

COLOSSIANS: WHY DID PAUL WRITE IT?

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:1-8

Intro: One of the first questions that Bible teachers ask, or should ask, when they begin the study of any book of the Bible is, *Why did he write it?* That is especially true of the epistles of the NT, but it also applies to any book of the Bible. If you are reading through the Bible on the schedule we give out at the beginning of each year, you have just finished reading the fifth book of the OT, the book of Deuteronomy. It contains four messages delivered by Moses to the people of Israel just before he died, and just before they were to enter the land which God had promised to Moses. Early in his second message he expressed his concern for the people, and I want to take the time to read several verses in which he expressed his concern for the people and what they would be prone to do after they got settled in the land where they were going. Listen as I read a portion of what he said to the people after being with them for forty years. I am reading from Deuteronomy, chapter 8, beginning with verse 11. His words must have shocked the people, but it turned out that they were prophetic. Listen to what Moses said in this part of his message, Deuteronomy 8, beginning with verse 11:

11 Beware that thou forget not the Lord thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day:

12 Lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt therein;

13 And when thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied;

14 Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 8:11-14).

Of course the people could not entirely forget the Lord. Moses knew that. But what he was talking about was that when they got into the land, and had conquered their enemies, they would not be trusting the Lord like they did when they knew that they were outnumbered and overpowered, and they would become complacent, and the pride that was always in their hearts would cause them to forget that if it hadn't been for the Lord they would never have made it. And it was when they got into this condition, that is when idolatry became a problem to them.

In contrast with that possibility, Moses had said to them in the second verse of this chapter:

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2 And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no (Deut. 8:2).

The journey from Egypt was not an easy one. In fact, there were many trials and difficulties, and many failures and defeats. But the Lord brought the people through and into the land. And there should have been unending praise in their hearts for all that the Lord had done for them.

Our experience of salvation has not been like the journey of the children of Israel, but in some ways it has been similar. We have had our trials, and we continue to have them. Often we have been victorious, but we have had our failures and sins as well. But the Lord has provided ways to keep us reminded about what He said while He was here on earth with His disciples. He gave them the Holy Spirit to bring to their remembrance what He had said to them. And the Holy Spirit led men to write the books of the Bible so that we would have a record of God's dealings with His people throughout history, and through the early days of the church. In our Tuesday Class we learned that the Lord Jesus told His disciples, and us through the disciples, "All things that I have heard of [or from] my Father, I have made known to you" (John 15:15).

So we have the Word, and we have the Holy Spirit, but we also have the Lord's Supper. The Apostle Paul told us in words which we have read literally hundreds of times as we have observed the Lord's Supper. Our Lord said of it, "This do in remembrance of Me." How it should humble us every time we take the Lord's Supper, it should humble us to be reminded that the Lord had to go to the Cross to suffer and die for us, or we would never have been saved. We must never forget the Lord. We must never allow ourselves to get into a condition where we are not conscious of how deep and abiding is our need to walk in fellowship with the Lord and to trust Him constantly, even moment by moment.

Now you may be saying what does all of this have to do with the study of Colossians? Well, we need to ask the question, Why did Paul write it? He was led by the Spirit of God to write it, but you can tell by reading it that his heart was fully behind the words that he wrote.

Before I answer this question, I want to encourage you to read this short letter at least once a week while we are studying it. As I usually do, I timed myself reading all four chapter slowly, aloud (which helps me to

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concentrate on my reading), and trying to retain what I was reading. I did it in twenty minutes. There is no better way that I have found better to begin to understand a book of the Bible that I am studying than by reading it over and over. So I want you to join me in reading it from start to finish at least once a week, and even more if you can.

Now let me help you this morning in finding out why Paul wrote to the church at Colosse from a Roman prison in the early A.D. 60's at the same time that he wrote to Philemon, who was a Colossian, as well as his Ephesian epistle, and his letter to the church at Philippi. These are usually referred to as Paul's prison epistles.

I think that the first sign of trouble is in chapter 2, verse 4. (Read.)

Verse 8 of chapter 2 is clearly a warning of some false teaching that was going on. (Read.)

