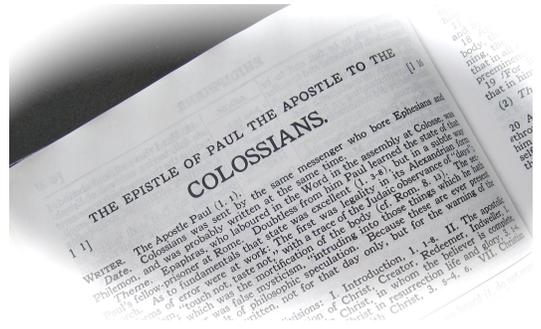


Books of The Bible

A Survey of the Epistle to The Colossians

Introduction

There has been from time to time discussion as to the authorship of Colossians. If this was a paper on that subject there could be presented considerable evidence indicating Paul as the writer. One of the substantiations of this is it is specifically stated (ch. 1:1; 4:18). This automatically seals it for it would surely be either a manifestation of weakness or personal deceptiveness for God, who is holy, to allow a deceptive name to be added to this book. A lesser observation is that the themes of the “mysteries”, while not exclusively the writings of Paul is a major focus of him. John is the only other New Testament epistle writer who mentions “mystery” (Rom. 11:25; 1 Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:9 Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:5, 7).



Place Of Writing

It is believed that Paul wrote the four “prison epistles”; Colossians, Philemon, Ephesians and Philippians when in his own hired house in Rome (Acts 28:30). However, without further evidence we do not know in what order they were written. As far as the truths contained in them is concerned it is of no importance.

Date Of Writing

It is generally taken that Paul reached Rome in 61 A.D. and was there until 63 A.D. Therefore, it was during that time Colossians was written.

The Church

There is no evidence that Paul was the founder of the church at Colosse but it is recorded that during the time he was at Ephesus, “All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:10). As of the time when this epistle was written, Paul had not yet visited that city (Colosse was 1:7; 2:1). It is thought that Epaphras was the channel through whom God planted the church. However, it is not important else it would have been revealed to us.

The City

Colosse was a city of Phrygia situated on the South bank of the River Lycus. It was a very large wealthy and prosperous city being on the main road from Ephesus to the Euphrates. Towards the end of the pre-Christian era it had diminished in importance as it's two neighboring cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis, grew more prominent. Colosse and Laodicea were in close proximity to each other (about 9 miles apart) therefore, the saints at Colosse were able to send their letter to the saints at Laodicea and receive the one which had been written to them (ch. 4:16).

In reading the scriptures there is an indication that Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12); Apphia (who was possibly the wife of Archippus, (Philemon 1:2); Archippus (Col. 4:17); and Onesimus (Col. 4:9) were all natives of that city.

The Book

It would appear to be that Colossians was written in the later part of his imprisonment in Rome. In Philemon Epaphras is imprisoned and yet in Colossians he comes to Paul. This would mean that he had been released from prison and comes back to visit the apostle and carry news concerning the saints at Colosse.

Books of The Bible
A Survey of the Epistle to The Colossians

In writing to the Colossians the purpose, in part, was to show the preeminence of Christ.

- a) To get the saints re-attracted to Christ.
- b) “For it pleased the Father that in Him (Christ alone) should all fulness dwell” (ch. 1:19).

Men were seeking to draw the saints’ attention away from the glories, fulness, and sufficiency of Christ.

Ephesians and Colossians

It is an accepted fact that Ephesians and Colossians are “sister” books, but there is a marked distinction between them.

