

51. Jesus in Colossians

January 25, 2018

The churches of the New Testament era were not nearly as attractive as some would make it out to be. I'd rather live in the time of the return of Jesus than the first century, especially knowing that they didn't have the high speed internet.

The first century religious environment was much like our own. It was a time of religious mixing, with people borrowing a little of this and a little of that. The only difference is that in the first century, you joined a group who did the borrowing. In our culture you do the borrowing yourself. Yes, you can be the founder of your own cult.

Whatever the problem was, Paul sticks with the solution which is a better understanding of Jesus. Knowing the real Jesus helps us stay away from the counterfeit, no matter how it is packaged.

A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

Colossians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

The author of the letter to the Colossians is the apostle Paul obviously. Many scholars believe that he wrote this sometime between 60-62 A.D., while he was in a Roman prison six years before his death.

But the report came from Epaphras, who was the leader of the church at Colosse and a convert of Paul from his two-year ministry in Ephesus. He consulted with Paul regarding the dangerous teachings the Colossians were hearing. So Paul sent this letter, along with the letters to Philemon and to the Ephesians, with Tychicus, accompanied by Onesimus. Tychicus was a coworker of Paul who would have been able to help the Colossian believers understand and apply the apostle's teachings of the letter.

B. ABOUT COLOSSE

Colossians 1:2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It was written to the people living in what was called the Lycus Valley, consisting of three communities: Laodicea, Hierapolis, and Colosse. This area was an intersection of Eastern and Western culture because an important trade route passed through there.

Colosse was located about 100 miles east from Ephesus. Though once a leading city in Asia Minor, Colosse became somewhat a second-rate market town in the latter days.

All kinds of philosophies mingled in this cosmopolitan area. There was a large Jewish colony in Colosse, and there was also a constant influx of new ideas and doctrines from the East. It was a fertile ground for religious speculations and heresies!

Actually, the city of Colosse is not even mentioned in the Book of Acts. All our biblical information about the church there comes from this letter and a few comments in the letter to Philemon. Paul had never been in Colosse during his missionary journeys.

C. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF COLOSSIANS

As with most of Paul's letters, this epistle combines profound doctrinal teachings with practical applications. The first two chapters contain some of Paul's most eloquent writing about the supremacy of Jesus Christ, reconciliation to God, the folly of following man-made rules. The last two chapters show practical applications that we can get from the foundation the Holy Spirit laid down through the apostle Paul.

Paul's epistle to the Ephesians was written and sent about the same time as his Colossian letter. Keeping this in mind, we can discover many parallels between these two letters. However, the emphasis in Ephesians is on the church, the body of Christ. But the emphasis in Colossians is on Christ, the Head of the body.

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 Christian meaning. We will find words such as 'fullness', 'perfect,' 'complete,' and 'wisdom,' all of which were often used by the gnostic heretics.

The church at Colosse was under attack from heretics who were disparaging the deity of Jesus; they were teaching that He was not actually God. The nature of Jesus Christ as Creator and Redeemer was non-negotiable, and it was critical to the apostle that this church needs to know God in His greatness and glory, rather than in the deficient view given them by the false teachers.

D. FALSE TEACHING BY Gnostics

The Colossians had become the target of a mix of religious philosophies that had the potential to lead them into a disaster as a church. The false teachings seemed to be a combination of Jewish legalism and a dangerous heresy called "Gnosticism."

The word is derived 'gnosis', the Greek word for 'knowledge'. In Greek and Latin language, if you add 'a' in front of a word, it becomes an opposite meaning of the original word. Many of English words were influenced by Latin and Greek languages. So the English word 'agnostic' is 'one who does not know' or 'ignorant'.

Gnostics claimed that they had a secret knowledge that was necessary in order to gain salvation. It was secret information available only to an exclusive group of people. The net result was a message that enticed the vulnerable with this idea: "There is something much deeper than Jesus Christ. Jesus is good. You need Him. But you need more than that. You need this special knowledge. It will give you much deeper meaning to your life – and it gives you salvation to boot." That is the garbage doctrine they were selling to the people of Colosse.

Notice how this arrogant message tried to cunningly undermine Jesus Christ and attacked His adequacy to be all we need for salvation. That's why Paul stressed the supremacy of Jesus Christ in the strongest terms.

The gnostic people also held to a form of astrology, believing that angelic beings ruled stars and influenced affairs on earth. In their minds, their angelic beings had equal power and authority as any gods.

Added to these Eastern speculations was a form of Jewish legalism. The teachers believed that the rite of circumcision was helpful in spiritual development. They taught that the Old Testament Law, especially the dietary law, was also useful in attaining spiritual perfection.

E. THE APOSTLE'S COUNTERATTACK

In this Book, the apostle Paul described Jesus with some of the loftiest language in all the New Testament, focusing on Christ's preeminence and sufficiency in all things. Paul presented Christ as the center of the universe, not only as the active Creator, but also as the recipient of creation – in His taking on of human flesh.

Christ was and is the visible image of the invisible God, containing within Himself the fullness of Deity.

