

## COLOSSIAN – INTRODUCTION Part 1

Colossae – probably one of the least important city that Paul dealt with in his ministry  
– such as Ephesus, Thessalonica, Rome...

Colossians – may be regarded as most significant of his writings on the person and work of Jesus Christ

### The City of Colossae

- Roman province – Asia (modern day Turkey)
  - Region – Phrygia
  - Lycus valley
- Near Laodicea and Hierapolis – mentioned in the book (4:13)
  - connected religiously with Colossae (small presbytery?)
  - a letter to Laodicea (4:15-16) – 2, 3? churches in this one area
- 120 miles southeast of Ephesus
- These 3 cities located on main East/West trade route - along with Ephesus
  - Resulted in much wealth and influence
- Laodicea - most prosperous and also proud about it
  - Rev 3:17 – “Because you say, I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing, and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked...”
- Hierapolis – a chief religious center – goddess Cybele – debasing rites
  - also famous medicinal baths – people came for health and pleasure
- Colossae – previously had been a great and populous city – days of Paul declined in importance

### The church at Colossae

#### How is was established

- Not recorded exactly how it was established
  - It is not believed that Paul started the church
  - Col 1:4 he “heard” about their Christian faith, love and hope
- Most probably - influence of Paul during long stay at Ephesus (3<sup>rd</sup> Miss Jrny)
  - Makes no reference directly of every visiting the church
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> Missionary Journey – visited the region – Acts 16:6
  - 3<sup>rd</sup> Missionary Journey – visited the region again before the church was established - Acts 18:23
  - Acts 19:8-10 (read) – while in Ephesus – “all who lived in Asia hear the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks”
    - Ephesus on the edge of Asia on main East/West trade route – makes sense - people traveled, meet Paul, and listened to him teach - then went back to their towns in Asia and started churches
    - Col 1:7 – The Colossians heard the gospel from Epaphras

- Epaphras probably came to Ephesus, meet Paul, then went back home to these 3 cities with the gospel and started the church (s).

### **Key people associated with the church and this letter - 1:7, 4:7-18**

- Epaphras – Brought the gospel to the 3 cities – 1:7, 4:12-13 – but currently with Paul now – who is in prison at Rome (4:18)
- Archippus – currently be a leader in the church – 4:17, Ph 2, wife(?) Apphia
- Philemon - the church meet in his house Ph 2
- Tychicus – messenger from Paul to the church, carried the letter along Onesimus 4:7-8
- Onesimus – 4:9 - was with Paul - sent my Paul with Tychicus back to the church with the letter - was a member of the Colossian church – the letter to Philemon is about him (Ph 10), a servant of Philemon
  - Tychicus & Onesimus carried the letters to the Colossian, Philemon and Ephesians all on one trip.

### **Members in general**

- Made up of mostly Gentile converts (1:21, 22) – recent converts from paganism
- But also some Jewish influence or Jewish members – references to Jewish customs in chapter 2 point to Jewish influence in the church – there were large Jewish communities in the area of these 3 cities

### **Purpose of the Letter**

Why is Paul writing to this group of mainly Gentile Christians who had recently been converted from paganism who he probably had never met face to face?

- Epaphras came to visit Paul in Rome after the church had been established
- Paul is imprisoned in Rome at this time – One of the 4 Prison Epistles (Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians – AD 61-63)
- Epaphras informed Paul about the condition of the church
- Mostly a good report – faith, love, and hope; gospel bearing fruit (1:3-6)
- Also a bad report - faced with dangers that threatened to lead them away from being firmly grounded in Christ and growing in Him
- So he wrote a letter to prevent this

The Colossians faced two threats

1. The danger of relapsing into the gross immorality of their pagan roots
2. The danger of accepting the “Colossian Heresy”

### **The danger of relapsing into the gross immorality of their pagan roots**

Paganism of almost every variety with its immortality thrived in this region.

