

A LOOK AT THE BOOK COLOSSIANS COMPLETE IN CHRIST!

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AUTHOR AND DATE

Evidence for Pauline authorship is strong as for the other prison epistles.

There isn't as much external evidence.

Internal evidence and parallels with the other prison epistles provide strong support.

The date is about A.D. 60.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Little is known about the origin of the church at Colosse.

It was not founded by Paul.

He had never been there personally.

Yet he was familiar with the church there.

It may have been a daughter church of Ephesus with which he had worked extensively.

He knew some of the brethren from the church and may have led them to the Lord in Ephesus.

They may have returned to start a church there.

However the church began, Paul felt a special relationship to the brethren there.

He was alarmed when he received reports that the Judaizers had made strong inroads into the church.

The letter was his response to that report.

PURPOSE AND THEME

The common concept proposed for the background for this book:
That it was written to address "incipient gnosticism."

Some of the issues addressed do have common roots with the system that later developed into Gnosticism.

However, Gnosticism didn't develop until a century later.

These false teachers have more in common with the Judaizers than with the Gnostics.

Dwight Pentecost has observed that there is nothing in Colossians that can not be explained on the basis of Paul's traditional confrontation with the Judaizers.

The Judaizers were promoting the doctrine of sanctification by the law, similar to the problem in Galatia.

LEGALISM:

People who want to walk

–by the flesh

–by man-made rules

Paul attempts to respond to that doctrine and correct those who have been influenced by it.

In Galatians, Paul responds that it's impossible to be saved by faith and then sanctified by the law.

The law brings condemnation and recognition of sin, not the power to overcome it.

In Colossians, Paul approaches the issue from the other side.

He emphasizes the positive doctrine of the provision we have in Christ.

THE TOTALITY OF GOD IS FOUND IN CHRIST

All that God is is present in Him. He lacks nothing Col 2:9

WE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM Col. 2:10

God has provided all we need for successful Christian living in Christ.

The spiritual life is life in Christ, not legalism.

We are to walk the same way as we received Him! Col. 2:6-7

ORGANIZATION

The doctrinal issue controls the organization of the book.

Other matters surround the central issue.

On the periphery are located Paul's greeting (1:1-2),
and his prayer for them (1:3-23).

He concludes with personal notes (4:7-18).

In the center, Paul presents the ministry God has given to him: to proclaim the complete provision we have in Christ (1:24-4:6).

This argument divides into two main parts which are intimately interrelated:

First, Paul describes the revelation of the provision in Christ (1:24-2:15).

The point of this section is that Christ has provided all we need.

Then Paul presents the logical consequences of that provision (2:16-4:6).

If Christ has provided everything we need, true spiritual life is life in Him, *not* legalism.

ARGUMENT

PAUL'S GREETING 1:1-2

Paul begins with a greeting to the church.

PAUL'S PRAYER 1:3-23

Then he shares with them his prayer on their behalf.

HIS THANKSGIVING 1:3-8

Paul thanks God for them because of the evidence of God's work in their lives.

In his thanksgiving, he underlines the hope we have.

We aren't going to lose our possession.

HIS PETITION 1:9-23

His prayer for us is that we might understand God's will for us, and walk in a worthy manner.

His request that we might know God's will 1:9

Paul wants the knowledge of God's will to control our life.

His purpose that we might walk worthily 1:10-23

Paul wants the knowledge of God's will to produce fruit in us.

The results of being controlled by the knowledge of God's will are cyclical.
They feed one another.

Bearing fruit 1:10a

The knowledge of God's will produces good works.

Growing in the knowledge of Him 1:10b

The knowledge of God's will produces an increasing comprehension of God.

Being strengthened 1:11

The knowledge of God's will produces strength to live as He desires.

Giving thanks to the Father 1:12-23

The knowledge of God's will produces thanksgiving to God for all He has done for us.

In confronting the issue of the legalism of the Judaizers, Paul puts his finger on the center of the problem:

They fail to appreciate all that God has done for us.

Therefore, he urges us to thank God for all He has done.

As we thank Him, our awareness of all that is involved in God's provision will begin to increase.

We give thanks to God for qualifying us for the inheritance 1:12

Specifically, Paul encourages us to thank God for making us qualified to participate in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom.

We give thanks to God for rescuing us from the darkness 1:13a

He has rescued us from the authority of darkness which was over us.

We give thanks for God for bringing us into the kingdom of His Son 1:13b-20

He brought us into the kingdom of His Son.

When we begin thanking Him for these things, we will realize that He has already provided everything we need.

Nothing is missing for us to provide!

Mention of all God has done for us forces Paul to focus on Christ's role in God's provision.

As we thank God for what He has done, we are reminded of Who He is and what He has done for us, within the broader context of what God has done for us.

Our redemption by the Son 1:13b-14

He is the source of our redemption and forgiveness of sins, not our works.

The position of the Son 1:15-20

Jesus, the One who gave us this provision; He is God Himself.

His position as God is thus defined.

All that God is was present in Him.

When He died an adequate price was paid to reconcile all things to God. *Nothing more was needed!*

As they thanked God for what He had given them in Jesus, they would recognize the foolishness of trying to add more.

We give thanks to God for reconciling us by the death of His Son 1:21-23

He reconciled us by the death of His Son.

When we begin thanking Him for these things, we will realize that He has already provided everything we need.

Nothing is lacking for us to provide.

