COLOSSIANS

**Jesus Christ is *Not* an Expletive**

I t’s Month #24 in our fly-over of the Bible, God’s love letter to earth -- 66 books penned over 16 centuries by 40-odd authors from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Written in some 13 countries on three continents in three languages, yet it reads as one unified book. Adrian Rogers says it hangs together so perfectly you can yank a thread at the front of the Bible, and it creates a wrinkle at the back!

The Bible has one theme (God’s love for us), one Hero (Jesus Christ, His only Son), one villain (satan) and one purpose (to honor God).

Rogers says, “*We* read *other* books, but *this* Book reads *us*!” In it God reveals who He is, all we need to know about who we are, and how we’re to relate with Him. Written millennia ago, it’s still totally actionable now, here at the brink of Y2K.

From Genesis to Revelation, in both Old and New Testaments, the central figure is Jesus Christ. In its pages we learn God’s perfect design for our lives. Our problems and their solutions are illuminated as we find our satisfaction in Christ.

Jesus said (John 10:10), “I’ve come that they may have life and have it to the full.” Jesus not only has forgiven your sins and mine IN FULL, He not only offers us free board and room in heaven with Him forever, but He says we can experience fulfillment, peace and joy right now! Thanks to this “*Good* News,” life’s not reduced to just making the best of a bad hand we’ve been dealt.

Why is polling so popular in this age of skepticism? Perhaps in order to formulate our *own* opinions, we need to know what *others* think. Focus groups are even used to “tell” us *what* we think!

Spiritually, many don’t know what to think. Some are *atheists* and don’t believe in God, *absolutely* convinced there’s no absolute truth!

*Agnostics* aren’t *sure* about God. *Skeptics* think there’s probably a Supreme Being, but they have too many questions to take the plunge.

Perhaps the vast majority are simply *disinterested* in God. “He’s too deep. By the way, when are The Simpsons on?”

Dick Paetzke tells this story. *Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went camping. As they lay down for the night, Holmes said:* ***"Watson, look up to the sky and tell me what you see?"***

*Watson said* ***"I see millions of stars."***

*Holmes:* ***"What does that tell you?"***

*Watson:* ***"Astronomically, it tells me there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Theologically, it tells me God is great and we’re small and insignificant. Meteorologically, it tells me we’ll have a beautiful day tomorrow. What does it tell you, Holmes?"***

*Holmes:* ***"It tells me that somebody stole our tent."***

Today’s prevailing belief system is *moral relativism*, i.e., nobody has a right to tell anybody else what’s right and wrong. If you have *convictions*, you’re a “bigot.” The highest compliment today seems to be that you’re *tolerant*. Well, *not* tolerant of slavery, discrimination, rights of the unborn, tobacco, logging, free trade, yadayada -- because if you’re tolerant of *these*, there ya go, you’re a bigot!

(Rewind! We’re back to needing polling which tells us what we *should* be *tolerant* of and what we can have *convictions* about.)

Society drifts on the sea of public opinion with no True North. If life is “Jeopardy,” then, tell us, Alex Trebek, what’s the right *question*?

**WHAT *IS* TRUTH?**

That’s what Pilate asked Jesus just before sentencing Him to be crucified (John 18:38). When it’s posed sincerely, “What is truth” is the cry of an honest seeker.

In John we read “’What is truth?’ Pilate asked. Then he went out again to the people…..” Pilate was standing in the very presence of the embodiment of Truth, but he walked away *before* hearing it.

Jesus had just told Pilate, “**I came to bring truth** to the world. All who love the truth recognize that **what I say is true**.”

The Bible is the reliable “deliverable” that God uses to download Truth to every age, culture, race and tongue. It’s the gold standard. Just as there’s only one True North, as gravity pulls in only one direction, as spring follows winter and day follows night, there’s *one* divine book containing *the* Truth.

Whoa, pretty narrow-minded! Yep because Jesus (who spoke the universe into being, then later gave His life to make peace with sinful man) said of Himself, “I *am* the Truth (John 14:6).”

Together we’ve skimmed the Old Testament’s 39 books, Genesis to Malachi, from Creation -- to the first sin (that ruined it for *all* of us) in the Garden of Eden -- to the Tower of Babel where different languages and nations first sprang up -- to the universal flood and that first boat nut Noah -- to Abraham, father of the Jewish race -- to Moses who freed the Jews from bondage in Egypt, through the Sinai wilderness to Club Med in Canaan (today’s Israel) -- to the overthrow and captivity of the Jewish tribes by Assyria and Babylon -- and to their release and homecoming to rebuild Jerusalem.

Woven through the O.T. is the promise that God would send to earth His Son, the Messiah, who’d be slain for the sins of the world and usher in “heaven on earth.” And that a bird’s-eye summary of the first part of the Bible, what Channel 9 would call “Over the Old Testament.”

The New Testament’s 27 books open with Matthew, Mark Luke and John which document Jesus’ life and teachings while He was on earth.

Next is Acts, written by the Bible’s lone Gentile author, Luke the physician, describes how Christ’s teachings spread after He returned to heaven. Next, 21 “letters” to churches that sprang up along the Mediterranean after Christ’s resurrection. 13 of these letters are from Paul, once a rabid Jewish persecutor of early Christians who miraculously morphed into Christianity’s first missionary! The N.T. wraps with Revelation, an epic peek at things to come, no-biggies like Antichrist, Armageddon and the “new heavens and new earth.”

**Steaming Open the COLOSSIANS’ Mail**

300 miles southeast of Istanbul, in untamed, mountainous Turkey, known in Christ’s day as Asia Minor, lies the remains of Colossae. This ancient commercial mecca lay on the busy trade route between Ephesus (100 miles west on the Mediterranean) and the Euphrates River (600 miles east) which runs from Syria through Iraq into the Persian Gulf. Founded about 500 B.C., Colossae came under Roman rule, then was razed by an earthquake in A.D. 62.

