

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

- A. Importance of the Epistle to the Colossians
 - 1. This letter from Paul is a book on Christian doctrine.
 - 2. Doctrine gives instruction against heresy.
- B. The heresy at Colossae
 - 1. It was tied to Judaism and Gnosticism.
 - 2. They emphasized special freedom, super protection, strict behavior, super knowledge and a superior attitude.
 - 3. Like all heresies, Jesus is not enough.
- C. An outline of the Epistle to the Colossians
 - 1. Introduction (1:1-14)
 - a. Greeting (1-2)
 - b. A prayer of thanksgiving for their faith (3-8)
 - c. A prayer of petition for them (9-14)
 - 2. Doctrinal Instruction (1:15-2:5)
 - a. The preeminent person of Christ (15-20)
- D. Review
 - 1. All the spirituality one could ever hope for is summed up in Christ.
 - 2. Spiritual knowledge of God's will enables Christians to live what they believe.
 - 3. Christians are to be thankful despite difficult circumstances because we have a new inheritance in heaven with new hearts that want to obey God.
- E. Importance of Colossians 1:10-19
 - 1. F. Bruce, *The doctrine of Christ was the principal truth threatened by the false teaching at Colossae, and this is the doctrine Paul presents to his readers before dealing specifically with the false teaching.*
 - 2. J. Vernon McGee, *This section provides an answer to those who would deny the deity of Jesus Christ. To understand these verses is to realize how wonderful He really is. Paul is specifically attempting to answer one of the oldest heresies in the church, Gnosticism. Another of the first heresies was Arianism. Arius of Alexandria said that the Lord Jesus Christ was a creature, a created being. The Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 answered this heresy saying, "The Son is very Man of very man, and very God of very God." Later on in the history of the church, Socinus propagated the heresy that Jesus was not God and that mankind did not need a Savior from sin. He taught that we were not totally depraved.*

COLOSSIANS 1:15, THE PREEMINENT PERSON OF CHRIST

- A. Jesus is God-Man (15)
 - 1. He is fully God (15a), *He is the image of the invisible God*
 - a. *image*
 - 1) It means *likeness* as in 2 Corinthians 4:4, *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*
 - 2) It means *representation*.
 - a) Hebrews 1:3, *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,*
 - b) John 14:9, *Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"*
 - 3) It means *manifestation*, John 1:18, *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*
 - 4) F. Bruce, *To call Christ the image of God is to say that in Him the being and nature of God have been perfectly manifested—that in Him the invisible has become visible.*

- b. *the invisible God*
 - 1) John 1:18, *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*
 - 2) J. Philips translated verse 15, *Christ is the visible expression of the invisible God.*

- c. The deity of Jesus was affirmed at the Council of Nicea, 325 A.D.
 - 1) Jesus is pre-existent.
 - a) Meaning - He existed before His human birth.
 - b) Importance
 - 1] If He is not pre-existent, He is not God.
 - 2] If He is not pre-existent, He is a liar.

 - c) Biblical confirmation
 - 1] Jesus had a heavenly origin, John 3:13, *No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.*
 - 2] Jesus is Creator, John 1:3, *All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*
 - 3] Jesus had relationship with the Father before creation, John 17:5, *And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*
 - 4] Jesus has the same nature as God, Philippians 2:6, *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,*
 - 5] Jesus has the attributes of God, Colossians 2:9, *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,*

- 2) Jesus is eternal.
 - a) Meaning - He not only existed before His birth or even before creation but He has always existed.
 - b) Importance
 - 1] If the Son is not eternal, He is not God.
 - 2] If the Son is not eternal, there is not Trinity.
 - 3] If the Son is not eternal, He lied.

 - c) Biblical confirmation
 - 1] Jesus has the same nature (essence) as God the Father.
 - a] John 10:30, *I and the Father are one.*
 - b] Hebrews 1:3, *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,*

 - 2] Jesus declared Himself to be eternal, John 8:58, *Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."*

- 3) Jesus is the Second Person of the Trinity.
 - a) Meaning - God has always existed with one nature in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - b) Importance
 - 1] God has always had fellowship within the Trinity.
 - 2] God does not need His creation for fellowship.
 - 3] God has chosen us for fellowship.

 - c) Biblical confirmation
 - 1] There is unity in God, Deuteronomy 6:4, *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*
 - 2] There is a note of diversity in God, Genesis 1:26, *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."*
 - 3] There is a focus on triunity in God, Isaiah 48:16, *Draw near to me, hear this: from the beginning I have not spoken in secret, from the time it came to be I have been there." And now the Lord GOD has sent me, and his Spirit.*
 - 4] There are illustrations of the Trinity in the New Testament.
 - a] There is oneness in name yet threeness, Matthew 28:18-19, *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"*
 - b] There is a benediction of Trinity with functions, 2 Corinthians 13:14, *The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

