

Colossians (September 9)

Reading Colossians

Wielding hammer and punch, the slave struck each weight of silver into the anvil and die, impressing each side of the metal. The face of the emperor looked back at him each time, perfectly raised and formed above the coin's background. With the rhythmic blows of the hammer and punch, old coins that were defaced by greedy hands in the markets, shaved by unscrupulous businessmen, or misstruck by inexperienced workmen were renewed in their image, made ready for new service.

In Colossians, the apostle Paul warns against greedy, unscrupulous false teachers who would steal the congregation away from their Lord Jesus Christ. To renew the congregation's faith and service, Paul repeatedly strikes upon the truths they once knew: Jesus is Lord of creation, the fullness of God dwells in him, their life is hidden with Christ in God. And so they are renewed in the image of their Creator.

Author, Date, and Place of Writing

That Colossians is a genuine letter of Paul is not usually disputed. In the early church, all who speak on the subject of authorship ascribe it to Paul. It is to be dated during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, where he spent at least two years under house arrest. Some have argued that Paul wrote Colossians from Ephesus or Caesarea, but most of the evidence favors Rome as the place where Paul penned all the Prison Letters (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon). Colossians should be dated circa AD 60, in the same year as Ephesians and Philemon.

Recipients

Several hundred years before Paul's day, Colosse had been a leading city in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). By the first century AD Colosse was diminished to a second-rate market town, which had been surpassed long ago in power and importance by the neighboring towns of Laodicea and Hierapolis.

During Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus, Epaphras had been converted and had carried the gospel to Colosse. The young church that resulted then became the target of heretical attack, which led to Epaphras' visit to Paul in Rome and ultimately to the penning of the Colossian letter.

Purpose and Theme

Paul's purpose is to refute the Colossian heresy, but he never explicitly describes the false teaching he opposes in the letter. The nature of the heresy must be inferred from statements he made in opposition to the false teachers. An analysis of his refutation suggests that the heresy was diverse in nature. Some of the elements of its teachings were ceremonialism (strict rules about permissible food and drink, religious festivals, and circumcision), asceticism (severe self-discipline and avoidance of all forms of indulgence), angel worship, deprecation of Christ, secret knowledge, and reliance on human wisdom and tradition.

To refute the heresy, Paul exalts Christ as the very image of God, the Creator, the preexistent sustainer of all things, the head of the church, the first to be resurrected, the fullness of deity in bodily form, and the reconciler. Thus Christ is completely adequate. The theme of Colossians is this complete adequacy of Christ as contrasted with the emptiness of mere human philosophy.

Blessings for Readers

Though Colossians is one of Paul's shorter letters, it is especially rich with descriptions of Christ, his work, and the blessings he extends to us through holy baptism. As you study Colossians, pray that the Lord would protect your congregation and all Christians from false teachers, for in Christ alone "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14).