



Jesus is Everything

A Quick Look at The Epistle to the Christians in Colosse

By: Josh Franklin

PAUL'S LETTERS:

- Romans – Paid in Full
- 1 Cor. - Correcting the Church
- 2 Cor. – God’s Man & Ministry
- Gal. – Free to Live for Christ
- Eph – Building the Body of Christ
- Phil – Finding Joy in Jesus

Col – The Preeminence of Christ

- 1 Thessalonians –
- 2 Thessalonians –
- 1 Timothy –
- 2 Timothy –
- Titus –
- Philemon –

Fast Facts on Colossians

Written by? Apostle Paul

Written to whom? Christians in Colosse

Written when? c. A.D. 60-63

Written where? Rome (Paul’s first Roman imprisonment)

Written why? Arrival of Epaphras with the news about heretical teaching at Colosse (1:7-8), which was a blending of Judaism and incipient Gnosticism.

The Book of Colossians

Focus	Christ...Preeminent in All Things			
Divisions	Christ, Supreme in the Church	Christ, Supreme in the Universe	Christ, Supreme in the Home	Christ, Supreme in the Community
	1	1 2	2 3	3 4
Topics	Christ, the Head of the Body	Christ, the Lord of the Universe	Christ, the Head of the Home	
	Reconciliation	Creation	Submission	Conversation
Place	Roman Prison			
Time	A.D. 60			
Author	The Apostle Paul			

No other New Testament book is more relevant in our generation, for the manifestations of the heresy at Colosse are present today. – Charles N. Pickell

The Story

Epaphras, the pastor and probable founder of the church at Colosse, traveled well over 1,000 miles – from Colosse to Rome – just to seek Paul’s counsel and help for handling serious doctrinal attacks against the Christian faith in that region. The epistle to the Colossians is Paul’s answer to Epaphras’ plea for help. Paul’s epistle did not come back with Epaphras, either because he himself was imprisoned with Paul (Philemon 23), or because Paul had asked Epaphras to stay and help him there.

The letter was probably written c. a.d. 62. Paul wrote it at roughly the same time that he wrote Philemon and Ephesians. **All three letters were sent with Tychicus (see Eph. 6:21) and Onesimus.**

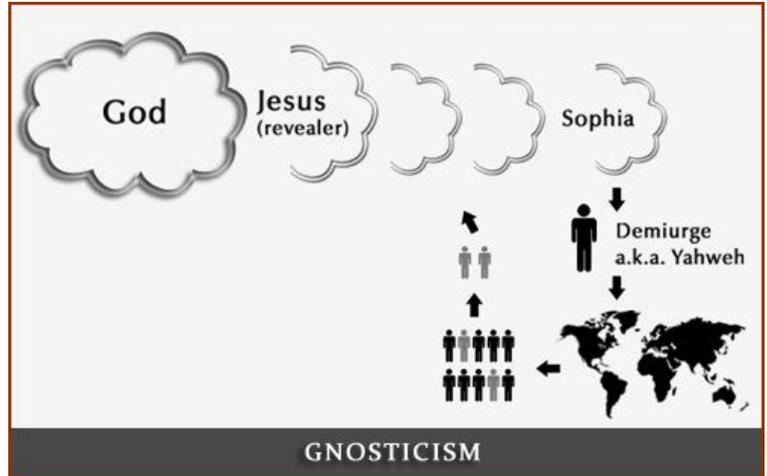
FASCINATING FACTS:

1. Colossians is one of only two of Paul’s epistles written to a church that he had never previously visited (Romans).
2. Colossians, like Philippians, contains some of the greatest passages on the deity and ministry of Christ (1:15-20; 2:9-10)
3. Over four-fifths of the verses here in Colossians are repeated in Ephesians with some slight variations.
4. In Colossians, Paul dealt with many forms of false teaching and harmful doctrines, including legalism, mysticism, asceticism, and Gnosticism.
5. There are no references made in Colossians to the Old Testament. Perhaps this shows the church coming from a Gentile background, not a Jewish background.

