

COLOSSIANS

ENCOURAGEMENT TO WALK IN ALL WISDOM
AS HOLY ONES IN CHRIST

John Paul Heil

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INTRODUCTION

A. COLOSSIANS: ENCOURAGEMENT TO WALK IN ALL WISDOM
AS HOLY ONES IN CHRIST

A close examination of the particular words chosen for the title of this book, “Colossians: Encouragement To Walk in All Wisdom as Holy Ones in Christ,” will serve to introduce it. The first word, “Colossians,” indicates that this book is concerned in a comprehensive way with the whole of the New Testament document commonly known as Paul’s letter to the Colossians. In it I will present an entirely new chiastic structure embracing all of the ten units that comprise this letter. In addition, I will show that within this overall macrochiastic structure each and every one of the letter’s ten units likewise exhibits its own individual chiastic structure. These macrochiastic and microchiastic patterns serve as a key to understanding what and how Paul, the implied author of the letter to the Colossians, is communicating to his implied audience.¹

“Encouragement,” the next word in this book’s title, indicates its concern to demonstrate that the main thrust of the letter to the Colossians is to encourage or exhort its implied audience. This is suggested, first of all, by the two key occurrences of the verb “encourage” (παρακαλέω) in the letter (2:2; 4:8). In 2:1–3 Paul points to the letter’s purpose to encourage its various intended audiences when he states: “For I wish you (that is, those in Colossae; cf. 1:2) to know how great a struggle I am having on behalf of you and those in Laodicea and as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,² that their hearts may be encouraged (παρακληθῶσιν) as they

1. For similar presentations of the comprehensive chiastic structures in Philemon and Ephesians, see John Paul Heil, “The Chiastic Structure and Meaning of Paul’s Letter to Philemon,” *Bib* 82 (2001): 178–206; idem, *Ephesians: Empowerment to Walk in Love for the Unity of All in Christ* (Studies in Biblical Literature 13; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

2. This does not necessarily mean that Paul was unknown to all in his intended audiences. James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 130: “[A]s many as have not seen my face’ (not every believer in the area—he may have passed through Colossae earlier and would probably have come to know some of the Colossian Christians during his time in Ephesus).” Bo Reicke, *Re-Examining Paul’s Letters: The History of the Pauline Correspondence* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2001), 75–76: “[I]ndications found in Acts show that Paul may have actually vis-

are held together in love, and for all richness of the full assurance of understanding, for the knowledge of the mystery of God, Christ, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.” The words “as they are held together in love” refer not only to the letter’s audiences being united in love generally but also, and more specifically and especially, to their being gathered and held together for the occasion of the public reading of the letter to them so that their hearts may be encouraged as they listen to it.³

The verb “encourage” occurs for the second time toward the end of the letter in 4:7–8 when Paul tells his audience: “All things regarding me Tychicus, the beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow slave in the Lord, will make known to you, whom I am sending to you for this very purpose, so that you may know the things concerning us and that he may encourage (παρακαλέσῃ) your hearts.” In all probability Paul has sent Tychicus to carry the letter to be read publicly before the Colossians either by Tychicus himself or someone delegated by him.⁴ A primary way that Tychicus may encourage their hearts, then, is by his role in the public reading of the letter.⁵ That the main thrust of the letter to the Colossians

ited Colossae and other cities in the Lycus valley during his third journey, around A.D. 55. Journeying through Galatia and Phrygia (Acts 18:23), he is portrayed as passing through ‘the upper parts’ of the country before arriving in Ephesus (19:1). From the Ephesian perspective, these upper parts were the valley of the river Maeander and its southern tributary, Lycus, where Colossae was situated. Luke’s references to these regions were certainly meant to show that Paul visited congregations already existing there, like the church of Colossae. In his letters to Philemon and Colossians, Paul also mentions several acquaintances in Colossae by name, such as Philemon, Onesimus, Archippus, and Epaphras. . . . Paul clearly had had contact with several believers in Colossae before he dictated the letter in question. Paul also extended his admonitions to people in Colossae who had never seen his face (2:1). This utterance, however, refers to neophytes who had been converted and instructed by Epaphras (1:7) in the four years after Paul’s visit to Colossae.”

