

Contending For The Faith
Lesson #17 May 13, 2020 Colossians: Background & Introduction

"Man, duped by the age-old lie of Satan, continues to believe in himself and his ability to solve his problems apart from God as He is revealed in Scripture. Through one avenue or another, man continues to offer his own manmade solutions for the ills of society whether in the form of secular humanism or religious syncretism."

Asia Minor was the seedbed for what developed into 2nd century Gnosticism. The Colossian church was witnessing the beginning of a heresy that would plague the church from that day until the present day. First it would plague the churches in the region of Phrygia, in which Colossae was located, for many centuries. As time went on, this heresy would spread far beyond Colossae. Christian writers of the late third and early fourth centuries, over 350 years after Paul warned the Colossians about this evil, tell us that the worship of angels was still a problem in some parts of the church.

Colossians speaks to our cosmic age and to the New Age movement which have its source in the occult and in Eastern religions that go back to the beginnings of history with the fall of man. The *New Age* movement is not new; it is the most recent repeat of the second oldest religion, the spirituality of the serpent. The appeal is ancient; its rudiments were seductively sold to our first parents in the garden. Human pride was tickled, and it jumped."

Locke: "Satan's target is your mind; his weapons are lies. Fill your mind with the Word of God. Colossians presents the all-supremacy, the all-sufficiency, the uniqueness, and the fullness of the person and work of Jesus Christ as the God-man Savior, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the only Redeemer/Reconciler of the universe and the total solution for man's needs both for time and eternity."

History of Colossian Church: Outgrowth of Paul's 3 year intensive ministry in Ephesus recorded in Acts 19:10 so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. Apparently Epaphras, a native of Colossae, had received the message Paul preached in Ephesus, taken it back to Colossae where he is credited with the founding of that church. Less than 10 years later [AD 60-62], Epaphras visited Paul [who was under house arrest in Rome] and shared his concerns about the Colossae church where he had labored, even wrestled, in prayer. [Col. 4:12-13]

Note: Paul wants this letter to be taken to Laodicea.

Col. 2:1 For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea,...
Col. 4:16 Paul requests that "after this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans." The letter to the Colossians was intended for Laodicea as well.

What's The Problem? A Crisis Was About To Destroy The Ministry

- Heretical teachings were attacking the deity of Jesus Christ.

Paul's counterattack tells us this about the heresy which is a syncretistic teaching of:

- Jewish legalism Following OT laws and ceremonies Col. 2:16-17
- Greek philosophy— "deeper knowledge" revealed only to a special "elite" [2:2b-4, 8-10]
- Worshipped angels as mediators between man and God Col. 2:18
- Ascetic nature: a low view of the body Col. 2:20-23
- Elements of Gnosticism
- Denied the deity of Christ [1:15; 2:9], His supremacy [1:15b, 17a] ability to create [1:16] and sustain the world [1:17]

Consider: Spiritually speaking, they are a young congregation. They were ripe targets for those who would lead them astray.

- By encouraging and instructing these young Christians to withstand this subversive teaching, Paul knew they would avoid the spiritual bondage that comes with false teaching
- This spiritual bondage can drain the church of its vitality and witness.
- Paul will use the false teacher's words but not their definitions. He will use the words in their true Biblical meaning.
 - Fullness, perfect, complete = used by the Gnostic heretics
 - Paul used the word ALL over 30x
 - He wrote about wisdom = a key word by Gnostics

Paul's Purpose: Refute the heretical teachings and establish the Truth of The Gospel

- Paul establishes the supremacy of Christ as God in order to deal with the theological basis of the false teaching. [Col. 1 & 2]
- Paul then provides practical instruction in light of the deity of Christ which will put the enemies of Christ to shame as they see holy living in the church. [Col. 3 & 4]

Paul's Theme: The fruitful and effective power of the gospel message, a message that heralds the supremacy or preeminence, headship, and the sole sufficiency of Christ to the church, which is His body.

Note: Paul does not begin by attacking the false teachers and their doctrines.

He begins by exalting Jesus Christ and showing His preeminence in 5 areas:

1. The Gospel Message
2. Redemption
3. Creation
4. The Church
5. Paul's own ministry

Note: Paul's introductory remarks in Col. 1:3-5: We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints, ⁵ For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

- He commends them for their faith, hope and love.

Paul emphasized three virtues that are essentials of authentic Christianity: faith in Jesus Christ, love for other believers, and the hope of heaven.

He also reflects the authentic Christian virtues of thankfulness and prayer.

Authentic Christians are marked by thankfulness and prayer, faith in Christ, love for the saints, and the hope of heaven.

He DOES NOT include their knowledge because of the heresy about "special knowledge."

- It is not what we know, but whom we know. Knowing Christ is knowing God.

The Exciting Gospel Message

A. Centers in a Person, Jesus Christ.

- False teachers were trying to remove Jesus Christ from His place of preeminence. This would destroy The Gospel.

