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# Church in Campbell Weekly News

June 5, 2011 Issue 11- 22

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## LIFE-STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

### MESSAGE ONE

#### THE BACKGROUND AND POSITION OF THE BOOK

The vital point concerning the background of the book of Colossians is that culture had been brought into the church life. The population of Colosse was a mixture of Gentiles and Jews. The Gentiles and the Jews had different cultures. For the most part, the Gentiles were under the influence of Greek culture with its philosophy. At that time, however, Greek philosophy was no longer pure. Rather it was a mingling of various philosophies. Furthermore, the Gentile culture was at least somewhat blended with Jewish religious concepts.

This mixture of cultures flooded the church at Colosse. The church should be a house filled with Christ and constituted with Him. Instead, the church there had been invaded by culture. To a large extent, Christ as the unique element in the church life was being replaced by various aspects of this mixed culture. The constituent of the church should be Christ and Christ alone, for the church is the Body of Christ. Therefore, the content of the church should be nothing other than Christ Himself. Nevertheless, the good elements of culture, especially philosophy and religion, had invaded the church and saturated it.

It is the subtlety of the enemy to flood the church with the elements of culture. This is what he was doing when the book of Colossians was written. His strategy was to send a mixture of Jewish religion and Gentile philosophy into the church and to saturate the church with this cultural mixture. From the human point of view, this culture, particularly its asceticism, was very good. Asceticism has a good purpose and goal; it attempts to enable people to deal with their lusts. However, we must see that Satan's strategy in flooding the church with culture is to use the most highly developed aspects of culture to replace Christ.

Do not think that this phenomenon was limited to the first century. It is still with us today. In today's Christianity Christ has been almost altogether replaced by other things, especially by good things. The name of Christ may be found in Christianity, but the reality of Christ may be absent. Many things have become substitutes for Christ. For example, even the teaching of the Bible is used by the enemy of God as such a substitute for Christ Himself. Many Christians study the Bible without contacting Christ. Due to Satan's subtlety, any kind of Christian work can also replace Christ Himself. Christian work should minister

Christ. However, some Christian works make their particular goal a substitute for Christ.

In today's religion some pastors and ministers may allow their own personalities to replace Christ. Certain Christian workers have attractive, powerful personalities. They use their personalities to draw people not to Christ, but to themselves. This is the reason that many Christians compliment and even praise the personalities of certain pastors. Those who do not have such a strong personality may attract people by their niceness or their humility. Christians may choose to attend a particular so-called church because the minister there is kind and sympathetic.

When Paul wrote the Epistle to the Colossians, a number of isms were exerting their influence: Judaism, asceticism, mysticism, Gnosticism. These isms were among the highest products of both Jewish and Gentile cultures. Being good things, they spontaneously became replacements for Christ. Therefore, Paul's purpose in the book of Colossians is to show that in the church nothing should be allowed to be a substitute for Christ. The church life must be constituted uniquely of Christ. He should be our only constituent and our very constitution. This is the reason that in this short Epistle a number of elevated expressions are used to describe Christ. For example, He is called the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the firstborn from among the dead, and the body of all the shadows. In 3:10 and 11, Paul says that in the new man there is no possibility of having Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian or Scythian, slave or freeman. Rather, in the new man Christ is all and in all. This means that Christ must be everyone and in everyone. In the new man there is no room for Chinese, Japanese, American, British, French, or Germans. Christ must be every one of us. In the new man Christ must be you and me. Not only must culture go, but even we have to go. It is crucial that we see this revelation.

#### A. The Cluster of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians Being the Heart of the Bible

Just as there is a heart in our physical body, so there is a heart in the Bible also. The heart of the Bible is not the book of Genesis or the book of Revelation, nor even the Gospels. It is a cluster of four books: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. These books were, of course, written according to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, their sequence in the arrangement of the New Testament books is most significant. If you read the New Testament carefully, you will realize that these four books stand out. Before Galatians is the book of 2 Corinthians.

There seems to be no connection between 2 Corinthians and Galatians. However, as we read through the New Testament, we sense that Galatians is the beginning of something new and that this book is connected to Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians. In particular, Ephesians and Colossians are sister books. When we turn from Colossians to 1 Thessalonians, we also sense that there is no connection between these books. Hence, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians are a cluster of books that make up the very heart of the Bible.