3. That the hearts of the letter’s audiences may be encouraged “gibt die Intention des Verfassers an” according to Michael Dübbers, *Christologie und Existenz im Kolosserbrief: Exegetische und semantische Untersuchungen zur Intention des Kolosserbriefes* (WUNT 2/191; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 169 n. 52. That their hearts “may be encouraged” is ultimately a divine passive, so that God is the agent of the encouragement through the instrumentality of the letter. That the letter to the Colossians is also to be read in the church or assembly of the Laodiceans is indicated in 4:16.

4. E. Randolph Richards, *Paul and First-Century Letter Writing: Secretaries, Composition and Collection* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004), 188, 199–200: “Tychicus carried Paul’s letters to the church at Colossae (Col 4:7), and likely to Philemon and the church at Ephesus (Eph 6:22).” Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation: Revised Edition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 387: “Tychichus, Onesimus’ companion, carries three or four letters: the letter of recommendation for Onesimus [Philemon]; the letter to the Colossian church, which Paul expects will be read aloud at the assembly; another possible letter, perhaps for the local assembly at Laodicea; and the circular letter, Ephesians, which Tychichus will deliver to Hierapolis, Ephesus, and other cities in Asia Minor. At the same time, he brings to these churches personal information concerning Paul’s condition in prison. The close proximity of Ephesus, Colossae, and Laodicea makes this thesis especially appealing.”

5. Tychicus has the same role to play in Eph 6:21–22, with Eph 6:22 being identical to Col 4:8. Richards, *Paul*, 202: “He [Paul] fully expected his letters to be read publicly. It is even possible that he chose carriers who could read his letter effectively. An informed carrier provided additional informa-

is to encourage its audience is confirmed by the many and various ways Paul directly addresses his audience throughout the letter with words of exhortation or encouragement: 1:9–10, 23; 2:6–8, 16, 18; 3:1–2, 5, 8–9, 12–17, 18–23; 4:1–3, 5–6, 15–18.⁶

The words “To Walk” in the title indicate the conduct to which the letter to the Colossians encourages its implied audience. In both Greek (περιπατέω) and English the verb “to walk” can designate “sphere of activity,” “comportment,” “mode of living,” “habit of conduct,” or “behavior.”⁷ “To walk” was chosen for the title because the Greek verb περιπατέω occurs in each chapter of the letter (1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5) at significant places within the overall chiasmic structure, as I will demonstrate in more detail later.

“In All Wisdom,” the next words of the title, specify the sphere or realm of conduct within which the audience are to walk. In four of the six occurrences of the word “wisdom” (σοφία) in the letter (1:9; 1:28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5) it is the object of the preposition “in” (ἐν), and in three of these four instances “wisdom” is modified by the adjective “all” (πᾶς). In the first occurrence of the phrase “in all wisdom” it is closely associated with the verb “to walk”: In 1:9–10 Paul and Timothy pray that the audience may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will “in all wisdom” (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ) and Spiritual understanding, “to walk” (περιπατήσαι) worthy of the Lord. In 1:28 Paul and Timothy state that it is Christ whom they proclaim, admonishing every person and teaching every person “in all wisdom” (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ). Correspondingly, in 3:16 Paul exhorts the audience to teach and admonish one another “in all wisdom” (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ). Finally, in 4:5, in what will be seen later as a chiasmic correspondence to 1:9–10, Paul exhorts the audience: “In wisdom” (ἐν σοφίᾳ) “walk” (περιπατεῖτε) before those outside, making the most of the opportunity.

“As Holy Ones,” the next phrase in the title, characterizes both what the audience now are as believers and what they are still to be at the end of time, namely, separated from the rest of the world and consecrated to God, in continuity with God’s “holy” chosen people of old.⁸ The audience are addressed as the “holy ones”

tion and perhaps also could comment and expound upon the letter. It was advantageous to both Paul and his recipients to have an informed carrier read the letter so as to provide the proper inflections and nuances.”

6. For a treatment of Colossians as parenetic theology, see Walter T. Wilson, “The ‘Practical’ Achievement of Colossians: A Theological Assessment,” *HBT* 20 (1998): 49–74.

