

Colossians

History

- One of Paul's prison letters
- Written, in all likelihood, from Ephesus
- Paul never visited Colossae, a city on the Lycus River, in Asia Minor about 100 miles inland from Ephesus
- Congregation founded by Epaphras, who informed Paul about the congregation

Purpose

- To **compliment** the Colossians on their faith
- To **steer** them from questionable religious beliefs and practices
- The Mediterranean world was **eclectic** in its religious beliefs and practices – a little of this and a little of that
- Some Colossians Christian were **more ascetic** than others – that observed certain days as holier than others; their observances included dietary restrictions and fasting
- For Paul, such practices weren't bad per se, they were unnecessary
- **Main concern**: A rift in the community where some Christians believed they were more Christian and others were less Christian
- The heart of Colossians is that **trust in Christ** is the one thing that matters for human salvation; Paul did not want this diluted in any way, shape, or form

Read the lesson

Sermon

- What are the marks of the Christian?
 - Church has debated this in every era
 - Apostolic era: Saying and doing the things Jesus said and did
 - Post-Constantine: Affirmation of creedal statements
 - Medieval era: Observance of the sacraments of the church
 - Reformation era: Sola gratia, sola scriptura, sola fidei
 - Modern era: Exercise of reasonable virtues attributed to Christianity; Therapeutic deism
 - Post-modern era: Saying and doing the things Jesus said and did

- Godspell illustration: At his baptism, Jesus' face is painted to mark him as God's son; disciple's faces are painted to mark them as followers of God's son
- Seinfeld illustration: Elaine borrows her boyfriend's car and discovers that Putty is, of all things, Christian – he has Jesus fish on his car and listens to contemporary Christian on the car's radio
- Implication: Face paint, a Jesus fish, and tastes in music mark one as Christian
- Me standing in a church building makes me a Christian about as much as me standing in a garage makes me a car

- French have been having this debate for a long – what does it mean to be French?
 - Language, food, literature, architecture
 - Secular values – liberte, egalite, fraternite
 - Suspicious of overt and outward religious expressions that are potentially divisive

- What does this conversation look like in contemporary Christianity?
 - Biblical literalism
 - Social justice
 - Inclusion

- Conversion experience
 - Missions
 - Evangelism
 - Theological orthodoxy
 - Denominational loyalty
 - Ecumenism
 - Interfaith dialogue
- Not all that different from conversation with Colossae – Jewish Christianity versus Astrological Christianity versus Pauline Christianity
- Being Christian:
 - Work of God
 - Identity is given not by anything outside of us, but what God through the Spirit of Christ has done and is doing inside of us.
 - Shared experiences and outward similarities will group us
 - Some divisions are benign
 - Other divisions are malevolent
 - Being a part of a group is human – we long for it, yearn; hardwired
- Let me share with you Dan McCoig’s take on being Christian for which I am indebted to a great number of thinkers and writers – Paul, Augustine, Calvin, CS Lewis, Tim Keller, Brian McLaren . . .
 - Christians are people who let the reality of Jesus change everything about who they are, how they see, and how they live
 - Keller identifies three issues that can keep persons from trusting Jesus
 - Content – parts of the Christian message that isn’t understood or is disagreeable
 - Coherence – doubts and objections that are unresolvable
 - Cost – Know exactly what trusting Jesus is all about and don’t want to; too much time, effort, energy . . .
 - To begin, repent – no more self-salvation

- Trust – Jesus was who he said he was; humans are sinful; on the cross God in Christ saves us [Not the strength of our faith but the object of our faith that saves us. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch.]
- Committing to a community – Hearts are unruly; we need a community around us to help us follow Jesus