

Introduction

Hank Hanagraaph's conversion from Biblical Christianity to Eastern Orthodoxy back in 2017

1. Split from the Roman Catholic Church in 1054 A.D. (called the Great Schism)
2. Tenants of Eastern Orthodoxy:
 - a. The Bible:
 - 1) They consider it the inspired Word of God, but include additional books such as the Apocrypha (intertestamental writings)
 - 2) Scripture is NOT their highest and final authority; Church tradition is
 - 3) No believer has the right to interpret the Scripture on his or her own, but must interpret the Scriptures according to what the Church Father's wrote about the Bible (in fact, they often read the Church Father's more than the Bible)
 - 4) While reading the Word of God is present during their liturgical mass, preaching the Word of God is not common
 - b. Salvation:
 - 1) Salvation is NOT possible outside the Orthodox Church, primarily because salvation is acquired through administration of the sacraments only by Orthodox priests
 - 2) Faith is NOT required—on the part of the one receiving the sacrament or even the priest administering the sacrament—in order for the sacraments to be effective (e.g. save the individual); the sacraments are effective simply because they are official and genuine ordinances of the Orthodox church
 - 3) The three most important sacraments are baptism, something called “chrismation”, and the Eucharist:
 - a) Baptism is the point at which the individual is regenerated and justified; both infants and adults are baptized
 - b) Chrismation is the point at which the Holy Spirit is bestowed upon newly baptized individuals by ordained priests through a process of anointing the candidate with oil and making the sign of the cross on multiple parts of their body from the forehead all the way down to the feet
 - c) The Eucharist is the primary means to how one experiences the grace of God (transubstantiation)
 - 4) Salvation is not a one-time act of God but a life-long process and cooperative effort between God and man:
 - a) They call this process theosis which involves three stages:
 - **The Purgative way:** the discipline of turning away from sin and doing penance and mortifications for past sins (mortification refers to denying oneself pleasurable things, humiliating or shaming oneself, sometimes inflicting pain or discomfort); in essence, it's the purification o
 - **The Illuminative way:** this is where one develops a profound understanding of self and God, not so much through a study of God's Word but through religious rites and practices like deep uninterrupted prayer, contemplation, meditation,

fasting, the sacraments, the study of the lives of the saints and their virtues, etc. It is a state of enhanced illumination or understanding of spiritual matters

- **The Unitive way** (sainthood): this stage describes someone who has acquired great purity of heart, great mastery over oneself (and sin), and a mind that constantly thinks and acts in accordance with pleasing God
- b) The entire process of theosis is very mystical and based on religious rites and practices, often resembling more of what's found in eastern mystic religions than the Bible
 - c. Other beliefs include the veneration (worship) of Mary, papal succession, praying to dead saints, the use of icons in worship, the existence of purgatory, and a rejection of a literal Hell
3. In all honestly, I stopped listening to Hanagraaph so I don't know if he's adopted all of Eastern Orthodoxy's doctrines or beliefs, but he's become a proponent of many, especially the concept of theosis
 4. So, this begs the question, how did Hank Hanagraath—the Bible Answer Man—become so deceived? How was he led astray from what appeared to be a solid, Biblical understanding of Christ and Christianity to the unbiblical views he now apparently affirms?
 - a. I can't answer that with any real certainty but after watching a video of him describing his conversion to EO, a few things stand out
 - b. First, it began when he became enamored with the teachings of Watchman Nee:
 - 1) Nee as a Chinese pastor and theologian who was arrested by the communist Chinese government in 1952 and confined to a labor camp for 20 years until his death in 1972
 - 2) He was one of the most influential leaders in the protestant church in China, and is revered by many even here in the west (in 2022, the Museum of the Bible just celebrated the 50th anniversary of his martyrdom)
 - 3) However, there are many areas of his theology and practice that were unbiblical:
 - a) His teachings on the trinity border on modalism
 - b) He believed baptism is necessary for salvation
 - c) He believed in direct revelation from God to the believer
 - d) He promoted a 2-stage approach to sanctification (theosis) which can best be described as a mystical practice that elevated a believer to a higher spiritual knowledge and experience with God where one was finally completely void of one's own will, motives, desires and work and totally surrendered to God, thus truly experiencing the life of Jesus; it deemphasized doctrine and theology and prioritized experience
 - e) Much of Nee's writings focused on experience and involved some form of mysticism, which should be expected because many of his earliest and most influential mentors were female mystics (Anglican and Catholic)
 - 4) According to Hanagraath, the more he studied the writings of Nee (especially the false teaching of theosis) the more he was attracted and drawn to them
 - c. Second, Hanagraath became enamored with the sacramental system and practice of the Eastern Orthodox church and became convinced that it is through these sacraments and practices that one truly experiences the "real" presence and grace of God (his views on the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist are similar to the Catholic church)

