

Message #1

Various Texts

There is no book of the Bible that ever demeans or downplays Jesus Christ. All books of the Bible point to Christ and honor Christ; in fact, this is one proof of canonicity.

However, of all the books in the Bible, no book exalts Jesus Christ quite like Colossians. Colossians is a unique book in that it gives Christ the prominence, the predominance and the preeminence that only belongs to Him. Colossians is a book that leaves no doubt as to who Christ is, as to what He accomplished and as to what a relationship with Him is supposed to do.

QUESTION #1 – Why study Colossians?

When we attempt to answer that question, we are forced to think concretely and accurately concerning the specific contents of a book.

Reason #1 - Because Colossians is a book in the Bible .

In our English translations, the book of Colossians sits, chronologically, as the 12th book of the 27 New Testament books. From an actual writing chronology, Colossians was probably the 10th New Testament book written of the 27 New Testament books.

Colossians is one New Testament book that has great manuscript support.

Around the year 1930, a man by the name of Chester Beatty purchased 86 “slightly mutilated leaves” of New Testament books that had been written on papyrus paper. The pages were 11 x 6 1/2 and dated back to the year A.D. 200. These manuscripts were considered to be exact copies of the originals. On these papyrus pages were nine of Paul’s epistles plus the entire book of Hebrews. These leaves contained the entire book of Colossians. This now famous group of manuscripts has been given the title “P 46.”

Furthermore, many key individuals from early New Testament church history cite many passages from Colossians. For example, Ignatius and Polycarp, two who lived during the apostolic era, cite passages from Colossians.

Also, Colossians was a book that showed up in all the major compilations of New Testament books, including the compilation by Marcion (A.D. 140). Colossians was also deemed canonical by the councils of Nicea (A.D. 325), Hippo (A.D. 393) and Carthage (A.D. 397 and 419).

When we journey through Colossians, we journey through one of God’s unique books. It was one of only 66 that He inspired for man.

Reason #2 - Because Colossians establishes and defends the preeminent character of Jesus Christ.

H.A. Ironside said: “Old errors are being paraded in new terms, on all sides” (Ironside, *Colossians*, Preface). When Paul wrote Colossians, there were people who thought more highly of angels than they did Jesus Christ, who created the angels (2:18; 1:16). We need a dogmatic, unchanging, unbending perspective of Jesus Christ and we need to “contend earnestly for the faith” (Jude 3). Colossians is one N.T. book that gives a clear dogmatic picture of Christ’s divine character. It defends His character and I trust this book will cause us to do the same.

Reason #3 - Because Colossians presents the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

A relationship with Jesus Christ is all you need to be complete in your relationship with God (2:10). A relationship with Jesus Christ sets you free from sin, from the Law and all of its legal codes (2:14). Dr. S. Lewis Johnson said Colossians “has always furnished a proper antidote to humanly devised schemes of salvation” (*Bibliotheca Sacra*, p. 239, July 1961).

Reason #4 - Because Colossians presents the practicality of a relationship with Jesus Christ.

In Colossians, Paul not only expected the believers to know the truth and to believe the truth, but he also expected them to live the truth. To Paul, one’s relationship with Jesus Christ was to be very practical. He expected a relationship with Jesus Christ not just to be theological, but very functional. Our relationship with Christ is to be worked out in our own lives (3:5), with other believers (3:12-13), in our homes (3:18-21) and on our jobs (3:22-4:1).

Reason #5 - Because Colossians presents the value of sound doctrine .

Colossians is a book of heavy and deep theology (i.e. 2:12). It presents some of the most glorious Christological doctrine found in the entire New Testament (i.e. 1:28).

In Colossians, Paul proves that sound doctrine develops sound minds, that develops righteous lives, that ultimately reap rewards. There is no question that Paul connected the issue of rewards or loss of rewards to adhering to true doctrine (2:18).

Reason #6 - Because Colossians presents the value of declining church.

Of all the cities and churches of the New Testament, Colossae was the least important physically, but it was very important spiritually.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote Colossians?

There really cannot be any doubt that the book of Colossians was written by Paul. This may be established under two headings of proof:

Proof #1 - The internal evidence.

1) Paul specifically names himself as the author. 1:1, 23; 4:18

2) Paul specifically names several of his close associates.

He names Timothy (1:1), Tychicus (4:7), Onesimus (4:9), Aristarchus (4:10), Barnabas (4:10), Mark (4:10), Justus (4:11), Epaphras (4:12), Luke (4:14), Demas (4:14) and Archippus (4:17).

3) Paul wrote Ephesians and Ephesians is similar to Colossians.

H.C.G. Moule lists 33 specific parallels between Colossians and Ephesians.*

(*See final page of notes taken from Bishop Moule, pp. 47-49.)

The logical explanation for this is that both epistles were written from the same place, Paul's first Roman imprisonment. It is only logical to assume that much of the same wording and doctrine would appear in two letters written to two churches by the same author, at about the same time and from the same place.

