

COLOSSIANS

The Sufficiency of Christ

Introduction

- Colossians, along with Ephesians, Philemon, and Philippians, belong to the cluster of letters called the Prison Epistles
- It's not clear where Paul was imprisoned, but Rome is the likely place, with the date of composition around AD 60-61
- Paul wrote Colossians to reinforce the Colossian's faith. The church was in danger of becoming extinct, because it was influenced by an error that Paul calls an outside "philosophy" (2:8, 16-23), which threatened their assurance
- This error was not a heresy. But it did devalued Christ's supremacy and the adequacy of salvation through him
- In other words, Christianity became a "gospel-plus" religion

Introduction

- The error promoted mystical experiences, spiritual agents, and various rituals or ascetic observances to achieve well-being
- The church needed to be reassured of the certainty of their faith. Paul argues for the all-sufficiency of Christ by asserting three truths:
 - all the fullness of deity dwells in Christ,
 - believers are complete in Christ, and
 - Christ has authority over all angelic beings and cosmic powers

The “Philosophy” (2:8, 16-23)

- ⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.
- ¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹ They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.
- ²⁰ Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? ²² These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. ²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

The “Philosophy” (2:8, 16-23)

- Cultural influences from Greek world—mystical polytheism (2:15)
 - Hermes (money)
 - Apollo (music)
 - Aphrodite (sex)
 - Jesus (one of many gods)
- Cultural influences from the Jewish community (2:16-17)
 - Kosher diet
 - Observe sacred days
 - Circumcision
 - Observe the laws of the Torah

Paul Addresses the “Philosophy” (2:15, 16-17)

- With regards to Mystical Polytheism, Paul says:
- ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.
- The mystical powers of the world have been “disarmed” by Jesus’ work on the cross
- With regards to the Jewish community, Paul says:
- ¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.
- Jesus fulfilled the laws of the Torah. We don’t need to supplement Christianity by following the laws. Jesus is the reality to which the laws pointed

The Deity of Christ (1:15-20)

- ¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

The Supremacy of Christ

- Christ is preeminent as Creator (1:16):
- ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.
- Christ reconciles all things (1:20):
- ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.
- He is the head of the church (1:18):
- ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.
- Christ is the source of all nourishment (2:19):
- ¹⁹ They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Believers are Complete in Christ (2:9-10)

- Because Christ is supreme, believers are complete in him (2:9-10):
- ⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.
- Christians are called to spiritual renewal (3:9-11):
- ⁹ Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹ Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.
- Paul focuses on interpersonal relationships (3:18-4:1)

Christ Has Authority Over All Powers (2:9-15)

- ⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.
- ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Christ Has Authority Over All Powers (2:9-15)

- Paul uses the term “disarmed” with reference to mystical polytheism—the powers and authorities (2:15)
- In the crucifixion God did to the powers what they did to Christ when they stripped him naked, treated him with contempt and nailed to him on the cross
- God stripped the “powers and authorities” of their power and exposed their weakness
- Christ’s victory on the cross brings freedom to believers from the tyranny of these evil forces

Everything Made New

- Paul tells the Colossian Christians that, as members of the new humanity, no part of their human existence remains untouched by the Lordship of Jesus
- Their suffering, temptation, moral character, and familial dynamics must all be re-examined and transformed in light of the work of Jesus
- They are joined to Jesus and are part of his new multi-ethnic family