And then from verse 16 in chapter 2 to the end of the chapter, we have a long section which speaks of trouble that they were having in the Colossian church. (Read 2:16-23.)

Now we can say about this letter to the Colossian church, what we can say about most of Paul's epistles, especially those written to churches, that he laid a foundation of doctrine first, in chapters 1 and 2. And that he followed this with a series of practical exhortation in chapters 3 and 4, at least down through verse 6 in chapter 4. Verses 7 in chapter 4 to the end of that chapter contains comments he made about certain people.

Now when we come to those verses in our study we will look more into the details of what the Apostle Paul was concerned about that was going on in the church at Colosse.

But having pointed out these verses which indicate that there were problems in the church which really bothered this Apostle Paul, I don't think that they were the main reason for Paul's letter to them. Now what I am going to point out as the real reason, could be stated as the main reason that Paul wrote all of his epistles, and the main reason that the Holy Spirit moved upon his heart to write, and guided him as to emphasis which we find in all of his epistles, not only those he wrote to churches, but those he wrote to individuals, such as to Philemon, to Timothy, and to Titus. There may have been problems which prompted Paul to write each of his

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letters, *but always his main concern was the spiritual condition of the churches and the individuals to whom he was writing.* You see, if the people of God are really walking in fellowship with the Lord, and growing spiritually, the Devil can do his worst, and false teachers can move in among the people of God, but the people who know the Lord, who are growing in their understanding of the truth of God, and who are walking in fellowship with the Lord, are going to be safe. But a major tragedy in our day is that many who claim to be Christians, know little or nothing about the Scriptures, and little or nothing about true fellowship with God. So they will be inclined to follow anything that comes along.

Now I want you to see how the Apostle Paul approached this subject as we begin, or begin again, our study of this divinely inspired epistle. Notice how he addressed his letter to them in verse 2: “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.” If Jesus Christ is your Savior you are a saint, a holy person, and you are a faithful brother or sister in the family of God. You and I aren’t completely holy or completely faithful, that is, we don’t trust the Lord all of the time like we should. Nevertheless this is God’s description of us. But I want you to notice where these saints were. They were “in Christ” and they were “at Colosse.”

I am reading Andrew Murray’s book, *Abide in Christ*, which I have read before, and thoroughly enjoying it. In his comments on the statement in 1 Cor. 1:30, “Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus,” he indicated that this is one of the first truths of Scripture that every new Christian should be told. “Of Him,” meaning of God, “are ye in Christ Jesus.” God has put each one of us “in Christ Jesus.” Not “will be,” but “are.” We all have our geographical location which is our sphere of life and ministry, but we are also “in Christ Jesus.” We are united to Christ like branches are joined to a vine. We are united to Christ so that He is our life, our strength, our all. And we need to know this because apart from Him we can do nothing that is pleasing to God. We can’t bear fruit if anything is not right in our relationship with the Lord. But we are joined to Christ forever! In verse 4 our faith is in Christ Jesus. We don’t produce faith; He gives us our faith.

So no one is more important to us in our Colosse than is our Lord Jesus Christ. This truth motivated Paul to pray for the believers at Colosse, and what a wonderful prayer that is! And from prayer Paul went on to speak of Christ in our salvation, in creation, and in the Church, the body of Christ. And God has done all of this through Christ, notice the end of

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verse 18, “that in all things He [our Lord Jesus Christ] might have the preeminence.” Christ is first in our salvation because He is the Savior. He is first in creation because He is the Creator. He is first in the Church as the Head. And He is to be first in our lives, because He is our life.

This is all doctrine, but it is reality. It is true doctrine. Christians need to know these truths, and to make Christ *first* in their lives, in your life and mine. Notice in verse 27 of chapter 1, where Paul spoke of our Lord as “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” You and I will never make it by ourselves, but we don’t have to because Christ is in us!

More truth and more encouragement is to be seen in verses 5 through 7 of chapter 2, speaking again of our union with Christ. We were saved by faith in Christ. That is how we received Him. Now we are to walk in Him. What a lot of truth is involved in that little preposition, “in”!

Look also at verses 9 and 10 in chapter 2.