- Though the epistle to the Colossians is very important, the city of Colosse itself was by far the least important city to which Paul had ever sent a letter, and afterward, the church disappeared from Church history.
- The writing of this epistle to a small church in an unimportant city proves that though Paul's strategy was to hit the major cities with the gospel, expecting the major cities to convert the minor cities, he was still concerned with the small churches, like Colosse.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

- Gnosticism has two tenets: 1) Matter is Evil; and 2) Salvation comes through knowledge.
- Jesus is Creator and Sustainer of all creation.
- Colossians ch 1-2 (What Christ did FOR us); ch 3-4 (What Christ does THROUGH us).
- A correct view of Christ (His Supremacy) causes a correct attitude in me (My Submission).
- Don't listen to anyone who tries to tell you that anything more-or less – than Christ's sacrifice is required for salvation (2:8).
- As a result of their new life in Jesus, Christians should live in a way that's noticeably different from the way non-Christians live (3:1-17).
Colossians 1:16 – Jesus CREATED ALL THINGS.
Colossians 1:18 – Jesus IS SUPREME.
Colossians 1:19 – ALL GOD'S FULLNESS DWELLS IN JESUS.



Extra Study: The Colossian Heresy

The Heresy	Reference	Paul's Answer
Spirit is good; matter is evil.	Col 1:15-20	God created heaven and earth for his glory.
One must follow ceremonies, rituals, and restrictions in order to be saved or perfected.	Col 2:11,16-23 ; 3:11	These were only shadows that ended when Christ came. He is all you need to be saved.
One must deny the body and live in strict asceticism.	Col 2:20-23	Asceticism is no help in conquering evil thoughts and desires; instead, it leads to pride.
Angels must be worshiped.	Col 2:18	Angels are not to be worshiped; Christ alone is worthy of worship.
Christ could not be both human and divine.	Col 1:15-20 ; 2:2, 3	Christ is God in the flesh; he is the eternal One, head of the body, first in everything, supreme.
One must obtain "secret knowledge" in order to be saved or perfected - and this was not available to everyone.	Col 2:2, 18	God's secret is Christ, and he has been revealed to all.
One must adhere to human wisdom, tradition, and philosophies.	Col 2:4, 8-10 ; 3:15-17	By themselves, these can be misleading and shallow because they have human origin; instead, we should remember what Christ taught and follow his words as our ultimate authority.
It is even better to combine aspects of several religions.	Col 2:10	You have everything when you have Christ; he is all-sufficient.
There is nothing wrong with immorality.	Col 3:1-11	Get rid of sin and evil because you have been chosen by God to live a new life as a representative of the Lord Jesus.

Paul answered the various tenets of the Colossian heresy that threatened the church. This heresy was a "mixed bag," containing elements from several different heresies, some of which contradicted each other (as the chart shows). *Source: Life Application Bible*

The City of Colosse - Colosse was a comparatively unimportant city; in fact, it was the least significant of the cities to which Paul addressed any of his letters. It was located near two other cities, Laodicea and Hierapolis. All three cities were on the Lycus River in Phrygia, which is in modern South Central Turkey. On a highway leading east to the Euphrates area, the cities were approximately 100 miles east of Ephesus. Colosse was once an important city, but by the first century it was a market town smaller than both Laodicea and Hierapolis. Wealthy Jewish merchants living in the area would have some impact on the thinking of religious people in the area.

The Church at Colosse - The church was not founded by Paul. He writes after hearing of their faith in Christ (1:4, 9). In 2:1 he says they have not seen his face. Evidently the church was founded during Paul's stay at Ephesus (Acts 19:10). It is likely that Epaphras was the founder of the church (cf. 1:7; 4:12-13). It seems that the church was primarily Gentile. Several passages give this impression. In 1:21 Paul refers to them as "formerly alienated and hostile in mind" (cf. Eph. 2:11-19). In 1:27 he speaks of ministering the mystery to Gentiles, evidently an allusion to the Colossians themselves. The sins that are listed in 3:5-7 fit particularly those of pagan Gentiles. There are no OT quotations in this letter.

The Heresy at Colosse - It seems Epaphras had brought a report of the heresy that was threatening the health of the church (cf. 1:7; 4:12-13).

The false doctrine seemed to have two convergent streams: Judaism and incipient Gnosticism. There are a number of allusions to the first of these. There are the references to circumcision in 2:11 and 3:11 (cf. 4:11). Paul also discusses dietary regulations and Jewish holidays in 2:16 (a shadow of coming things). The reference to angel worship also indicates a possible Jewish emphasis (2:18). However, the more prominent false doctrine was incipient Gnosticism. The whole book breathes this heresy.

