

THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE

Colossians 1:1-10

Introduction:

Colossae was a town church. It was about a hundred miles from Ephesus in the upper part of a valley - Lycus. And it was about ~~75~~ miles, or 10 miles rather from Laodicea and 13 miles from Hierapolis. It was never a large or a rich community - but in the age of the Persians and the Greeks empires - Zerxes halted his Army there. And he was on his way where the Spartan guards were annihilated.

Years later, Cyprus passed through with his 10,000 Greeks and 100,000 Barbarians - it is said in history they halted a week at Colossae.

But all the historians agree or ascribe Colossae as a small town.

Now the three communities in the valley each had a Christian church established. And each of these churches had survived many difficulties, however, they were the object of the most dangerous heresay of that period.

I should like to divide our study into three or four statements.

- ✓ 1. Historical Insight
- ✓ 2. Hot Issues
- ✓ 3. Hindrances Incurred
- ✓ 4. Honest Information

I. Historical Insight

Now I have said that Colossae was a small town. But it had adopted mysticism and false doctrines began to spring up.

Now the three churches had been constituted no doubt during Paul's ministry at Ephesus, but not by Paul in person. He did not visit these communities. In fact, the Scripture says that many of them did not know him by face. Chapter 2:1. reads - for many have not seen my face in the flesh. It is almost certain that the church was not planted by Paul himself. That he had never visited that city when he wrote the epistle.

The epistle speaks of his knowledge about the Colossian Christians by report.

Chapter 1:4 - Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints.

V. 9 - For this cause, we also, since the day we heard it - do not cease to pray for you and to desire that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

He makes no mention of any personal incident as having occurred during his sojourn among them. This he always mentions when writing to particular churches. But Col. 2:1 proves that he has never seen many of them in the flesh.

Epaphras was the founder of this church - as well as those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

And yet Colossae was no doubt one of the fruits of Paul's labors after all. As we may gather from the story of his work in Ephesus, near by - as recorded in Acts 19:10-26 - the intercourse between the surrounding country was close and people like Philemon and Epaphras could have come from Colossae and have listened to Paul preach. So the man who planted this church, who directly established it was Epaphras, an evangelist who lived at Colossae. He established the churches but

Archippus, the son of Philemon, was the pastor at Colossae.

Now in the historical insight here, we see that the occasion of the letter to the Colossians was the visit of Epaphras to Paul in Rome - giving him an account of the state of affairs in the church. There were many errors that were developing in the church. And it was in part mystic speculation and a mixture of Judiasm - 2:16.

Now it is that Paul addresses these people as spiritual children. They had been converted, no doubt, by the Christians who had operated at Ephesus, in the evangelistic program. And he was the first to preach the Gospel in his own home town.

Chapter 1:6 - We read this in reference to him - also in the 7th Verse, that he had learned this from his fellow worker. And in the 4th Chapter, 12th Verse, he says Epaphras - who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluted you, always laboring, fervently for you. That ye may stand perfect and complete in the will of God. So he was an honorable man, dearly beloved, a bond servant who lived a similar life as Paul. And Paul speaks highly of him - Chapter 1:7. It says that he is worthy of the title of minister of Christ. And he has brought this perplexing situation to seek the council of Paul. He has a deep personal interest in the situation here.

He states that he does not cease to pray for this waivering congregation - that they might stand fast. And he was not ashamed to be a lined with the Apostle Paul.

In this historical insight, we have some information about the church that is derived from two letters by Paul - one to the church and another to Philemon. A Christian of the community and supposed that he was a member of this church.

Now they ^{things} discussed in the letter to the church - it may have been vague and somewhat difficult for the average reader to understand or appreciate. Now this is

where you have to put on your thinking cap. It deals with philosophical subjects of little interest to practical Christians of our time.

The circumstances here were such as I hope that you will not get lost in the maize of things - but that you will be able to get this important lesson as we unfold about this church.

Now simply keep in mind that in the valley of Lycus - a terrible foe attack Christianity from within. It was an old foe - it made a subtle approach - and it was a fearful force. And the founder of the church visited Paul in Rome to seek advice as to how best to handle the heresy. It still persisted there. And let me see if I can't help you to understand this foe.

