

Today we begin a sermon series on the remarkable Biblical book of Colossians. It is one of the 13 letters of the New Testament that begins with a salutation from the author of Paul the apostle (Romans through Philemon). It is written to the smallest and comparatively most insignificant city that Paul ever wrote to, Colossae, and yet its strength of teaching on the person of Jesus Christ surpasses all. It is also remarkable in its application. Whereas the other letters of Paul teach us how to be saved, to be doctrinally sound and to live the Christian life well, the book of Colossians teaches us to “be complete” in Christ. Thus, we have entitled our series, “Be Complete,” which is also the title of our companion book by Warren Wiersbe of the same name. May we indeed learn to realize that “in Him you have been made complete.”

THE PLACEMENT OF COLOSSIANS

The late J. Sidlow Baxter makes a very helpful observation in his classic book “Explore the Book” about how Colossians relates to the other Pauline church letters. (Now follow me here – I believe you will find this worth your close attention.)

He notes that the 9 letters of Paul to the churches can be seen as in 3 groups of 4, 3, and then 2. The first group of 4: Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians and Galatians are generally about Christ and His Cross. The second group of 3: Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians are generally about Christ and His Church. And the third group of 2: 1 & 2 Thessalonians are generally about Christ and His Coming.

He then notes that in 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul teaches that all Scripture is profitable for (1) teaching, (2) reproof, and (3) for correction – all three of which are for our training in right living. Teaching is the establishment of the norm, or canon, of our Christian belief. Reproof is cautioning about inappropriate Christian practice. Correction is a rebuking about errant Christian doctrine. And then Baxter points out, remarkably, that each of the first two groups of letters mentioned above are in the exact order of teaching, reproof and correction.

Now follow me here. Romans, in the first group, is a book of teaching, regarding the cross. 1 & 2 Corinthians in the first group, are the books of reproof regarding the cross. And Galatians in the first group, is the book of correction. If you know the content of these books you will see that this is true. Now look at the second group of books. Ephesians is the book of teaching regarding the church. Philippians is the book of reproof regarding the church (inappropriate practice). And, Colossians is the book of correction regarding the church (deviant doctrine).

Now observe this in outline form:

BOOKS OF HIS CROSS

Romans – teaching about His cross

1 & 2 Corinthians – reproof about inappropriate practice

Galatians – correction about deviant doctrine

BOOKS OF HIS CHURCH

Ephesians – teaching about His church

Philippians – reproof about inappropriate practice

Colossians – correction about deviant doctrine

BOOKS OF HIS COMING

1 Thessalonians – teaching about His coming

2 Thessalonians – reproof and correction about His coming

I don’t know if this is remarkable and illuminating to you, but it is extremely so to me! And what was the chief doctrinal error of the Colossian church that Paul was correcting? It was a low view of the person of Jesus Christ, considered to be a higher “knowledge” or “gnosis” (Greek), and thus the heresy was called “Gnosticism” (or ‘higher knowledge’). But it was and is in truth, a lower and counterfeit view of Jesus. So in Colossians, Paul seeks to exalt Christ to His rightful place as the fulness of God and of man. And when

we truly come to know Christ as our “hope of glory” (1:27) and our “all in all” (3:11) - phrases Paul uses in Colossians – we are truly on the way to being “complete in Christ” (1:28, 2:10).

KEYS TO COLOSSIANS

Theme: Exaltation (Christ: the head; we are raised up with Christ)
CHRIST THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH

Key Greek word: “pleroma” (1:19, 2:9) = “fullness”

Key doctrinal verse: 2:9 “For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form”

Philosophy refuted: “Gnosticism” = knowing is the answer / Jesus was holy in mind and person, but not in body

Chapter 1-2 DOCTRINAL – Christ is exalted & preeminent – and we are exalted with Him

Chapter 3-4 PRACTICAL – Keep living the exalted life in Christ

Pivotal verse: 3:1

“If [since] you have been raised up with Christ, [the doctrine] keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.” [the practice]

Key passages:

Chapter 1

- a. 1:15-19 Divinity and Preeminence of Christ
- b. 1:27 Christ in you, the hope of glory

Chapter 2

- a. 2:2b-3 God’s mystery: Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge
- b. 2:8 Beware the philosophy of the world
- c. 2:9-10 In Christ all the fullness of God dwells in bodily form

Chapter 3

- a. 3:1-4 Set your mind on things above; your life is hidden with Christ
- b. 3:10 Put on the new self (consider some things as “dead”; some things “put off”)
- c. 3:16-17 Let the word of Christ dwell richly within you
- d. 3:18-25 Wives - be subject; husbands – love; children – obey; servants - be God-pleasers

Chapter 4

- a. 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert w/thanksgiving
- b. 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt

Chapter Emphases Regarding Your Faith

1. DOWNWARD

1:23 – *“firmly established and steadfast”*

2. UPWARD

2:7 – *“having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him”*

3. INWARD

3:3, 15 *“your life is hidden with Christ in God”, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you”*

4. OUTWARD

4:2, 5 – *“devote yourself to prayer”, “conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity”*

THE OPENING GREETING (1:1-2)

Colossians 1:1-2 *Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*

√ There are no “self-made” men or women. Just as Paul knew himself to be an apostle “by the will of God”, we must know that anything we have achieved and been given is by God’s good hand of blessing.

√ “Brother” or “sister” is a most affectionate and intimate relationship with our fellow believers. Paul used it this way regarding his co-laborer and author, Timothy. Use these names fondly and meaningfully between one another. We are indeed a family – the family of God.

√ Paul’s earlier letters were addressed to “the church at ...” (1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1& 2 Corinthians, Galatians). But his later letters were addressed to the people of the church (Romans, Philippians, Ephesians and Colossians). It seems Paul learned as he grew in faith that it was the people, not the institution that mattered most. May we learn the same!

√ Paul wrote to the faithful brethren who were “in Christ, in Colossae.” Realize that Christians live in two worlds – the physical world of where we live, and the spiritual world of being in Christ. We are “in the world, but not of it,” “raised up with Christ.”

√ Paul’s opening greeting of “grace” and “peace” is his typical greeting in his letters. It is the grace (Greek: “charis”) of the New Testament gospel and the peace (Hebrew: “shalom”) of the Old Testament mixed into one. We may not use that specific greeting, but may we always bless those we meet with God’s grace and God’s peace. Everyone needs both!

I look forward to our journey through the book of Colossians, as I trust you do as well. May we learn well what it is to “be complete” in Christ Jesus our Lord. This completeness is not a “pie in the sky” hope, but it is a finished fact that we must recognize and live out day by day.

Colossians 2:10 *And in Him [Jesus] you have been made complete.*