PAUL'S MINISTRY 1:24-4:6

Paul approaches the doctrinal argument of the book from the viewpoint of his own call to the ministry.

He was called to proclaim the good news of the provision God has made in Christ.

First he presents the *content* of that revelation (1:24-2:15).

Then he deals with the *practical implications* of the truth (2:16-4:6).

THE REVELATION OF THE PROVISION IN CHRIST 1:24-2:15

Paul is grateful that God has chosen him for a special role in His program.

He has the privilege of announcing to pagan Gentiles that we can take part in God's program.

Revelation of the mystery concerning Gentiles 1:24-27

Christ in us is now the hope of pagans also.

Proclamation of Christ to all 1:28-29

Because of this new universal message, Paul proclaims this message to everyone, that he might present all people perfect in Christ.

Struggle that we not be misled 2:1-5

Because of the greatness of the message which has been entrusted to him, Paul struggles to keep us from being deceived by those who present persuasive arguments.

Conclusion that we walk in Christ 2:6-7

Just as we have received Christ by faith, the Christian life is lived by faith in Him.

Warning that we not be taken captive 2:8

The philosophy of the world is different.

The traditions and principles the world proposes indicate that we can earn our own way by obeying the rules and doing good works.

This philosophy will only deceive and enslave.

Complete provision in Christ 2:9-15

True spirituality recognizes that the totality of God was in Christ (2:9).

When we are in Him *we are complete*.

Christ has provided everything (2:10-15).

In Him we have the true circumcision, not a physical one, but that which changes the sinful heart (2:11).

We were buried and raised to new life in Him (2:12).

Christ has handled every obstacle to our fellowship with God, and God has made us alive in Him (2:13-15).

Nothing else is left for us to handle.

Christ did it all.

We are complete in Him.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROVISION IN CHRIST 2:16-4:6

Having demonstrated the complete provision that is ours when we are in Christ, Paul discusses the implications of that provision.

Don't allow yourself to be judged on the basis of ritual 2:16-19

Since we are complete in Him, we should not allow anyone to judge us on the basis of the old rituals.

Those were mere shadows of the reality.

Now that we have the real thing, why should we go back to a shadow?

Those who would judge us are characterized by false humility, religious ritual and personal experience.

They are convinced by their own experience and importance.

However, they are out of touch with the Head.

Don't submit to human rules 2:20-23

Since we have died with Christ to the principles of this world, we ought not to submit ourselves to its rules.

Although the rules and regulations may have some value, they have a major weakness: *the rules can't provide the power to obey them.*

All they can do is condemn us.

Seek heavenly things 3:1-4

On the positive side, instead of submitting to human rules, we should walk with our eyes fixed on Christ.

Focus on *Him!*
Where is He?
What is He doing?

He is seated at the right hand of God.

His work is complete and has been accepted by the Father.

Therefore, in Him we have hope for the future.

Put to death the things of the old life 3:5-11

The replacement for legalism is not license.

Since we are no longer citizens of this world, we should eliminate the lifestyle of the world and adopt practices which correspond to the lifestyle of our new home.

Paul describes the sinful deeds of the world which should be eliminated.

The new lifestyle is described as giving Christ His proper place in our lives.

Clothe yourselves as God's people 3:12-15

In contrast to the lifestyle of the old life, Paul describes the new lifestyle we should adopt.

It's described as the clothing which God's people ought to wear.

The prohibitions and commands appear to be new rules and regulations to obey.

However, they aren't presented as rules, but as a pattern of life which ought to characterize the person who is already complete because of faith in Christ.

Instead of a new legalism, Paul exhorts us to demonstrate four attitudes that will distinguish us from the world (3:15-17).

We should demonstrate:
Unity
Gratitude
Mutual edification
And, the purpose of glorifying God.

These are the opposite of the fruit of legalistic ritualism!

Let the word of Christ dwell in you 3:16-4:6

When these attitudes control our lives, they will show up in our conduct, especially in our relationships with one another.

In general, we will seek to build up one another and to glorify God in everything we do (3:16-17).

Fellowship with others 3:16

Relationships with others 3:17-4:1

Summary 3:17

As in Ephesians, Paul outlines the relationships which should exist between wives and husbands (3:18-19) . . .

Wives 3:18
Husbands 3:19

. . . between children and parents (3:20-21) . . .

Children 3:20
Parents 3:21

. . . and between slaves and masters (3:22-4:1) . . .

Slaves 3:22-25
Masters 4:1

Constant prayer 4:2-4

He urges us to maintain a personal relationship to God through persistent prayer.

Wise conduct and speech 4:5-6

Finally, he exhorts us to guard our conduct and our conversation around unbelievers so that we will be winsome in our witness.

PAUL'S PERSONAL NOTES 4:7-18

Paul concludes the letter with several personal notes.

In these notes, he describes various people who have been faithful in their ministries.

He commends them for their faithfulness.

REPORT ON HIS CONDITION 4:7-9

Tychicus and Onesimus will inform them concerning Paul's circumstances in prison.

GREETINGS 4:10-15

He sends greetings from other co-laborers in Rome (10-14)

Specific greetings are directed to the brethren there (15)

EXCHANGE OF LETTERS 4:16

He asks them to interchange letters with the church at Laodicea.

In that way they will both benefit from the letters.

EXHORTATION TO ARCHIPPUS 4:17

Paul sends instructions for Archippus to finish the task God gave to him.

FINAL GREETING 4:18

Finally, Paul closes with his personal greeting.