

The Churches of Christ Salute You

Lesson Seven

(Romans 16:16)

May 18, 2008

LESSONS FROM THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE

Overview:

1. Paul wrote to the Romans about the “churches of Christ.”
2. A plurality of churches did not mean a number of different denominations.
3. Instead, each was a local body of believers that belonged to Christ.
4. Since we also are a church of Christ, there are many lessons to be learned from these early churches.

Introduction:

1. Colossae was located in Asia Minor, about 100 miles east of Ephesus.
2. In 62 BC, there were around 11,000 Jews living in the city of Colossae.
3. It was a city of great wealth and luxurious resorts that many desired to visit.
4. It was also a pagan city – influenced by Greek culture and eastern religions.
5. These three worldviews would cause problems for the church in Colossae.

I. The Colossian History

- A. It is not know who established the church in the city of Colossae.
 1. Paul had traveled to the region of Phrygia, where Colossae was located (Acts 16:6; 18:23; cf. 19:8-10, 26).
 2. However, Paul writes about those who had not seen his “face in the flesh” (Colossians 2:1).
 - a. He could be referring to the Laodiceans or others.
 - b. Or, he could mean those who had been converted after he had left Colossae.
 3. Further, Paul had only “heard” of their faith from Epaphras (Colossians 1:4, 7-9).
- B. It is possible that Epaphras established this congregation, though even if not, he clearly was a diligent worker in this area.
- C. In the end, it is not important who established the church in Colossae.
- D. Rather, it is important that the church existed in this city and that their example is educational for all congregations of God’s people.

II. The Colossian Heresy

- A. The culture of Colossae was influenced by the Jewish religion, Greek paganism and eastern philosophy.
- B. Eventually, all of these concepts began to affect the thinking and beliefs of the church in Colossae.
- C. This mixture of error became known as the Colossian Heresy and it consisted of four basic beliefs.
 1. 2:8-9 – A denial of the deity of Jesus.
 2. 2:10-17 – A denial of the Law of Jesus.
 3. 2:18-19 – A denial of the preeminence of Jesus.
 4. 2:20-23 – A denial of the liberty of Jesus.
- D. The sufficiency of the New Testament of Christ was denied by their holding on to certain teachings of the Law of Moses.
 1. 2:10 – They had to be reminded that completion is in Christ alone.
 2. 2:11-13 – They had to be reminded about true circumcision (spiritual, not physical).

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3. 2:14-15 – They had to be reminded that the Old Law had been taken away.
4. 2:16-17 – They had to be reminded that the rituals and laws under the Old Testament had been taken away.
- E. The other three basic beliefs of this heresy were all early forms of Gnosticism.
 1. Gnosticism comes from the Greek work *gnosis* (γνωσις) which means, “knowledge.”
 2. The Gnostics believed they had superior knowledge – a knowledge above things learned from physical, human understanding.
 3. They believed that all matter was evil and could not be touched by God.
 4. Thus, they did not believe that Jesus was God in the flesh.
 - a. They claimed that He was an emanation from God, but not God Himself.
 - b. Others claimed that the emanation from God came upon a man named Jesus at His baptism and left Him on the cross.
 - c. Both of these views deny the deity of Christ.
 5. Further, they believed that since all matter is evil then the human body also must be evil.
 - a. Thus, some claimed that the body must be denied its natural desires and they became ascetics.
 - b. Others believed that the soul was not affected by the things done in the body, so one’s natural desires should be indulged.
 6. Finally, Gnostics believe in a hierarchy of angelic beings through which one must pass to reach enlightenment or God.
 - a. Thus, Gnostics would worship angels as mediators between them and God.
 - b. They believed that Jesus was the highest of the intermediate beings, just below God Himself.
- F. All of these things were mixed together with a bit of mysticism.
 1. Mysticism is the belief that spiritual knowledge is gained through intuition or insight in some way different from normal human perception and reason.
 2. This would include fortune telling, psychic phenomena, communicating with the dead, and other such beliefs.
- G. Clearly, the Colossian Heresy was vastly different from the Gospel of Christ.
- H. There is an important lesson to be learned from this threat to the church at Colossae.
 1. Christians must always be on guard from influences of the world in which they live.
 2. Satan will use any means he can to move the church from God’s path.
 3. The key to victory is remaining true to the Gospel of Christ (1:3-6).
 - a. With prayer...
 - b. With faith...
 - c. With love...
 - d. With hope...
 - e. With truth...
 - f. With fruit...
 - g. With grace...

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III. The Colossian Hierarchy

- A. Due to the nature of the Colossian Heresy, Paul must reestablish before the Colossians the nature of Christ and His church – of which they are members.
- B. Jesus and the fullness of the Godhead (2:6-9)
 - 1. Paul declares that Jesus possessed the divine nature.
 - 2. Further, He possessed the fullness – the completeness, totality – of the divine nature.
 - 3. Finally, He possessed complete divinity in a fleshly, human body.
 - a. This attribute characterized Christ before His incarnation (John 1:1-3, Philippians 2:6).
 - b. It characterized Him in His incarnation (John 1:14; Phil. 2:7).
 - c. It characterizes Him in His glorified state (John 17:5).
 - 4. Thus, Jesus is preeminent over all creation.
 - a. Jesus is the image (manifestation in essence) of God (1:15; cf. Philippians 2:6; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3).
 - b. He is the first born of all creation (1:15; cf. 1:17; Hebrews 1:2).
 - c. He is the Creator of the universe (1:16).
 - d. He is eternal (1:17a).
 - e. He is the sustainer of the universe (1:17b).
 - 5. Through all of this, Jesus became first (preeminent) over all creation.
- C. Jesus and the fullness of the Gospel (1:23-29)
 - 1. It is the word of truth (1:5).
 - 2. It is the message of salvation (1:21-23).
 - 3. It is worth suffering persecution (1:24).
 - 4. It is divinely ordered and given (1:25).
 - 5. It is the revelation of God's plan (1:26).
 - 6. It is the key to fellowship with God (1:27).
 - 7. It is a warning against sin and punishment (1:28).
 - 8. It is worth every sacrifice (1:29).
 - 9. Therefore, it is superior to any other teaching (2:4-8, 13-23)
- D. Jesus and the fullness of His authority (1:18; 2:10-12)
 - 1. Because of His divinity and the completeness of His Gospel, Jesus is the perfect and final authority for man.
 - 2. Paul declares that He has authority over the body, the church.
 - 3. He has authority over the resurrection from the dead (cf. Acts 26:23; 1 Cor. 15:20-23; Revelation 1:5, 18).
 - 4. He has authority over all powers, human, demonic and angelic.
 - 5. He has authority over forgiveness of sins.
 - 6. He is the first over all! This is His preeminence.
- E. Jesus and the faithfulness of His servants (3:1 – 4:1)
 - 1. Christ is Head over all things.
 - 2. Beneath Him are the angels, His ministering servants, who are not to be worshipped (cf. Hebrews 1:14-15; Revelation 19:20).
 - 3. Beneath them are the apostles whose message is authoritative (1:1-5).
 - 4. Beneath them are members of the Lord's church who are servants.
 - a. Epaphras (1:7; 4:12-13)
 - b. Tychicus (4:7-9)
 - c. Onesimus, Aristarchus, Marcus, Justus, Luke, Demas, Archippus and all Christians (4:9-18).

Conclusion: The church at Colossae teaches many powerful lessons for us today.