7. BDAG, 803; Roland Bergmeier, “περιπατέω,” *EDNT* 3.75–76.

8. Peter Thomas O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (WBC 44; Waco, Texas: Word, 1982), 3: “The antecedents of this expression are to be found in the OT. Israel was God’s holy people (Exod 19:6) chosen by him and appointed to his service. Having been brought into a covenant relationship with him, Israel was to be a holy nation because he is holy (Lev 11:44; 19:2; etc.). Christians are ‘saints’ because of the new relationship they have been brought into by God through Jesus Christ. They are set apart for him and his service; as the people of his own possession they are the called and elect community of the end-time: they are ‘God’s chosen ones, holy (ἅγιοι) and beloved’ (3:12) whose lives are to be

(ἀγίους) and faithful brothers in Christ (1:2),⁹ who have love for all of their fellow believers as “holy ones” (ἀγίους, 1:4). God has made the audience, as God’s chosen ones, “holy” (ἅγιοι) and beloved (3:12), fit for the share of the inheritance of the “holy ones” (ἀγίων) in the light (1:12). Thus, as “holy ones,” the audience, along with their fellow believers, share in the inheritance of the people of Israel as God’s chosen holy ones of the past.¹⁰ The mystery of Christ has now been manifested to the audience as among the “holy ones” (ἀγίους, 1:26), and through the death of Christ God has now reconciled the audience to present them as “holy ones” (ἀγίους), without blemish, and blameless before him (1:22) when Christ is manifested again at the end (3:4).

“In Christ,” the final phrase of the title, completes the characterization of the audience as holy ones who have been incorporated to live in union with Christ Jesus within a new sphere, realm, or domain of existence determined by what God has done in raising Christ Jesus from the dead and exalting him to the heavenly regions.¹¹ The audience are initially addressed as the holy ones and faithful brothers within the realm of being “in Christ” (1:2), who have faith within the realm of being “in Christ Jesus” (1:4). It is in union with Christ, that is, “in him,” that all believers have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (1:14). Within the realm of Christ (“in him”) all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (2:3). In union with Christ the audience were “circumcised” with a “circumcision” not made by

characterized by godly behavior.” See also Horst Balz, “ἅγιος,” *EDNT* 1.18; Stanley E. Porter, “Holiness, Sanctification,” *DPL*, 397–98.

9. For an unconvincing attempt to translate ἀγίους in 1:2 as an adjective rather than a noun, see Thomas B. Slater, “Translating ἅγιος in Col 1,2 and Eph 1,1,” *Bib* 87 (2006): 52–54. As O’Brien (*Colossians*, 3) already pointed out, “Because the article is missing before ‘faithful brothers’ (πιστοῖς ἀδελφοῖς) it has been argued that ἀγίους should be connected with πιστοῖς as an adjective and rendered ‘holy and faithful brothers.’ However, ἅγιοι always appears as a noun in the salutations of the letters and in our view this is how it is being employed here; it should therefore be translated ‘saints’ or ‘holy ones.’” “Paul’s use of the word in other letters suggests that for him ἅγιοι (in the plural) was almost a technical term,” according to Robert McLachlan Wilson, *Colossians and Philemon* (ICC; London: Clark, 2005), 70.

10. Allan R. Bevere, *Sharing in the Inheritance: Identity and the Moral Life in Colossians* (JSNT-Sup 226; London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 18: “Colossian Christians participate in Israel’s distinctive heritage.”

11. Winfried Elliger, “ἐν,” *EDNT* 1.448: “Ἐν Χριστῷ thus refers not to mystical life in Christ; it serves rather, like the related formula ἐν πίστει, ‘in faith,’ as a characterization of one’s realm of existence, which is often set in contrast to the worldly realm (ἐν σαρκί, ‘in the flesh’)” (Elliger’s emphases). See also Friedrich Büchsel, “‘In Christus’ bei Paulus,” *ZNW* 42 (1949): 141–58; Fritz Neugebauer, “Das Paulinische ‘In Christo,’” *NTS* 4 (1957–58): 124–38; John A. Allan, “The ‘In Christ’ Formula in Ephesians,” *NTS* 5 (1958–59): 54–62; Michel Bouttier, *En Christ: Étude d’exégèse et de théologie pauliniennes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1962); Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, “Some Observations on Paul’s Use of the Phrases ‘in Christ’ and ‘with Christ,’” *JSNT* 25 (1985): 83–97; Celia E. T. Kourie, “In Christ and Related Expressions in Paul,” *Theologia Evangelica* 20 (1987): 33–43; James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 396–401; Mehrdad Fatehi, *The Spirit’s Relation to the Risen Lord in Paul: An Examination of Its Christological Implications* (WUNT 128; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 269–74; Mark A. Seifrid, “In Christ,” *DPL*, 433–36.

hand (2:11) and were buried and raised from the dead “with him” in baptism (2:12). Indeed, the audience have died “with Christ” (2:20) and were raised “with Christ” (3:1), so that their life is now hidden “with Christ” in God (3:3). Consequently, through the letter to the Colossians Paul and Timothy are admonishing and teaching (thus encouraging) the audience to walk in all wisdom, that they may present them as perfect holy ones within the realm of being “in Christ” (1:28).