Ephesians	Reference	Colossians	Reference
To correct the error of separating Jews and Gentiles	Ch. 2:14-22	To correct the error concerning the person and work of Christ	Ch. 1:15-18, 21-22; 2:9
Christ head over all	Ch. 1:10, 22; 5:23	Christ the creator of all	Ch. 1:16-17
The mystery of the church	Ch. 3:1-6	The mystery of your hope, Christ in you	Ch. 1:27
The slain One becomes the Slayer	Ch. 2:16	The Nailed One becomes the Nailers	Ch. 2:14
Twelve references to the Holy Spirit	Ch. 1:13, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:5, 16; 4:3, 4, 30; 5:9, 18; 6:17, 18.	One reference to the Holy Spirit	Ch. 1:8
The believer seen “in Christ”	Ch. 2:6, 10, 13; 3:6	Christ seen in the believer. The believer is also seen in Christ in Colossians. (Ch. 1:2, 28; 2:5)	Ch. 1:27
The believer raised and seated	Ch. 2:6	The believer raised but not seated	Ch. 2:12
The church is the fulness of Christ	Ch. 4:13	Christ is the fulness of the Godhead	Ch. 2:9

The Composite Dangers They Faced

- 1) The greatest covert operator the world will ever know is Satan who can come as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14). When these religious leaders came to the saints at Colosse they were wily, for they resented their views by “Enticing words” (ch. 2:4) beguiling (ch. 2:4, 18). Therefore, it is possible the saints did not suspect the implications of the satanic teachings these persons propagated. In the distortion of the gospel there would be taken from the saints their enjoyment of the fullness of Christ and their salvation. Paul writes against this. While we cannot find specifically the character of the Colossian heresy, yet because of references in Paul's writing we can gain an understanding of what was being taught and recognize how it would unsettle the saints.

Books of The Bible
A Survey of the Epistle to The Colossians

- 2) In warning of “philosophy and vain deceit” it does not appear to be a two pronged attack by Jewish and pagan philosophies. Paul does not name a particular sort of philosophy, but by considering that which Josephus and others referred to as the three philosophies of Judaism, I take it as being:
- a) The Pharisee philosophy which taught the resurrection and angels. In contrast to the Sadducees these men were more legalistic and were very ascetic in their lives.
 - b) The Sadducee philosophy which taught there was no resurrection nor angels. From these came the Boethusians who, despite being the High Priests, taught that this is all there is to life and there was no retribution for a life of wickedness.
 - c) The Essenes philosophy which taught almost extreme asceticism in the pursuit of holiness, but included illumination of inner life and the knowledge of hidden mysteries unknown to the uninitiated. They taught that because of advanced knowledge there could be the triumph of light over the darkness of the mind. They accepted, to a degree, the secret institutions of Moses.

These three philosophies were void of any spiritual substance for they held to the shadows of the Old Testament (ch. 2:16); a separatist lifestyle in neglecting the body (ch. 2:23); and a pseudo humility and false worship (ch. 2:23).

- 3) The saints needed to understand that these were the results of man’s wisdom (ch. 2:23), being “puffed up by his fleshly mind” (ch. 2:18), and these teachers ought to be recognized for what they are. With the knowledge of the character of such individuals, the saints were to be on their guard, thus Paul writes: “beware” (ch. 2:8) for these men are seeking to beguile you (ch. 2:4, 18). Paul warns them of the danger of listening to enticing words (ch. 2:4) which are the philosophies of the world (ch. 2:8–9); teaching Jewish legalism and aesthetic traditions with its enslaving observances (ch. 2:11–23); erroneous worship (ch. 2:18); and demanding rites (ch. 2:20-23). These teachings were satanic deceptions which degraded the person and work of the Lord and the gospel. It is only to the Galatians and Colossians Paul speaks of the gospel as: “the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:5, 14; Col. 1:5) because he was writing to counteract false teaching. In both these epistles the gospel is being degraded and any degrading of the gospel by the addition of man’s endeavors is an insult to God and Christ, and the Holy Spirit will not allow such. Make no mistake, any church or religious leaders who add works to the gospel is a servant of Satan, and has a blasphemous understanding of the grace of God and the work of the Lord Jesus.
- 4) The antidote to this is the truths of the singular sufficiency of the Lord; His sacrifice (ch. 1:21-22; 2:14-15); His essential deity (ch. 1:13-18); and their completeness in Him exclusively (ch. 1:12-14, 22; 2:10-13).