4) Paul wrote Philemon and Philemon is similar to Colossians.

Dr. Norman Geisler said this proof presents authenticity concerning Pauline authorship that is "virtually impeccable," because Philemon is most assuredly Pauline (*Bible Knowledge*, p. 667).

A. Both books include Timothy's name in Paul's opening greeting (Col. 1:1; Phil. 1).

B. Both books contain greetings from Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke and Demas (Col. 4:10-14, Phil. 23-24).

C. Both books have a reference to Archippus (Col. 4:17; Phil. 2).

D. Both books contain a mention of Onesimus (Col. 4:9; Philemon 10).

Proof #2 - The external evidence.

As we have already stated, several key individuals from early N.T. church history cite many passages from Colossians. Marcion (A.D. 150) was the first to recognize the epistle as being a genuine letter of Paul, and Irenaeus (A.D. 190) was the first to use the epistle definitely and teach it as one of Paul's writings.

Dr. Curtis Vaughn says Colossians "was never suspect in ancient times" and "Pauline authorship appears not to have been seriously questioned until the middle of the 19th century"...(*Expositor Bible Commentary*, Vol. 11, p. 164).

QUESTION #3 – When was Colossians written?

Four books written by Paul are termed prison epistles: Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians.

As Dr. William Hendriksen says, “The place of origin and in general the date of one determines the date of all four” (William Hendriksen, *Colossians*, p. 28). Dr. Paul Benware says many commentators classify these prison epistles as the Christological epistles because they all present the glorious theme of the person and work of Jesus Christ (Paul Benware, *Survey of the New Testament*, p. 207).

Fact #1 - Paul is a prisoner. Col. 1:24; 4:3, 10, 18

Fact #2 - Paul sensed the potential of an open door to preach. Col. 4:3-4

Fact #3 - Colossians, Philemon and Ephesians are carried to their respective destinations by Tychicus and Onesimus all on one trip. Col. 4:7-9; Philemon 10-12; Eph. 6:21-22

Fact #4 - There is no mention of Paul expecting a decision soon concerning his freedom like in Philippians. Phil. 1:19-21

Based on these facts, the most logical and biblical time would be Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome described by Luke at the end of the book of Acts (Acts 28:30-31). All pieces fit this time period making the year Colossians was written sometime near A.D. 61-62. This also explains why Aristarchus is still with Paul, because he accompanied him to Rome (Acts 27:2; Col. 4:10).

Although Bishop Moule does not think it is possible to determine what point in time from A.D. 61-63 Paul wrote Colossians—“At what time of the Two Years the Epistle to the Colossians was written, we cannot hope to determine with precision” (Moule, p. 28)—it seems to me that it is early in his first Roman imprisonment because he asks for prayer for an open door (Col. 4:3-4), which was answered (Acts 28:30-31).

This would make the writing of Colossians early in Paul’s first imprisonment. Paul wrote from Rome in A.D. 61-62. The point of application which is so profound from Colossians is no matter what Paul was facing personally, his total focus was on Jesus Christ.

QUESTION #4 – Why was Colossians written?

A Colossian named Epaphras apparently traveled to Rome to see the Apostle Paul in light of some serious doctrinal problems that were occurring in the Colossian church (1:7; 4:12-13). Epaphras was so troubled by the “persuasive arguments” (2:4) of doctrinal heretics and perverters, that he traveled over 900 miles, from Colossae to Rome, just to see Paul and discuss the problems.

The particular false teaching that was surfacing in the church was the beginning of a heresy that in the second century would become known as Gnosticism.

1) It turned people away from Christ and stressed some hidden knowledge other than God’s Word (Col. 2:2-3).

- 2) It used persuasive argumentation that was not biblical, but philosophical. 2:4, 8
(Very philosophical and intellectual rhetoric.)
- 3) It denied the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2:9
- 4) It tried to put one under the Old Testament Law. 2:14-17 (Christ was not enough to make one right with God—Christ plus Law.)
- 5) It promoted the worship of angels as being a key to a proper relationship with God. Col. 2:18
- 6) It promoted an intense legalism not based on God's Word. 2:20-23
- 7) It promoted licentiousness. 3:5-6

There is a very important lesson to be learned from Colossians; if you do not stay close to sound doctrine and theology, it doesn't take long for an entire church to become confused and quickly deteriorate. The Colossian church deteriorated in about eight years!

QUESTION #5 – What is the theme of Colossians?

Dr. S. Lewis Johnson wrote, “The distinctive feature of this epistle is its Christology” (*Bib. Sac.*, p. 246). Paul was not mystical in his perspective of Jesus Christ, he was very doctrinal and it was this that brought him to such a deep level of spirituality.

The theme of Colossians is Jesus Christ. More specifically, we may state it this way: “A proper understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ will refute any and all doctrinal and practical errors.”

Who is Jesus Christ to you? Will you give Jesus Christ the preeminence in your life? Colossians is a book that will force you to answer that question.