B. AUTHORSHIP

Although the letter to the Colossians presents itself as authored and sent by Paul and Timothy (1:1), with Paul eventually emerging as the primary authorial voice (1:23; 4:18), many scholars in modern times have questioned and/or denied that the historical apostle Paul could have authored Colossians because in their estimation it differs too greatly from the so-called main or undisputed letters of Paul.¹² But an appeal to pseudonymity involves problematical assumptions, so that it is debatable whether any of the NT letters which present Paul as their primary author is pseudonymous.¹³ Recent studies in the role of co-authors, co-workers, and secretaries in the composition of the Pauline letters have indicated the complexity involved in the question of their authorship. Paul may have authored his letters in a broader sense of authorizing or directing their composition in collaboration

12. See, for example, Walter Bujard, *Stilanalytische Untersuchungen zum Kolosserbrief als Beitrag zur Methodik von Sprachvergleichen* (SUNT 11; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1973); Mark Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudepigraphy* (The Biblical Seminar 4; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986). Colossians is pseudonymous based on an analysis of its inscription in 1:1–2, according to Pierre Jordaán, “The *Inscriptio* Colossians 1:1–2,” *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 79 (1997): 62–69.

13. E. Earle Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 324: “The hypothesis of innocent apostolic pseudepigrapha appears to be designed to defend the canonicity of certain New Testament writings that are, at the same time, regarded as pseudepigrapha. It is a modern invention that has no evident basis in the attitude or writings of the apostolic and patristic church and is more an exercise in apologetics than in historical criticism.” Terry L. Wilder, *Pseudonymity, the New Testament and Deception: An Inquiry Into Intention and Reception* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2004), 265 n. 52: “Though the case against the traditional authorship of some of the disputed Pauline letters is sometimes strong, several scholars today believe that no pseudonymous works exist in the NT. Scholars hold this view with good reason because (a) the greatest weakness of pseudepigraphic theories is the number of assumptions upon which they rest, and (b) they have been encouraged by recent studies which focus on Paul’s use of a secretary, a co-author, and tradition when writing his letters. A resort to pseudonymity is not necessary.” D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 350: “In short, the search for parallels to justify the view that the intended readers of some New Testament documents would have understood them to be pseudonymous, so that no deception took place, has proved a failure. The hard evidence demands that we conclude either that some New Testament documents are pseudonymous and that the real authors intended to deceive their readers, or that the real authors intended to speak the truth and that pseudonymity is not attested in the New Testament.” Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians Volume 1: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1–2 Timothy and 1–3 John* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2006), 38: “[A]lthough there may be pseudepigrapha within the New Testament, the burden of proof falls squarely on the shoulders of those who make that claim.”

with fellow workers. Furthermore, the different audiences, situations, and times of composition, could also account for many of the differences among the Pauline letters.¹⁴

With this broader sense of authorship and complexity of composition in mind, then, I follow those scholars who argue that the historical apostle Paul of Tarsus, the Paul who is the primary author of the “undisputed” letters of Paul, is indeed also the primary author of the letter to the Colossians.¹⁵ But even those

14. Luther M. Stirewalt, *Paul: The Letter Writer* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); E. Randolph Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (WUNT 42; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991); idem, *Paul*. For suggestions regarding the possible roles of Timothy, Epaphras, or Tychicus in the writing of Colossians, see Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 477–78. Johnson, *Writings*, 269, 273: “The composition of Paul’s letters involved a complex process, which affects how we understand his authorship of the various epistles ascribed to him. Paul ‘authors’ all his letters, in the broad sense that they were composed under his authority and direction. But it is sometimes difficult to determine the exact nature of his role in the writing process. . . . The reader may be surprised at my bias for the authenticity of all the letters. It is based on the persuasiveness of their literary self-presentation, the ability to find plausible places for them in Paul’s career, and a conviction that the whole Pauline corpus is one that Paul ‘authored’ but did not necessarily write.” See also Reicke, *Paul’s Letters*.

