

COLOSSIANS

Introduction

Author. The pauline authorship of this letter is normally undisputed. The book claims to be written by Paul (1:1) and the circumstances (4:10-18) and theology suggest the apostle as well.

Date. A date early in Paul's first Roman imprisonment is likely. 60 A. D. would be reasonable.

Occasion. The church at Colossae was not started by Paul, but rather, by one of his converts, Epaphras (1:7-8; 4:12-13). Thus, Paul is not building on the foundation of another, but is ministering in this letter to his "grandchildren" in the faith.

Paul had evidently heard from Epaphras of the struggles of the Colossian church, particularly the problem of the dangerous heresy which had arisen there. Therefore, Paul writes to strengthen and confirm the church in the truth of the gospel and to crush the dangerous heresy which had gained a foothold there.

Message Statement. *Jesus Christ ought to have first place in every area of life.*

Argument

- 1A INTRODUCTION 1:1-14
Paul's introduction in this epistle is relatively positive. Although the doctrinal issues which faced the Colossians were serious, Paul's thanks for the Colossians expresses a confidence in their growth and adherence to the gospel. He commends them for their display of basic Christian virtues, faith and love, and prays for their continued growth. His prayer for them ends with a focus upon God in the persons of the Father and the Son. This serves as a transition into the body of the letter which discusses the superiority and supremacy of the son in all areas of life.
- 1B JESUS CHRIST IS SUPREME OVER ALL OF LIFE 1:15--4:6
This, the heart of the epistle extols and explains the place of Jesus Christ in the lives of the Colossians. Paul first teaches positively about the supremacy of Christ and then uses this as a basis for warning against false teachings. He closes the section with an application of Jesus' supremacy as it relates to various practical facets of the readers' lives
- 1B The General Statement 1:15-29
Paul's strategy in combatting the problems at Colossae places positive teaching about Christ at the forefront of his message. Paul immediately discusses the person and work of Jesus Christ and then delineates the implications for the readers and the writer.
- 1C The reasons 1:15-20
Paul reviews the person and work of Jesus to establish the basis for His supremacy over all. He is first of all deity, the image of God. He is also the creator and sustainer of all life, the head of the church and the reconciler of all the world. The proper result of these things is ". . . *that in everything He might have the supremacy*" (1:18).
- 2C The benefits for believers 1:21-23
The basic benefit of the person and work of Christ for believers is the salvation and hope which they have. Perhaps betraying a hint of his warning against false teachings later in the letter, Paul adds a conditional element to his statement for the believers. That is, he states that Christ is their hope

"... if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel" (1:23). Paul is not disavowing the truth of perseverance; rather, as elsewhere, he teaches that perseverance is the demonstration of salvation.

- 3C The obligations for Paul 1:24-29
The person and work of Christ place great obligations on Paul, namely, to suffer and to proclaim him in all the world. Again, perhaps with the next section in mind, Paul states that his particular obligation to Christ is to proclaim the gospel of salvation by faith especially to the Gentiles. Paul's calling to Gentiles as Gentiles is a subtle reminder of correct doctrine for a people who were challenged to keep the law.
- 2B Over False Religions 2:1-23
For the first time Paul addresses the issue of false teaching. This particular brand of heresy seems to be a mixture of Jewish ceremonialism, asceticism and worship of angels. Paul's attack is once again straightforward. He first presents the truth of Christ and then denies the error of this teaching.
- 1C The basic principle of correct teaching 2:1-8
Paul clearly states (2:2-4) that his purpose in writing is to inform the people about correct doctrine as the best preventive medicine against false teaching. Because this is not new teaching Paul admonishes the people to continue to live as they have been taught and to deny the deceptive philosophies with which they have been recently challenged. The bases of these new teachings are simply human tradition and the principles of the world.
- 2C The basis of superiority: Jesus' victory at calvary 2:9-15
The center of Paul's theology here is the cross. In the cross, Jesus not only gained victory for the believer but also victory over the condemnation of the law upon sinners and over supernatural powers. In distinction to the false teachings, the work of Christ, and not the work of the believer, is Paul's focus.
- 3C The implications of superiority 2:16-23
Christ's victory over the law and supernatural powers has both simple and powerful implications for the believer. Because of what Jesus has done the believer ought to resist the pressures to conform to false teaching (2:16-19) and reject the principles of that teaching in their daily practice (2:20-23).
- 3B Over True Religion 3:1--4:6
With a short refutation of the theology and practice of the false teaching Paul then moves onto the implications of Jesus' supremacy in true and undefiled religion. Paul gives general and specific principles for Christian behavior.
- 1C The general principles 3:1-4
The basic principle from which the Christian's practice evolves is his union with Christ and the heavenly life they share. Because the Christian's life is hidden with Christ in God, earthly practices and principles have no place in his being.
- 2C The specific applications 3:5--4:6
Paul's applications for the believers are divided in to two sections: for all (3:5-17; 4:2-6) and for specific groups (3:18--4:1). His counsel to all involves putting away earthly practices and replacing them with godly character. In his exhortations to specific groups he appeals first to the relationships between spouses (3:18-19), then parents and children (3:20-21), and finally masters and slaves (3:22-4:1).
- 1C CONCLUSION 4:7-18
In typical pauline fashion, Paul closes with personal greetings and then a benediction. As in the epistle to Rome, a city which he had never visited, he greets, under the circumstances, a large amount of people. This might lend credibility to his message or at least establish that he was not building upon another's foundation (Romans 15:20).

