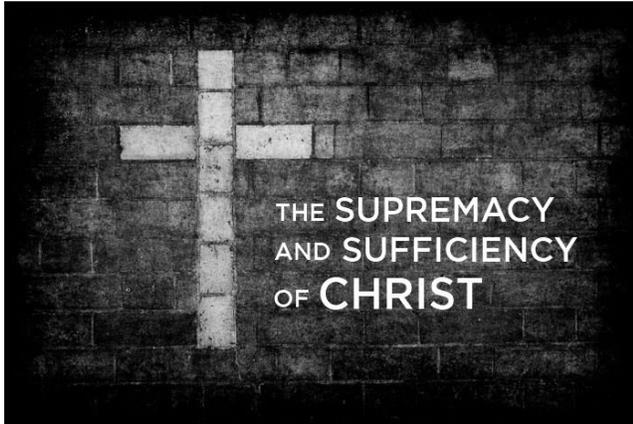


Reading Through the New Testament

Paul's Letter to the Colossians



Background to the Letter

- Colossae was about 100 miles east of Ephesus. The city was overshadowed by neighboring cities Laodicea and Hierapolis.
- Paul had never visited the church (2:1). Its founder, a man named Epaphrus, likely heard the gospel while Paul was in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (Col. 1:7).
- The letter was written around 62 A.D., the same timeframe as Philemon and Ephesians. All three letters were delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus (4:7, 9; Eph.6:21).
- Epaphrus was with Paul while imprisoned in Rome, and informed the apostle of dangerous false teaching threatening the church. (4:12)
- There are different theories about the precise nature of the false teaching (Jewish mysticism, Gnosticism...?) Whatever it was, it seems to have taken the focus away from Christ and His finished work at the cross.
- The main theme of the letter is the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

Outline

I. Doctrine: (Chapter 1)

- *The Preeminence of Christ Declared*

II. Danger: (Chapter 2)

- *The Preeminence of Christ Defended*

III. Duty: (Chapters 3 & 4)

- *The Preeminence of Christ Demonstrated*

I. Who Is Jesus Christ? (1:9-20)

1. Even though Paul had not personally met most of these believers, he prayed for them. How did Paul pray for the Colossians?

- "...asking God to fill you with the k_____ of his will..." (v.9)
- "...that you might p_____ him in every way..." (v.10)
- "...being s_____ with all power..." (v.11)

2. Can we pray for fellow Christians whom we have never even met? How?

3. Does the human race need rescuing? From what / whom? Who came to bring redemption? (v.13)

4. Before dealing with specific issues of the false teaching that was being spread in Colossae, Paul first lays the foundation for a proper view of the person of Christ (v.15-20). **Jesus is:**

- a) "...the i_____ of the invisible God" – if we want to know what God the Father is like, where do look? Who has perfectly revealed God to human beings? (John 1:18; 10:30; 14:7)
- b) "...the f_____ over all creation" – a term describing supremacy of rank. The eldest son in the ancient world was the father's representative and heir; he was given responsibility to manage the household. So Christ is the Father's representative, above every authority.
- c) ...the m_____ of the universe – "...by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible..." If Jesus brought the universe into being, what does that mean? What does the passage tell us about why all things were made?
- d) "...b_____ all things..." – elsewhere Jesus is called "the alpha and omega, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 21:6). Was there ever a time when he did not exist?
- e) the one in whom "...all things h_____ together..." – what would happen to this universe if the Lord somehow vanished, or simply let go? Could the world go on without Him?
- f) "...the h_____ of the body, the church..." – The church is more than an organization, it is a living organism and each member is vitally connected with Christ, our leader and guide. What does this tell us about how God chooses to work in this world, today?

5. In verse 19, the apostle uses the word "fullness" to describe Christ, perhaps because false teachers claimed the Colossians were still incomplete somehow and needed something more to make them whole. If we have Christ, is there anything more (an experience, vision, revelation) the believer needs?

6. Paul goes on to deal with specific errors. False teachers claimed that rituals, rules, and regulations were the key to being a more spiritual person. What does the apostle say in 2:16-7? False teachers placed a great deal of emphasis on angels. What caution does Paul give in 2:18? False teachers also practiced a form of asceticism (harsh treatment of body). What does Paul say in 2:23?

II. Putting on the New: (3:5-17)

7. The passage uses the imagery of changing clothes to describe our old way of living and our new life in Christ. What are we to put off? Why? What are we to put on? How?

8. Verse 17 could be a theme verse for every Christian. What should be our greatest goal and deepest desire? Can we honor God with every aspect of our lives (i.e. work, home, school, relationships, entertainment, service...)?