

Ancient Problems — Current Battles — Biblical Solutions

(An Overview of Colossians)

Dr. Jim Cecy

Introduction and Review:

- Last week: A Renewed Focus: Introducing Paul's Letter to the Colossians
- The Church in Colossae was being destroyed by a blending of false religion, pagan rituals and worldly philosophy.
- The Central Theme: Focusing on the greatness of Christ who is "all and in all" (3:11) and who is "to have first place in everything." (1:18)

I. The Theological Issues (Colossians 1-2)

• Error #1: Arianism — "Jesus is not the eternal and fully divine Son of God."

A. The Problem Then

The Colossian Heresy: The Father and the Son did NOT exist together eternally. Christ was a created being and therefore inferior. The Holy Spirit is an impersonal energy force.

B. The Problem Today

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

- "...(Jesus Christ) is the image of the invisible God" (1:15)
- "...all things have been created by Him and for Him." (1:16)
- "...in Him all things hold together." (1:17)
- "...it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him." (1:19)
- "...in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form." (2:9)
- "...He is the head over all rule and authority." (2:10)
- Jesus Christ is "the exact representation of His (God's) nature..." (Heb. 1:3)
- Hypostatic Union: Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man

• Error #2: Docetism — "Christ only seemed to be fully human."

A. The Problem Then

The Colossian Heresy: Jesus only *seemed* to have a physical body and to physically die on the cross. He was incorporeal, a pure and ethereal spirit, an emanation from God.

B. The Problem Today

Regarding the liberals who say that Jesus was not a truly historical figure...
Regarding those who focus on just Jesus' divinity and deny His true humanity...
Regarding those who speak not of the PERSON of Christ, but of the "Christ spirit" or the "Christ nature."

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

- "...(Jesus Christ) is the (visible) image of the invisible God" (1:15)
- "...all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form..." (2:9)
- "...the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (Jn 1:14; cf. 1 John 1)

• Error #3: Abuse of Church Leadership — "Christ is not the head of the Church."

A. The Problem Then

B. The Problem Today

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

It is Jesus Christ who "...transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son..." (1:13), "...is before all things..." (1:17), "...is the head of the body, the Church..." (1:18), "...the head over all rule and authority..." (2:10) and "...disarmed the rulers and authorities..." (2:15) "Of this church I was made a minister (i.e. not the head) according to the stewardship from God..." (1:25)

• Error #4: Pragmatism — "What works is more important than what is true."

Pragmatism is the belief that ideas are tested by their practical value and not whether they are right in the eyes of God.

A. The Problem Then

B. The Problem Today

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

- "...continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel..." (1:23)
- "...increasing in the knowledge of God." (1:10)
- "...proclaim(ing) Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ." (1:28)
- "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another..." (3:16)
- "Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." (3:17)

• Error #5: Modernism — "We need new ideas for modern times."

A. The Problem Then

Paul warns the Colossians of the empty deception that disguises itself as a key to fulfillment.

B. The Problem Today

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

"I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument." (2:4)

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." (2:8)

• Error #6: Legalism — "The gospel is too simple. You need more."

A. The Problem Then

Once again the Apostle Paul does battle with the Judaizers (cf. Galatians) presenting a gospel of faith plus works.

B. The Problem Today

Regarding those who deny the true gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

"Therefore no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a *mere* shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." (2:16-17)

"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all *refer to* things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, *but are* of no value against fleshly indulgence." (2:20-23)

"faith in Christ Jesus" (1:4) "the truth of the gospel" (1:5) and "the grace of God in truth" (1:6)

• Error #7: Elitism — "We have a special insight from God that is only available through us."

A. The Problem Then

The Colossian Church had been invaded by a group of people who claimed to have special insight into God — a super-knowledge (an epignosis) for an enlightened elite.

B. The Problem Today

"I have a message from God that no one has ever heard."

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

Regarding the knowledge of God (biblical epignosis) and the mysteries of the gospel for all who are indwelt by God's Holy Spirit.

"...increasing in the knowledge of God." (1:10)

"...(the Word of God), that is the mystery which...has now been manifested to His saints..." (1:26)

"...God willed to make known...this mystery among the Gentiles..." (1:27)

"...(Christ) in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge...in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument." (2:3-4)

• Error #8: The Worship of Angels — "We have special angelic spirit guides."

A. The Problem Then

False teachers taught the people to call for help and insight from angelic spirit-guides and other spiritual mediators.

B. The Problem Today "Just ask your spirit guide"

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

"Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in...the worship of angels, taking his stand on the visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind."

• Error #9: Asceticism — "The body is evil and deserves harsh treatment in order for your soul to be saved."

A. The Problem Then

The Colossian Heresy: The teaching that that since the body is evil we need to buffet the body and engage in harsh treatment and self denial in order to be saved. Also, the taught that the Christian life must also be filled with pain and suffering.

B. The Problem Today

Some teach that any expressions of joy mock the reality that our lives are to be filled with persecution and suffering "or something is wrong."

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

"Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement..." (2:18)

"When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." (2:13-14)

• Error #10: Licentiousness — "If it feels good, do it."

A. The Problem Then

The Colossian Heresy: The teaching that since the body is evil and has nothing to do with the spiritual, people might as well let the body do what it pleases.

B. The Problem Today

Regarding those who refuse to talk about sin...

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

"Therefore, consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion evil desire and greed, which amounts to idolatry" (3:5)

"...on account of these things that the wrath of God will come."(3:6) "...put them all aside..."(3:8) "evil practices..." (3:9)

• **Error #11: Astrology — "There are natural forces influencing our destinies."**

A. The Problem Then

The Colossian Heresy: Teaching that stellar and planetary forces influence their lives and destinies.

B. The Problem Today

Regarding people who are looking to the stars for answers and direction.

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

"See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (2:8)

• **Error #12: Universalism — "There are many ways to God."**

A. The Problem Then

The Colossian Heresy: "Faith in Jesus Christ is not the only way to the Father. It is one of many ways."

B. The Problem Today

Universalism today...

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

"For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (1:13-14)

• **Error #13: Un-named Heresies — "There's always something new to believe in."**

A. The Problem Then

The Colossian Heresy: An unrecognizable blend of many heresies.

B. The Problem Today

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and Us

Paul's Warnings to Christians of Every Age

- Beware of anything that keeps you from putting Christ first in everything (1:18)
- Beware of anyone who deludes you (2:4)
- Beware of anything that takes you captive (2:8)
- Beware of anyone who tries to judge your heart (2:16)
- Beware of anyone who tries to defraud you of your heavenly prize (2:18)
- Beware of anyone who presents to you any form of false teaching (2:19)

II. The Practical Issues (Colossians 3-4)

A. The Problem

The Colossian Christians were real people living in real time and facing real problems.

B. The Problem Today

C. Paul's Response to the Colossians and to Us

- Putting Christ first in our lives (Col. 3:1-17)
- Putting Christ first in our homes (Col. 3:18-21)
- Putting Christ first in our jobs (Col. 3:22-4:1)
- Putting Christ first in our conduct toward outsiders (Col. 4:2-5)
- Putting Christ first in our speech (Col. 4:6)

Closing Challenge: Colossians = Life lessons from Paul's heart to our lives.