

Waco—A Modern-day Colossae?

A number of years ago, I brought a devotional lesson on a Wednesday evening comparing the city of Waco and her surrounding area to the biblical town of Colossae. As Waco has grown, so have the similarities. I thought perhaps the lesson I brought then would be one that would suit a NEWSLETTER article.

Where Colossae was located was a perfect place for a city. It sat on a river, the source of wealth for many cities. In addition, it sat on a major highway—with goods being transported through it between major cities in the area. It was located near a number of other cities, cities that grew to be much larger than it. It faced calamity, an earthquake that nearly wiped it off of the face of the earth. It was rebuilt, but now doesn't exist. It came, flourished, declined, and disappeared. What we know about it is what we see in the words Paul wrote in his letter to the Christians in Colossae.

The Colossians had been taught the truth. In **chapter 1**, we see that they were aware of the reward that had been reserved for them. (**verses 5-6**) They had been **“rescued...from the dominion of darkness”** and had been **“brought...into the kingdom of the Son.”** (**verse 13**) They had been forgiven of their sins. (**verse 14**) and had been reconciled to God by Jesus' sacrifice. (**verse 22**) And they knew the truth of the gospel would teach them how to **“live a life worthy of the Lord”** and how to **“please Him in every way.”**

The Colossians were taught in chapter 3 just how to do that. In **Colossians 3:5-15**, Paul tells them:

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”

Everything was to be done as worship to God, including all of their interpersonal relationships: Husbands and wives, parents and children,

masters and slaves. They were to be “devoted to prayer” and set good examples for everyone with whom they came in contact. They faced heresy and evidently the heretics won out. The church at Laodicea, just a few miles from Colossae certainly faced the same difficulties and in Revelation 3, Jesus chastises them for being lukewarm, not cold or hot. He says that rather than being independent, they were wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked. Ill-equipped to face false teaching and the “wisdom” of the time and defeat it.

Waco is located in the perfect place for a city. It sits on the confluence of two rivers. It sits on a major highway, Interstate 35, with goods being transported to it and through it to the larger cities of Dallas, Fort Worth, and Austin. It faced calamity in 1953 when a tornado almost destroyed the downtown area. The area was rebuilt, and the church in Waco flourished, but is now on the decline.

All of the instructions Paul gave to the people of Colossae are instructions for us. We need to learn what to do to be pleasing to God and how to stand up to the false teaching and the so-called wisdom of the time. Sharing the truth of Christ and setting a good example will go