II. Hot Issues

Now using terms that we hear so much today in the news - about hot issues in politics, etc. that people are discussing. This was the same thing that was taking place in this church. And it had a doctrinal aspect to it.

It took two or three shapes - and there were two or three different labels that you might put on this. Now less you go to sleep and say that we don't have anything like this in the modern churches today, do we? Lets look at the issues.

2:16
First, there was Judaistic - now this was a little different from the changeable Galatians - it was Pharisaic in it's ritualism. Now Paul argued this point in the 2nd Chapter and 16th Verse with these people. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a Holy Day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath Day. In one statement, he answers those who are bound by the regulations of

days and feasts, and asecicism.

In whom also ye are circumcized with the circumcism made without hands in putting off the body, the sins of the flesh, by the circumcism of Christ. You have put off the sinful nature. It has been a spiritual circumcism he says. Not one that is bound by the flesh.

In V. 12 - buried with him in baptism - where in ye are also risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who has raised Him from the dead. You have been raised with Jesus Christ from among the dead. The symbolic burial of you past sins.

V. 14 - blotting out the handwriting of ordinances, was against us, and was contrary to us, and took it out of the way - nailing it on his cross. So you are saved, not by the law - but by grace. Now this was beyond your ability to pay for sin. Here was the hot issue. The Judaism was saying thus and so. And this heresay was not on the outside of the church - it was on the inside. And this was the thing that Paul was talking to these people about.

Second, the next hottest issue was gnosticism. Simply these were the knowing ones. Did you ever hear of any people like this today. Now this was a hot issue. People were attempting to pervert Christianity by learning and speculation. And they assumed that everything was in reach - by knowledge and by subjectivity.

In fact, this was rather a philosophy than a religion. They were more interested in the systems of the universe.

They denied the historical basis of the Gospel. They denied it's claim to authority. And they denied the spiritual freedom. And the equality of men.

It was more like a habit - it was a disposition. They developed to deny God in two or three ways.

First of all, they denied the creation of the world and how things came into being. They said God is unknowable. They taught that it was impossible for a man to come in contact or in touch with God. And that through several grades of eons - or emanations, that a man could learn from God.

Hence, they based it all on (angels) - and these grades or classes of angels they held - they were the ones that created the world. That God did not create it. This was just one of these eons that took possession of him. And that Jesus was a mere (man) - born of Joseph and Mary. And when he was crucified, the eon left him and he had no real divinity. And so they denied the direct agency of God in creation.

They also tried to give some sort of account for the origin of evil. They said there was two principles in the world - one was good and the other was evil. They said that evil rested in matter - and that the spirit was good. Therefore, this brought on the ascetic doctrines. The denial of the appetite - just as far as one could - and hold body and soul together. For instances, they would take a drink of water and a crust of bread - and have one simple garment, would not marry, withdraw from the world as much as possible. And in this way, they would triumph over sin. Now this idea has been incorporated by some religions that you know about today. The matter of fasting - refusal to eat certain things. Of penance, of scourgings - these are examples. Now Paul had to take the occasion here to deal with these issues. They had questions about how the work of the creation could be explained. And how can we account for the existance of evil. And how can we reconcile the creation of the world and the existance of sin with a holy God as the creator. And so if God created the universe out of nothing - then God is holy, and he could not have brought this evil into the world. And so they worked out their own line of

answers to these matters.

A section of the church was dissatisfied with the simplicity of the Gospel and they sought to advance something higher by adopting the current speculations. This had worked its way into the Christian church and was corrupting the church. They put knowledge in the place that Christian faith had occupied. What must I do to be saved - they felt they knew the secrets and had the mystery. They had this special knowledge and no one else had it. And they attempted a solution to the problem, by denying the humanity of Jesus Christ and denying that he was divine. And they had knowledge as if others were destitute of it. They thought themselves wise.

