

NAME

The book gets its name from city it is addressed to. See below for a discussion of Recipient(s).

AUTHOR

NASB - Introduction to Colossians:

That Colossians is a genuine letter of Paul is not usually disputed. In the early church, all who speak on the subject of authorship ascribe it to Paul. In recent years (19th century) some liberal scholarship has questioned the authorship of Paul. Their main contention is an assertion that the heresy refuted in chapter 2 was second century Gnosticism. But a careful analysis of Chapter 2 shows that the heresy referred to there is noticeably less developed than the Gnosticism of leading Gnostic teachers of the second and third centuries.

DATE

The letter can be dated during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome (59-61/62 A.D.), where he spent at least two years under house arrest (Acts 28:16-31). Colossians should be dated around 60-61 A.D., in the same year as Ephesians and Philemon. Colossians is one of Paul's Prison Epistles (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon).

THEME

Halley (page 44): *"Deity of Jesus"*

Mitchell: *"To expose error and exhort godliness."*

Throughout Church history there have been two dangers confronting God's people. There has been the danger of Christianity freezing into a form as exemplified in Roman Catholicism, or the danger of evaporating into a philosophy as exemplified in Christian Science. But Jesus is neither ice nor vapor. He is the water of life. The Colossian church was headed in the direction of reducing Christianity to a vaporous philosophy.

NASB - Introduction to Colossians

Paul's purpose is to refute the Colossian heresy. To accomplish this goal, he exalts Christ as the very image of God (1:15), the Creator (1:16), the preexistent sustainer of all things (1:17), the head of the Church (1:18), the first to be resurrected (1:19), the fullness of deity in bodily form (1:19; 2:9), and the reconciler (1:20-22). Thus Christ is completely adequate. We "have been made complete" in Christ (2:10). On the other hand, the Colossian heresy was altogether inadequate. It was a hollow and deceptive philosophy (2:8), lacking any ability to restrain the old sinful nature (2:23).

Colossian Heresy:

A new form of error was being introduced. Paul never explicitly describes the false teaching he opposes. The nature of the heresy must be inferred from statements he made in opposition to the false teachers. An analysis of his refutation suggests that the heresy was diverse in nature. The heresy seemed to be a mixture of Jewish legalism and Oriental mysticism - an extreme form of Judaism and an early stage of Gnosticism. It closely resembles the full blown Gnosticism of the 2nd century.

Gnosticism taught that matter was polluting. Therefore, the material body was to be degraded. Often this was done by self abasement and rigid asceticism. The Gnostic also postulated an elaborate series of intermediate beings (called aeons) between God (pure spirit) and the material world. Each aeon was progressively slightly less like God until one of the lesser aeons created matter. The high god was to be worshipped through these aeons.

Paul proceeds to write this special letter to the Colossian church to deal with this special problem. He wrote it in close conjunction with the Ephesian letter, because the more general letter (Ephesians) was not adequate to deal with the unique heresy at Colossae. In comparing Ephesians and Colossians, out of 210 verses, 78 contain similar phraseology. Both focus on the Gospel. Yet each is different in emphasis.

Halley (page 742):

Ephesians focuses on the unity and grandeur of the Church; Colossians emphasizes the deity and all-sufficiency of Christ as contrasted with the emptiness of mere human philosophy.

A Comparison of Ephesians and Colossians (Nelson's):

<u>Ephesians</u>	<u>Colossians</u>
Jesus Christ: Lord of the Church	Jesus Christ: Lord of the cosmos
Emphasis on the church as the body of Christ but also affirms Christ as Head Of the church	Emphasis on Christ as the Head of the cosmos and the church
Less personal and probably a circular epistle	More personal and local-church orientated
Address the errors of false teaching less directly (Heresy is not yet a major danger)	Speaks to the errors of false doctrine directly (heresy is more threatening)
Common themes treated extensively	Common themes treated briefly

