

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: **Colossians 1:1-8**.
- B. Some contemporary concerns:
 - 1. How many Xians regularly read their horoscopes?
 - 2. Is there any relationship between diet and spiritual living?
 - 3. Does God speak to us today, or only through His Word?
 - 4. Do the Eastern religions have something offer the Xian?
- C. While this sounds very current, it is these very issues that Paul deals w/in Colossians.
- D. We live in an age of "syncretism" (trying to mix and harmonize various schools of thought). The church today desperately needs the message of Colossians. We live in a day when religious toleration is interpreted to mean "one religion is just as good as the other." Some people try to take the best from various religious systems and manufacture their own private religion. To many people JC is only one of several great religious teachers, with no more authority than they. He may be prominent, but He is definitely not preeminent.
- E. To take a stand for the unique and exclusive nature of the church is thought by many today to be intolerant or legalistic or even bigotry.

I. FROM PAUL, WITH LOVE (Col. 1:1-2).

- A. **The City.**
 - 1. Colossae was one of three cities located about 100 miles inland from Ephesus. The other two cities were Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13, 16). This area was a meeting point of East and West because an important trade route passed through there.
 - 2. All kinds of philosophies mingled in this cosmopolitan area, and religious hucksters abounded. There was a large Jewish colony in Colossae, and there was a constant influx of new ideas and doctrines from the East. This was fertile ground for religious speculation and heresies!
- B. **The Church.**
 - 1. How did the Colossian church begin? It was probably the outgrowth of Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus (Ac. 19,20). So effective was the witness of the church at Ephesus that "all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greek" (Ac. 19:10). This would include people in Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.
 - 2. Epaphras apparently was one of the key founders of the church in Colossae, for he shared the gospel with his friends there (1:7).
 - 3. The Colossians assembly may have been predominantly Gentile in its membership. The sins that Paul named (3:5-9) were commonly associated with the Gentiles, and his statements about the mystery applied more so to the Gentiles than to the Jews (1:25-29).
- C. **The Crisis.**
 - 1. Onesimus.
While Paul was a prisoner in Rome (Ac. 21-28) he met a runaway slave named Onesimus who belonged to Philemon, one of the leaders of the church in Colossae. Paul led Onesimus to Christ. He then wrote his letter to Philemon, asking his friend to forgive Onesimus and received him back as a brother in X.
 - 2. Epaphras.
About the same time, Epaphras showed up in Rome because he needed Paul's help. Some new doctrines were being taught in Colossae and were invading the church and creating problems. So, Paul wrote this letter to the Colossians in order to refute these heretical teachings and establish the truth of the gospel.
 - 3. What was the heresy that threatened the Colossian church?

- a. It was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism, with elements of what Bible scholars call Gnosticism. The false teachers promised a more perfect relationship with God if the brethren would add some of their practices and beliefs to their faith in X. Added to this was Jewish legalism.
- b. Some false teachers believed:
 - 1) Circumcision was helpful in spiritual development (2:11).
 - 2) The OT Law, especially the dietary laws, was also useful in attaining spiritual perfection (2:14-17).
 - 3) Definite rules and regulations told them what was good and evil (2:21).
4. This false teaching was a deceptive combination of many things: Jewish legalism, Oriental philosophy, pagan astrology, mysticism, and asceticism. Mix in a little Xianity and there would be something for everyone! And this is why it was so dangerous. The false teachers claimed that they were not **denying** the Xian faith, but only lifting it to a higher level.
5. Of course, this teaching was man-made philosophy based on traditions and not on divine truth (2:8).
6. JC alone is the preeminent One (1:18; 3:11). In His work on the cross, Jesus:
 - a. Settled the sin question (1:20).
 - b. Completely defeated all satanic forces (2:15).
 - c. Put an end to all worship of angels and heavenly bodies
 - d. Put an end to the legal demands of the Law (2:14-17).
 All the believer needs is Jesus!

D. **The Correspondence.**

1. In this letter, Paul used the vocabulary of the false teachers, but he did not use their definitions. He used these words in their true Xian meaning. In Colossians, we find words such as **fullness**, **perfect**, and **complete**, all of which were used by the Gnostics. Over 30 times Paul used the little word **all**. He also wrote about **wisdom**, which was a key term in the Gnostic vocabulary; he had a great deal to say about angels and spirit powers too.
2. Paul did not begin by attacking the false teachers and their doctrines. He began by exalting JC and showing His preeminence in five areas: the gospel message, redemption, creation, the church, and Paul's own ministry. Once he had established the preeminence of X, then Paul attacked the heretics on their own ground. In Col. 2, Paul exposed the false origin of their teachings and showed how their teachings contradicted everything Paul taught about JC.
3. The main theme is **the preeminence of JC** (1:18; 3:11). God has sent Jesus to die for us! Nothing needs to be added to our relationship with God through X. We are "complete in Him" (2:10), because the fulness of deity (God) dwells in Him (2:9).

II. FAITH, LOVE, AND HOPE.

A. **They Heard the Gospel** (Col. 1:5b-7).

1. The gospel is the good news that JC has solved the problem of sin through His death, burial, and resurrection.
2. The gospel is the "word of truth." It came from God and can be trusted (Jn. 17:17). There are many messages and ideas that can be called **true**, but only God's word can be called **truth**.
3. The gospel is the message of God's grace. Two words in the Xian vocabulary are often confused: *grace* and *mercy*. God in His grace gives me what I do not deserve; yet in His mercy, God does not give me what I do deserve.
4. Paul said that the gospel was bearing fruit in all the world. The word of God is the only seed that can be planted anywhere in the world and bear fruit. False teachers do not take their message to all the world. They go where the gospel has already gone and try to lead believers astray. They have no good news for lost sinners!

- B. **They Believed in Christ (Col. 1:4).**
1. We are not saved by faith in faith. The modern attitude is, "If you believe, you are safe." But the obvious question is, "Believe in *what?*" Faith is not to be just a mental assent to a body of doctrines, no matter how true those doctrines may be. Faith is not an emotional concern. Faith is a commitment to JC.
 2. Saving faith is grounded in the gospel (1:23). It is the word of God that gives us assurance. As we grow in the Lord, our faith becomes steadfast (2:5) and established (2:7).
- C. **They were Discipled (Col. 1:7).**
1. In that day, a disciple was not simply a person who sat and listened to a teacher. He was someone who lived with the teachers and who learned by listening, looking, and living. Discipleship involved more than enrolling in a school and attending lectures. It meant total surrender to the teacher. It meant learning by living.
 2. A modern-day example would be the training of doctors, or those in trade apprenticeships.
- D. **They became Faithful to Christ (Col. 1:6, 8).**
1. Faith comes through hearing of God's word (Rom. 10:17). Love is another evidence of salvation, without which all else is meaningless (1Cor. 13:1-4). Hope is yet another characteristic of the believer in X. As our faith and love grows, so will our hope be better defined and assured.
 2. Our Xian journey begins in faith, it is sustained by love, and the future is anchored by hope.

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. The message of the book of Colossians is as timely as our newspapers.
- B. The power of X is just as fresh today as it was in the first century.
- C. X is the preeminent One, give your life to Him!
- D. Plan of salvation for non-Xians; erring Xians.