

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

TEXT: COLOSSIANS 1:1-8

INTRODUCTION:

1. Paul's epistle to the Colossians was written between 62-64 AD (*Scofield Study Bible* says 64 AD). It is one of the four "Prison Epistles" Paul wrote from Rome. The others are Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon.
2. The theme: the pre-eminence of Christ.
3. Key verse: "that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Col. 1:18b).
4. The writer is the Apostle Paul (1:1).
5. Date: Colossians was sent by the same messenger who bore Ephesians and Philemon, and was probably written at the same time (64 AD).
6. "Epaphras (1:7), who laboured in the Word in the assembly at Colosse, was Paul's fellow-prisoner at Rome. Doubtless from him Paul learned the state of that church" (*Scofield Study Bible*).
7. The *Scofield Study Bible* says two forms of error were at work in the church at Colossae: "legality in its Alexandrian form of asceticism" (aka Phariseeism -- salvation by works or "legalism"), and false mysticism (Gnosticism).
8. There was a proud intellectualism in the church at Colossae that threatened to destroy it -- the Gnostics were "vainly puffed up" (2:18).
9. Colosse was a small town near Laodicea in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).
10. Several years after writing this letter, Colosse was destroyed by an earthquake. Paul had never been to Colosse when he wrote this epistle (Colossians 2:1).
11. He was in Ephesus (Colosse was about 75 to 100 miles east of Ephesus) for about two years where he had his most fruitful ministry (Acts 19:8-19).
12. Philemon lived in Colosse, and a church was established in his house (Philemon 2).
13. Epaphras was probably the pastor of the Colossian church (Colossians 1:7, 8; 4:12, 13).
14. Paul intended to visit there when he was released from prison (Philemon 22).
15. We probably never would have heard of the town of Colosse had it not been for Paul's epistle to the Colossians.

I. THE GNOSTIC ERROR

1. Gnosticism was a mixture of mysticism, pantheism, and other pagan philosophies, such as asceticism (influenced by Greek Stoicism) and licentiousness (from Greek Epicureanism).
2. Strangely, Gnosticism embraced two extremes. They taught that the body was evil, and the only way to overcome sensuality was to indulge bodily cravings to the full, even to excess and satiety.
3. Gross sensuality and licentiousness draws many people into cults.
4. Colossians 2:16, 23 and 3:5-9 refute Gnosticism.
5. Ostensibly, the goal of the Gnostics was knowledge. Therefore, Gnostics assumed an air of superiority, "an exclusive spirit" (J. Vernon McGee).
6. The Gnostics taught that God did not create the universe directly, but that He created an angel, who in turn created another angel, until one finally created the entire physical universe. To the Gnostics, Christ was a created being. This is similar to the Jehovah's Witness error that Jehovah God created Jesus, who in turn created the rest of creation.
7. Colossians 1:16 says, "For by him (Christ) were all things created..." The JW cult's "New World Translation" inserted the word "other" into Colossians 1:16 so it reads, "because by means of him all (other) things were created..."

II. THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE (1:1-6)

1. Like all good churches, the church at Colossae was made up of "saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (1:2). The two terms are interchangeable.
2. There is an emphasis on prayer in all of Paul's epistles (1:3, 9; 4:2, 3, 12). Paul was "praying always" for them (1:3). First Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray without ceasing."
3. The church at Colossae was being infiltrated by Gnostics and other false teachers. Therefore, Paul emphasized "the word of the truth of the gospel" and "the grace of God in truth" (1:5, 6).
4. This brought forth fruit (1:6).
5. In Paul's day he could say that the Gospel was preached "in all the world" (1:6; cf. 1:23). Unfortunately that could not be said today. Today there are millions of people who have never even heard about Jesus.

6. Some Bible teachers say the word "world" (*kosmos*) here means the Roman world. Certainly it indicates the universal character of the Gospel.
7. Albert Barnes said the Gospel "is in all the world" means it is not confined to any place or people, "but is designed to be a universal religion. It offers the same blessedness in heaven to all."
8. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "Perhaps there is nothing more impressive than the adaptability of Christianity to the varied types, capacities, and circumstances of human life all over the world. This is one of the strongest evidences that it comes from God. Other...religions are only partial and local, and so they make no universal appeal. Christianity, on the contrary, because its source is divine, is equally suited to all of mankind" (*Studies in Colossians*).
9. Guy King said, "Down through the years (the Gospel) has proved itself indigenous in all lands...it is at home in every clime and age, it has flourished in its conquests of human hearts throughout the wide world" (*Crossing the Border*).

III. EPAPHRAS (1:7)

1. Epaphras may have been the founder of the church, and was probably the pastor of the church at Colossae. Unlike many preachers today who like exalted titles, he is simply referred to as a "dear fellowservant" and "a faithful minister of Christ" (1:7).
2. Paul said Epaphras "is for you" (1:7). That is the meaning of "servant" (1:7; 4:12, 13), and the meaning of "minister."
3. In the epistle to Philemon, Paul refers to Epaphras as his "fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus."
4. Epaphras declared to Paul their "love in the Spirit" (1:8), i.e., a love produced by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22 says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith."

CONCLUSION:

1. Colossians 1:5 refers to "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven." Spurgeon said, "A hope of Heaven is a mighty strengthener for bearing the ills of life and the persecutions of the adversary. 'It will soon be over,' says a man who looks for Heaven and, therefore, he is not overweighted with grief. 'It is an ill lodging,' said the traveler, "but I shall be away in the morning."
2. "Make the world know that you have a hope of Heaven! Make worldlings feel that you are a believer in eternal Glory and that you

hope to be where Jesus is!" ("The Hope Laid up in Heaven," October 13, 1878).