

LESSON EIGHT

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Scriptural Reference: Colossians Chapter 1.

A. INTRODUCTION:

1. COLOSSE:

The city of Colosse was situated about one hundred miles east of Ephesus on a caravan route to the East near the cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. The Apostle Paul had, undoubtedly, traveled through Colosse, but it seems that he was not acquainted with the Christians there (Colossians 2:1). It is quite possible that the church was established as an outreach of Paul's Ephesians ministry.

2. THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS:

This letter was written by Paul while he was in prison at Rome, AD 61-63. Epaphras, a Colossian and minister of the church there, had come to Rome informing Paul of a heresy, which was growing in the church there. Paul sent the letter by Tychicus and Onesimus who also carried the letter to the Ephesians and one to Philemon.

3. THE Gnostic HERESY:

At Colosse, some false teachers were teaching false doctrine which later was known as Gnosticism. They changed the Gospel into a mere philosophy. They placed the emphasis on "knowledge" rather than on "faith." They taught that all matter was evil and that God alone was holy. God could not span the gulf between Him and man, so mediatory angels were used. They interpreted Christ according to their pagan philosophy and classified Jesus with these mediatory angels. This heathen philosophy was mixed with the legalism of Judaism.

In Paul's letter to the Colossians, he gives the remedy for this false teaching. This remedy may be stated under two headings: 1) The Lordship of Jesus Christ and 2) Christian Liberty.

4. THE GODHEAD OF JESUS CHRIST:

The key verse in this letter to the Colossians is the last clause of verse eighteen in chapter one, *"that in all things he may have pre-eminence."* In this passage of Scripture, Paul states the He had the pre-eminence in creation (verse 16), in the resurrection (verse 18) and in redemption (verse 20). Here, He is stated to be the originator of all the wonders of creation and their Sustainer. He also is the One that overcame death and brought peace to the Redeemed. All the power, wisdom and glory of God are resident in Him and in Him all the fullness dwells corporeally and bodily.

Let us list some of the prominent phrases found in Colossians that establishes His pre-eminence:

- a. Colossians 1:15 - *"image of the invisible God ... firstborn of all creation.*
- b. Colossians 1:16 - *"all things created by Him."*
- c. Colossians 1:17 - *"he is before all things ... in all things hold together."*
- d. Colossians 1:18 - *"head of the church...the beginning...firstborn from the dead."*
- e. Colossians 1:19 - *"in him all fulness dwells."*
- f. Colossians 1:20 - *"through him all things are reconciled."*
- g. Colossians 1:27 - *"Christ in you, the hope of glory."*
- h. Colossians 2:3 - *"in him are all the treasure of wisdom and knowledge."*
- i. Colossians 2:9 - *"in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily."*
- j. Colossians 2:10 - *"head of all principality and power."*

B. CHAPTER ONE:

1. PAUL'S PRAYER: (Colossians 1:9-13).

Two of Paul's prayers are recorded in his Epistle to the Ephesians, one in his letter to the Philippians and here in his fourth.

In contrast to the intellectualism of the Gnostics, Paul prayed that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will. As they are fruitful in every good work, their knowledge of God will grow. This power will be God's power in their lives to produce patience, longsuffering and joyfulness.

2. TRANSLATED FROM DARKNESS:

Scriptural Reference:

"Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son: In whom we have redemption through his blood, even forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:13-14).

In describing the power of God in action, Paul uses the two verbs "delivered" and "translated." The child of God has been rescued from the darkness of Satan's kingdom and translated into the light of Christ's kingdom. This is experienced when a person is born again according to the obedience of the Gospel as preached by Peter on the Day of Pentecost.

In redemption, we experience forgiveness of sins. In translating the word "forgiveness" into the Eskimo language, translators used a word of twenty-four letters meaning, "not being able to think about it any more." This only partially expresses what divine forgiveness means.

3. IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD:

Scriptural Reference:

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature" (Colossians 1:15).

God is a Spirit, and as such is invisible; Jesus Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. The only God that man will ever see is Jesus Christ. The knowledge of the glory of

God may be seen in the face of Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 4:6). Philip asked Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father." The reply of our Lord was, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father (John 14:8-9).

The phrase "firstborn of every creature" has given some students difficulty. If we read this Scripture in the Amplified New Testament, the meaning here is very clear: "*And He Himself existed before all things and in Him, all things consist - cohere, are held together. He also is the Head of His body, the church; seeing He is the Beginning, the First-born from among the dead, so that He alone is everything and in every respect might occupy the chief place - stand first and be pre-eminent. For it has pleased the Father that all the divine fullness - the sum total of the divine perfection, powers and attributes - should dwell in Him permanently*" (Colossians 1:17-19).

4. ALL THINGS RECONCILED:

Scriptural Reference:

"And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say" (Colossians 1:20).

It was through the atonement provided on the cross of Calvary that reconciliation was accomplished for all men. No matter how alienated man may be with God, they may be fully reconciled if they will accept the salvation provided for them. There is no other reconciliation possible but that provided by the death of Christ.

5. IF YE CONTINUE:

Scriptural Reference:

"If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister" (Colossians 1:23).

Paul certainly made it clear that our position in Christ depends upon "our continuing in the faith." There is no room for unconditional eternal security here.

6. MYSTERY NOW MADE MANIFEST:

Scriptural Reference:

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:26-27).

When a believer is baptized with the Holy Ghost, he is in Christ (I Corinthians 12:13) and Christ is in him. The church is Christ's body and Jesus takes up residence in the heart of His saints.

This is a tremendous truth, which answers many questions, which cannot otherwise be explained.

LESSON EIGHT

SELF HELP TEST

- A. Where was the city of Colosse located?

- B. Who was Epaphras?

- C. Describe fully the error of Gnosticism.

- D. List the TEN phrases in Colossians to show the pre-eminence of Christ.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
 - 6.
 - 7.
 - 8.
 - 9.
 - 10.

- E. Define carefully the meaning of the phrase "firstborn of every creature."

- F. What verse in Chapter One shows clearly that the theory of unconditional eternal security is false?

- G. In what way did Paul give the remedy for Gnosticism?