

# THE FOREST HILL NEWS

Published weekly by the Forest Hill church of Christ

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## **Forest Hill**

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Barry M. Grider

## **VISIT US SOON!**

### **Sunday:**

Bible Study..... 9:30 A.M.  
Morning Worship... 10:30 A.M.  
Evening Worship..... 6:00 P.M.

### **Wednesday:**

Bible Study .....7:00 P.M.

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Volume 32

MARCH 23, 2004

Number 11

## **PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS (PART TWO)**

Barry M. Grider

Furthermore, for those who argue that the literary style is not Paul's and that the language employed is not the same as in other Pauline epistles, one should consider that anyone writing concerning a new theme might very well incorporate words not found in another composition.<sup>4</sup> However, if one is honest he will note there is much similarity between the letter to the Colossians and other writings of Paul.

For those contending that the book is a refutation of second century Gnosticism, and therefore could not have been written by Paul, consider the epistle deals with Gnosticism in its "incipient form," rather than its full blown stage.<sup>5</sup> Moffit correctly states: "[G]nosticism grew out of a combination of Greek philosophy, Judaism, and Christianity, all of which were firmly rooted in the first century."<sup>6</sup>

### **DATE**

When Paul wrote Colossians he was in prison (4:3, 18). However, when and where was he in prison? Some speculate that Paul wrote from Caesarea or Ephesus. No credible evidence has been established to validate such a claim. The most likely place of writing was Rome, which helps give a better estimate regarding the date. The Bible student understands Philippians was written from Rome (Phil. 1:13; 4:22), and it is generally agreed upon that Philippians and Colossians were written about the same time.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Luke is with Paul when he writes the letter to the church at Colosse (4:14) and the book of Acts confirms this occasion to be when Paul was under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28:16ff). Being under house arrest would also allow him the opportunity to greet visitors, including Onesimus. Aristarchus is mentioned in the epistle (4:10) and was en route to Rome with Paul (Acts 27:2), and most likely arrived there with him. Furthermore, the doctrinal content of the book seems to imply a later imprisonment.<sup>8</sup> However, because Paul was awaiting death in a Roman prison (2 Tim. 4:6), the writing of this epistle could not have been at that time. Paul's ability to freely write and distribute those epistles leads to the conclusion that Colossians was written during his first Roman imprisonment, A.D. 60-63. It is estimated the date would have been later during the imprisonment, rather than earlier.<sup>9</sup> The church at Colosse, therefore, had reached some degree of spiritual maturity by the time of the writing.

### **THE PURPOSE FOR WRITING COLOSSIANS**

The primary purpose Paul had for writing the epistle to the Colossians was

to deal with an emergency that endangered the faith of those brethren.<sup>10</sup> It does not appear that these brethren were nearly as close to apostatizing as those to whom Hebrews was written, however, the apostle responsibly seeks to nip the error being taught by some, “in the bud.” This error is most commonly called the “Colossian heresy.”

Colossians 2:4-23 sets forth the nature of the error being taught. It was philosophical in nature (v.8), a denial of the deity of Christ (v.9) (which is the root of Gnosticism), an insufficient Christ (v.10), a reviving of parts of Judaism (vv.14-17), mediation through inferior beings such as angels (v.18), asceticism (vv.20-21), and “will worship” (v.23). What the errorists sought was an intermingling of philosophy, paganism, Judaism, and Christianity. They neither called for an overthrow of Christianity nor did they specifically denounce it. However, the claim was made that the Christian system was imperfect and that something needed to supplement it.<sup>11</sup> This is sometimes called “syncretistic religion.”<sup>12</sup>

In this epistle, Paul affirms the supremacy of Christ. He does this by showing:

1. The completeness of His forgiveness (1:13-14).
2. That He is the Creator of all things (1:16).
3. That He is the sustainer of all things (1:17).
4. That He is the preeminent One (1:18).
5. That He is Deity (1:19).

While the book of Ephesians is considered the twin epistle to Colossians, Ephesians exalts the church of Christ, while Colossians exalts the Christ of the church (1:18). The heresy Paul was fighting most likely had its roots in Greek pagan cults (the roots of Gnosticism) which would have had an influence in Colosse, and Jewish mysticism. Through Paul’s writing, Christians today should see how important it is to “contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Ju.3).

In Colossians 3, Paul speaks of another purpose for writing the epistle. He was thrilled by the report Epaphras had delivered concerning their faith and love. The apostle exhorts them to remember the new life that is theirs in Christ. Hence, live a life that would please Him. Furthermore, just as each child of God is complete in Christ, each child of God is to let Christ completely control every area of his life, including his home and work.

