

Colossians – Teacher’s Notes

Lesson 1

(Resources: *How to Get Into the Bible*, Stephen Miller, Thomas Nelson Publishers. *Daily Bible Study Series*, William Barclay. *Wiersbe’s Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, Warren Wiersbe. *Through the Bible*, J. Vernon McGee.)

I. Introduction

- A. **Written by Paul** in 60 AD – the same year as Philemon and Ephesians (Philippians written the next year). These 3 letters were delivered at the same time.
- B. **Prison epistle** from Rome, during the two years awaiting trial
- C. **Colosse** – “punishment”
 - In Asia Minor – present-day Turkey
 - Located on the great trade route across Asia Minor –an unimportant city
 - Tri-city area – Colosse, Laodicea (8 mi), Hierapolis (14 mi)
 - None of these cities were ever visited by Paul
 - These cities were primarily Gentile
 - Only 100 miles from Ephesus
 - Churches here were started during the 3 years Paul was in Ephesus
 - Epaphras was converted and carried the gospel to this tri-city area
 - The church at Colosse may have met in the house of Philemon.
 - A few months after receiving the letter from Paul, the same year, the city was destroyed by an earthquake. The survivors moved 3 miles south and founded the city of Honaz.

D. The Purpose of the letter to the Colossians

Heresy (false teachers) rose in Colossae. Epaphras made a journey to visit Paul. Epaphras reported to Paul on the Colosse church and the dangerous heresy.

This heresy was a mixture of an extreme form of Judaism and an early form of Gnosticism.

Paul does not argue with the heresy directly. Instead he teaches truth and draws them back to the gospel they heard at first.

Gnosticism taught that the spirit alone was good and the flesh or the physical world was evil.

- God was spirit and therefore good. He could not have anything to do with the evil matter. Therefore God was not the creator of the world.
- Since matter was evil and if Jesus was the Son of God, then Jesus could not have had a flesh and blood body. He must have been some sort of spiritual phantom. (Some of their writing say he left no footprints on the ground) This removed Jesus from humanity and made it impossible for him to be the Savior of men. Denied the sufficiency of Christ.
- Since matter was evil then our bodies were evil. This led to two different extremes. Either the body was beaten, starved and denied or the fleshly desires were completely given into since only the spirit mattered and immorality was justified.
- Rigid rules had to be followed. (leaning to the Jewish element) Circumcision, dietary regulations, and ritual observances were stressed.
- There was a special knowledge (secret knowledge) that enabled man to reach God. Only a few could understand this. Worship of angels and mystical experiences were encouraged.

Paul draws the Colossians back to the true gospel, teaching the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ. That we have been made complete in Christ.

II. Chapter One

A. v.1-2

Paul – author with Timothy

Colossians – recipients, saints and faithful brethren (grace & peace)

Delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus.

B. v. 3-5

Paul heard of their:

FAITH in Christ

LOVE for the Saints

HOPE laid up in heaven

(compare to 1 Cor 13:13)

The two sides of the Christian life.... (1) have faith and know what you believe, and (2) have love for men, belief in action.

No matter what loss or suffering we experience for the gospel, we hold on to the Hope of heaven. Because of the hope set before Him, Christ endured the cross.

Paul is praying for them. (Even though he has never been there.)

v. 5 “previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel” – Paul directs them back to the first message they heard, the true gospel.

- C. v. 6 the gospel – because it is true and is bearing fruit and increasing
- D. v. 7-8 Epaphras - remember Church who you heard the gospel from. He is a faithful servant of Christ.
- E. v. 9-12 What does Paul pray for them?
 1. That they might know His will
 2. That they would walk so as to please God
 3. That they would work to bear fruit
 4. That they would understand the word better
 5. That they would know His glorious power.
 - 1) Know God’s will and the power to do it.
 - 2) Know God and eternal truths and understand how to apply them to everyday living.
 - 3) Please God in all they do.
 - 4) To be strengthened with power.

Christ has QUALIFIED THEM. Only Christ can give faith, change their hearts and offer hope. The word of the gospel has brought fruit in their lives.

F. v 13-17 THE INCOMPARABLE CHRIST

v. 13 “For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son...”

Christ rescued us, transferred us, redeemed us, and forgave us. A reminder of the work of the cross.

v. 15-17 Christ, the image of the invisible (Spirit) God and the firstborn of all creation (matter)

The Gnostics believed Jesus was only a partial revelation of God. The word used for “image” is also translated “portrait.” If you want to see what God is like, look at Jesus.

We see Christ as the creator, the owner of creation, and the sustainer of creation. For Him everything was created. The firstborn of all creation signifies that He receives the place of highest honor. He has his hand on his creation.

G. v 18-23

v.18- Head of the body, the church – we are Christ’s body.
Christ is the firstborn of the dead.

v. 19 – “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the FULLNESS to dwell in Him....” Jesus was all God. He was not merely a lifeless PORTRAIT, but a complete picture... a full revelation. God was pleased for Jesus to be completely God in a flesh body.

v. 20 Jesus reconciled all things to Himself.... on earth and in heaven. The purpose for which He came was reconciliation with God.

v. 21-22 Jesus reconciled us in His FLESHLY BODY. Jesus wants us to be holy, blameless, beyond reproach.

v. 23 Continue in the faith. Don't move away from the gospel you have heard and which Paul has taught.

H. v. 24- 29

Paul emphasizes that he has labored and suffered for the gospel, for their sakes.

v. 26-27 The MYSTERY: was hidden, but now made known.... That not only the Jews, but the Gentiles also can know the riches of Christ, be complete in Him.

v. 28 Paul's task as he saw it:

- 1) Admonish or warn every man
- 2) Teach every man
- 3) Present every man (Jew and Gentile) complete in Christ

v. 29- Paul says, "His power works in me."

III. Summary

The Preeminence of Christ

1. In the Cross – Only Christ died for the sins of the world
2. In Creation – All things were created by Him and for Him. He holds all things together. The firstborn of creation.
3. In the Church – Christ is the head. The church is the new creation and the body of Christ. The firstborn of the dead.
4. In Paul's ministry – Paul has suffered and labored for Christ's sake. He risked his life because Christ was preeminent; He is Lord. Paul did not run his ministry in his own power, as empowered by God.

Paul exalts Christ as:

1. The image of God
2. The creator
3. The preexistent sustainer of all things
4. The head of the church
5. The first to be resurrected
6. The fullness of deity in bodily form
7. The reconciler