- Colossians Christians probably were recent Gentile converts from paganism
  - Long standing bad habits are hard to break
- Real threat of be drawn back into their past life style

- Their wicked environment was still there tempting them
- Paul in the letter urges them to stand firm in their faith and press on to maturity (remember Pastor's sermons)
  - They were mostly babes in Christ and maybe not yet completely in control of their own passions and desires
- Paul repeatedly urges them to continue in their faith and grow
  - 1:9-12 (prays for their growth)
  - 1:23 (admonition to continue firmly in the faith, not moved away from it)
  - 2:6-7 (admonition to walk in Christ and be built up in Him)
  - 3:5-11 (admonition not to return to their former way of life full of immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, wrath, anger, malice, slander, shameful language and lies.)

### **The danger of accepting the Colossian Heresy**

The “Colossian Heresy” - what was it? What was the church being threatened by?

Key verses 2: 4, 8

The threat:

- Of being “deluded” by persuasive arguments (2:4)
- Of being taken captive by philosophy and empty deception which had its source in the traditions of men, and the elementary principles of the world, and not according to Christ (2:8).
- Following these false teachings would led them away from continuing in Christ just as they had received Him – away from being “firmly rooted in Him and being built up in Him and established in their faith, and overflowing with gratitude.” (2:6-7)

It doesn't appear that the false teaching had taken hold of them yet and lead them astray.

- He calls them saints and faithful brethren in Christ (1:2)
- He attributes faith, love and hope – the triad of Christ virtues – to them (1:4-5)
- But they must have been toying around with these false doctrines – like playing with fire – so Paul tries put out the flame before the get burned.

What the heresy was, every author and commentator agrees is hard to determine exactly – it's different than anything else mentioned in scripture

- None would say with certainty. – they have similar ideas about its roots
- Paul never gives it a name or directly addresses it – like he does with the Judaizers in some of his other letters.
- It can only deduce by implication and by what Paul emphasizes as wrong and right beliefs and practices.

Vs. 9-10 – Key to the whole letter

- The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ was being attacked
- The false teaching devalued Jesus Christ – so strongly emphasizes the truth
  - There is nothing new in Colossians about Christ that is not Paul’s other letters. But nowhere does he so forcefully assert the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.
  - On one hand, the Colossians were facing a battle with their flesh – the danger of relapsing back into their immoral life style
  - This false teaching seemed to show up at an opportune time and say that Christ was not supreme enough and therefore not sufficient enough to give them all the knowledge of God and power they needed to overcome their old sin nature.

Supremacy of Christ – his deity and position of authority

- Jesus Christ is not just “partly” God or a “semi-God”. All that God is can be found in the person of Jesus Christ – “in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells” (2:9)
- As fully God, Jesus is in the position of being over all rule and authority (2:10b)
  - Paul strongly emphasizes the deity and authority of Christ  
1:15-19      2:15
  - This was evidently being attacked by the false teaching
  - Maybe this is where the worship of angels (2:18-19) came into play – other mediators were believed to be needed, not just Christ the head
    - Paul emphasizes that Christ is God; He is above all powers and authorities, even above angels.

Sufficiency of Christ – his complete ability to save and sanctify us

- Jesus was not only fully God but also fully man: the “God-man”
  - “All the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form” (2:9)
    - Fully God + Fully Man = complete ability to save and sanctifies us
  - Paul spent a lot of time emphasizing that Christ had completely redeemed us and completely sanctifies us
 

Save	1:13-14	1:20-22
Sanctify	1: 28	2:10-15
- The false teaching however appears to have not only questioned the deity of Jesus Christ but also his manhood.
  - This consequently led them to question their completeness in Christ – this is why Paul emphasized that “in Him you have been made complete” (2:10)
- It taught that Christ’s work of redemption was not enough to completely **save** nor **sanctify** them.
  - Hence the old “Christ plus...” formula.
  - 2:16-23 – the other things they were looking to
- Ultimately it attacked the sufficiency of Christ as our Prophet, Priest and King
  - WSC Q 23                      Q 20 – 28 (commentary on the letter)