- 4) The Nicene Creed, *We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of the Father, that is, of the substance [ousias] of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one substance [homoousion] with the Father, through whom all things came to be, those things that are in heaven and those things that are on earth, who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and was made man, suffered, rose the third day, ascended into the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead.*
- d. Quotes on the nature of God
- 1) Ignatius of Antioch (circa 110 A.D.), *We have also as a physician the Lord our God, Jesus the Christ, the only-begotten Son and Word, before time began, but who afterwards became also a man, of Mary the virgin.*
 - 2) Irenaeus (circa 170 A.D.), *...the incomprehensible being made comprehensible, the impossible becoming capable of suffering, and the Word being made man.*
 - 3) D. McCullough, *Only a wholly other God could save, and only a God wholly other in self-giving love would save. Only a God different from humanity, outside the world of self-centeredness has the power to reverse the deadly order of things.*
 - 4) J. Walvoord, *The evidence of Scripture is so complete that one who denies the deity of Christ must necessarily reject the accuracy of Scriptures.*
2. He is fully man (15b), ***the firstborn of all creation.***
- a. *firstborn*
- 1) It can have a temporal meaning, first in time.
 - 2) It can have a sovereign meaning, first in authority, as in Psalm 89:27, *And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.*
 - 3) Here, it can mean both but the emphasis in this passage is authority, N. Geisler, *“Firstborn” implies both Christ’s priority to all Creation (in time) and His sovereignty over all Creation (in rank).*
 - 4) It does not mean that Jesus was the first created being as taught by Jehovah’s Witnesses. It will be seen in Colossians 1:16-19 that Jesus existed before all things and is Himself, Creator of all things.
 - 5) J. McGee, *So, my friend, what we are talking about here is not that the Lord Jesus was born a creature; we are talking about the fact that He is God. When He came into the world, a child was born but the Son was given, and He had come out of eternity.*
 - 6) H. Spence, *Looking up to God, he is his Image: looking down on creation, he is its primal Head and Lord.*
- b. *of all creation*
- 1) As will be seen in Colossians 1:16, Jesus created all things in heaven and on earth.
 - 2) It would be impossible for Jesus to have been created since He created all things.
 - 3) Paul makes a strong case against those who said that Jesus was one of many emanations from God.
 - 4) J. McGee clearly describes the heresy Paul was combating, *Paul is dealing with one of the philosophies of that day, one of the mystery religions. It is called the demiurge, and it held that God created a creature just beneath Him; then that creature created a creature beneath him; then that creature created a creature beneath him. You can just keep on going down that ladder until finally you come to a creature that created this universe. These were emanations from God. Gnosticism taught that Jesus was one of these creatures, an emanation from God...He is the Creator. There is no demiurge, no series of creatures being created one after another. He Himself created all things.*
3. The dual nature of Jesus was affirmed at the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.).
- a. Results from Chalcedon
- 1) The Council of Nicea’s position on Jesus’ deity was affirmed.
 - 2) The christological formula was affirmed.
 - a) Jesus Christ is one Person with two natures, human and divine.
 - b) He is equal with the Father in deity and equal with man in humanity, except for sin.
 - 3) Key points concerning Jesus
 - a) He is one and the same Son (one person)
 - b) He is perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity (two natures)
 - c) He is truly God and truly man (two natures maintained)
 - d) He was begotten before the ages (eternal)
 - e) The relationship between His two natures: no confusion, no change, no division, no separation.

- 4) Theological definitions
 - a) Hypostatic Union - the relationship of Jesus' human and divine natures.
 - 1] The two natures constitute one person.
 - 2] It insures the constant presence of both humanity and deity.
 - b) Kenosis - the subordination of Jesus' divine attributes.
 - 1] His divine power was veiled but not surrendered, John 1:14, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
 - 2] He voluntarily relinquished independent use of His divine attributes, Phil. 2:5-8, *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*
 - 3] Definitions
 - a] Tertullian of Carthage (circa 160-220 A.D.), *...we see plainly the twofold state, which is not confounded, not intermixed but conjoined in One person, Jesus, God and Man.*
 - b] Jesus surrendered no attributes of deity but He did voluntarily subordinate His use of them in keeping with His purpose of living among men and their limitations.
 - 5) The Creed of Chalcedon, *So, following the saintly fathers, we all with one voice teach the confession of one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man, of a rational soul and a body; consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin; begotten before the ages from the Father as regards his divinity, and in the last days the same for us and for our salvation from Mary, the virgin God-bearer as regards his humanity; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, acknowledged in two natures which undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being; he is not parted or divided into two persons, but is one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ, just as the prophets taught from the beginning about him, and as the Lord Jesus Christ himself instructed us, and as the creed of the fathers handed down to us.*
4. Quotes from Leo I on the dual nature of Christ
 - a. *...God the Father almighty and in Jesus Christ His only Son, our Lord, Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary. These three statements wreck the tricks of nearly every heretic.*
 - b. *His subjection to human weaknesses in common with us did not mean that he shared our sins. He took on the form of a servant without the defilement of sin, thereby enhancing the human and not diminishing the divine. For that self-emptying whereby the Invisible rendered himself visible, and the Creator and Lord of all things chose to join the ranks of mortals, spelled no failure of power: it was an act of merciful favor...What was taken from the mother of the Lord was the nature without the guilt.*
 - c. *The birth of flesh reveals human nature; birth from a virgin is a proof of divine power...the divinity was concealed by the veil of flesh...For it is from us that he gets a humanity which is less than the Father; it is from the Father that he gets a divinity which is equal to the Father.*
 5. Practical ramifications of the dual nature of Jesus Christ
 - a. Jesus is preeminent in all of creation which will be developed in Paul's Epistle to the Colossians.
 - b. The Trinity makes it possible for there to be love and fellowship within the Godhead. Therefore, God does not need us but He wants us.
 - c. Priority without inferiority as seen in the Trinity is the basis for proper relationship between men and women, 1 Corinthians 11:3, *But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.*
 - d. Prayer is practiced in a Trinitarian way, addressing the Father in the Name of Christ as the Spirit directs, Ephesians 2:18, *For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.*

CONCLUSION

- A. What Jesus can do is based on Who He is.
- B. Jesus is preminent in heaven and on earth because He is fully God and fully man.