15. For the arguments of those who hold that Paul is the primary author of Colossians, see O’Brien, *Colossians*, xli–xlix; Reicke, *Paul’s Letters*, 75–78; Frederick Fyvie Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 28–32; Nicholas Thomas Wright, *The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 31–34; Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon* (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 3–4; Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 34B; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 114–26; Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 636–38; David E. Garland, *Colossians and Philemon: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 17–22; Paul E. Deterding, *Colossians* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 3–7; Marianne Meye Thompson, *Colossians & Philemon* (The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 2–5, esp. 4: “I will refer to the author of the letter as Paul because I believe that, in spite of the difficulties, the letter can still best be explained as written or authorized by Paul during his own lifetime.” Ian K. Smith, *Heavenly Perspective: A Study of the Apostle Paul’s Response to a Jewish Mystical Movement at Colossae* (LNTS 326; London: Clark, 2006), 6–16, esp. 16: “It is concluded that there is insufficient evidence to deny Pauline authorship of Colossians.” See also Todd D. Still, “Colossians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Revised Edition* (vol. 12; ed. Tremper Longman and David E. Garland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 268–70. Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), 289 n. 2: “It remains one of the singular mysteries in NT scholarship that so many scholars reject Pauline authorship of Colossians yet affirm the authenticity of Philemon.” On the issue of authorship see also James D. G. Dunn, “Colossians, Letter To,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible A–C Volume 1* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006) 705; Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Paideia Commentaries on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 7–11; Ben Witherington, *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 100–103; Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to Colossians and to Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 28–41; Stephen Finlan, *The Apostle Paul and the Pauline Tradition* (Collegetown, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2008), 151–59.

who maintain that the historical Paul is not the author of Colossians must admit that the letter itself presents Paul as its primary textual or implied author. And it is with this implied author “Paul” that I will be concerned in this investigation of the rhetorical dynamics of the chiasmic structures in the letter to the Colossians.

Paul is in prison (4:3, 10, 18; cf. 1:24) when he and Timothy send the letter, so that Colossians is one of the Pauline “captivity” letters, in addition to Philemon, Ephesians, Philippians, and 2 Timothy. Rome, Ephesus, or Caesarea have been suggested as possible locations for Paul’s imprisonment while authorizing and directing the composition of Colossians. Although no absolute certainty is possible in this matter, it seems likely that Paul sent Tychicus with the letter to the Colossians from his Caesarean imprisonment with both the letter to Philemon and the letter to the Ephesians. All three of these letters appear to be very closely related.¹⁶ At any rate, that the implied author “Paul” was in prison somewhere for its composition and sending is significant for the interpretation of Colossians.¹⁷

C. AUDIENCE

What does the letter to the Colossians tell us about the character and situation of its implied audience? Paul and Timothy address their audience as fellow believers set apart from the world and consecrated to God: They are “the holy ones and

16. Reicke, *Paul’s Letters*, 75, 83: “The remarkable correspondence in personal names between Philemon and Colossians supports the conclusion that Colossians was also written during Paul’s two-year imprisonment (A.D. 59–60) in Caesarea (Acts 24:27). . . . Chronologically, Ephesians may have been written somewhat later than Philemon and Colossians since Timothy is not mentioned. But A.D. 59 must still be the year of composition, because Tychicus was expected to take all three letters with him, delivering the letters to Philemon and to the Colossians in Colossae, before continuing on with Ephesians (cf. Col. 4:7—Tychicus with Philemon’s servant Onesimus in 4:9, who was returned to Colossae—and Eph. 6:21, where Tychicus is still mentioned but not Onesimus).” See also Bo Reicke, “The Historical Setting of Colossians,” *RevExp* 70 (1973): 429–38. On Caesarea as the origin of Colossians, see also John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1976), 65–67. With regard to the possibility that Paul sent Colossians while imprisoned in Caesarea, Thompson (*Colossians*, 6) states: “One might note here the interesting, but not complete, overlap between the names of co-workers in Colossians and those who accompanied Paul, particularly as he journeyed towards Jerusalem and subsequent detention in Caesarea (Aristarchus, Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Timothy and Tychicus, 20:4; see also Acts 12:12, 25; 15:37, 39 for references to Mark; 4:36; 9:27–15:39 *passim* for Barnabas).” See also E. Earle Ellis, *History and Interpretation in New Testament Perspective* (BIS 54; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 86; idem, *Making of the New Testament*, 266–75.

