

COLOSSIANS

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

In
The Bible Notebook
Series

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INTRODUCTION

AUTHOR: The human author was Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. He is identified in Acts as Saul of Tarsus. His Roman name was Paul. The divine author is the Holy Spirit Who inspired Paul to write this epistle and illumines our hearts that we might understand it and apply it to our lives.

DATE, PLACE OF WRITING. Colossians was probably written while Paul was a prisoner in Rome. We may group it with Paul's Prison Epistles. The date was possibly A. D. 62 or 63.

OCCASION. To understand the occasion, or purpose of Colossians we should be aware of certain circumstances that have a bearing on the message of this Epistle. None of the books in the Bible was written in a vacuum.

THE CITY OF COLOSSE. Colosse was a declining city in a tri-city area located in the southwestern sector of present day Turkey. It was located on the Lycus River about 100 miles east of Ephesus. About twelve miles down the river stood Laodicea on the south bank and Hierapolis on the north. The Lycus Valley was known for its beauty and commerce, and even though chalky deposits from the Lycus River limited land use, there were many fertile valleys, and thus a lot of sheep and a good wool industry. However, Colosse was not keeping pace with the other two cities. Lightfoot says Colosse was the most unimportant town to which Paul wrote a letter.

JEWISH POPULATION. There were probably as many as 50,000 Jews in this tri-city area at the time Paul wrote to the church. They posed a constant threat to the young church. Those who rejected Christ were constantly going to the authorities with tales about Christians, and many who accepted Christ tried to introduce ritualism and legalism to the church.

THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE. Paul, who had never been to Colosse, probably encouraged fellow workers to establish the church. During Paul's three year ministry at Ephesus the whole province of Asia was a target for evangelism. Paul concentrated on the major population centers along the great Roman highways. From these great population centers the Gospel spread to the towns and villages and the country side. Epaphras was probably instrumental in founding the church to which Paul was writing (Acts 19:1ff).

A CHURCH WITH A PROBLEM. It was probably Epaphras who brought to Paul news of the situation in Colosse. If so, we must remember that Paul was in prison in Rome and Epaphras had a long and possibly costly trip. There may have been some risk involved in visiting Paul under the circumstances.

SOME GOOD NEWS. There were many strong, faithful saints in Colosse. A prayer of thanksgiving is uttered for them, as it well should have been. Every church needs faithful members, but it is particularly important when there are problems. That faithful Christian who is willing to put the church ahead of his, or her, personal interests is a blessing the Lord's church, in any place and in any century.

SOME BAD NEWS. The church at Colosse was threatened with a very serious heresy. No name is given to the heresy that threatened the church but several characteristics of the heresy are revealed.

1. The heresy "clearly attacked the total adequacy and the supremacy of Christ" (Barclay).
2. Paul stresses the role Jesus Christ played in creation. It seems to have been the same type of problem John faced in the Gospel and the Epistles that bear his name.
3. Paul emphasized strongly both the HUMANITY and DEITY of Christ. Obviously both had been questioned by someone.
4. Astrological elements were associated with the heresy.
5. The heresy emphasized demonic spirits.
6. There were philosophical and ascetic elements.
7. Ritualism received more than a little attention.
8. there was a spiritual and intellectual snobbery associated with the problem.

GNOSTIC HERESY. The heresy at Colosse seems to have been the same incipient Gnosticism that posed such a threat to other churches in this area. Gnosticism means "knowledge" and describes a philosophy that was erected upon three assumptions: (1) that all material things are inherently evil, (2) only the spiritual is good and (3) that both the material and spiritual are eternal. These presuppositions led the Gnostics to deny that God created the universe because He is good and could not touch matter (which is evil) without becoming contaminated by it. One group spiritualized Christ and denied his humanity, while other branches developed other theories about Christ. They all prided themselves in their having discovered a highly intelligent way of life.

THE HERESY AT WORK IN THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH. The church was predominantly Gentile which means that most of the members had a pagan background and were susceptible to certain elements in pagan religions. Some questioned the adequacy of Jesus Christ to replace all their former gods and to protect them from all the evil spirits lurking around them. Some decided on a compromise: they would take the best elements of all religions and put them together, just to be sure! Some of the Jewish converts were ready to help with the rituals and rules. A few members seemed to think if they could master all these theories it would make them a sort of "super saint."

AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION. The trouble in Colosse had not yet reached epidemic

proportions, but it posed a serious threat. The Lord inspired Paul to write to the church in an effort to "nip this movement in the bud" and persuade the Christians to go back to their early lessons in the Gospel, to live by that Gospel and share it with others.

AN OUTLINE WITH NOTES

INTRODUCTION - 1:1-14

A. GREETINGS (1:1-2).

1. THE AUTHOR: Paul is the human author. He wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

2. APOSTLE. The word means "one sent forth."

BY THE WILL OF GOD. He was not self-appointed, nor had he been sent by any other man. His appointment was received from Jesus on the road to Damascus.

OF CHRIST. Jesus was the one sending him forth and he never lost sight of that.

TIMOTHEUS. Timothy, who joined Paul and Silas on the Second Missionary Journey. They were later joined by Luke at Troas.

3. THE RECIPIENTS. The "saints and faithful brethren" in the church at Colosse. There were some Jews and many Gentiles in the church.

