

April, 2008

Pause Ponder Profit

The Church At Colosse

by James A. Brown

Col. 1:2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The city of Colosse was located in the southwest part of ancient Phrygia in Asia Minor, or modern Turkey. The city lay about 100 miles east of Ephesus, which was the capital of the Roman province of Asia. Colosse straddled the Lycus river which ran into the Meander. The Meander river flowed eastward and emptied into the Aegean Sea not far from Ephesus. About 12 miles downstream on the Lycus river from Colosse lay two cities more prominent than Colosse, Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 2:1; 4:13, 15-16; Rev. 3:14). These cities were about 6 miles apart on opposite sides of the river.

The epistle of Colossians is addressed to the saints and faithful brethren in Colosse, i.e., the church at Colosse. This epistle is commonly referred to as one of Paul's prison epistles because Paul identifies himself as the writer (Col. 1:1, 23; 4:18), and he is in prison (Col. 4:3, 10, 18). It is generally believed that Paul wrote

this epistle around the same time he wrote Ephesians and Philemon. That dates the writing in the Spring of 63 A.D., perhaps not long before he was to be officially released from his two year Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:30).

It is not crystal-clear as to when and how the church came to be established in Colosse. The city itself is not mentioned in the Scriptures outside the epistle to the Colossians. Luke, in the book of Acts does mention Phrygia. In Acts 2:10, Luke tells us that there were Jews from Phrygia in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. Did these take the gospel back to Phrygia? We have no way of knowing. Paul, Silas, and Timothy traveled through Phrygia during Paul's second journey (Acts 16:6). And during Paul's third journey disciples are mentioned as being present in the region of Phrygia (Acts 18:23). Some in the church at Colosse and also at Laodicea were acquainted with Paul but not all had seen his face in the flesh (Col. 2:1). Paul includes Timothy in sending greetings to the church at Colosse and also to Philemon (Col. 1:1; Phile. 1) which indicates that the Colossians must have known him. Paul also writes a very intimate epistle to Philemon, who most likely was his convert (Phile. 19). Paul ask Philemon to prepare a guest room for him as if he had stayed in his home before (Phile. 22). Did Paul establish the church in Colosse on his second or third journey? Again, we have no way of knowing.

Perhaps the most likely person to have started the church in Colosse was Epaphras. Epaphras was from the city of Colosse (Col. 4:12). He had come to Rome for some reason. Perhaps it was for the purpose of reporting to Paul the condition of the church at Colosse (Col. 1:4, 8). Which apparently motivated Paul to write

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the epistle to the Colossians. Epaphras was a beloved companion of Paul and likely his convert. Paul referred to him as his fellow servant (Col. 1:7) and as a fellow prisoner (Phile. 23). Paul also tells us that it was from Epaphras that the Colossians had learned "the grace of God" (Col. 1:6-7). Actually Paul may have sent Epaphras to Colosse for the purpose of preaching the gospel. One may conclude that from Paul's statement in Col. 1:7 where he referred to Epaphras as a faithful minister of Christ "on our behalf" (ASV, NASB, NIV). Epaphras had great zeal for the saints at Colosse and also for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4:12-13). He labored fervently for the Colossians in prayer, that they may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God (Col. 4:12).

The church at Colosse was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. In the epistle Paul makes reference to Jewish teaching with which the Jewish members would have been familiar (Col. 2:11, 16). He also, with out a doubt, mentions the Gentiles (Col. 1:21, 27; 3:5-7). Epaphras himself was evidently a Gentile (Col. 4:10-12). Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus are named by Paul as being members of the church at Colosse (Phile. 1-2). It is believed by some that Apphia was Philemon's wife and that Archippus was his son. Based upon Paul's remarks in Col. 4:17 one may conclude that Archippus was a gospel preacher and perhaps was working with the church in Colosse.

The Brethren at Colosse had some commendable qualities. Paul notes their faithfulness to Christ, their love which was directed toward all the saints and their hope laid up in heaven (Col. 1:4-5). In Col. 2:5, he mentions their well-ordered behavior and their personal faith in Christ (Col. 2:5). Although these brethren were worthy of commendation, this does not seem to be the main reason why Paul wrote the epistle.