17. On the significance of Paul being in prison for the interpretation of Colossians but arguing for an imprisonment in Rome, see Richard J. Cassidy, *Paul in Chains: Roman Imprisonment and the Letters of St. Paul* (New York: Crossroad, 2001), 88–94. For a treatment of Colossians in the context of the Roman Empire, see Brian J. Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2004); Harry O. Maier, “A Sly Civility: Colossians and Empire,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 323–49. And for a discussion of Paul’s use of scripture in Colossians in relation to its Roman imperial context, see Sylvia C. Keesmaat, “In the Face of the Empire: Paul’s Use of Scripture in the Shorter Epistles,” in *Hearing the Old Testament in the New Testament* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; McMaster New Testament Studies; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 198–203.

faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae” (1:2).¹⁸ They have faith in Christ Jesus as well as love for all of their fellow believers, their fellow “holy ones” (1:4; 2:5). They have already heard of the hope reserved for them in heaven through the gospel (1:5) they learned from Epaphras, “our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful minister of Christ on behalf of you” (1:7).

The audience were probably mainly believers of Gentile origin whom God has made “fit for the share of the inheritance of the holy ones in the light” (1:12). They were once alienated from God and hostile of mind in evil deeds (1:21), “dead” in transgressions and in the “uncircumcision” of their flesh (2:13), indeed, they formerly lived (3:7) in immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, the greed that is idolatry (3:5), anger, fury, malice, slander, obscene language, and lying (3:8–9), but have now been reconciled through the death of Christ in the body of his flesh (1:22). Yet this audience of former Gentiles seem to be familiar with some of the practices of Jews and probably also included former Jews, as indicated by the references to circumcision (2:11) and sabbaths (2:16).¹⁹

The implied Colossian audience include husbands and their wives, parents and their children, masters and their slaves (3:18–4:1), a certain “Nympha and the church in her house” (4:15), as well as Archippus, who is to fulfill the ministry he received in the Lord (4:17; cf. Phlm 1:2). Although the primary audience of the letter are the Colossian believers, it is meant to be read also to the believers in Laodicea (4:16; cf. 2:1; 4:13), and possibly by those in nearby Hierapolis as well (4:13), so that it can be considered a kind of circular letter addressed primarily to the Colossians, but relevant also to those in Laodicea and Hierapolis.

These implied audiences of believers are apparently in danger of being captivated “through a philosophy that is of empty deceit” (2:8). There has been much discussion about the precise nature of this “philosophy,” with a great divergence of resulting theories and opinions.²⁰ I am persuaded by those who argue that this

18. Colossae, together with the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis (cf. 4:13), was located in the Lycus river valley in the region of Phrygia in Asia Minor. The archaeological site now located in modern Turkey remains unexcavated. For a recent discussion of Colossae, see Wilson, *Colossians*, 3–6.

19. Smith, *Heavenly Perspective*, 5: “It would appear that the Christian church in Colossae was made up of both Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish influence within the congregation can be seen by references to circumcision (2.11) and to Sabbath (2.16). There are also allusions to a Gentile background for other members of the congregation. In 1.12, 21; 2.13 there are indications of outsiders being brought into the company of the people of God.” See also Christopher A. Beetham, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letter of Paul to the Colossians* (BIS 96; Leiden: Brill, 2008).

20. See, for some recent examples, H. Wayne House, “Doctrinal Issues in Colossians. Part 1 (of 4 Parts): Heresies in the Colossian Church,” *BSac* 149 (1992): 45–59; Jerry L. Sumney, “Those Who ‘Pass Judgment’: The Identity of the Opponents in Colossians,” *Bib* 74 (1993): 366–88; Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, “The Theology of Colossians,” in *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; New Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 3–71; Harold W. Attridge, “Becoming an Angel: Rival Baptismal Theologies at Colossae,” in *Religious Propaganda and Missionary Competition in the New Testament World: Essays Honoring Dieter Georgi* (ed. Lukas Bormann et al.; NovTSup 74; Leiden: Brill, 1994), 481–98; Richard E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy: Wisdom in Dispute at Colossae* (JSNTSup 96; Sheffield: JSOT, 1994); Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian*