Another angle of this issue was that it led to rigid contact with matter which should be reduced to a minimum. Thus the material part of man should be subdued and should live on a spare diet and should not marry. He would avoid the flesh of animals and the anointing of his body with olive oil. They argued that matter was everywhere and the only way to escape it was to be indifferent to the world.

On the other hand, there were those who said, just follow your own impulses.

The other thing, the third not issue which these people were contending with - was the doctrine of the essenes. They do not sacrifice animals - they lived in villages, they avoided the cities. Some of them cultivate soil. They do not store up treasures. They do not make arms for military. They avoid commerce. If this might make them covetous - they abstain from work on the seventh day. They assemble in sacred buildings. They have everything in common, their expenses, their garments, their food. If they work for wages - they do not retain them. But bring them into the common stock. If one is sick - he is cared for. Some of them were shepherds - they had general managers to purchase whatever was necessary. They lived and ate

together at the same table. Their dress was common.

One of the queer things about these folks - they reputiated marriage because they looked on a woman as a selfish creature. They said that she was given to jealousy. And that a man bound to a woman would be hampered by his affections. A free man - was a slave. So they were building up a little society. This geological position here in the church - new members into this society were gotten after a man reached material years. They did not take in young people or children - they were too unstable. So they lived on bread and vegetables and they condemned any natural cravings - and they disengaged themselves from the world. Now these people were some worshippers.

At the break of day, they would address certain prayers to the Son, upon rising.

And then at the close of the day, they would have prayers again.

Now they did not believe in the resurrection of the body. They believed in the continuance of the soul's life - but they maintained that the soul was just a prisoner in jail in the body. And only at death would it be set free. They placed angels in the place of worship. They were like the gnostics. They had secret doctrine - they were exclusive. They had this false doctrine that crept into the church at Colossae. Now this was the issue that Paul, in his letter, was trying to combat - this error of these intellectuals. The teaching of these select few who had a monopoly on superior wisdom. And Paul comes and says we have a universal Gospel message. This Gospel is for every man. They were withdrawing to convents and these false doctrines were spreading.

There was an exclusive spirit. They had preminent knowledge and wisdom. They speculated on the creation, evil, and angels, and a supreme God - that he

could have nothing to do with evil.

They began to practice this. Chapter 1:28. He warned that every man, and teaching all men in wisdom - we may present every man perfect in Jesus Christ. (Not just a few.) At the bottom of these issues was the yearning, the earnestness of the unsatisfied desire of the soul. There was a sense of need that had not been met. There was a aching void that the world had never filled. And they began to search in vain to answer this. And this has been the issue displayed everywhere, in every age. Even the errors of our time. In the form of Christian Science, etc.

These Christians were striving with principles that were more or less found in the Gospel - but there was an effort to modify them - pervert them in regard to the person of Jesus Christ.

And second, there was with regard to Christ's redemption - they felt that it was by observances, and ascetic methods that they would bring in salvation through their own merits. And this discredited the work of Jesus, our Saviour.

Now the process of their reasoning then led them to the monastery. Sin resides in the Bible - if you are going to get rid of sin, then you have to do thus and so. Or sin cannot touch your soul - until you live. You will not be punished for your indulgence because you are going to be free from your body when you die.

III. Hindrances Incurred

Now Paul said, this was (irreligious). And it was frivolous talk. And it was

a false knowledge. It was bringing about controversy and it led people - instead of faith they were following the heresy.

And the real hindrance was that it was reference to the true nature, the office and the mission of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the visible representation of the invisible God. The first born and Lord of all creation. He was here before all things and he is the source of Christian excellence. He is superior to all ranks of heavenly beings. He is the head of the church - and he is the one that gives life and gives unity.

They were hindering his mission because he had come to secure the release of the captives from sin and to reconcile the estranged to God. And he alone can impart full knowledge of God's truth to triumph over all hostile powers. And that he is now at the right hand of God.

1:20 Chapter 1:20 - And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him, to reconcile all things - to himself by him - I say whether they be things in earth or things in Heaven. His method was through the blood and the cross. It was his human body by death that brought about this.

