

=THE EPISTLES=

Lesson 7

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians

AIM: to teach my pupils the general teaching and truths of the book of Colossians.

POINT OF CONTACT: Many times in Bible lessons we can use a photo as a point of contact and as an illustration. Take a picture to class Sunday. Be sure it is large enough so the entire class can see it. Tell whose picture it is, and then ask them, "Who is this?" They, of course, will give the same name. You say, "No, it's not. This is just a piece of paper reflecting him." Then lead up to the fact that Paul is writing the Colossian people, explaining to them that their ritualism is only a picture of Christ and that Christ has come and now lives in every believer's heart. Consequently, we do not need the pictures, the ritual, the formalism, etc.

INTRODUCTION: This is another one of Paul's prison Epistles. It was written about the same time as the letter to the church at Ephesus. Timothy was associated with Paul at the time, Colossians 1:1. Paul had completed his three missionary journeys and was in Rome as a prisoner of the state. The church at Colosse was actually not one church but a cluster of small churches. Colosse was about ten miles from Laodicea. Notice Colossians 4:13, 15 and 16. Let us notice some truths about the letter, the church, etc.

I. THE CHURCH HAD PROBABLY BEEN FOUNDED BY EPAPHRAS. (Colossians 4:12) Paul may or may not ever have been at this church, but he did have many friends among its members.

II. LET US NOTICE SOME OF THE MEMBERS OF THIS CHURCH:

1. Epaphras. Epaphras was a faithful minister of Christ; notice Colossians 4:12. He had come to visit Paul in Rome and brought glowing reports of the spiritual progress of the church. (Colossians 1:3-8)
2. Philemon. Philemon was a wealthy man and one of Paul's closest friends.
3. Onesimus. (Colossians 4:9) Onesimus had been a slave or servant of Philemon. He had stolen from his master and run away to Rome. No doubt at Rome he had been caught and put in prison where he met Paul. While in prison, perhaps Paul led him to Christ. The entire little book of Philemon is a letter sent by Paul to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus, asking Philemon to receive Onesimus back.
4. Archippus. Archippus was a son of Philemon, and we think he may have become the pastor of the church at Colosse. Notice Colossians 4:17; Philemon 2.

These people at the church at Colosse formed a nucleus of fine Christians! It is also a tremendous cross section: a slave, a wealthy man, a young man, his old father, a faithful servant of Christ, etc.

III. THE PURPOSE OF THE LETTER. Epaphras had not only told Paul of the progress of the church, but he had also explained to Paul that the believers at Colosse were exposed to serious doctrinal danger. They needed help! The letter of Colossians is to help them concerning these false doctrines. One of these doctrines was the worshipping of angels. Another was that God was remote, unknowable, and not personal. Another was that a Christian should withdraw himself from the world and not have contact with outside people. Of course, this would eliminate soul winning, etc. The main error, however, was angel worship, and the book of Colossians is written to straighten out the people doctrinally.

IV. THE THEME OF THE BOOK IS THE PREMINENCE OF CHRIST. (Colossians 1:15-23)

V. COLOSSIANS AND EPHESIANS. Ephesians was probably written shortly after Colossians. They are addressed to churches facing similar problems, and there are many similarities in these two books. Tychicus, a former traveling companion of Paul (Acts 20:4), took the letter to Colosse (Colossians 4:7). He was a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord (Ephesians 6:21). He also carried the letter of Paul to the Ephesians. He was accompanied by Onesimus (Colossians 4:9), who bore with him the letter to his former master, Philemon. (See verses 10-12 of Philemon.) After that, Tychicus became a faithful

messenger to other churches. Notice II Timothy 4:12 and Titus 3:12. He was a helper to Paul. Paul was constantly reminded of his own heart's gratitude for his helpers. (You could make a list of the many people here at our church who are such a help. List also what these people do.)

- VI. NO DOUBT EPAPHRAS SUFFERED FOR HIS STAND. Later Paul calls him his "fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus," Philemon 23.
- VII. NOTICE SOME OF THE THINGS WHICH PAUL REFUTES IN THIS LETTER TO THE COLOSSIAN PEOPLE.
1. Holy days. (Colossians 2:14-16) There are many holy days in the Old Testament. These were all a picture of Jesus Christ. Since He has come, these holy days have been blotted out and nailed to the cross.
 2. Sabbath days. There were many Old Testament sabbaths. We have a Lord's Day now on which we serve God; we are not bound by the Sabbath. This was all blotted out and nailed to the cross. See Colossians 2:14.
 3. All of these things were a shadow. (Colossians 2:14-17) When we see a person's shadow approaching, we look at the shadow to figure out who it is. When the person arrives, we no longer need the shadow; we now have the person. (Once again, use the photo to illustrate this.)
 4. Other similar passages in the Bible remind us not to revere persons, days, places, etc. One of these is Matthew 23:6-11. You will notice He is talking here about spiritual leaders—they are not to be called "rabbi," "father," or "master." This is a very interesting passage.
 5. Paul predicted the false doctrines of forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats. Read I Timothy 4:1-5 very carefully. They certainly explain themselves.