was happening in the church. From Colossae to Rome was about a 1300-mile journey. That is a long way to travel to share the problem with the Apostle Paul, and it also tells us how urgent the need was to get the situation resolved.

Application:

How far are we willing to go to preserve what we have here at Claysburg Bible? What kind of sacrifices are we willing to make to make sure this church remains? This church as well as any church that is solid in the Word is worth fighting for. Good churches are very hard to find today. It is important that we help out so that just a few people do not have to carry all the load. I was told years ago that 10% of the people in a church do 100% of the work.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

⁴ *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*

⁵ *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*

⁶ *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

⁷ *But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.*

We are all given spiritual gifts so that the entire church will benefit. Spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of edification of the body. When some do not exercise their gifts then others are called upon to fill in the gaps and this often leads to exhausted and frustrated believers. The bottom line is we need to care about what we have and we need to strive to keep it. Epaphras was willing to walk 1300 miles to present the problem at his church to the Apostle Paul.

So, what was the problem in the church at Colossae? The problem was "heresy". What is heresy? Heresy is an opinion or belief that is contrary to what is true. What was the heresy that had entered into the church at Colossae? It was a mixture of legalism and pagan philosophy. This heresy would later become known as "Gnosticism". The Gnostics took pride in their possession of a wisdom far deeper than that revealed in the sacred Scriptures. It was a wisdom they believed belonged to only a favored few. "Gnostic" comes from a Greek word meaning "knowledge". They believed that matter was inherently evil, therefore a holy God could not have created it.

Just to help you to understand how dangerous this heresy was, notice the information that Jowett gives on one of the beliefs of the Gnostics.

"Flesh is essentially evil; God is essentially holy; between the essentially evil and the essentially holy there can be no communion. It is impossible, says the heresy, for the essentially holy to touch the essentially evil. There is an infinite gulf between the two and the one cannot touch and be intimate with the other. The heresy then had to devise some means whereby this gulf could be crossed, and by which the essentially holy God could come into communion with the essentially evil state in which mankind was dwelling. What could it do? It said that out of the essentially holy God there emanated a being slightly less holy, and then out of the second holy one there emanated a third one less holy still and out of the third, a fourth, and so on, with increasing dilution of holiness, with divinity more and more impoverished, until one appeared (Jesus), who was so emptied of divinity, holiness, so nearly like man, that he could touch man."

Eventually the teaching of the Gnostics became a real problem for the first century church to deal with. They came into the churches and taught that Jesus was not really a man but only had the appearance of a man and they believed this because they believed that all matter was evil.

1 John 4:1-3

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.

² *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God:*

³ *And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

Getting back to Colossae, Gnosticism had not developed this far yet but there were still matters that had to be addressed. The belief that had crept in the church was an attack upon the supremacy and the all sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Notice Colossians 2:8-10, 16-18

Here in these verses, we can see the problems being addressed. The entire theme of the letter is to show the readers that Jesus Christ makes us complete. There is nothing to be added, there are no man-made rules to follow, there is no deeper knowledge that some have access to. Colossians 2:10 says it all, "We are complete in Him."

Application:

We must understand that Satan hates the church because we are the salt and the light of the world. Therefore, we can expect that just like this small church came under attack so will our church also face many spiritual battles and attacks. As time moves forward there will be attacks against the Truth that is preached from this pulpit. Satan will try his best to somehow bring false doctrine through the doors. It can start with something as simple as a family with a different belief to come in and get involved. Satan seems to take pleasure in bringing his attacks through people that are loved and respected in the church. Let us remember how Satan got to Adam. He went through Eve, the person Adam loved so much. Satan also went through Eve because she did not have the knowledge that Adam had. He knew the animals could not talk because he spent the time with them to name them. She did not have that knowledge. He attacked the weaker of the two. He still focuses upon the weak believers today in an attempt to distort the Truth.

In Exodus 17 Israel was attacked by a group of people known as the Amalekites. This was the first battle Israel faced after leaving Egypt. Now let us notice what happened in the attack.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

17 Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt;

18 How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God.

19 Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it.

Getting back to Colossians, this then answers the question, "Why was the letter written?"

2. Where was the letter written?

Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome. There are some interesting thoughts to point out concerning this letter and the other letters he wrote while in prison. In none of them do we read one word of complaining because he was in prison. Let us notice something that is recorded in Philippians which was also written from the prison.

Philippians 1:12-21

12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel;

13 So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places;

14 And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.

15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:

16 The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds:

17 But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

18 What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

19 For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

²⁰ *According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.*

²¹ *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

Paul never complained about the conditions he just became determined to magnify Jesus Christ in his life or in his death. Here is the point I want you to grasp, he turned the prison into his pulpit. What is your prison? We can have the same attitude that Paul had when our hearts are set on magnifying Jesus Christ. This we can do wherever we are at. It is a choice on our part as to how we are going to respond to the situation which we are in. Notice the words in Philippians written from the same prison.

Philippians 4:11-13

¹¹ *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*

¹² *I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

¹³ *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*

3. How is the letter divided?

This letter is very similar to the letter to the Ephesians. In Colossians the first two chapters will deal with Doctrine and the last two chapters will deal with Duty. The letter to the Ephesians had three chapters of Doctrine and three of Duty. Colossians is two and two. If we look at the letters in sequence, we could see that Romans tells us how to be saved and Ephesians and Colossians tells us how to live the new exalted life in Jesus Christ.

Now let us look briefly at the opening of the letter.

I. The Greeting.

Notice Colossians 1:1-2

I just want you to see the gentleness with which Paul addresses these believers. It is seen in verse 2. Paul addresses these people as Saints and Faithful Brethren in Christ. He was not harsh with them even though they had allowed the heresy to get in the church. Notice what Paul wrote to Timothy.

2 Timothy 2:24-26

²⁴ And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

²⁵ In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth;

²⁶ And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Application:

There are certain pastors who just seem to always be bitter and angry. They are quick to rebuke others who are struggling in their walk. But I have learned that patience is so important when it comes to dealing with people. The church is a group of broken and often struggling people. Sometimes believers do need to be rebuked but at other times they need to be handled very gently so as to help them through a struggle.

Conclusion:

We will pick this up again next week. Now that you have the background of the letter, I would encourage you to read it through every week.