

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

- A. 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.
- B. An outline of the Epistle to the Colossians
 - 1. Introduction (1:1-14)
 - 2. Doctrinal Instruction (1:15-29)
 - a. The supreme person of Christ (15-20)
 - b. The supreme work of Christ (21-29)
 - 1) Instruction on reconciliation (21-23)
 - 2) Paul's ministry of reconciliation (24-29)
 - 3. Warnings against false teaching (2:1-23)
 - a. Encouragement to persevere in the faith (1-7)
- C. Review of Colossians 1:21-23
 - 1. The Position of the Colossians
 - a. In the past (21): They were alienated from God.
 - b. In the present (22): They were reconciled to God by the death of Jesus Christ.
 - c. In the future (23): Their perseverance in the faith was secured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.
 - 2. The importance of reconciliation, G. Osborne, *Due to their total depravity, the people of this world could not traverse the enmity gap between themselves and God, so a loving, merciful God sent his Son to bridge the gap for us through his sacrificial death on the cross. By placing our sins under his blood, Christ made atonement, and the result was reconciliation...*

COLOSSIANS 1:24-29, PAUL'S MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

- A. Paul's ministry included sufferings for them who were part of the body of Christ (24), *Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,*
 - 1. He identified his suffering in prison as for the sake of the Colossians.
 - a. His suffering was part of being a minister of the Gospel to them and others he served.
 - b. Paul was in a Roman prison ministering to them by letter, encouraging them to not be misled by false teachers.
 - c. M. Anders, *Paul tells us the truth about authentic ministry. It involves suffering. It's aim is maturity. It's hard work.*
 - 2. He declared that he was *filling up what is lacking* in the Church.
 - a. Paul was not saying that Christ's suffering on the cross was insufficient.
 - 1) His one-time payment on the cross is eternally sufficient, Hebrews 10:12-14, *But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*
 - 2) *affliction* was never used in the New Testament of Christ's death.
 - a) It means *distress, pressure, trouble.*
 - b) N. Geisler, *Ordinarily it refers to trials in life, not the pains of death. Christ does indeed continue to suffer when Christians suffer for Him. Acts 9:4, And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"*
- b. Paul was not speaking of sacrifice but service through suffering.

- 1) It is the believer's privilege to suffer for Christ.
 - a) 1 Peter 5:9, *Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*
 - b) Philippians 1:29, *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,*
- 2) When the believer suffers because of Christian ministry, Jesus suffers in and through them.
 - a) Jesus indwells believers and suffers with us as we suffer.
 - b) M. Anders, *Suffering brings about an identification with the Savior that nothing else can, Philippians 3:10, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,*
 - c) Our sufferings for Christ are added to those of all other Christians, thereby, *filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions until His return, M. Vincent, The full tale of sufferings will not be completed until the Church shall have finished her conflict, and shall have come up "out of great tribulation" to sit at the marriage-supper of the Lamb.*

B. Paul was selected by God to proclaim the mystery of reconciliation (25-27)

1. Paul identified himself to the Colossians as one assigned by God to serve them (25), ***of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,***

a. *steward ship from God*

- 1) It means administration of a household which here means the household of God, the church.
- 2) Ephesians 3:1-2, *For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles - assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,*

b. Paul was given a commission to proclaim the Gospel which included suffering.

- 1) Acts 9:15-16, *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."*
- 2) Paul is emphasizing the importance of following those who have been recognized as leaders of the church.
- 3) False teachers came to town with no authority and no interest in suffering for the flock.
- 4) J. McGee, *All of us would like to see revival. We talk glibly about witnessing and about living for God*

and all that sort of thing. My friend, may I say to you that if the gospel is going to go forward today and if people are going to be saved, someone is going to have to pay a price.

How much are you paying to get out the Word of God? What is it really costing you? Are you willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel?

