

Colossians

Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon were all written and sent by Paul at about the same time. Paul was in prison, in the general time frame of Acts 28:30-31, 60-62 A.D., while he waited for his trial before Caesar. He mentioned also writing a letter to Laodicea at that time (Col 4:16), which we no longer have. Since Ephesians and Colossians have similar outlines and several similar themes, we can imagine the Laodicean letter and perhaps others written at that time would have overlapped the material we do have.

Colossians opens with a salutation indicating Paul was the primary author, with Timothy as a coauthor. It was initially sent to saints (holy ones) and brethren (male and female) in Christ at Colossae.

Consistently, Paul's letters affirm frequent prayers and thankfulness for Christians walking in faith and love and hope (1:4-5). Paul had not been to Colossae, the church was started by Epaphras (1:7, 2:1), who was with Paul in Rome at the time of writing (4:12).

A strong emphasis on divine power for Christian life is repeatedly mentioned in Paul's letters (1:9-14).

Colossians 1:15-20 is an awesome and beautiful acclamation of the praise worthiness of Jesus Christ. He is above all created powers in heaven and earth, immediately involved in sustaining the creation moment by moment, and worthy of all our adoration and devotion and obedience.

Because our Lord is beautiful and holy, we ought to be like him (1:21-23).

The uniqueness and universality of the gospel is stridently affirmed in 1:23, as also in Galatians 1:6ff and Jude 1:3. There is no other gospel for any creature anywhere.

The mystery revealed in the gospel, 1:26-27, is here described as "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Paul wrote of this mystery in Romans 11:25 in connection to the salvation of Jews and Greeks in one body, and all things united in Christ in Ephesians 1:9-10. Under Christ as head there is one body, one people of God, chosen and redeemed from the dominion

of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son (1:13).

Paul's purpose in this letter, to encourage the hearts of believers who didn't know him personally (2:1-5) is still pertinent to Christians in every generation and location.

Christians have received Christ Jesus the Lord (2:6) who is the fullness of deity (2:9) and fills his people (2:10). There is no room for other spirits or philosophies and traditions of this world (2:8), which clamor for our attention and devotion.

The circumcised heart (2:11) was already foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 30:2 as the Lord's work within his people when they turn to him in repentance from being scattered among the nations.

Baptism in 2:12-16 is pictured as described in Romans 6:1ff, dead in sin, buried with Jesus, and raised to a new life through faith, sharing in Christ's victory. This is described as God's powerful working, not our own doing.

Romans 14 enjoined courtesy and consideration for one another in matters of food and drink and preferences that don't matter in our service to God. Colossians 2:16-23 warns against allowing ourselves to become captive to such elements, specifically mentioning matters of Jewish custom that were given by God (the Sabbath, ceremonial foods, holy days) but were a part of what Jesus took to the cross (2:14). Abstinence and self-denial have some appearance of value, and many religions embrace similar philosophies. Living by such rules can be very seductive, but they don't overcome the appetites of the flesh (perhaps just the opposite) and only Christ within can meet our needs.

The rulers and authorities defeated by Jesus in 1:16, 2:10 and 2:15 (as also in Romans 8:38, 1 Cor 15:24, Eph 1:21, 3:10, 6:12) should be understood as including mighty spiritual forces, not merely human rulers.

Colossians 3:1-4:6 is a series of instructions (in the same order as Ephesians 4:1-6:20) relating to

- 1) our personal walk with the Lord, 3:1-17;
- 2) husbands and wives, 3:18-19;
- 3) parents and children, 3:20-21;
- 4) servants (employees) and masters (employers), 3:22-4:1;

5) confronting the world, evangelism and prayer, 4:2-6.

The letter carriers included Tychichus (4:7, as also Ephesians 6:21) and Onesimus (4:9, and see Philemon 1:10ff).

Onesimus is listed as “one of you” and “our faithful and beloved brother,” which, along with 4:1 put pressure on Philemon to receive him with forgiveness. Onesimus the returning slave was put in the same category as Epaphras who first preached in Colossae (compare 4:9, 4:12-13).

Compare the individuals listed in 4:10-17 with Philemon 1:2, 23.

House churches were typical in the 1st century (4:15).

Note the injunction for public reading and sharing of Paul’s letters in 4:16. We would do well from time to time to read the letters and other scriptures as a whole, and always take the public reading of scripture seriously (1 Timothy 4:13).

Exactly what the service of Archippus was intended to be, we don’t know, but each of us should seriously consider the admonition to fulfill the ministry we have received in the Lord (4:17).