

Letter To The Colossian Church #1

The book of Colossians is the seventh in order of the thirteen letters which claim to have been written by Paul. The book is one of the five "prison epistles", so called. The writer acknowledged he was a prisoner in his casual statement "Aristarchus, my fellow-prisoner saluteth you" (4:10). But, had no such specific mention been made, that conclusion would still be reached because the book was written at the same time Ephesians and Philemon were and both those letters make specific reference to Paul being a prisoner (Eph. 3:1, 4:1; 6:20; Phile. 1). Tychicus was the bearer of both Colossians and Ephesians to the receptive congregations (4:7; Eph. 6:21) and this letter names seven other brethren from whom or to whom greeting were sent; who are also named in Philemon: Epaphras, Onesimus, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke and Archippus. Ephesians 6:26 is almost identical to Colossians 4:7f which reads "All my affairs shall Tychicus make known unto you, the beloved brethren and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord: whom I have sent unto you for this very purpose, that ye may know our state and that he may comfort your heart." The letter was written from Rome about AD 60 or 61 according to many commentaries.

Not only were Ephesians and Colossians written at the same time, by the same writer and sent by the same messenger, they both contain much of the same instructions. Parallel accounts from both letters may be examined to gather so that things expressed in a different way can be perceived to be the same. Both letters offer advice to wives, husbands, children, parents, fathers, masters and servants and both mention not only Paul's prayers for them, but include his request that they pray for him (Col. 4:3f; Eph. 6:18-20). But, having noted the many similarities between the letters, we hasten to add that the theme of the two letters is decidedly different. The theme of the Ephesian letter is "The Glorious Church." The theme of Colossians is "The Preeminence of Christ."

The letter begins, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus." As is true in six of the letters, Timothy is included with Paul in greeting the brethren, but this is courtesy Paul extends to Timothy for the letter is certainly Paul's personal instructions to them as an apostle of Christ. Although sometimes a plural "we" is found, the apostle shortly lapses to "I" (cp. Col. 1:3, 9; 24, 25, 29 for examples of this). Of Paul's thirteen letters, he most often identifies himself as an apostle, First and Second Thessalonians and Titus being exceptions to this. In these, he appears as "Paul."

The apostleship of Paul was sometimes contested by false teachers and in some of his letters to areas where their influence was greater, he was constrained to defend his apostleship with argument and effort: First and Second Corinthians and Galatians being examples of this. The Colossian letter, however, states his claim that he "was made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which was given me to you-ward..." (1:25). The letter does not offer additional proof of his apostleship aside from his claims to be so.

Those whom Paul addresses are "the saints and faithful brethren in Christ that are at Colossae." He does not address two different groups: he writes to the brethren at Colossae who are both saints and faithful.

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