

Colossians

Authorship: This epistle was written by the apostle Paul while he was in prison (Perhaps while he was under house arrest in Rome).

Date: If the letter to the Colossians was written from Rome a likely date would fall in the early AD 60's.

Place in Canon: New Testament - Prison Epistle.

Genre: Letter

Unique Features: Colossians has many verbal parallels with Ephesians. Ephesians is a church letter and Colossians is a Christ letter. Ephesians gives the grandness view of the church. Colossians gives the grandness view of Christ. The church at Colosse was not founded by Paul but by a man named Epaphras (1:7, 4:12).

Background & Historical Situation: Paul's contact with Colosse was most likely while he was at Ephesus. Luke tells us in Acts 19:10 that Paul was in Ephesus for a couple of years. During that time it is believed that he made contact with those living in Colosse and Laodicea which were only about 12 miles apart. Some heard and believed the gospel. Some of the people that are from or are connected with Colosse are Epaphras, Philemon, Apphia, Archippus, and Onesimus. What is interesting about Colosse was that it was located in the Lycus Valley. During the first century there were many earthquakes in this region. However, the Lycus Valley was best known as a place that was filled with all kinds of Pagan religions and philosophy. It was thoroughly syncretistic (a mixture of beliefs and values). It was a place prided and visited by many teachers and scholars. It was infected with a form of Gnosticism which is identified as the Colossian heresy.

Purpose: It appears that Paul wrote to the Colossians with a two-fold purpose in mind. First, he wanted to assure the Colossians and Laodiceans of his sincere concern for them. Second, he wanted to combat the false teaching that took liberties in giving a Gnostic reinterpretation of Jesus. Gnostics believed in intermediary beings (angels, ghost, etc.). This form of false teaching promoted that Jesus was not really human. That what the disciple really witnessed was a ghost and not the resurrected body of Jesus.

Key Passage: 1:15-20 Jesus is like God. He is not a created being but He is the image of the invisible God. Jesus is the head of the church. The head and the body are concerned with reconciliation.

- Outline:**
- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - A. Sender (1:1)
 - B. Addressee (1:2a)
 - C. Greeting (1:2b)
 - II. Thanksgiving and Prayer (1:3-14)
 - A. Thanksgiving for the Colossian's Love (1:3-8)
 - B. Prayer for Knowledge and Godly Conduct (1:9-14)
 - III. Body (1:15-3:4)
 - A. Christ's Work and the Reconciling of the Gentiles (1:15-23)
 - B. Paul's Ministry to the Gentiles (1:24-2:5)
 - C. Error and Antidote (2:6-19)
 - D. New Life in Christ (2:20-3:4)
 - IV. Ethical Exhortations and Instructions
 - A. Put to Death what is Earthly (3:5-11)
 - B. Put on Christian Virtues (3:12-17)
 - C. Relations within Christian Households (3:18-4:1)
 - D. Continue in Prayer (4:2-4)
 - E. Conduct toward Outsiders (4:5-6)
 - V. Closing (4:7-18)
 - A. Greeting (4:7-17)
 - B. Benediction (4:18)

Structure: The letter to the Colossians follows the normal Greco-Roman letter writing form.

Sources:

Elwell, Walter A. and Robert W. Yarbrough. *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1998).
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