

Parson to Person

Colossians – Part 1

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” (Colossians 2:6–7)

Background

The Colossian church is presumed to have been founded around AD 52–55. One of the main theories is that a Colossian man named Epaphras (Col. 1:7; 4:12; Phil. 1:23) heard Paul preach in Ephesus during the events of Acts 19 and brought the gospel back to his hometown. This is plausible because Epaphras is called “a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf” and is referred to as the one “who also declared to us your love in the Spirit” (Col. 1:7–8).

Regardless, the mentions of Epaphras give context to the setting of the letter to the Colossians. Paul was apparently visited by Epaphras while in prison (Phil. 1:23). He then told Paul about the churches in his region—Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis (Col. 4:13). The report, however, was mixed. The church was full of “faith...and love for all the saints,” which Paul commended (Col. 1:4), but the church had also become encumbered by false teaching. Based on the arguments made by Paul in the letter, this false teaching was likely some syncretistic view involving Judaizing and angel worship (Col. 2:17–18).

With that report in mind, around AD 60–61 Paul wrote the letter to the Colossian church, gave it to Tychicus and Onesimus (more on him next week), along with the letter to Philemon, and had it delivered and circulated.

As You Have Received Christ

Paul began his defense with Christology. Chapter one focuses on the person of Jesus and on His finished work on the cross. Paul explained Jesus as the preeminent creator of all things, the image of the invisible God. He pointed to Jesus' work on the cross as causing the reconciliation of all things to Himself. This Christology becomes vitally important to the argument because of what Jesus has done for people. Through His finished work on the cross, Jesus qualified, redeemed, forgave, and reconciled believers, to present them holy, blameless, and above reproach. The death and resurrection of the preeminent Creator could have no less effect.

Note on verse 23: it is tempting to read Colossians 1:23 as a conditional statement about legalism or merit. A careless read will equate “if you continue in the faith” to a statement about works. However, in the context of the letter, it seems more likely that this “if–then” clause has to do with the heresy Paul is combating. In verses 9–22, he outlines the power and the FINISHED work of Jesus as the gospel they were first taught (Col. 1:5–7). When he writes, “if indeed you continue in the faith...,” he is talking to those in the congregation who might be swayed from that teaching.

In Him

Continuing his defense, Paul moved from the person of Jesus to the nature of the believer in Jesus. Believers, once alienated and enemies in their minds by wicked works, are now reconciled by the work of their Savior. “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him” (Col. 2:9). Because of who He is, the power of what He did is the power to completely save. “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col. 2:13). Apart from Him is death, but in Him there is life and complete forgiveness.

The Heresy

The false teachers in Colosse were encouraging dietary restrictions and pushing religious adherence to the Jewish calendar, all for the sake of angel worship and meriting favor. This syncretism of Judaism and Christianity was burdensome and false. The Old Covenant Law, although good, was never meant to save. “For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been through the law. But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal. 3:21b–22).

In addressing the present heresies, Paul concluded his argument with a final note, this time specifically about the law. In a statement about the power by which a believer is made alive, Paul wrote of what Jesus did on the cross: “Having

wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col. 2:14–15). The law was never meant to give life but instead was to point us to our need for a Savior. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul writes, “But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless...” (1 Tim. 1:8–9a). Because God has made the believer holy, blameless, and above reproach (through the work of Jesus), our works are not for merit but for worship.

The Colossian heresy was orthopraxy for spiritual merit. Paul denounced this and pointed them back to the truth. “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col. 2:23). Good works are important and even vital to the life of a Christian, but the motivation behind them is paramount. Because Jesus has wiped out the handwriting of requirements, we live righteously because of the grace we have been given, not as a means to earn it.

Rooted, Built Up, and Established in Faith

“...through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven all your trespasses” (Col. 2:12b–13). This is the truth of the gospel: we are forgiven by faith in the power of Jesus alone.

Exhortation

“As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” (Colossians 2:6–7). Paul’s correction to the Colossian church is not a rejection of orthopraxy, but a reminder of its proper foundation. Because we are forgiven in Jesus and complete in Him, our obedience flows from walking in Him—not from striving to earn what has already been given.

Love you all,
Pastor Jeff Gambrino