22 In the body of his flesh, V. 22, through death, to present you wholly, unapproachable in his sight.

He sums it up, in God, incarnated in Christ - the mediator and the head of the church. And so, the hindrances incurred was that it was making the redemption naught.

Think not that these heresies or this valley are dead, Christianity has no more to be warned against than this today.

These hindrances are in our colleges, our universities and they haunt us at every

us at every turn.

There are would-be wise professors undermining Christians monotheism - with their gnostic chatter. They undermine Christian practice by separating knowledge from action. They undermine the very basis of the Gospel and explain it away in history.

Those today, still preach that through the emanations from God, through endless aeons - has brought about the evolution. Modern gnostics reason on the ascending scale - both the deity of Christ, the supreme authority of the inspired revelation of the Scripture, and the vicarious atonement.

These are speculated philosophies.

Now they have no power to warm the cold heart, they reclaim the wayward life, they promote the vast missionary enterprises, to put passion in a soul, with zeal for Christ.

They are filled with intellect and much of this information is being digested. There are institutions that have been founded and maintained by questioning Christians - where Christ's name is rarely mentioned. Where the birth is stomped at. Where his bodily resurrection is rejected as being absurd. And where his atoning sacrifice is mocked as a outrage on justice.

These hindrances are everywhere. And the time has arrived - when those destroying the faith of the young - were exposed as Paul put them to task. And really, they should not be shunned today. We, as Christians, should stand up and say that the only abiding character is the Christian, the only Jesus of the Gospel was the unique son of God, the only way sinners become children of God is to have faith in Jesus Christ. And we ought to stand

if they believe this. If they do not believe this and teach this - and practice these truths - then they do not fulfill the requirements of an instructor or a leader for our young people today.

This, teaching in the colleges is then worse than the chemist who would put poison in the food. They put poison in the minds of the students. It is better to destroy the human life than to wreck the immortal soul.

But they say it is a question of moral freedom - of intellectual liberty. Such a plea is nonsense. The question is far deeper - it is personal honor.

A young man, being ordained to the Gospel ministry, had gone through the questions that had been asked of him. And after the ordination service was over, a Deacon of the church came up to him, said - I want to congratulate you but there is one question that I would like to ask you. If you ever find yourself out of harmony with the doctrines you have subscribed tonight - and in the confidence in which this church ordained you, what are you doing to do. Are you going to try and reform your denomination - or are you going to have the honor of manhood and character to surrender your credentials as a minister of the Gospel in this denomination whose view you no longer represent. The young man's instant reply was - I will be honest and surrender my credentials.

Now we would say that that Deacon hit the nail right on the head. That is the question - the principle which underlies the ministry and Christian education in our colleges. One has no moral right to undo - he is expected to do or pull down what he is ordained or elected to build up. Should you find yourself out of harmony with the cherished historical principles, then we expect you to have the honor to surrender your partition or position. It is really not honest to accept the financial support of a church of a denomination, of a college, or seminary

us at every turn.

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of God is to have faith in Jesus Christ. And we ought to ask those who teach -

and to undermine the faith that you are appointed to uphold. It is like getting money under a false pretense. It is really a fraud and a hindrance to the cause of Christ.

Remember these gnostics were inside the churches - rather than outside. They were more harmful on the outside - they could have not had the approach and enjoyment as members on the inside.

But these people get on the inside - then they have as Paul says, crept in unnoticed. Now he warns of this - these people who lead astray by means of their philosophy, their idle fancies, and follow after human tradition - instead of following Christ. They, themselves, seem to be enlightened - but they were a small group of intellectuals of colleges, universities, seminaries, that retained church membership - but their thoughts, words, and actions are false to the very nature and command upon what the church is founded. They think they are wise. They are in their own conceit. Those dealing with the kingdom know they have little evangelistic zeal, and that it is all selfish purpose.

Suppose the Professor has your son and your daughter at a period in life under circumstances when they are susceptible to impressions. And you have, instead of putting peace of mind and salvation to a useful life, this skeptical Professor shakes by one stroke the structure of belief constructed by his parents, and by his pastor.