- c. His purpose was to fully proclaim God's word.
 - 1) There was no need for the false teachers who said they had special revelation which could only be obtained through them.
 - 2) Paul's Gospel message was complete, Colossians 1:9, *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,*
2. Paul was given a message for the Gentiles which had been a mystery (26-27)
 - a. His task was to reveal the age-old mystery to Christians (26), ***the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.***
 - 1) *mystery*
 - a) Biblically, it refers to a truth previously unknown but now revealed by God.
 - b) To the Greek world, it referred to secret ceremonies of pagan cults that only the initiated knew.
 - c) False teachers were declaring they had secret teaching known only to them.
 - 2) *for ages and generations*
 - a) *ages* refers to the time before creation.
 - b) *generations* refers to the times of human existence.
 - c) 1 Corinthians 2:7, *But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*
 - 3) *revealed to his saints*
 - a) Some believe this refers to church leaders, like Paul, who were instructed in the mystery so they could proclaim it to the world.
 - b) Others believe the emphasis is on the revelation of the mystery to *the saints*, those who had placed faith in Christ. Note verse 25, *that was given to me for you.*
 - c) It is assuredly both since Paul was assigned the responsibility to proclaim the Gospel directly by Jesus Christ which was then proclaimed by others in places where Paul had never been.
 - b. The mystery is that Gentiles have full-access to God and that He would dwell in them (27), ***To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.***
 - 1) The mystery was not that salvation is available to Gentiles.
 - a) That was taught in the Old Testament, Isaiah 49:6, *...I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.*
 - b) The New Testament affirmed that Old Testament truth, Galatians 3:8, *And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed."*

- 2) The mystery is richly glorious for Gentile believers in the present as well as the future.
 - a) They are fellow-heirs, on the same level with Jews, Ephesians 3:6, *This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.*
 - b) They are indwelt by Christ, *Christ in you.*
 - 1] 2 Corinthians 5:17, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*
 - 2] 2 Corinthians 13:5, *Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*
 - 3] H. Spence, *Christ dwelling in Gentile hearts - this is the wonder of wonders!*
 - c) They will share Christ's glory, *the hope of glory.*
 - 1] Colossians 3:4, *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*
 - 2] Romans 8:18, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*
 - d) They will be part of Christ's body, the church.
 - 1] 1 Corinthians 12:13, *For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and all were made to drink of one Spirit.*
 - 2] J. McGee, *The mystery, the new thing, was that God would now put Israel on the same basis as the Gentiles. All men are lost; all men have sinned; all men have come short of the glory of God. Now God is taking both Jews and Gentiles, men out of all races, and He is putting them into a new body which is called the church. That was never revealed in the Old Testament, but it is now being revealed.*

C. Paul's ministry goal was for every believer to become mature in Christ (28-29)

1. His purpose was to proclaim Christ and produce mature Christians (28), ***Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.***
 - a. His message was Christ.
 - 1) *we* refers to Paul's ministry team which included Epaphras, Colossians 1:7.
 - 2) J. McGee, *The gospel is not what we preach, but it is whom we preach. No man has ever preached the gospel who hasn't preached Christ. Jesus Christ is the gospel.*
 - b. His method of instruction.
 - 1) *proclaim* is to preach, declare.
 - 2) *warn* is to admonish or make one aware as to the consequences of one's actions.
 - 3) *teach* is instruction in truth, doctrine.
 - c. Notes on biblical instruction.
 - 1) 2 Timothy 3:16, *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,*
 - 2) Proper instruction takes a person from knowledge to wisdom, from head to heart.
 - d. Paul wanted all Christians to become mature in their faith.
 - 1) Ephesians 4:12-15, *to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*
 - 2) G. Osborne, *The purpose of the church's teaching ministry is to expose the needs of every person, convict individuals of the need to change, and present a plan to guide them in doing so. The church must proclaim the good news of Christ and his indwelling Spirit, so that it can help the individual to root out the bad and forge a healthy life of fruitfulness for God.*
2. His strength was the power of Christ working in and through him (29), ***For this I toil, struggling with all his***

energy that he powerfully works within me.

- a. Paul labored to present believers to Christ fully mature.
 - 1) It involved evangelizing the lost.
 - 2) It included helping Christians grow spiritually.
- b. His strength for ministry came from the indwelling Christ.
 - 1) Philippians 4:13, *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*
 - 2) 2 Corinthians 12:9, *But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*
 - 3) 1 Timothy 1:12, *I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,*

CONCLUSION

- A. Suffering is a part of serving.
- B. Future hope is assured by the presence of Christ in one's life.
- C. Strength for serving others comes from the power of Christ.