Some particular elements of Gnosticism are (NASB - Introduction to Colossians):

1. Ceremonialism: It held to strict rules about the kinds of permissible food and drink, religious festivals (2:16,17), and circumcision (2:11; 3:11).
2. Asceticism (austere rules): *"Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!"* (2:21,23).
3. Angel worship: See 2:18.
4. Depreciation of Jesus: This is implied in Paul's stress on the supremacy of Jesus (1:15-20; 2:2-3:9)
5. Secret knowledge: The Gnostics boasted of this (see 2:18 and Paul's emphasis in 2:2,3 on Jesus, *"in Whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom."*).
6. Reliance on human wisdom and tradition: See 2:4,8.

Mitchell:

Paul's method in attacking these problems is a positive presentation of the supremacy of Christ. Rather than denounce the wrong he declares the truth. Positive truth always exposes error. He shows the Colossians that as Christians they have Christ and when you have Christ you have everything. You have need of nothing, be it angels, ritual, knowledge, etc.

Key Word (Nelson's): The Preeminence of Christ - The resounding theme in Colossians is the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ in all things. The believer is complete in Him alone and lacks nothing because "In Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (2:9).

Key Verses:

"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27)

"For in Him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in Him, who is the head of all rule and authority." (Colossians 2:9,10)

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." (Colossians 3:1,2)

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 3 - Chapter 3 links the three themes of Colossians together showing their cause and effect relationship: Because the believer is risen with Christ (3:1-4), he is to put off the old man and put on the new (3:5-17), which will result in holiness in all relationships (3:18-25).

Outline:

- I. Introduction 1:1-14
- II. The Pre-eminence of Christ (theological discussion) 1:15-2:3
 - A. In creation 1:15-17
 - B. In the Church 1:18-2:3
- III. The Program of the Church (practical discussion) 2:4-4:6
 - A. Dangers to avoid 2:4-8
 - B. Doctrine to remember 2:9-15
 - C. Deductions to follow 2:16-3:4
 - D. Duty to perform 3:5-4:6
- IV. Conclusion 4:7-18

RECIPIENTS

Colossae was located in Phrygia (southwest Turkey) about 120 miles inland of Ephesus and about 10 miles up the Lycus valley from Laodicea. Colosse had been located on the most important east-west trade route from Ephesus on the Aegean Sea to the Euphrates River. But when Laodicea was founded a short distance away the traffic re-routed through the new city. By the first century A.D. Colosse was diminished to a second-rate market town which had been surpassed long ago in power and importance by the neighboring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:3).

Colossae was never actually visited by Paul. During Paul's third missionary journey Paul was ministering in Ephesus where Epaphras was converted and carried the gospel to Colosse (1:7,8; 4:12,13; Acts 19:10). Archippus also had a fruitful ministry there (4:17; Philemon 2). Philemon was an active member of this church, as was Onesimus (Colossians 4:9). The young church that had grown up in Colosse had become the target of heretical attack, which led to Epaphras' visit to Paul in

Rome and ultimately the penning of the Colossian letter.

Epaphras had reported that the Colossian church had a faith in God and a love for the saints. There was spiritual growth and potential here - aside from the false teaching which was threatening to lead believers from the truth of Jesus Christ.

WARNING: Where there is the potential for God's people to do great things for God, Satan works to take the eyes of God's people from the simple truths of the Gospel.

Halley (page 741):

It seems that Epaphras then was also imprisoned in Rome (Philemon 23). Paul then wrote this letter and sent it with Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7-9), who also carried Paul's letter to the Ephesians and the one to Philemon (Ephesians 6:21).

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Colossians is pre-eminently the "christological letter." It places heavy emphasis on the full deity of Christ. All of the fullness of God is in Christ. All of Christ's fullness is available for every believer. To have Christ is to have everything.

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Robert H. Gundry, Ph.D., *A Survey Of The New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1970

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary (WCBS), and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartozián.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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