“philosophy” is not really a heresy,²¹ but rather refers to the erroneous viewpoints and practices of some Jews in the local synagogues in the area of Colossae and/or of some Jewish Christians influenced by them.²²

D. LITERARY-RHETORICAL, AUDIENCE-ORIENTED METHOD

Colossians is a letter written to be read publicly, most likely in a liturgical assembly, as an oral performance substituting for the personal presence of the imprisoned Paul.²³ I will employ a literary-rhetorical method that treats Colossians as a let-

Syncretism: The Interface Between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae (WUNT 77; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995); Michael D. Goulder, “Colossians and Barbelo,” *NTS* 41 (1995): 601–19; L. Hartman, “Humble and Confident: On the So-Called Philosophers in Colossae,” *ST* 49 (1995): 25–39; Troy W. Martin, *By Philosophy and Empty Deceit: Colossians as Response to a Cynic Critique* (JSNTSup 118; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996); H. Van Broekhoven, “The Social Profiles in the Colossian Debate,” *JSNT* 66 (1997): 73–90; J. H. Roberts, “Jewish Mystical Experience in the Early Christian Era as Background to Understanding Colossians,” *Neot* 32 (1998): 161–89; Gregory E. Sterling, “A Philosophy According to the Elements of the Cosmos: Colossian Christianity and Philo of Alexandria,” in *Philon d’Alexandrie et le langage de la philosophie: Actes du colloque international organisé par le Centre d’études sur la philosophie hellénistique et romaine de l’Université de Paris XII-Val de Marne (Créteil, Fontenay, Paris, 26–28 octobre 1995)* (ed. Carlos Lévy; Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1998), 349–73; Paolo Garuti, “L’eresia di Colossi, l’antanaclasi e la storia della redazione: Qualche considerazione a proposito di Col 2,6–23,” *Ang* 79 (2002): 303–26; Robert M. Royalty, “Dwelling on Visions: On the Nature of the So-Called ‘Colossians Heresy,’” *Bib* 83 (2002): 329–57; Wilson, *Colossians*, 35–58.

21. Morna D. Hooker, “Were There False Teachers in Colossae?” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: Essays in Honour of Charles Francis Digby Moule* (ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 315–31.

22. Fred O. Francis, “Humility and Angelic Worship in Col 2:18,” in *Conflict at Colossae: A Problem in the Interpretation of Early Christianity Illustrated by Selected Modern Studies: Revised Edition* (ed. Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks; Sources for Biblical Study 4; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), 163–95; idem, “The Christological Argument of Colossians,” in *God’s Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl* (ed. Jacob Jervell and Wayne A. Meeks; Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1977), 192–208; Stanislas Lyonnet, “Paul’s Adversaries in Colossae,” in *Conflict at Colossae: A Problem in the Interpretation of Early Christianity Illustrated by Selected Modern Studies: Revised Edition* (ed. Fred O. Francis and Wayne A. Meeks; Sources for Biblical Study 4; Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1975), 147–61; Craig A. Evans, “The Colossian Mystics,” *Bib* 63 (1982): 188–205; Wright, *Colossians*, 23–30; Thomas J. Sappington, *Revelation and Redemption at Colossae* (JSNTSup 53; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 17–22; Daniel J. Harrington, “Christians and Jews in Colossians,” in *Diaspora Jews and Judaism: Essays in Honor of, and in Dialogue with, A. Thomas Kraabel* (ed. J. Andrew Overmann and Robert S. MacLennan; South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 41; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 153–61; James D. G. Dunn, “The Colossian Philosophy: A Confident Jewish Apologia,” *Bib* 76 (1995): 153–81; idem, *Colossians*, 29–35; Garland, *Colossians*, 23–32; Bevere, *Sharing*; Thompson, *Colossians*, 6–9. See also the recent treatments by Christian Stettler, “The Opponents at Colossae,” in *Paul and His Opponents* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Pauline Studies 2; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 169–200; Smith, *Heavenly Perspective*. Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 10–12.