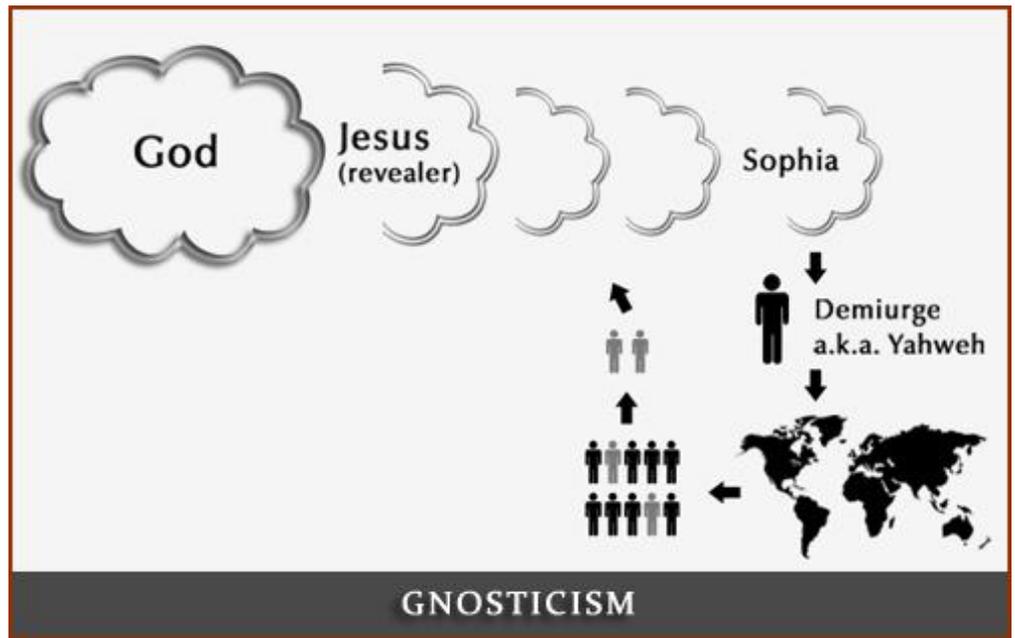
Gnosticism had two basic premises—(1) matter is intrinsically and essentially inferior or evil, and (2) salvation comes through mystic knowledge. Good is found only in the spirit world. This basic premise led to all sorts of teachings.

- (1) If matter is evil, the supreme and good God could not have created it. How then did matter come into being? This was explained by saying that God put out a series of emanations. The more distant these were from God, the less they were connected to (or knew about) Him until finally a distant evil emanation created matter and the world. This is the god of the OT.
- (2) If matter is evil, then "the Christ" did not have a physical body. He was only a phantom, or the Christ spirit may have come upon the man Jesus at His baptism and left Him at the cross. Of course, this means Jesus Christ ultimately could not save mankind because He did not become flesh and blood.
- (3) This doctrine also has implications in the realm of morality and ethics. It took its course in two opposite extremes. One side said because matter is evil and our bodies are made of matter, we must be ascetics. The only way to deal with our bodies is to starve, beat and deny them. The opposite view was held by libertines who say the body is evil no matter what we do. Therefore, it does not matter how much we sin. Of course, this led to all sorts of sensual practices.

There also was great stress on mystic knowledge. There was much speculation and philosophizing about such things as emanations and secret knowledge. Salvation became a matter of knowledge and not faith. Strangely, the rituals of Judaism and the esoteric knowledge of incipient Gnosticism joined forces to produce this bizarre heresy that Paul combats in this epistle. Providentially, this crucially important letter was written to a group of believers in an insignificant town, but it was necessary to check this false doctrine that has much in common with modern New Age teachings.

Extra: Understanding Gnosticism

Many people in the second century flocked to a new form of the Christian message known as Gnosticism. The Greek word *gnosis* simply means knowledge. Gnostics let you know there's some secret knowledge you need, *in addition to the Bible*, which will open your eyes to the real truth and make it possible for you to really be a Christian. Would you like to know the secret? I'm sure you do. Ok, here it goes in a nutshell:



The ultimate God is an amazing God too great to know. In the Pleroma (think heaven), God lives and has many sub-gods. One of these sub-gods known as Sophia grew impatient and wanted to be like the unknowable supreme God. Pride and arrogance led her to take matters into her own hands and birth a son known as Demiurge. He had all the traits of his mother: sinful; prideful; arrogant and evil. The Demiurge then created the world. You might know him through another name, Yahweh. He's the evil god we read of in the Old Testament. **Everything Yahweh created is evil and his people, Jews, are especially evil.**