Key Words / Phrases

- 1) **Key verse:** “Christ in you, the hope of glory: Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Ch. 1:27–28).
- 2) **Keywords:**
 - a) Body (Ch. 1:18, 22; 2:11, 17, 19, 23)
 - b) Wisdom (Ch. 1:9, 28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5)
 - c) Knowledge (Ch. 1:9, 10; 2:3; 3:10)
 - d) Fullness and fill (Ch. 1:19, 24; 2:9)
 - e) Mystery (Ch. 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3)
 - f) Walk (Ch. 1:10; 2:6; 4:5)
 - g) Pleasing / pleased (Ch. 1:10; 19; 3:20)

Books of The Bible
A Survey of the Epistle to The Colossians

Words or Phrases Which Are Peculiar to Colossians

The following thirty-four words are the translations of Greek words found only in this epistle and never again in the New Testament.

Word	Reference	Word	Reference
Ye heard before	Ch. 1:5	New Moon	Ch. 2:16
Pleasing	Ch. 1:10	Intruding into	Ch. 2:18
Visible	Ch. 1:16	Beguile (Different word from v. 4)	Ch. 2:18
Preeminence	Ch. 1:18	Subject to ordinances	Ch. 2:20
Having made peace	Ch. 1:20	Using	Ch. 2:22
Moved away	Ch. 1:23	Will worship	Ch. 2:23 cp 18
Fill up	Ch. 1:24	Neglecting	Ch. 2:23
Enticing words	Ch. 2:4	Satisfying	Ch. 2:23
Stedfastness	Ch. 2:5	Filthy communication	Ch. 3:8
Spoil	Ch. 2:8	Scythian	Ch. 3:11
Philosophy	Ch. 2:8	Quarrel	Ch. 3:13
Godhead	Ch. 2:9	Rule	Ch. 3:15
Bodily	Ch. 2:9	Thankful	Ch. 3:15
Putting off	Ch. 2:11	Discouraged	Ch. 3:21
Handwriting	Ch. 2:14	Reward	Ch. 3:24
Nailing	Ch. 2:14	Sister's son	Ch. 4:10
Having spoiled / having put off	Ch. 2:15; 3:9	Comfort	Ch. 4:11

An Outline of Colossians

It is commonly agreed that Colossians is in two major sections: the doctrinal (chs. 1-2) and the practical (chs. 3-4). Like a rushing torrent the exhortations of Paul, His prayers and doxologies, at times flow into each other. For instance, does the introduction finish in chapter 1:2, or verse 8 or 10? At what point does his prayer change from praying to worship? Thus, the following is an attempt to give a flow chart of the book.

- 1) Introduction (Ch. 1:1-11)
 - a) Salutation (ch. 1:1-2)
 - b) His joy in them and prayer for them (ch. 1:1-11)

Books of The Bible
A Survey of the Epistle to The Colossians

2) The burden of his prayer

- a) That ye might walk worthy of the Lord (ch. 1:10) Which leads to the questions:
- i) What are my resources to walk worthy of the Lord? Living in the reality of:
 1. The all sufficiency of the Work of Christ in salvation (ch. 1:12-14, 21-22; 2:11-15).
 2. The reality of the glory of the Person of Christ (ch. 1:15-19; 2:3, 9).
 3. The responsibility, afflictions, and revelation given to Paul (ch. 1:23-27).
 4. The genuineness of Paul's concern for them in contrast to those who sought their own glory (ch. 1:28-2:2).
 - ii) What ought I avoid to walk worthy of the Lord?
 1. By not associating with any teaching which denies the deity of the Lord, belittles the fulness of His work, intimates the exclusive sufficiency of the redemption He has provided (ch. 2:4-8; 16-23).
 - iii) What are my responsibilities in walking worthy of the Lord?
 1. Seek those things which are above, living in the reality of being dead, and anticipating when our life in all its fulness will be gloriously revealed (ch. 3:1-4). This means living that life by:
 - (a) What we put off (ch. 3:5-9)
 - (b) What we put on (ch. 3:10-14) which will result in:
 - (i) The peace of God ruling the heart with thankfulness (ch. 3:15)
 - (ii) Letting the word of Christ dwell in us richly (ch. 3:16)
 - (iii) Do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ giving thanks to God by Him (Christ) (ch. 3:17). This will effect:
 - (1) Family life (ch. 3:18-21)
 - (2) Work life (ch. 3:23) spoken to the servants with vv. 23-25 as a bracketed section.
 - (3) Work life (ch. 4:1) spoken to the masters.
 - (c) Pray for us (ch. 4:3-4)
 - (d) Walk in wisdom and watch your speech (ch. 4:5-6)