Paul's primary purpose for writing to the church at Colosse was to defend the faith against false doctrine which was apparently a mixture of Jewish, Greek, and pagan ideas. We really know nothing about this false doctrine other than what we may infer from the epistle. And the only way one may arrive at the stated purpose is to carefully consider the implications in the epistle itself. Paul told the brethren at Colosse to, "*Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ*" (Col. 2:8). Evidently the false teaching which the Colossians were at that time subject to believing and practicing, denied the adequacy and supremacy of Christ (Col. 1:15, 19; 2:2, 9). It denied Christ's part in the creation (Col. 1:16-17) and also that he came in a physical body (Col. 1:22; 2:9). Whatever the specific points of the doctrine, it is clear that it would erode ones faith in Christ as being deity. Paul declares that all the fullness of God resides in Him (Col. 1:19; 2:9). And as God's children we are complete in Him and Him alone (Col. 2:10). We need nothing else in which to put our trust, regardless of whether it be the worship of angels, the mortification of the body or religious ceremony (Col. 2:18-3:4). Christ is Lord (Col. 1:2, 3, 10; 2:6; 3:16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 24; 4:7, 17) and whatever we do in word or deed we are to do by His authority, giving thanks to God the Father through Him (Col. 3:17).

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“Not By Bread Alone”

by Lloyd Atherton

The Fourth chapter of Matthew records the temptation scene of Jesus. The Holy Spirit led Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After forty days and nights, Satan came to Jesus and, trying to take advantage of His hunger, said, *“If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread”* (Matt. 4:3). Satan may have been appealing to His pride — “If you are the Son of God” — but, it seems to me, he was also admonishing Jesus to take the easy way out. Jesus is indeed the “Suffering Servant.” Satan was trying to get Jesus to take the course of least resistance. “Why do you suffer from hunger? You are the Son of God. Alleviate your hunger by changing these stones into bread.” If he could get Jesus to do that, Satan would have won the day. However, Jesus replied. *“It is written. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”* (Matt. 4:4).

When Jesus said “It is written,” it is imperative that we know where it is written and for what purpose it was written. Jesus was quoting from Deuteronomy 8:1-3. Moses was reminding the children of Israel that God fed them with manna during their wilderness wanderings for the past 40 years. *“Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness to humble you and test you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.”*

The primary purpose of feeding manna to the Israelites was not to preserve their physical life but to see if they would follow God’s instructions. Did they really want to go into the Promised Land? They may have said they did. However, entrance into that land was dependent upon obedience to Him. The giving of manna and adherence to the instructions for gathering it constituted the test to determine what was in their hearts and to see if they would obey from the heart God’s instructions. They needed to recognize that they were as dependent on God’s words for their survival as they were on bread for their physical sustenance.

The original instructions to the Israelites were given in Exodus 16:4-7, 16-3. The Israelites murmured because they were hungry. There was no food available to them. They thought they were going to starve to death. In fact, they accused Moses of bringing them into the wilderness for that very purpose! They wished that God had killed them in Egypt. At least they had more than enough food to eat! They weren’t going to starve to death.

God promised Moses He would feed them but at the same time He would put them to the test. The test involved the gathering of the manna. They were to gather an omer (3 pints) per person every morning. They were not to save any for the next day for it would spoil and be inedible. On the sixth day they were to gather a double portion. They were to prepare all of it on the sixth day and save half of it for the seventh day. The seventh day was the Sabbath day of rest. God would not give any manna on the seventh day; therefore, don’t go out and gather any.

The instructions were very simple and easy to follow. One could not plead ignorance or inability to understand His will because it was too complicated. Did the Israelites pass the test?

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Many of them did not. *"Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses, but some of them left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and stank. And Moses was angry with them."* (Ex. 16:20) Why would they do that? They didn't trust God to keep His word! Oh, He promised to feed them, but just in case He forgot, they kept back some for the next day. They didn't have sufficient faith to trust Him (cf. Heb. 11:6).

"Now it happened that some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather, but they found none" (Ex. 16:27). They failed the test! God did learn what was in their hearts. Their refusal to walk according to God's instructions resulted in their perishing in the wilderness.

The lesson for us is plain. Jesus was reminding Satan that man is a dual being. If we needed only physical nourishment, we would be no different from the animals. Man is not wholly mortal but bread is. It can only sustain man physically. We must remember that we are also spiritual beings and we must seek spiritual nourishment through the word of God to sustain us spiritually. Jesus is our manna today. *"And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst'"* (John 6:35). The Lord has given instructions to us. We must be obedient if we hope to enter into heaven. *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven'"* (Matt. 7:21). The reason Israel didn't make it to their destination was because of disobedience. They got tired of "light bread." Let us not make the same mistake. Remember: "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord!"



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