The essential subject of these four books is Christ and the church. We have seen that the church is composed of human beings who live in society. As such an entity, it is difficult for the church to stay away from the influence of culture. For this reason, in these books concerning Christ and the church, two of them, Galatians and Colossians, show the damage caused by the law, Jewish religion, and other substitutes for Christ such as asceticism, mysticism, and Gnosticism.

**B. Galatians Revealing Christ versus Religion with Its Law**  
According to Galatians, the Jewish religion, the typical religion, was formed according to God's oracle. But this fundamental religion with its law became a replacement for Christ. Hence, in Galatians there is a strong emphasis upon the danger of the law replacing Christ. In Galatians 1 Paul testifies that he was once a leading religionist among the Jews. He was zealous for God and blameless according to the law. But one day it pleased God to reveal His Son, Christ, in Paul. As a result, Paul came to realize that Judaism is contrary to Christ and that Christ is versus religion with its law. Paul could then declare that he was dead to the law and had nothing to do with it. He had been crucified with Christ, and Christ now lived within him (2:20). Furthermore, in chapter six he said that he suffered persecution simply because he did not teach circumcision. Then he went on to say that the world, meaning specifically the religious world, was dead to him and that he was dead to the world. Between Paul and the Jewish religion there was the dividing line of the cross. As far as Paul was concerned, the entire religious world was on the cross. Moreover, to the Jews, Paul also was on the cross. As a man in Christ, he bore upon him the mark of Christ's death. No longer was he in the Jewish religion, but was absolutely in Christ and for Christ. Hence, Galatians reveals that Christ is versus religion, the law, and circumcision.

**C. Colossians Unveiling Christ versus Human Philosophies with Tradition and Asceticism**

We have pointed out that in Colossians Christ is revealed to the uttermost, much more than in Galatians. In Galatians Paul speaks of Christ being revealed in us, of Christ living in us, and of Christ being formed in us. But in Colossians he uses a number of special terms for Christ: the portion of the saints, the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. In this short book, one aspect of Christ after another is unfolded. Therefore, Colossians reveals that

Christ is profound and all-inclusive. The all-inclusive Christ transcends our understanding. Our need is to be infused, saturated, and permeated with Him until in our experience Christ is everything to us: our food, our drink, our feasts, our holy days, our Sabbath, our new moon, our everything. We must not allow anything to replace Christ or to be a substitute for Him. This is the central point of Colossians. Whereas Galatians reveals that Christ is versus religion and the law, Colossians reveals that Christ is versus everything because He Himself is the reality of every positive thing.

**D. Philippians Stressing the Living Out of Christ**

The book of Philippians emphasizes the matter of living Christ. In Philippians 1:21 Paul declares, "To me to live is Christ." For Paul, to live was not human virtues such as meekness or humility; to live was Christ.

**E. Ephesians Revealing the Church**

Ephesians deals specifically with the church. The issue, the result, of our living Christ is that the church is produced and built up in a practical way.

We all need to spend more time on the four books that compose the heart of the Bible. Viewing these books as a cluster, we see that we should care only for Christ, not for religion or culture. For us to live is not religion, philosophy, or any ism. In our living, Christ must be all and in all. The result of such a living is the church. Therefore, the heart of the Bible, as seen in this cluster of books, is Christ and the church.

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#### ***Burdens for Church Prayers***

- Pray for the enjoyment of reading Colossians.
- For daily exercise in GOW training: prophesying on Lord's day by daily enjoying His word and pursue the truth and attend Lord's day meeting on time.
- Pray for Russian speaking saints for their needed shepherding from past co-workers.
- For gospel preaching on West Valley College campus, as well as for English-speaking testimony in Campbell.
- Pray for Boston Training Center that all the practical needs will be met.

#### ***Announcement***

- Morning Revival: Colossians chapter 1 I:1~8, II:9~14, III-15~18, IV-19~23, V-24~27, VI-28~29, Life Study 1~14.
- YP Bible Reading this week: Colossians chapter 1
- Prayer meeting 7:30PM on Tues (6/7) at saints' home.
- Re-speaking on Memorial conference on June 12 (next Lord's day), 4pm-7 pm at San Jose meeting hall
- Bay Area Summer School of Truth will be held on July 24-29 at Alliance Redwood. South Bay YP pursuing program starts on 6/11. Please register ASAP via brother Tai.
- Blending activities (BBQ) with Palo Alto young people will be held on 6/25 from 10 am to 3 pm at Palo Alto Foothills Park. Parents, young people saints and friends are welcome to join the blending.