3) Final salutations (ch. 4:7-18)

[Notes on Colossians 1:24-26.](#)

There are two verses in Colossians which can cause some difficulty, chapter 1:24 and 25-26. The words which cause difficulties are: "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh" and "According to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations".

Colossians 1:24

- a) What it does not mean:
- i) That Paul was sharing in the penalty of sin with that which the Lord bore for our sins on the cross.
 - ii) That there was any deficiency in the work of Christ, especially after that which he had just written.
- b) Afflictions
- i) This word is never used anywhere else in the New Testament, neither is it used for the substitutionary sufferings of Christ, but only of humanity.

Books of The Bible
A Survey of the Epistle to The Colossians

- c) The afflictions Paul experienced were those which God had told Ananias about (Acts 9:16). In that passage the reason for his sufferings were for “my (Christ’s) name’s sake”. In Colossians 1:24 they are for the blessing of sinners and saints, for Paul suffered much for them. Concerning the situation in Corinth Paul wrote: “Out of much affliction and anguish of heart” (2 Cor. 2:4). He will speak of his sufferings in (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 1:5-6; 2 Tim. 3:11; his weeping (Phil. 3:18; 2 Cor. 2:4).
- d) Peter brings to the attention of the saints that they were, “partakers of Christ’s sufferings” (1 Pet. 4:13). And it is in this way Paul speaks of “filling up”. Like those saints, Paul was a sympathetic fellow sufferer with the Lord, filling up the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24). Each in their own generation can be said to be, “partakers of Christ’s sufferings” by their suffering in fellowship with the Lord. They are enduring their own complement for that generation. This is what is meant by “filling up”. Such saints do not shirk but staying steadfast to that which God had appointed for the blessing of the saints of that generation. There are saints today who are being afflicted for the cause of Christ, some imprisoned, some humiliated, some despised, and some slain, but the enduring brings blessing to them and others. Had Paul not been put in prison, those of Caesar’s household would not have heard the gospel (Phil. 1:12-13), and we would not have the prison epistles.
- e) It is the suffering sympathetically with the cause of Christ for the perfecting of the saints (Col. 1:28).

Colossians 1:25-26

- a) When it says: “fulfil the word of God”, what does it mean? It has been suggested that Paul, by his suffering for the greater glory of God, was the fulfilling of the previously given prophecy (Acts 9:16). However, I do not think this is the answer.
- b) That which I understand it to mean is, all the doctrine concerning Israel had been fully given, but there was one glorious truth concerning the church which had never been revealed, that of the mystery of the church. This was a truth revealed to Paul (Eph. 3:3).
 - i) It had been hid “from ages and from generations (Col. 1:26)
 - ii) It was “not made known to the sons of men” (Eph. 1:5) and from the beginning of the world had been hid in God” (Eph. 3:9).

That mystery of the union of the Jews and Gentiles into one living organism with Christ as the Head was because of another mystery: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). Paul was the channel chosen by God to fulfill or bring to completion the revelation of God concerning the church.

**May God grant us good understanding as He, by His Holy Spirit, deigns to guide us into all truth.
John 16:13**

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