## THE RECIPIENTS OF THE BOOK

Thiessan states: “The people [of Colosse] were mostly native Phrygians and Greek colonists,” along with a number of Jews whose ancestors had been transplanted there.<sup>13</sup> The city was located between Laodicea and Hierapolis along the Lycus River. Under Persian kings, Colosse was populous, prosperous, and great. However, because the two other cities were geographically better situated, Colosse faded from prominence.<sup>14</sup> The region was primarily noted for its wool.<sup>15</sup> Some have suggested that the Colossians’ mid-eastern habits did not allow them to keep up with their neighbors and thus the city declined. However, it should be kept in mind, the city was often devastated by earthquakes, and the calcareous deposits of the Lycus River caused the city to suffer, as well.<sup>16</sup> According to Eusebius, Colosse, along with Laodicea and Hierapolis, were destroyed by an earthquake, about a year after the epistle was written.

Concerning Colosse’s government, Clarke writes:

The government of this city is said to have been *democratic*, and its first magistrate bore the title of *archon* and *prator*. The Macedonians transferred Colosse to the Persians; and it afterwards passed under the government of the Seleucidae. After the defeat of Antiochus III, at the battle of Magnesia, it became subject to Eumenes, king of Pergamus: and when Attalus, the last of his successors, bequeathed his dominions to the Romans, this city, with the whole of Phrygia, formed a part of the proconsular province of Asia; which division subsisted till the time of Constantine the Great. After the time of this emperor, Phrygia was divided into Phrygia Pacatiana, and Phrygia Salutaris: and Colosse was the sixth city of the first division.<sup>17</sup>

There does not appear to be any reason which would cause one to have desired to visit Colosse. However, because of Paul’s love for truth and for souls, he showed tremendous concern for the church there. May this be a lesson for Christians today. Even though some places may seem rather uneventful or unappealing, if souls are present, the Gospel must go there.

*(To be continued next week)*

# WATCH OUT FOR THE FOG

Chuck Webster

It was a fog-shrouded morning, July 4, 1952, when a young woman named Florence Chadwick waded into the water off Catalina Island. She intended to swim the channel from the island to the California coast. Long-distance swimming was not new to her; she had been the first woman to swim the English Channel in both directions.

The water was numbing cold that day. The fog was so thick she could hardly see the boats in her party. Several times sharks had to be driven away with rifle fire. She swam more than fifteen hours before she asked to be taken out of the water. Her trainer tried to encourage her to swim on since they were so close to land, but when Florence looked, all she saw was fog. So she quit ... only one-half mile from her goal. Later she said, "I'm not excusing myself, but if I could have seen the land, I might have made it." It wasn't the cold or fear or exhaustion that caused Florence Chadwick to fail. It was the fog (from Larson).

Discouraged by fog...doesn't that frequently happen to us? It's often not the obvious dangers (doctrinal pitfalls, trials, etc.) that derail us, but rather that we simply allow something to cloud our view of the goal. That's why Paul wrote; "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). The Hebrew writer encouraged us to look "unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" as we run the race (Heb. 12:2). In other words, we're told to "keep our eyes on the finish line." "Don't let fog cloud your focus."

As we run (or swim) the Christian race, the most common fog that clouds our view of the finish line is this old world in which we live. We sing the words, "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue..." But is that our *real* perspective of life? Too often we get so caught up in the pleasures of this life that we forget about the promises of the next. We have the tendency to live this life as if we belong here...as if we were created for this to be "home." But like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob we need to remember that we are but "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb. 11:13). Our bodies are but earthly tabernacles in which God clothed our spirits for some threescore and ten years to prepare within us the desire for that eternal abode with Him. That's why no matter how many possessions we acquire in this world...no matter how many pleasures we enjoy, we never feel satisfied till we've fulfilled our spiritual longing. God created us with a higher purpose than simply to live in this world. He made us in His image, that is, with a soul, a part of us that will never die. It is with that spirit that we must earnestly look through the fog and see peace, joy, and rest in Abraham's bosom. It is with that spirit that we can see through the fog and behold the streets of gold and mansions of silver of that beautiful city. It is with that spirit that we can see through the fog and look on the nail-scarred hands of Jesus as they lovingly beacon us to come home.

Two months after her failure, Florence Chadwick walked off the same beach into the same channel and swam the distance, setting a new speed record. That day, there was no fog. She could see land. And so can we through the eye of faith. Keep swimming.

*(Chuck Webster is the preacher for the Hoover church of Christ, Hoover, Alabama)*

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The Forest Hill News (USPS #018-150) is published weekly by the Forest Hill Church of Christ, 3950 Forest Hill-Irene Road, Memphis, TN 38125-2585. **POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to Forest Hill News, 3950 Forest Hill-Irene Rd., Memphis, TN 38125-2585.