

## 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 ~~7~~ 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 wavering 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 <sup>things</sup> 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 suttle 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 heresay. 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 polities, 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 hot 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 frivorous talk. And it was