B. It is the Word of Truth [Col. 1:5]

- It came from God and can be trusted.
- John 17:17 Thy Word is Truth.
- John 14:6 I am the Way, the TRUTH, and the Life...
- Our faith is in Jesus Christ and based on the Word of Truth.

C. Message of God's Grace

Col. 1:6b since the day ye heard of it [Gospel Message] and knew the grace of God in truth:

- God's favor shown to undeserving sinners

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

D. Gospel Message is for the whole world

Col. 1:6a Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you,

- Word of God is the only seed that can be planted anywhere in the world and bear fruit.
- The Gospel can be preached "to every creature which is under heaven." [Col. 1:23]

Col. 1:28-29 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

²⁹ Whereunto I also labor, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Wiersbe: False teachers usually go where the Gospel has been and try to lead believers astray. They have NO good news for lost sinners.

The people in the church at Colossae BELIEVED in Jesus Christ.

Col. 1:4a Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus...

Note: It is possible to hear and not believe even though the Word of God has the POWER to generate faith in those who hear.

Rom. 10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

- Millions hear: yet don't believe.
- Those who believe in Jesus Christ receive the gift of eternal life. [John 3:14-18]

Consider: We are not saved by faith in faith. Saving faith involves the mind, the emotions and the will.

- With the mind, we understand the truth of the Gospel
- With the heart, we feel conviction and the need to be saved.
- When we exercise the will and commit ourselves to Christ the process is complete.
- Faith is not mental assent to a body of doctrines. Faith is not emotional concern.
- Faith is commitment to Jesus Christ.
- Saving Faith is grounded in the Gospel.

Col. 1:21-23a And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled ²² In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight:

²³ If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard,

- The Word of God gives us assurance.
- As we grow in the Lord, our faith becomes steadfast and established.

Col. 2:5-7 For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

⁶ As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him:

⁷ Rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Note in 2:7 ...as you have been taught...

- Epaphras lead them to Christ, taught the Word, and sought to establish their faith.

Results of Epaphras's Discipleship

1. Became Faithful In Christ Col. 1:6, 8

- Luke 8:11 Word of God is Seed
- Heb. 4:12 Word of God has Life in it

When the Word of God is planted in the heart and cultivated, it produces fruit.

- Faith, hope and love are among the firstfruits in the spiritual harvest. [Col. 1:4-5]

James 1:21 Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and *all* that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.

2. They loved all the saints = proof God had changed them and given them eternal life

- Christian love is not a shallow feeling that we manufacture. It is the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. [Rom. 5:5; Col. 1:8]

Note: Col. 1:8 is the only verse in Colossians that mentions the Holy Spirit>context of love

3. They knew they had a HOPE in Christ that is reserved or set aside for them in heaven.

I Pet. 1:1-5 We are being kept by God's power so that we can be sure of enjoying Heaven one day. We are being guarded for glory!

What Does Spiritual Growth Look Like?

Col. 1:9-12 Paul's prayer for them: understand God's will, gain spiritual wisdom, please and honor God, do kind things for others, know God better and better, be filled with God's strength, endure in faith, stay full of Christ's joy and always be thankful.

A. Spiritual Understanding

Col. 1:9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

Consider: Why does Paul pray for them to be filled with this Knowledge?

Hosea 4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:

This Knowledge Is Essential To Our Renewal In Becoming Like Christ

Col. 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

- False teachers had promised them they would be "in the know" if they accepted the "new doctrines." Words like knowledge, wisdom and spiritual understanding were part of their religious vocabulary, so Paul used them.
- Satan is so deceptive! He borrows our vocabulary but doesn't use our dictionary!

For This cause: refer to v. 6: knew the grace of God in truth:

- They had been born again but there is so much more. You need to grow in the experience you already had. When you are born again, you have ALL you need for growth and maturity

Theme of Colossians: Col. 2:10 And you are COMPLETE in Him.

- Don't look for something new. Continue to grow in what you received in the beginning.

Truth: Every believer needs to have "the knowledge of His will."

- Acts 22:14 God wants us to know His will.
- I Thess. 4:3a For this is the will of God, even your sanctification,
- Rom. 8:29 he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son,
- Eph. 5:17 God wants us to understand His will.
- Eph. 5:18 Be ye [continually] filled with the Spirit
- Col. 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;

Evidence of being filled with the Spirit and the word of Christ dwelling in me:

- Joyful > Thankful > Submissive

Prayer: That you might be filled full = be fully equipped

- It was used to describe a ship that was ready for a voyage
- Believers have in Christ all they need for the voyage of life. [Col. 2:10]
- John 1:16 - and of His fullness have all we received.

II Pet. 1:3 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

Bible: To be "filled" means to "be controlled by."

To be filled with the Holy Spirit means I am controlled by Him.

- Paul desires they be controlled by the full knowledge of God's will.

Question: How can this happen?

Col. 1:9 By means of all wisdom and spiritual insight = We understand the will of God through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit teaches us as we submit to Him.

Wiersbe: Paul did not encourage them to seek visions or wait for voice. He prayed they might get deeper into God's Word and thus have greater wisdom and insight concerning God's will.

