

New Testament Survey—Colossians

It didn't make sense. Paul wanted to preach. He wanted to be taking the good news of Christ to unreached places, for that was his calling. But he couldn't. He couldn't go anywhere. He was in prison.

And so, while he prison he did what he could do to make Christ known in the world. He witnessed to guards and other prisoners. He taught God's Word to those who visited him. And he wrote letters, one of which we'll be considering this evening.

That's often how the Lord works, isn't it? What appears to be a closed door to us, at least at first, is often an open door to an unexpected ministry. Paul's unjust imprisonment led to him being used by the Lord to give us the wonderful teaching of Colossians.

To do: Share ways God has done this in your life, how what appeared to be a closed door in time became a wonderful open door for His kingdom purposes.

Discuss: What stands out to you when you think of the book of Colossians?

- **Who wrote the book?**

--Paul

- **When was the book written?**

--A.D. 60 (the same year Paul wrote Ephesians and Philemon, while in prison)

The City of Colosse:

--Located in Asia Minor, in present-day Turkey, 100 miles east of Ephesus

--A few hundred years before Paul's day, the city was a leading city in Asia Minor

--Due to the growth of nearby cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13), Colosse declined, and by the 1st century A.D., it was a second-rate market town.

--Today the ancient site lies in ruins with a modern town, Chronas, located nearby

(see Gromacki, 267; and NIVsb)

How the Church was Established:

--What made Colosse importance in the NT, however, was the fact that Paul was the spiritual "grandfather" of the church. He himself did not personally start the church.

--Apparently, during Paul's 3-year ministry in Ephesus, Epaphras was converted and carried the

gospel to Colosse. See the following...

1:3-4 Paul thanked God for the Colossian church.

1:7 How did the church learn about God's grace?

1:8 How did Paul learn about the status of the Colossian church?

--Other churches were started in the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis, perhaps as the result of the efforts of Epaphras (4:15).

Question: Why did Paul write this letter to the Colossian Christians, most of whom, he had never met? It was to deal with a serious problem...

- **Why was the book written?**

--Paul wrote this epistle to deal with the "Colossian heresy." What is a "heresy?" What was the Colossian heresy? Paul never tells us explicitly in the letter. We can infer the nature of the heresy by the teaching Paul gives to refute the false teachers. The *NIV Study Bible* suggests some of the elements were (p. 1813):

1. *Ceremonialism*. This group tried to turn Christianity into a list of rules.

2:16 What kind of rules?

2:17 What did Paul say about OT ceremonial "rules"?

2:13 Apparently circumcision was another hangup. So the teachers held to strict rules about the kinds of food and drink that were permissible, and about religious festivals.

2. *Asceticism*. We hear some of the regulations the teachers were commanding in 2:21 and 2:23, "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!" Influenced by Greek, gnostic thought, they taught that all matter was innately evil and that only the soul was intrinsically good.

3. *Angel worship*. See 2:18

Discuss: We saw an "angel fad" in our country a decade ago that continues to the present. In the materialistic 70's and 80's, it wasn't popular to talk about the supernatural in public. Not so today. Public figures (TV shows, politicians, athletes) talk about "God" and the supernatural. It's kind of refreshing to us at first. But, what's really happening? We're facing a very similar problem that the Colossian church faced. We need discernment. (e.g. What kind of view of God do you find when you watch reruns of "Touched By An Angel"?)

4. *Depreciation of Christ*. This is implied by how Paul stresses the supremacy of Christ (1:15-20; 2:2-3, 9).

5. *Secret knowledge*. The Gnostics boasted of this.

2:2-3 But what do we have as Christians? "all the treasures..."

6. *Reliance on human wisdom and tradition*.

2:8 What are we to avoid?

Discuss: You may think, "Colossians is such a technical book. As long as I believe in God and Christ, what difference does the rest make?" Does it really make a difference what we believe?

It sure does! False teaching led to legalism and asceticism at Colosse. What you believe directs how you live.

Key: Gromacki suggests that it was within 8 years of the church's establishment that Paul had to write this letter to warn the young, vulnerable church.

- **What is the outline of the book?**

(adapted from Gromacki, 271)

Introduction (1:1-8)

I. The Preeminence of Christ (1:9-29)

II. The Warning against the Heresy (ch. 2)

III. The Practice of True Christian Living (3:1-4:6)

Conclusion (4:7-18)

Resemblance between Ephesians and Colossians (taken from Gromacki, 270)

<i>Colossians</i>	<i>Ephesians</i>
Completeness in Christ	Oneness in Christ
Christ in the body of the believer is a mystery	Jew and Gentile as one in the body of Christ is a mystery
Christ as the <i>Head</i> of the body is emphasized	The Church as the <i>Body</i> of Christ is emphasized

- **What is the message of the book in one sentence?**

Colossians is a letter that warns us about heresy. Or better, Colossians warns us about heresy so we'll guard and appreciate the supremacy of Christ.

- **What contribution does the book make to biblical theology (that is, how does this book relate to the rest of the Bible)?**

1. *Colossians highlights the supremacy of Christ.*

What do we learn about Christ from...

1:15 He is the image of the invisible God.

1:16 He created everything.

1:18 He is the Head of the Church.

1:19 He is the fullness of God.

1:20 He reconciled all things to the Father through His shed blood.

1:28 He is the goal of our disciple-making (Christlikeness).

2:3 In Him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Discuss: Have we lost the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in the Church today? How so?

2. *Colossians reminds us that Paul was a team-player in the ministry.*

He mentions some of his associates (the same found in Philemon, which supports the idea that these two letters were written by Paul at the same time): Timothy, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke, and Demas (1:1; 4:9-14).

What can we learn from this?

3. *Colossians emphasizes the importance of prayer.*

- a. We see Paul's prayer for the Christians at Colossae--1:9-14. (2:5)

How does Paul's prayer differ from ours?

- b. Paul urges Christians to pray--4:2-4.

- c. Paul gives us a model of prayer in Epaphras--4:12-13.

To do: Let's spend time in prayer. Let's pray 1:9-14. Change the pronouns to make it personal. [have different people pray the following]

Verse 9 "Lord, we ask You to fill us with the knowledge of Your will. Please give us spiritual wisdom and understanding so we can know You better."

Verse 10 "We pray this so we will live a life worthy of You, and please You in every way. Help us to bear fruit and grow in our knowledge of You."

Verse 11 "Please strengthen us with Your great power so we will be able to endure the challenges of living for You. But we don't want to just get by with sour faces. Help us to endure with joy and thankfulness."

Verse 12-13 "Thank You for what You did to qualify us to share in Your inheritance. We are unworthy. Thank You for rescuing us from the dominion of darkness and bringing us into the kingdom of Your Son."

Verse 14 "Thank You for Jesus. It's in Him that we have Your redemption and forgiveness."