Once we understand what we have in Christ, we are not going to give an ear to those false teachers who say that they have more for us to know and for us to have. What needs to be added to Christ? What can be added to Christ? What we need to do is stated very clearly in chapter 3, verses 1 through 4 which contain not only important exhortations, but a glorious promise in verse 4.

Chapter 3 tells us how we need to put off all that we were before we were in Christ. See verses 5 through 9, and put on what we have in Christ in verse 10 through 14. And here at the end of verse 11 we are told that “Christ is all, and in all.” No false teacher can match that. So the more we know of Christ, and the closer we walk in fellowship with Him, the less interest we are going to have in the false teachers. What can anyone give us beyond what we have in Christ.

Beginning with verse 18 of chapter 3 we see how the Lord affects our family relationships. And He transforms the servant and master relationships as well.

The closing exhortations in 4:2-6

Concl: Now the question that we all need to ask, all of us who know the Lord, is this: To what extent am I enjoying my union with Christ?

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This is not a relationship that I need to seek. It is a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ that we already have. The best safeguard we have against the temptations that the Devil puts in our way, is walk in Christ. We need to live with our dependence in Christ, not in ourselves. And it is only through our daily fellowship with the Lord that we can be spared from being tripped up by the false teachers which come our way. We all have trials and testings that are too much for us. The Lord has designed them that way that we may find our all in Christ.

Let us all be praying that the study of this short but very powerful letter written long ago by the Apostle Paul to the church at Colosse, will have a transforming effect in our lives that we may know what it is to “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might” (Eph. 6:10). “Thanks be unto God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57).

But let me make a national application to the message of Colossians. We are facing as a nation the biggest problem that our nation has ever faced. Our leaders are telling us that the solution to our problem is money. Anyone who knows the Bible, God’s infallible Word, knows that the money and jobs problems we face are only a symptoms of our real problem. Our main problem is that we as a nation have turned away from God. For years nationally we have been more concerned about what we want to have and about what we want to do than we have about pleasing God. Our leaders are still not talking about our relationship to God. The solution to our many problems is a return to God. But most people will laugh at us if we make such a suggestion. But the Word of God is the only real truth that there is. And I would remind all of us today of the message of the Bible that applies to our nation, and to all of us individually. You find it many places in Scripture. But let me remind you of what the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the churches of Galatia over 2,000 years ago. And remember he was writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit. You will find these words in Galatians 6:7-9:

7 Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

8 For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

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Years ago there was a preacher in the Memphis, Tennessee who was famous for a message that he preached over and over again. People came from everywhere to hear that message, and many people heard it over and over again. The subject of his message was this: “Pay Day Some Day.”

That’s where we are in our beloved country. It’s pay day! Pay day for all of the years and in the many ways that nationally we have chosen our way instead of God’s way. God has been very patient with us, amazingly so! But time has run out for us. Is there no hope? Yes, there is hope. But it begins where Paul put it in his epistles, where the Lord put it in His ministry when He was here on earth. It was the message of the OT prophets who were raised up by God to call people everywhere to turn to God, or back to God if they had turned away from Him. The message was never clearer than it was as stated by the Lord Himself to Solomon and which has been recorded for us in 2 Chronicles 7:14. Probably many of you have memorized it from hearing it so often in the past. We need to hear it again today. This is what the Lord said to Solomon:

14 If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.

Israel had, and may I add, still has, a very unique relationship to God. And God’s dealings with Israel so clearly laid out in the Bible, are a message to the nations of the earth. No nation can survive which does not put God, and His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, first! So we in the true Church, those of us who know the Lord, need to turn our attention to ourselves. You and I need to ask ourselves, What is the condition of our relationship to the Lord? Are we walking with the Lord? Can we say that our relationship with the Lord is what God wants it to be? What about our prayer life? If blessing is to return to our nation, it is going to begin with us. But unfortunately there are many, far too many, who name the name of Christ, but they are more interested in entertainment than they are in Bible teaching. And over the years the ways of the world have come into the church with the idea that if we are like the world, we can win the world. You don’t get that message out of the Bible. In fact, just exactly the opposite is true. The more we live the way God wants us to live, the more the people of the world are going to be inclined to ask us for the reason we have the hope that we do. See 1 Peter 3:15.