The ultimate God placed on the evil earth some good spirits known as Aeons. These Aeons would be inside evil bodies and when these "seeds of light" were turned on they would allow people to escape the world and rise to be part of the Pleroma. How does your "seed of light" get turned on? Well, let me quote a verse you probably already know, "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*" ([John 3:16](#))

You see the true God, not that evil Yahweh sub-god, sent another glorious sub-god named Christ to enlighten and open the eyes of the elect Aeons. Christ had to join up with the evil body of a man named Jesus (luckily only for a little while) in order to give people the secret knowledge. Would you believe in Jesus today? He came for you to show you the way. He is the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the unknowable God but through Him. Here is a visual of Gnosticism:

Contrary to common belief, Gnosticism is alive and well in our twenty-first century. It survives the aeons of time exceedingly well because of its uncanny ability to morph and mutate, to disappear and to materialize. Gnostic thinking is basic to the "human potential movement" because it focuses on man and his problems, man and his needs, man and his happiness. Taking up the mantra of Enlightenment thinking by making "man as the measure of all things," Gnostic thinking would postulate that human tragedy is not the result of sin, but only ignorance. The answer to life's plight and inequities is therefore found in knowledge. Evolutionary thinking would prefer to find man in his next stage of development, free from the oppressive bonds of religion and open to the fresh winds of self-awareness, human reason, and discovery as man discovers new vistas of "human potential." Immediately at hand is Gnostic thinking that whispers to the anxious enquirer, "Search your heart; seek the truth deep within your soul. You are the truth because God is in you."¹

¹ See more at: <http://blogs.answersingenesis.org/blogs/worldwide/2012/11/16/are-there-gnostics-in-todays-world/#sthash.m2WLSGiX.dpuf>

Key Word in Colossians:

First Born: Greek *prototokos*—1:15, 18—literally, “first in time” or “first in place.” In this context, *prototokos* should be translated as preeminent or “first in place.” Therefore, Jesus Christ is the “chief born” who reigns over all creation (see Exodus 4:22; Deuteronomy 21:16–17; Psalm 89:23). This title reveals the humanity of the Son as the foremost creature of all creation. However, this designation in no way suggests that Christ Himself was created by God. The next verse clearly declares Christ as the Creator of all things. Thus, Christ cannot be a created being. Instead He is the eternal Son of God and the second Person of the Godhead.

COLOSSIANS 4: 16 – What happened to the lost epistle of the Laodiceans? ²

PROBLEM: Paul refers to the “epistle from Laodicea” as a book he wrote that should be read by the church at Colosse, just as the inspired Book of Colossians was to be read by the Laodiceans. However, no such 1st century epistle to the Laodiceans exists (though there is a 4th century fraud).³ But, it is very strange that an inspired book would perish. Why would God inspire it for the faith and practice of the church (2 Tim. 3:16-17) and then allow it to be destroyed?

SOLUTION: There are two possibilities.

First, it is possible that not all divinely authoritative or inspired books were intended by God to be in the Bible. Luke refers to other gospels (Luke 1:1), and John affirmed that there were many other things Jesus did that are not recorded in his Gospel (John 20:30; 21:25). So, it is possible that only those inspired books that God preserved by His providence were intended to be in the canon of Scripture.

Second, there are some good reasons to believe that “the epistle from Laodicea” is not really lost, but is really the Book of Ephesians.

First of all, the text does not call it the epistle of the Laodiceans, but the “epistle (coming) from Laodicea” (Col. 4:16), whatever name it may have had.

Second, it is known that Paul wrote Ephesians at the same time he wrote Colossians and sent it to another church in the same general area.

Third, there is evidence that the Book of Ephesians did not originally bear that title, but was a kind of cyclical letter sent to the churches of Asia Minor. As a matter of fact, some early manuscripts do not have the phrase “in Ephesus” in Ephesians 1:1. It is certainly strange that Paul, who spent three years ministering to the Ephesians (Acts 20:31), sent no personal greetings to them, if the book known as “Ephesians” was intended for them alone. By contrast, Paul had never visited Rome, but he greeted numerous people in his letter to them (Rom. 16:1-16).

Fourth, no epistle of the Laodiceans is cited by any early church father, though they make over 36,000 NT citations including every book and almost every verse of the NT.

² Norman Geisler, “When Critics Ask”, 489.

³ A fraudulent epistle of the Laodiceans appeared in the 4th century, but scholars do not believe it is the one referred to by Paul. Indeed, it is largely a collection of quotations from Ephesians and Colossians which the Church Council of Nicea (A.D. 787) called a “forged epistle.”