

New Testament Survey

The Book of Colossians

I. Attestation and Authorship¹

A. External

1. Ignatius may refer to 1:23 in his *Epistle to the Ephesians* (chapter 10).
2. Justyn Martyr uses the phrase “the firstborn of all creation” several times as well as does Theophilus of Antioch.
3. Irenaeus says that Paul, in the Epistle to the Colossians says: “Luke the beloved physician, greets.”
4. Clement of Alexandria quotes 1:28 in *Stromata* (I.i) as being written by Paul. He also quotes 3:12, 14, 15 in *Stromata* (IV.vii) and 4:2-4 in *Stromata* (V.x).
5. Tertullian quotes 2:8 in *Prescription Against Heretics* (chapter 7) and 2:12-13 in *Resurrection of the Flesh* (chapter 23).
6. Origen quotes 2:18-19 as being in Colossians and as having been written by Paul in *Against Celsus* (V.viii).
7. Colossians appears in Marcion’s Canon, the Old Syriac, the Old Latin, and in the Muratorian Canon.

B. Internal

1. The writer calls himself Paul three times (1:1, 1:23, and 4:18).
2. The language and structure of the book is Pauline.
3. Philemon is considered by many to be certainly Pauline. Since many details coincide in both Philemon and Colossians, and five of the persons mentioned in Colossians 4:10-14 are also mentioned in Philemon 23-24, it is arguable that Colossians is written by Paul as well.
4. Colossians and Ephesians are very much alike. In fact, of the 155 verses in Ephesians, 78 are also found in Colossians. This is most likely true because Paul wrote both Colossians and Ephesians at nearly the same time.

C. Critical Objections

1. Usual Pauline words, e.g. *righteous, revelation, prove, obedience, salvation, fellowship, law, and believe*, are omitted.
2. The concept of Christ in Colossians is very much like the *Logos* of John rather than the Christ of Paul.

¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), p p. 229-230.

3. The error of Gnosticism, dealt with in Colossians, did not arise until much later.

II. Background and Destination

A. Written to the church at Colossae - Colossians 1:2.²

1. Paul had never visited Colossae, as well as its neighbor cities of Hierapolis and Laodicea. He bypassed all of them on his missionary journeys.
2. Paul, in his ministry at Ephesus during his three year stay there, most likely ministered to people from Colossae as we read in Acts 19:10, "all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."
3. Paul wrote a letter to Laodicea, a close neighbor of Colossae (Colossians 4:16).
4. Most likely, Epaphrus and Philemon were saved under Paul's ministry. Paul later sent Epaphrus to Colossae in order to preach (Colossians 1:7).
5. Paul considered these three churches (Hierapolis, Colossae, and Laodicea) to be his own and under his care.

B. The City of Colossae.

1. Colossae was ten miles southeast of Laodicea in the fertile Lycus valley.
2. Colossae had a considerable population of Jews. In fact, Antiochus the Great transported 2,000 Jewish families to this area.
3. Colossae used to be on a main trade route until the eight century when the route shifted to Laodicea. At the time of Paul's writing of Colossians, it was mostly a minor country village.

III. Occasion and Date

A. It is pretty much apparent that during Paul's absence from the area of Asia Minor, the Judaizers had some success in spreading their error, as well as a proto-gnostic element of Greek philosophy. (For example, the book of Galatians written to the same general area deals heavily with the Judaizers).

B. As one reads Colossians, three areas of heresy become apparent:

1. A Judaizing element - Colossians 2:11-16.
2. An ascetic element - Colossians 2:20-23.
3. A speculative element - Colossians 2:8).
 - a. Denial of Christ's diety - Colossians 2:19 cf. 1:19
 - b. Worship of angels (aeons) - Colossians 2:18-19.

C. Written approximately A.D. 60-61 from Rome during Paul's first imprisonment.

² Thiessen, pp. 231-232.

1. Epaphrus travels to Rome to seeks Paul's help with the incipient gnostic heresy - Colossians 1:7-8.
 2. Tychicus is the bearer of this letter (4:7-9) and also of the letters of Ephesians and Philemon.
 3. Most likely, Onesimus travels back to Colossae with Tychicus.
- D. Paul wanted to clearly define the doctrine of the Church in order to deal with the dangerous heresies from creeping in. He therefore writes Ephesians and Colossians to do this.
1. Ephesians deals with the Church as being the body of Christ.
 2. Colossians deals with Christ, the Head of the Church.

IV. Purpose and Plan³

- A. To present Christ as the Head of the Church.
- B. To deal with the incipient gnostic heresy as well as the ascetic and Judaizing heresies.

V. A Basic Outline⁴

- A. Introduction - 1:1-12.
- B. The Doctrinal Section
 1. The Nature of Redemption - 1:13-14.
 2. The Person of Christ - 1:15-19.
 3. The Work of Christ - 1:20-23.
 4. The Apostle's Share in Carrying Out this Work of Christ - 1:24-2:3.
- C. The Polemical Section
 1. The Warning Against False Philosophy - 2:4-8.
 2. The Person and Work of Christ - 2:9-15.
 3. The Obligations Resulting Therefrom - 2:16-3:4.
- D. The Practical Section
 1. The Application of this Death and Resurrection in Personal Life - 3:5-17.
 2. The Application of this Death and Resurrection in the Domestic Life - 3:18-4:1.
 3. The Application of this Death and Resurrection in Relation to the World - 4:2-6.

³ Thiessen, pp. 233-234.

⁴ Thiessen, p. 234.

E. The Personal Section

1. The Mission of Tychicus and Onesimus - 4:7-9.
2. The Salutations from His Associates - 4:10-14.
3. The Apostle's Own Salutations - 4:15.
4. The Message to Laodicea - 4:16-17.

F. Conclusion - 4:18**VI. Chapters To Remember**

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| Colossians 1 | The Preeminence of Christ |
| Colossians 2 | Beware of Philosophy! |
| Colossians 3 | Do All to the Glory of God |

VII. Points and Peculiarities

1. Colossians deals with the Church, the Body of Christ, Colossians deals with Christ, the Head of the Church.
2. Colossians gives a clear presentation of the deity of Christ in chapter 1.
3. Colossians tells us of Christ's victory over Satan and his demons.

VIII. A Closer Look**A. Colossians 1**

1. Prayer for Spiritual Wisdom - Colossians 1:9-13.
2. The Preeminence of Christ - Colossians 1:14-22.
3. Paul's Service for Christ - Colossians 1:23-29.

B. Colossians 2

1. Beware of Philosophy! - Colossians 2:1-10.
2. Beware of the Judaizers! - Colossians 2:11-17.
3. Beware of Mysticism! - Colossians 2:18-23.

C. Colossians 3

1. New Life in Christ - Colossians 3:1-17.
2. Christian Domesticity - Colossians 3:18-4:1.

D. Colossians 4

1. Personal Greetings and Exhortations- Colossians 4:2-6.
2. The Mission of Tychicus and Onesimus - Colossians 4:7-9.