- d. Third, his (quote) “experiences” with Eastern Orthodoxy were a major factor in his conversion; he repeats this often and it genuinely appears that these experiences were what drove his conversion, rather than the Bible driving his conversion
 - e. Finally, there is a sense of arrogance or pride in that those who have not yet converted to Eastern Orthodoxy simply do not understand the history of the Church and fail to see that Eastern Orthodoxy was the original faith and practice of the 1st century Church (in much the same way that the Catholic church believes the same thing!)
 - f. So, with these four things in mind, it becomes clear is that Hanagraath allowed himself to be drawn away by two things:
 - 1) The philosophy, teachings, and traditions of men
 - 2) Mystical experiences
5. The reason I shared this rather long illustration is because the Colossians were facing something very similar

A. Author and Recipients

1. Verse 1 indicates Paul authored the letter along with Timothy (READ 1:1):
 - a. Paul was in prison at this time, probably in Rome between AD 60-62 (READ 4:3, 10, 18)
 - b. Evidence suggests he also wrote his letters to the Ephesians and Philemon at the same time (due to similarities between Colossians and Ephesians, and the fact that Philemon lived in Colossae)
 - c. He also appears to have penned another letter at the same time which we do not have; it was to the Laodiceans, a city about 10 miles away from Colossae (READ 4:16)
2. The recipients of the letter were the “**saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae**” (1:2):
 - a. Colossae was primarily a gentile city, but it did have a large settlement of Jews:
 - 1) It was located in Phrygia which was in the Roman province of Asia (now modern Turkey)
 - 2) It was about 100 miles east of Ephesus and located at the delta where two rivers merged which made it a commercial hub for boat traffic
 - 3) It was also located only the highway that connected Ephesus to the Tigris Euphrates valley which made it a lucrative business hub
 - 4) As a result, the city of Colossae was a mix if cultures, nationalities, and religions
 - 5) Its main industry was the manufacturing and exporting of wool products and by today’s standards it would be considered a blue-collar town
 - 6) Nearly half of the residents were slaves
 - b. In v. 2 Paul refers to them not only as “**saints**” but “**faithful brothers**”:
 - 1) One of the signs of their faithfulness was their love for others which he mentions twice (1:4, 8)
 - 2) However, as we’ll learn throughout this letter, their faithfulness was being challenged as they were being tempted and drawn away to beliefs and practices that undermined the Gospel (we’ll get to this in a bit)
 - 3) We don’t know much about the makeup of the church, but the language and contents of the letter suggest they were mostly gentiles and a mix of slaves and free men/women:
 - a) Paul refers specifically to God’s mystery being revealed to gentiles (READ 1:27)
 - b) The list of vices in 3:5-7 were common among gentiles but not as much among Jews

- c) We know there were slaves and slave owners because Paul addresses them in 3:22-4:2; this should be expected since half the citizens of Colossae were slaves
- d) There are also few, if any, allusions to the Old Testament which also suggests a primarily gentile audience