Colossians 2:9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily

Because of His divine nature, Jesus is sovereign, above all things with an authority given Him by the Father. As such, Jesus is also Head over the church. He has reconciled all things to Himself through His death on the cross, making believers alive to God and setting them on the path to the righteous living. This proper view of Christ served as the antidote for the Colossian heresy as well as a building block for Christian life and doctrine both then and now.

One thing I cannot overemphasize in the Book of Colossians is that the apostle Paul clearly mentions Jesus Christ as the Creator and the Sustainer of the universe and all created beings. To learn more about it, we need to jump into a portion of the first chapter of this Book.

1) The image of the Invisible God

Colossians 1:15a He is the image of the invisible God,

The Greek word for 'image' is 'eikon'. Apostle Paul used the word image to make this fact clear. It means "an exact representation." The writer of the Book of Hebrews affirms that Jesus Christ is "*the express image of His Person*" in Hebrews 1:3. Jesus was able to say, "*He that has seen Me, has seen the Father*" in John 14:9. It is only in Jesus Christ that the invisible God is revealed perfectly. Since no mere creature can perfectly reveal God, Jesus Christ must be God.

2) The Firstborn over all creation

Colossians 1:15b the firstborn over all creation.

This is where Jehovah's Witness people get so happy to explain their fabricated doctrines to the people who do not know the truth of Jesus. Obviously the Jehovah's Witness people didn't understand the definition of the Greek word 'prototokos'. It does not refer to time, but to place or status. The firstborn of all Creation means, "Headship of all Creation." His headship of all creation does not mean that He was born first.

Solomon was certainly not born first of all of David's sons, yet he was named the firstborn. Jesus Christ is not a created being. He is eternal God.

3) By Him all things were created

Colossians 1:16a For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers.

Now we come to the portion of the Scripture that is used by a cult group to justify their doctrines even though they are the ones who completely misunderstood and twisted. They know that if they accept this portion of the Word of God, they must come to the realization that they are in a cult.

Jehovah's Witness' bible, the New World Translation states, "by him all other things were created." They inserted the word "other" in v16 to claim that Jesus is not the Jehovah God, but a son of God. Actually, Jehovah's Witness is nothing more than a reincarnation of Gnosticism from the first century.

Ever since the evolution theory came into the picture, there have been constant arguments between the believers of Creation Fact and the evolution theory followers. More people would rather believe evolution because they think that they don't have to be accountable to Almighty God who created everything in heaven and earth. But they remain to be wrong. Even though they claim themselves to be scientific people, yet they are extremely illogical and fanatic in their new-created religion, the evolution theory. Because it takes more faith to believe what they claim than simply believing that our God created everything.

The word 'for' that introduces this verse could be translated "because." Jesus Christ is the Firstborn of all because He created all things. It is no wonder that the winds and waves obeyed Him, and diseases and death fled from Him, because He is Master over all.

Jesus created all things, including angels – some became fallen angels by their own choice.

For these fallen angels, demons, have you ever wondered why they don't get to have salvation like humans since they chose to walk away from God's goodness? What is the difference between human and angel? We humans have spirit just like angels, but we have human bodies that require redemption through Jesus Christ, but angels don't have that case. That is why fallen angels cannot have salvation as we do.

All things are under Jesus' command. Nothing escapes from our Lord Jesus' acknowledgement. Without His permission, nothing will happen, including what the devil wants to do.

4) All things were created for Him

Colossians 1:16b All things were created through Him and for Him.
Everything exists in Him, for Him, and through Him. Jesus is the object of all creations. We are created for His pleasure.

We all once were unbelievers in the past. Until we came to know Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we knew that something was missing in our lives. We couldn't be satisfied unless we come to know Him. Augustine said, "We are restless until we come to rest in God."

Apostle Paul's use of three different prepositions is one way of refuting the philosophy of the false teachers. For centuries, the Greek philosophers had taught that everything needed a primary cause, an instrumental cause, and a final cause. The primary cause is the plan, the instrumental cause the power, and the final cause the purpose. When it comes to Creation, Jesus Christ is the primary cause, because He planned it. He is the instrumental cause, because He produced it. He is the final cause, because He did it for His own pleasure.

5) In Him all things consist

Colossians 1:17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

A guide took a group of people through an atomic laboratory and explained how all matter was composed of rapidly moving electric particles. The tourists studied models of molecules and were amazed to learn that matter is made up primarily of space. During the question period, one visitor asked, "If this is the way matter works, what holds it all together?" For that, the guide had no answer. Because the scientists don't know how these atoms are staying together, they call this holding agent as "Atomic Glue" of which ingredients they have no idea.

However, mankind has figured out how to split these atoms. When they were able to split these atoms, they have learned that there is a tremendous amount of energy released instantly that would blow up everything around for many miles and destroy everything in its path.

But we know who is holding every atom in its place. Again, this is another affirmation that Jesus Christ is God. Only God exists before all of Creation, and only God can make Creation held together. To make Jesus Christ less than God is a useless attempt to dethrone Him.

F. APPLICATION

Jesus must be the first priority and preeminence in our lives.

No human's desire can be placed in the spot of Jesus in our hearts.