An educator by his example, by his word of criticism, can paralyze. One cannot know too much for the Christian - provided what he knows is real knowledge and not speculation. Now to these gnostics - Paul replies, we know in part, someday we are going to have the clear light. They altared the Holy Scriptures. They formed their opinions according to their logic. These hindrances had incurred much damage.

IV. Honest Information

Just a word about what Paul had to say about these people. You must remember that some of these people were of the better social class. Paul takes note of their exceptional learning. And he seeks to give them some honest information. He brings to them an interpretation of the Word of God. It will enlighten.

Philemon was a prosperious land owner, slave owner, in this church. He was rich and he had faith. And his son, Archippus entered the ministry.

We need today to have more recruits in the ministry. Even from the better families. I wonder if it is not the lack of atmosphere in the homes where there is devotion - that sons will come to think that preaching is a life work and a calling.

One great man said, I only have one child and she has a son. I would rather he would be a Baptist preacher than to win any honor that man can bestow. Now when parents have such ambitions - more sons of the well to do will enlist in the ranks of the preacher.

Paul was honest in sending out this letter to the brethren. It was to be read publicly and re-read. And he told them that Christ was the head of the church and that Christ was supreme over angels. And Christ has brought reconciliation through his death.

He informs them that this liberal doctrinal drift - they were tempted with their elaborate ceremonies. It was not rooted and grounded in the faith. It was like a virous in the church family.

This has always been a danger - even today. Of advancing away from the base.

Of cutting off the supply that really meets the need.

Gradually people today want to accomodate their own ideas in a new population and slowly they are absorbed and forget the first principles of Christ. Fortunately Paul said at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess him as King of Glory now. My dear Brothers, the Lord Jesus shall return again. With his Father's Glory and with his angel friends. For all needs of empire meet upon his brow and our hearts confess from King of Glory now.

Paul was honest to tell them that they had neglected the practical Christianity. And they had nothing that was permanent. It had chilled their spiritual lives. They were lacking in real wisdom. And there was a tendency to slow down on their work.

4:17 Paul gave some honest information - Chapter 4:17 - And take heed to the ministry which thou has received in the Lord, that thou fulfill it. This ministry is not of man but it is the work that you receive of the Lord Jesus Christ. It requires complete dedication - give your whole self to it. Discharge your duties carefully. And take heed, he says, to these people who have ears that want to hear things that are soft. The preacher should never be shaped by the environment - he should never be influenced to grow in the mold - they will mar him.

But he was to go about his everyday duties. Putting on Christ-like qualities - appropriating the Gospel in the observance of Christian principles. To preach the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's own conversion confirms this. He was a sample of the grace of God. No sinner needs to despair. Faithful is the saying and worthy of all expectation. Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom, I am the chief.

The church here had an example - Onesimus. Who was Philemon's slave in Colossae. They should not rebel in these theories of false philosophy. This was not to be the fruit of the Gospel - but they must return to the honest way of life.

4:9 Chapter 4:9 - He tells about this faithful and beloved brother. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here. Now he deals with the question of slavery here. He talked about the matter of surrender and property rights.

I think quite often if people understood slavery in the South, that in Virginia between 1619 and 1772, they say that Virginia passed 33 legislative acts ranging from graduated taxes to discriminatory laws - designed to discourage slavery in the Colony. And the King in his counsel vetoed all of these acts.

In 1778 Virginia, on her own choice, enacted - no slave or slaves hereafter shall be imported into the Commonwealth by sea or land - nor shall any slaves be imported, sold, or bought by any person whatsoever.

Now it was the ~~blundering~~ abolitionists and the misguided enthusiasts that aggravated the question because in 1856 General Lee said, we see that the course will be abolishing slavery. We give our aid to it in prayer and we put it in his hands who sees the end, and chooses to work by slow influences.

People were not Christian enough to settle this slavery. I wonder today if we are Christian enough to build a brotherhood out of the wreckage of suspicion and distrust and strife, that we have today.

Lord, God of Hosts - be with us yet. Less we forget, less we forget.