

## WHAT COLOSSIANS MEANS FOR US TODAY

(David Garland)

COLOSSIANS was written to a negligible Phrygian Christian community almost two thousand years ago, and yet it still speaks relevantly today. It gives witness "to the finality, adequacy and all-sufficiency of the cosmic Christ by whom and for whom all things were made, in whom they cohere, and with whom in God the life of the Christian and of the Church is hidden," so that truth will never go out of date.

But the situation facing the Colossians is also similar to ours today. They faced opponents who challenged and belittled the sufficiency of Christ and their hope. Christians today live in a secular society, which regularly scoffs at Christian faith. Many Christians in the West have become increasingly uncertain of their faith and consequently hold it uncertainly. The acids of criticism can eat away at the foundations of a weak and vacillating faith. There are also fewer cultural forces to keep people in the church. When confronted with the laughter and scorn of the modern-day scoffers, nominal church members may be tempted to capitulate. They will abandon their faith or trade it in for the latest craze. In Paul's language, they return to the darkness where the rulers of this age hold sway.

When Christians do not understand their faith, they are likely to water down the gospel and accommodate it to cultural expectations. They will cut out any offending articles of faith or append specious ones more in accord with the fashion of the age. Paul wrote to the Colossians to help them grasp ever more firmly who Christ is and the rich glories of all that God has done in him.

When Christians have little confidence in their faith, they will be overly tentative in their claims and easily shaken by challenges. Paul hoped to fortify the Colossians in their assurance of the hope they had in Christ. The letter affirms that God's creation has a divine purpose, which is brought to fulfillment in and through Christ. It affirms the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as the fullness of God and as our Creator and Redeemer.

When Christians do not live with a deep sense of gratitude for what God has done for them in Christ, they will become engulfed in anxieties and will be tempted to look for security in something other than Christ. Paul repeatedly urged the Colossians to be thankful for the victory already won for them by Christ's cross and resurrection. Salvation can be found only in Christ, and Christians do not need something else or something more. The cross brings redemption, the forgiveness of sin, and triumph over all the powers that would oppress human life. Every believer is made complete when placed under the complete claim of Christ, and all the spiritual ills of our world find their only cure in him.

When Christians live no differently from those around them who do not know God or who defy God's commands, they bring discredit to their faith and cause others to think that their claims are false. The letter to the Colossians argues that Christians must not only be solidly grounded in their faith. They must also be ethically above reproach. Discerning, confident, grateful, and ethical Christians lead lives worthy of the Lord, are pleasing to God, and will bear spiritual fruit in a spiritually blighted world. Paul intends in this letter to help form this kind of believer.

