

(35) THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH: COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

- Focus Idea:** The mission of the church parallels the mission of Jesus Christ. As Christ, the universe's ultimate ruler, left his eternal throne to die for those who were lost, so believers in Jesus must also participate in redemptive activity in order to end the alienation that exists in their world.
- The Context:** Colossae was a small town in the Lycus Valley of the province of Asia. Famous for its wool, the city had once been large and powerful, but it had dwindled in size in the First Century AD. Paul's letter included both a doctrinal/theological component that challenged the Colossian incorporation of pagan elements into their faith and a later section about right living as a community of believers. Verses 15-23 follow immediately after a standard greeting section (vs. 1-8) and an opening prayer for the church (vs. 9-14)
- The Characters:** The Apostle Paul, detailed in previous Core40 studies, wrote Colossians.
- The Core:** The postmodern world often wonders why Christians are as adamant in their mission as they are. Aren't there many equally viable belief systems out there? Why should one be committed to a single narrative about reality? Even more to the point: Why would Christians encourage others to believe the way they do?

Both the Old and New Testaments arose in cultures that thought similarly. Colossians, in particular, was penned in a Greco-Roman society where many gods were worshipped. Ancient statues, ancestors, gods of wind and water...even politicians were turned into objects of devotion.

The issue in Colossae seems to be the introduction of angel-worship, corrupted Judaism, and New-Age philosophy into Christian doctrine. For some in the community, belief and instruction in this kind of hybrid faith felt empowering. For others, it may have been a case of trying to "cover all the bases" in a world populated by many gods.

Paul probably wrote this corrective letter to the Colossians during a time of imprisonment. But his chains could not diminish his enthusiasm for a gospel that affirmed Jesus' supremacy. His words are clear and cogent: The Son (Jesus) is above all things, creator of all things, Lord over all things, and remains the only reason why all things hold together (vs. 15-16). No other deity, philosophy, worldview, or ruler can transcend his power. When one remembers that Paul, an Orthodox Jew by upbringing, was raised to think of God a transcendent spirit, this account of a human being, Jesus of Nazareth, is stunning.

Paul continues by pointing out that Jesus is Lord over the Church (vs. 18) and that all of God's fullness dwelled in Jesus in order that the world might be reconciled to God. This reconciliation was the peace that Jesus' blood, shed on the cross, opened between the Almighty God and a fallen world (vs. 19-22)

This good news is to be a firm standing-place in a world of contending ideas. It is the sole and single gospel which the Colossians know and the primary message Paul wants the world to understand.

For many in our society, the task of missions, the idea of conversion, and the claim to singular truth feel off-putting and offensive. But in view of Christ's power and glory, especially as manifest in his sacrifice for the whole world, believers have a reason to feel confident and motivated to witness.