

Colossians

Introduction, Background, and Argument

1. Title and Destination

1.1 *ΠΡΟΣ ΚΟΛΟΣΣΑΙΕΣ* - "To the Colossians"

1.2 Colosse was located in the Lycus Valley about 120 miles east of Ephesus.

1.3 Colosse was a very small town that shipped its wool products down the Lycus River which flowed into the Meander River and into Miletus Bay. From there the products were shipped to various places in the ancient world.

1.4 Colosse was about 12 miles north of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

1.5 Colosse had most likely been evangelized by Epaphras who had been a disciple of Paul in Ephesus (1:7-8; 2:1; 4:12-13). Other possibilities are Timothy (1:1), Nymphas (4:15) or Philemon (Phlm 23).

2. Authorship

2.1 Paul is named as author three times in the letter (1:1, 23; 4:18)

2.2 Early church tradition

2.2.1 Muratorian Canon

2.2.2 Justin Martyr

2.2.3 Irenaeus

2.2.4 Clement of Alexandria

2.2.5 Tertullian

2.2.6 Origen

2.2.7 Marcion

2.2.8 Ignatius

2.2.9 Polycarp

2.2.10 Barnabas

2.3 Paul signed the letter with his own mark (4:18), a custom he mentioned in earlier letters (2 Thess 3:17; 1 Cor 16:21).

2.4 Many of Paul's associates are mentioned in the letter (Col 1:1; 4:7, 9-14, 17; Phlm 1, 23-24).

2.5 Close parallels with Ephesians support Paul's authorship of both letters.

2.6 Challenged by some as not Pauline because of the 55 Greek words not used in Paul's other epistles. However, the particular Christological heresy Paul was dealing with is the main cause for these particular words.

2.7 Some challenge the epistle as Pauline by claiming that it addresses Gnosticism which was not fully developed till the 2nd century AD. However, the letter does not address a full blown Gnosticism, only an early form.

3. Date

3.1 AD61

3.2 Paul was under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16-31).

3.3 Paul mentions Tychicus in both Ephesians and Colossians (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7), and in Ephesians he was in prison (Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20).

3.4 Neither Ephesians or Colossians mention a hopeful verdict for Paul as the other prison epistles of Philippians and Philemon do (Phil 1:19-21, 25, 27; 2:24; Phlm 22). Thus, it is likely that Ephesians and Colossians were written before these Philippians and Philemon.

4. Occasion

Epaphras, the pastor-teacher at Colosse, made a special trip to Rome to get Paul's advice on how to address the threat of a Christological heresy (Col 1:7; 4:12-13; Phlm 23). This heresy included elements of Jewish legalism, mysticism, and Gnosticism. This knowledge was secret and accessible only by superior intellect. The universe was a dualism where matter was evil and soul and mind good. This compromised the true humanity of Christ in His incarnation, resurrection, and death. True spirituality was ascetic and legalistic since it denied the body and its desires with strict compliance to the Mosaic Law. Jesus was viewed as perhaps the highest being in the ladder of emanations, but still only a created being. Other angels on this ladder should also be worshipped. Paul wrote to correct these Christological distortions. While Epaphras intended to take the letter back to the Colossians he was arrested and imprisoned (Phlm 23). Paul was forced to send the letter to the Colossians by way of Tychicus (Col 4:7) who also took the letter to the Ephesians (6:21). In Epaphras' place Archippus was to resume the pastoral duties (Col 4:17).

5. Purpose(s) of Writing

5.1 Paul's main purpose for writing was to correct the Christological heresy that had encroached. To do so he did not focus on the details of Jewish legalism, mysticism, and Gnosticism, but who Jesus Christ was. A strong Christology was the best answer to the heresy. Words with special meanings in the heresies he adapts and fills with orthodox meanings (e.g. fullness, knowledge).

5.2 Paul wrote to show the supremacy of Christ and that all they needed to advance spiritually and become mature was focus on Him.

5.3 Paul wrote to promote submission to Christ in human relationships.

5.4 Paul wrote to request prayer on his behalf

5.5 Paul wrote to explain the ministry of Tychicus and Onesimus.

5.6 Paul wrote to explain Epaphras' love and prayers for them.

5.7 Paul wrote to make sure this letter was read among the Laodiceans and the Laodicean letter was read among them.

5.8 Paul wrote to exhort Archippus to take up the role of pastor in Epaphras' absence.

6. Argument

Christ is supreme. He is not simply a creature on the ladder of emanations. He is God the creator who came in human flesh, who died for you and rose again, who destroyed the debt you owed, who reconciled you to Himself, who killed your old person and made you a new person, who made you spiritually alive with Him, who is in you, and your spiritual life. In Him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Therefore, you don't need anything except Christ to grow spiritually to become mature.

7. Themes

7.1 The theme is the supremacy of Christ.

7.2 A sub-theme is that Christ is all you need to grow spiritually.

8. Outline

8.1 Supremacy of Christ (1-2)

8.3 Submission to Christ (3-4)

9. Uniquenesses

9.1 Most Christological book in the NT.

9.2 One of only two books that ends with extensive list of greetings (also cf Romans).

9.3 One of only two books written to cities Paul had not visited.

9.4 Contains no quotations of the OT.

9.5 The letter shows numerous parallels with Ephesians.

10. Keys to Colossians

10.1 Key Word: Christ

10.2 Key Verse: 2:9-10, "For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority..."

10.3 Key Idea: Christ is God who is supreme over all. You don't need anything but Christ to grow spiritually.