23. For treatments of the oral performance of NT documents, see: Whitney Taylor Shiner, *Proclaiming the Gospel: First Century Performance of Mark* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 2003); Holly E. Hearon, “The Implications of Orality for Studies of the Biblical Text,” in *Performing the Gospel: Orality, Mem-*

ter with a rhetorical strategy of persuading its implied audience to the viewpoint of Paul, the primary implied author. I use the term “rhetorical” in its broadest and most general sense. Rather than applying the categories of either ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric or the modern “new rhetoric” to Colossians, the rhetorical method I will follow is entirely and rigorously text-centered. I will determine Paul’s rhetorical or persuasive strategy by carefully and closely listening to the chiasmic structures of the text of the letter to the Colossians.²⁴

My method is “audience-oriented” in that it is concerned to determine how the implied audience are meant to respond to Paul’s rhetorical strategy as it unfolds in the progression of the chiasmatically arranged textual units of the letter to the Colossians. Paul as the primary implied author presupposes a certain competency on the part of his implied audience. Within the rhetorical strategy of the letter Paul utilizes a number of various traditions—Jewish, Christian, and Gentile, assuming his audience are familiar with them.²⁵ This would accord with an implied audience consisting mainly of converts of Gentile origin who are now in danger of being influenced by Jews in the area. Our focus, then, is upon how this implied audience are being encouraged to conduct their lives in all the wisdom they have as holy ones in union with Christ.²⁶

ory, and Mark: Essays Dedicated to Werner Kelber (ed. Richard A. Horsley et al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 3–20; Bridget Gilfillan Upton, *Hearing Mark’s Endings: Listening to Ancient Popular Texts Through Speech Act Theory* (BIS 79; Leiden: Brill, 2006); William David Shiell, *Reading Acts: The Lector and the Early Christian Audience* (BIS 70; Boston: Brill, 2004), 209: “Paul’s letters also give examples of the kinds of documents that need to be discussed in light of delivery. How were they performed, and what vocal inflection would have been used?” On the public performance of Paul’s letters, see Pieter J. J. Botha, “The Verbal Art of the Pauline Letters: Rhetoric, Performance and Presence,” in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht; JSNTSup 90; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 409–28; Stirewalt, *Paul*, 13–18; Richards, *Paul*, 202. On oral patterns in Paul’s letters, but which unfortunately does not include a discussion of Colossians, see John D. Harvey, *Listening to the Text: Oral Patterning in Paul’s Letters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998). On the liturgical context and worship dimensions of Colossians, see Gerald L. Borchert, *Worship in the New Testament: Divine Mystery and Human Response* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2008), 146–51.

24. For a text-centered approach to the rhetoric of another Pauline letter, see D. Francois Tolmie, *Persuading the Galatians: A Text-Centered Rhetorical Analysis of a Pauline Letter* (WUNT 190; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

25. George E. Cannon, *The Use of Traditional Materials in Colossians* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1983). See also Johannes Lähnemann, *Der Kolosserbrief: Komposition, Situation und Argumentation* (SNT 3; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1971).

26. For more on the audience-oriented method to be used in this investigation, see Warren Carter and John Paul Heil, *Matthew’s Parables: Audience-Oriented Perspectives* (CBQMS 30; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1998), 8–17; John Paul Heil, *The Meal Scenes in Luke-Acts: An Audience-Oriented Approach* (SBLMS 52; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 1999), 2–4; idem, *The Transfiguration of Jesus: Narrative Meaning and Function of Mark 9:2–8, Matt 17:1–8 and Luke 9:28–36* (AnBib 144; Rome: Biblical Institute, 2000), 22–24; idem, *The Rhetorical Role of Scripture in 1 Corinthians* (Studies in Biblical Literature 15; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), 5–10; idem, *Ephesians*, 9–10.

E. SUMMARY

1. In this book I will propose and demonstrate new chiasmic structures for the entire letter to the Colossians as a key to understanding it as a means of encouraging its implied audience(s) to walk in all wisdom as holy ones in Christ.

2. Although it is debated whether the historical apostle Paul composed Colossians, this investigation follows those who argue that he did, at least in the broad sense of authorizing and directing the writing of it. At any rate, according to the text of Colossians, Paul, imprisoned somewhere, is the primary implied author (together with Timothy) who sent Tychicus to carry the letter to its destination in Colossae.

3. Although the letter is sent primarily to believers in Colossae, it is also to be read to the believers in Laodicea, and possibly in Hierapolis as well, to encourage them not to be unduly influenced by local Jewish synagogues in the area.

4. In this investigation I will employ a text-centered, literary-rhetorical and audience-oriented method concerned with demonstrating how the implied audience are persuaded and encouraged by the dynamic progression of the letter's chiasmic structures to conduct themselves according to all the wisdom now at their disposal as holy ones in union with Christ.