Conclusion: Spiritual understanding is the beginning of a successful, fruitful Christian life. Growing in the will of God by knowing the Word of God.

B. Paul prayed for Practical Obedience

Col. 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Consider: The false teachers attracted people through their offer of "spiritual knowledge," but they did not relate this knowledge to life.

- Knowledge and obedience go together in our spiritual growth.
- True spiritual wisdom must affect the daily life.

Wiersbe: All Bible truths are practical, not just theoretical. If we are growing in knowledge, we should be also growing in grace.

II Pet. 3:18 But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Sequence of Christian Growth: Wisdom > Walk > Work

Truth: I cannot work for God unless I am walking with Him, but I cannot walk with Him if I am ignorant of His will. As I spend time daily in His Word and prayer, I will know God's will and be able to walk with Him and work for Him.

Truth: My purpose in life is to please the Lord.

- Eph. 4:1 Walk worthy of our calling
- Phil. 1:27 Walk worthy of the Gospel
- I Thess. 2:12 Walk worthy of God
- I Thess. 4:1 Walk to please God

Paul prayed they would walk worthy, fully pleasing God. We do not please God by accident!

II Cor. 5:6-10 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: ⁷ (For we walk by faith, not by sight;) ⁸ We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Wherefore we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

[fully pleasing to Him] For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

Eph. 5:8-10 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: ⁹ (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;)

¹⁰ Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. [what is well-pleasing to the Lord]

Truth: It is not we who work for God. It is God who works in us and through us to produce the fruit of His grace.

Phil. 2:13 For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Truth: The work we do is the outflow of the life that we live. It is by abiding in Christ that we can produce fruit.

Consider: God must make the worker before He can do the work.

- God spent 13 years preparing Joseph for his ministry in Egypt.
- God spent 80 years preparing Moses to lead Israel.
- Jesus spent 3 years teaching His disciples how to bear fruit.
- Paul needed a "postgraduate course" in Arabia before he could serve God effectively.

Col. 1:10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

God's wisdom reveals God's will. As we obey God's will in our walk, we can work for Him, bear fruit and be fruitful in every good work.

Eph. 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. Why?

Matt. 5:16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

By-product of this obedience: Increasing in the knowledge of God.

C. Paul Prayed For Moral Excellence

Col. 1:11 Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

- Knowledge, conduct, service and character must always go together.

Truth: God's energy empowers us. With all power being empowered...

- Power = dunamis = inherent power
- Power = kratos = manifested power or power put forth in action

The grace for me to live His Christian life is a result of God's power at work in me. Spiritual growth and maturity can come only as I yield to God's power and permit Him to work in me.

Consider: We think of God's glorious and mighty power as in the crossing of the Red Sea, etc. The inner victories of the soul are just as great. For David to control his temper when he was being maligned by Shimei was a greater victory than his slaying of Goliath.

Prov. 16:32 He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.

Strengthened with all might: "Strengthened" is a present participle: indicates our need for a continual infusion of God's power.

"ALL" power or might points to the fact that it is an unlimited supply.

Phil. 4:13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

Patience: endurance when circumstances are difficult

- Maturing believers are able to rejoice even in our tribulations because we know that "tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance proven character; and proven character, hope. [Rom. 5:3-4 NASB]

- Patience is NOT complacency. Patience is endurance in action. It is the soldier on the battlefield; keeping on when the going is rough. It is the runner refusing to stop because he wants to win the race. [Heb. 12:1]

Dr. Edman: "It is always too soon to quit."

Spurgeon: "It is not talent or training that guarantees victory. It is perseverance. By perseverance, the snail reached the ark."

Longsuffering: Self-restraint = opposite of revenge

- Patience has to do more with circumstances. Longsuffering has to do more with people.
- It is one of the "grace garments" we are to wear. [Col. 3:12]
- Patience and longsuffering go together if we are growing spiritually.

Consider: It is easy for God to perform miracles in the realms of the material or physical because everything in creation obeys His commands. Jesus could heal Malchus's ear, but He could not automatically change Peter's heart and remove the hatred and violence that was in it. [Luke 22:50-51] God could bring water out of a rock but he could not force Moses to be patient. God's power is evident in our lives not only in our patience and longsuffering, but in our...

Joyfulness:

- Difficult circumstances > Joyful patience
- Difficult people > Joyful longsuffering

Truth: Only the power of God's Holy Spirit working in us can give us joy in the midst of problem circumstances and problem people. The fruit of the Spirit is...JOY.

D. Evidence of God's Power In My Life > Thankfulness

Col. 1:12 Giving thanks unto the Father ...

Those who are filled with the Spirit, filled with God's Word and watching in prayer will have an attitude of thanksgiving to God.

Conclusion: I need spiritual wisdom if I am going to live to please God.

I need practical obedience in my walk and work.

The result of all of this must be spiritual power in the inner man, power that leads to joyful patience and longsuffering with thanksgiving.

Jude 1:24-25 Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,
To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever.
Amen.