GRACE. In the New testament sense grace means the unmerited love or favor of God. It was the common Greek greeting. It was a positive word and when one used it in a greeting he was wishing all things kind and gracious to the person he greeted.

PEACE. Peace (shalom) was the common Jewish greeting and in essence, it meant, "I wish you the highest good you may experience."

GOD OUR FATHER. Paul often refers to God as the Father. While the term Trinity does not appear in his epistles, he refers to Father, Son and Holy Spirit frequently.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. Jesus is His name, "The Name Above Every Name." Christ is His title (Messiah in the Old Testament; the Anointed One). Lord is the title often used for Jesus by Paul.

4. THE GREETING. Paul used both the Greek and Hebrew greeting. The extent of one's inner peace is relative to one's response to God's grace.

B. PRAYER FOR A TROUBLED CHURCH (1:3-14).

1. Prayer of Thanksgiving, 1:3-8.

- a. "We always give thanks" (keep on giving thanks), 1:3.
- b. "Having heard of..." (Probably from Epaphras), 1:4-5.
- c. Two evidences of the true Gospel, 1:6.
- d. Thanksgiving for the work of Epaphras, 1:7-8.

2. Prayer for Spiritual Prosperity (1:9-14).

- a. A petitionary prayer that they might know God, 1:9.
- b. Prayer that they might walk worthy of the Lord, 1:10. (4 goals)
 - (1) Bearing fruit (1:10).
 - (2) Increasing in the knowledge of God (1:10).
 - (3) Being strengthened (1:11).
 - (4) Giving thanks (1:12).
- c. Prayer that they might be strengthened in Christ, 1:11-14.
- d. Paul saw a foundation for massive thanksgiving:
 1. He qualified us.
 2. He transferred us.
 3. He delivered us
 4. He redeemed us.
 5. He has forgiven us.

I. THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS CHRIST (1:15-23).

A. The Person and work of Jesus Christ, 1:15-20.

1. Christ praised as Lord of the universe, 1:15-17.
2. Christ praised as Lord of the Church, 1:18-20.

B. Christ, supreme in the believer's life, 1:21-23.

1. His supremacy demonstrated through reconciliation, 1:21-22a.

2. His supremacy manifested in restoration, 1:22a-23.

II. PAUL'S MINISTRY TO THE CHURCH 91:24-2:5).

A. Paul Found Happiness and Joy Despite Suffering, 1:24.

B. The Nature of His Ministry, 1:25-26.

1. To proclaim the Word of God, 1:25.
2. To reveal the mystery of the ages, 1:26.

C. The Purpose of His Ministry, 1:27-29.

1. To make known the secret of the Riches of Christ, 1:27.
2. To preach and teach Christ in an effort to bring men to maturity in Christ, 1:28-29.

D. Paul's Concern for the Colossian Believers, 2:1-5.

1. That they may have wisdom and knowledge, 2:1-3.
2. They should not be deceived by even the best sounding arguments, 2:4.
3. Paul's concern is that the Colossian Christians remain firm in the faith.

III. A NOTE OF WARNING (2:6-23).

A. Warning against false doctrines, 2:6-15.

1. Plea for spiritual depth, 2:6-7.
2. Warning to avoid being deceived by worldly wisdom, 2:8.
3. The sovereignty and deity of Christ, 2:9-15.

B. Warning against ritualism, 2:16-23.

IV. THE MEANING OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, 3:1-4:1.

A. What it means to be raised together with Christ, 3:1-4.

1. It means setting your heart on the things of heaven, 3:1.

2. It means fixing your mind on things above and not on things of the earth, 3:2.
3. It means being hidden with Christ in God, 3:3.
4. It means that believers will appear with Him in glory, 3:4.

B. The Old Life and the New, 3:5-17.

1. Putting off the old way of life, 3:5-11.
2. Ladder to Christian maturity, 3:12-17.
 - Putting on Christian character, 3:12-15.

(1) Compassion	(2) Kindness	(3) Humility
(4) Gentleness and meekness	(5) Patience	(6) Be helpful to others
(7) Forgive one another.		

C. Personal relations in the New Life, 3:18-4:1.

1. WIVES, 3:18.
2. HUSBANDS, 3:19.
3. CHILDREN, 3:20.
4. PARENTS, 3:21.
5. SLAVES, 3:22.
6. EMPLOYEES, 3:23.
7. CHRIST is the real master and He will reward all believers, 3:24.
8. God is also the Judge of the unrighteous, 3:25.
9. MASTERS, 4:1.

V. FINAL INSTRUCTIONS, 4:2-6.

A. Be persistent in prayer, 4:2-4.

1. Pray persistently and with an alert mind.
2. Paul requested special prayer for himself.

B. Be wise in outreach (witnessing to the lost), 4:5.

C. Let your speech be "seasoned with salt," (4:6).

CONCLUSION, 4:7-18

1. Tychicus and Onesimus commended, 4:7-9.
2. Greetings from Paul's fellow workers, 4:10-14.
3. Final message from Paul, 4:15-17.
4. Closing salutation. 4:18.

SIGNED: "With the hands of me, Paul." A. T. Robertson says, "The chains clanked as Paul took the pen to sign the letter personally." May God add His blessing to the study of His Word.