B. History of the Church

1. The book of Acts doesn't record the founding of the church at Colossae, but it is generally thought that it was founded during Paul's 2nd missionary journey when he spent three years in Ephesus; this is in part because of something Luke recorded in Acts 19:10 (READ)
2. However, it wasn't Paul who founded the church but rather a man named Epaphras (READ 1:7):
 - a. In 4:12 Paul refers to Epaphras as "**one of your number**" which means he was from Colossae
 - b. This is also indicated in Philemon 1:23 where Paul sends Philemon (who lived in Colossae) greeting from Epaphras
 - c. We don't know much about Epaphras' history but Acts 19:10 says that "**all Asia**" heard the Gospel during Paul's long ministry in Ephesus
 - d. So, it is assumed that Epaphras may have visited Ephesus and first heard the Gospel there from Paul, and then returned to Colossae preaching the Gospel
 - e. It appears that Epaphras also started churches in two neighboring cities—Laodicea and Hierapolis (READ 4:12-13)
 - f. It appears that most of the Colossians had never personally met Paul (READ 2:1)
3. At the time of this letter, the church was 5 and 10 years old so it was fairly young but well established (started between AD 52-55 when Paul was in Ephesus and this letter was written about AD 60-62 when Paul was in Rome)

C. Reason for writing

1. Like many of Paul's letters, he wrote this letter out of concern for the Colossians; his concerns appeared to be threefold:
 - a. He was concerned they would be taken captive by false teaching and manmade religion
 - b. He was concerned they would fall into religious legalism
 - c. He was concerned they would be defrauded of their spiritual prize/reward
2. There's been a tremendous amount of debate over exactly what was being taught at Colossae so generically it is simply referred to as the Colossian Heresy; However, there are some clues in the text:
 - a. There were elements of philosophy which was based purely on human observation and traditions of men (READ Colossians 2:8)
 - b. There were elements of Jewish legalism (READ Colossians 2:16, 21)
 - c. There were elements of what later became Gnosticism which was the belief that one could attain secret spiritual knowledge through mystical practices and experiences (READ Colossians 2:18)
 - d. There were even physical elements like "**self-abasement and severe treatment of the body**" (2:23)
3. All of this undermined the Gospel and put the Colossians at risk of being led astray:

- a. Paul's hope and prayer for them was that they might become fully mature in their knowledge and understanding of Christ so they could walk in a manner that pleased Him:
 - 1) 1:9: He wanted them to be **"filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding"**
 - 2) 1:10: He wanted them to bear fruit **"in every good work and [increase] in the knowledge of God"**
 - 3) 1:23: He wanted them to **"continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel"**
 - 4) 1:27: He wanted them to understand the riches of God's mystery among the gentiles **"which is Christ in you, the hope of glory"** so that they might be **"complete in Christ"**
 - 5) 2:2 He wanted them to attain **"the wealth of the full assurance of understanding, unto the full knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself"**
 - 6) 2:7 His hope was that they would continue to **"walk in Him"** just as they had been instructed
- b. But, all of this was at risk and he was concerned that they would be led astray from a true knowledge and understanding of God and Jesus Christ, and toward man-made religion which was based upon Jewish legalism, philosophy, human wisdom and observation, teachings and traditions of men, idolatry, false visions, and a host of other mystical and earthly practices

D. Fate of the Church

1. History suggests there was a church presence at Colossae up through the 6th century because bishops from Colossae attended the Council of Chalcedon in 451 and the Quinisext Council in 692
2. Aside from this, not much is known regarding the spiritual or doctrinal integrity of the church
3. However, because the churches at Laodicea and Colossae were closely related, it might be reasonable to assume, based on Jesus' warning to Laodicea in Revelation 3, that they didn't heed Paul's warnings (READ Revelation 3:14-22)

E. Preaching Outline

1. One of the things that stands out about this letter is that it's all about Jesus, in part because the Colossians were being tempted to be drawn away from faith alone in Jesus
2. So, our preaching outline is going to take a somewhat topical approach to the letter over nine weeks:
 - a. The Faith, Love, and Hope Found in Jesus Christ (1:1-8)
 - b. The Wisdom and Knowledge Found in Jesus Christ (1:9-12)
 - c. The Reconciliation Found in Jesus Christ (1:13-23)
 - d. The Perfection Found in Jesus Christ (1:24-2:5)
 - e. The Freedom Found in Jesus Christ (2:6-23)
 - f. The Newness Found in Jesus Christ (3 parts):
 - 1) The Newness Found in Jesus Christ (Part 1): New Life (3:1-7)
 - 2) The Newness Found in Jesus Christ (Part 2): New Relationships (3:18-4:2)
 - 3) The Newness Found in Jesus Christ (Part 3): New Mission (4:3-6)
 - g. The Role Models Found in Jesus Christ (4:7-18)