Today the town of Chonas squats nears its ruins. A Web site touts a lavish 224-room resort nearby named Colossae Hotel Thermal! (We’re talkin’ *lava* baths here!)

As our scene opens, missionary Paul is in military custody in the imperial capital Rome in chains, his only crime being telling people about Jesus. The time is just before the Colossian tremor of A.D.62.

There was a group of followers of Christ in Colossae, apparently led by Epaphras, the “Big E” whom we met last month, who delivered Paul’s letter from Rome to the believers in Ephesus. Paul had never visited Colossae, but as God’s DH to the non-Jewish world, he was consulted for wisdom and leadership.

“E-man” had come to Rome to tell Paul about heresies threatening to lure Christ's faithful band in Colossae away from the simplicity of the Gospel. These bogus “add-ons” to Paul’s message about Christ would, so their hype went, give the believers in Colossae a fuller life. Even today the danger is in either adding to or subtracting something from Christ and the Bible.

Eugene Peterson says, “Hardly anyone who hears the full story of Jesus and learns the true facts of His life and teaching, crucifixion and resurrection, walks away … dismissing Him as unimportant. … but it’s quite common for those who consider Him truly important to include (in His company) others who seem to be equally important --Buddha, Moses, Socrates and Muhammed (et al) …. For these people, Jesus is important but not *central* … The Christians in Colossae, or at least some of them, seem to have been taking this line. For them, cosmic forces of one sort or another were getting equal billing with Jesus. Paul writes to them in an attempt to restore Jesus, the Messiah, to the center of their lives.”

These heresies probably included Essenism, Greek pagan cults like Neopythagoreanism, mystery religions, Gnosticism, the Iranian Redemption myth, the Isis mysteries, Hellenism, Syncretistic Religion, and Jewish Mysticism like the Merkabah myth.

So Paul untangles this theological hairball, giving not *his* opinion, but as an apostle, he renders God’s verdict on paganism and false teachers. God’s *unvarnished* truth is found only in the Bible, not with church fathers, councils, creeds or other so-called holy books.

Religious sirens dangled before the Colossians phony distractions like abstaining from certain food and drink, observing certain religious feasts and sabbaths, self-abasement, visions, angel worship, self-made religious worship, self-abuse and other philosophies.

Colossian Christians were intimidated by an evil world which devalued life, where men could murder their wives, children and slaves for no reason -- with impunity!

They were confused by Greece’s Golden Age thinkers. Paul assured them that Christ is the plumbline for measuring ideas.

Some were hung up on legalism, thinking to *really* please God, you had to *stop* doing certain things and *start* doing others. No way, says Paul; Christ offers liberty! Jesus looks at our heart, not our rituals.

Other Colossian Christians had conflicts with their spouse, their kids and their workplace. Forget Dr. Laura, writes Paul; as a Christian whose life is plugged into Christ, your IV is pumping 100% Love, empowering you to have good relationships at *every* level. This is rubber-meets-the-road ammo for us in the ‘90s.

Paul says all the Colossian Christians need is what they *already have* in Christ. Jesus is “pure God;” excuse’ moi, need more? What Paul really wants his friends in Asia Minor to “get” is "the mystery of Christ." Whether they know it or not, this is what people everywhere seek. It’s the key that makes life worth living.

The “secret,” or mystery, revealed by Paul, is that God wants to (drum roll, please) live - *in* - us! The Gospel is not *just* “fire insurance” to keep us out of an eternity in a place the Bible calls hell.

The *total* solution to your sin problem and mine, Paul says, is Christ’s death and resurrection. All we ante up is our sin. Everything else is solved by God at the cross. It’s one-stop-shopping, Good News. God Himself literally wants to take up residence in your life and mine!

With Inter, Intra and Extranets, “sales force automation” and “smart homes” we’ve moved from the Information Age into the Information-*Now* Age! Here’s the deal; Christ offers you and me total, already-paid-for forgiveness for our sins. That transaction was handled on the cross 2,000 years ago. God’s made peace with us. *Now* He invites you and me to welcome Him into our lives, to know Him personally, to possess *all* of Him right now.

And the price point we can handle; it’s *free*! No strings, no rituals, no good works. This gift of eternal life is ours simply by believing it. And that brings us full cycle to “What is truth?”

Paul says this mystery is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Translation -- Jesus is our *only* prayer for getting all God has for us.

Tom Allen says, “You can’t understand the *Gospel* ‘til you understand what it means to be *human*. And you can’t understand what it means to be *human* ‘til you understand the *Gospel*.”

Paul expresses his joy that the Colossians had not only *heard* the Good News about Jesus but, they’d taken that step of actually *believing* and *trusting* in Jesus. **Let’s read ch. 1.**

Paul drills down deeper, explaining the power God has for us to bring on board: “Christ in you!” Here’s Paul’s point -- we don’t need more of God; He needs more of us. **Let’s dive into ch. 2.**

Paul now turns from esoteric doctrine to street-level living, explaining how those who follow Christ can virtually experience heaven’s benefits right now, daily! **Let’s check out ch. 3.**

Finally, Paul urges believers to talk and listen to God often. Handier than a pager, we have the awesome, instant option of just dialing up God direct -- verbally or silently -- and telling Him what’s on our mind, telling Him we understand that He’s God, that He’s in charge, that we know He loves us, and that we love Him. Meanwhile, almost surreally, Paul seems more concerned with getting out this message than in getting out of jail. **Let’s read ch. 4.**

His Deal

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