Jesus + ?

A STUDY THROUGH COLOSSIANS

STUDY GUIDE

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RESOURCES

Blue Letter Bible

www.blueletterbible.org

The Bible Project

Colossians Video

IVP New Testament Commentary / Robert W. Wall

Colossians and Ephesians (IVP Academic, 2010)

Tyndale New Testament Commentaries / N.T. Wright

Colossians and Philemon, Vol. 10

(Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1986)

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ECF meets every **SUNDAY @ 10 AM** at Rose Hill Middle School in Redmond WA. Visit ***ecfconnect.org*** for more details about who we are and what we do!

Week #1– JESUS + ?

INTRODUCTION TO COLOSSIANS

May 5, 2019

"Slowly, deftly we begin believing in the doctrine of salvation by Jesus plus. Jesus plus good deeds. Jesus plus the right doctrine. Jesus plus the right Bible translation. Jesus plus the right charitable activities. Or in the case of the church in Colossae, Jesus plus the right religious feast, New Moon Festival, and Sabbath Day. To the Christians in Colossae, the right ritual was just as important as the right Savior. Paul would have none of this. He denounced the philosophy as heretical and stated in no uncertain terms that if we are saved it is because God rescued us and not because we learned to swim."
- Max Lucado

CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

THE CHURCH AT COLOSSAE: The establishment of the church is uncertain. The issue is whether Paul himself had ever been there. Some suggest that Paul may have done some work there during his third journey, on the way to Ephesus (cf. Ac 18:23; 19:1). Others point out that Paul's comments imply that he had not personally been in Colossae (cf. Col 2:1). One possibility is that the church was established during Paul's extended stay at Ephesus, where the effect of his work spread throughout Asia Minor (cf. Ac 19:8-10). It may not have been Paul himself, but one of his co-workers who went out to Colossae. Paul's remarks in the epistle indicate that Epaphras was the one who preached the gospel there (Col 1:5-8) and in Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col 4:12-13). Though he was with Paul at the time the epistle was written, Epaphras is identified as "one of you" (Col 4:12), suggesting that he may have originally been from Colossae.

Other members of the church at Colossae included Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, who may have been father, mother, and son. By comparing the epistle to the Colossians with that written to Philemon, it is reasonable to suppose that the church at Colossae met in their home (cf. Col 4:17 with Philemon 1-2, and the references to Archippus). If Philemon and his family were hosts of the church at Colossae, then Onesimus (Philemon's slave) would have also been a member there upon his return (cf. Col 4:7-9 with Phe 8 -16).

TIME & PLACE OF WRITING

Colossians is one of Paul's four "prison epistles" (Col 4:18; cf. Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). The general consensus is that these epistles were written during Paul's imprisonment at Rome (cf. Ac 28:16,30-31). If such is truly the case, then Paul wrote Colossians around 61-63 A.D. from Rome. The indication is that the epistles to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians were carried to their destination by Tychicus and Onesimus (cf. Col 4:7-9; Philemon 10-12; Ep 6:21-22).

PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE

Paul had received a report of the situation at Colossae by way of Epaphras (Col 1:7-8). This report was for the most part favorable (Col 2:5). But the subject matter in the epistle strongly suggests that the church was facing a two-fold danger:

1. The danger of relapse into paganism with its gross immorality (cf. Col 1:21 -23; 2:6; 3:5-11)
2. The danger of accepting what has become known as "The Colossian heresy". This heresy was a syncretism (blending or fusion) involving four elements of both pagan and Jewish origin:

   I. **Philosophies of men** - which denied the all sufficiency and pre-eminence of Christ (Col 2:8)

   II. **Judaistic ceremonialism** - which attached special significance to the rite of circumcision, food regulations, and observance of special days (Col 2:11,16-17)

   III. **Angel worship** - which detracted from the uniqueness of Christ (Col 2:18)

   IV. **Asceticism** - which called for harsh treatment of the body as the means to control its lusts (Col 2:20-23)

To guard these dangers, Paul writes to tell the Colossians to be on their guard and be aware of relapsing (Col 1:21-23) into what they may have believed before becoming a Christian. Paul warns this church to be aware of and not buy into any belief that denies the all-sufficiency of Christ (Col. 2:8-23). He points their attention back to Jesus the "all sufficient and Pre-Eminent Savior" who has reconciled them to God and has given them fullness in Christ.

THEME OF THE EPISTLE: Christ is Sufficient and in Him you are complete.

RESPONSE

We must be on guard against the plethora of teachings, philosophies and religions that challenge, discount or deny the supremacy or deity of Jesus Christ. Syncretism is just as prevalent today as it was then, though beliefs or philosophies may have changed. Sometimes it's good for us to take another deep dive into who Jesus is to remind us of what role he has played in our salvation story. Use your community group to ask questions and explore some of the heresy that have perhaps crept into your own beliefs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some examples of syncretism in our world today?
2. As we begin this series, we challenge you to highlight all the places in Colossians where the words, "in Christ", "in Him" and "with Christ" occur.
3. What was Paul's main point by using "in/with Christ" or "in Him" throughout this letter? Do you think of yourself as being "In Christ"?

Week #2—COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Healthy Fruit

May 12, 2019

CONTEXT

When we consider what it means to be a church, fundamentally we are a family. In a family, the well-being of every member is important, and members of the family should be willing to sacrifice themselves on behalf of other members. The church is a special kind of family. Paul calls it a fellowship of "saints." The word means "dedicated" or "consecrated." Those that made up the church of Colossae were saints not because they were distinguished from others by their moral and spiritual qualities, but because they had received and responded to a divine calling, they were set apart by belonging to Christ.

That is our identity as Christians: We are saints because we belong to Christ. We have been called by Him to serve Him and we need to be faithful to that call. As members of Christ's family, we are called to live fruitful lives. Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers in chapter one is also a prayer for us. We need to make it our aim to live a life worthy of being called by Christ. In other words, our lives must bear fruit consistent with being attached to the Vine—which is Christ. Being fruitful in our work for the Lord and continually growing in our knowledge of Him will give testimony that we belong to Him and are members of His family.

RESPONSE

C. F. D. Moule says we learn from this passage that prayer at its best makes two great requests: (1) for the discernment of God's will, and (2) for the power to perform God's will. In Colossians 1:10, Paul writes, *"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."* Paul's prayer for us should encourage us to pray daily that God will transform us into transparent witnesses of His glory in the world. In this way, we can effectively reflect the Holy Spirit who is at work within us. This is the healthy fruit we are called to bear.

Paul is praying for us, that we would walk in a holiness that is at the same time personal and social or relational. We are not to pray to be removed from this world, but rather that the image of Christ in us would shine even brighter in the face of darkness and opposition. This healthy fruit is pleasing to God and leads to doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with the Lord (Mic. 6:8). Only in the strength of Christ can believers be faithful to their heavenly calling; therefore they need to be strengthened with the Lord's might.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When you think about your obedience to Christ, how passionately eager are you to please Him? How is that reflected in your relationships with others?
2. Read Paul's prayer for the Church in verses 9-14. What does he specifically pray for concerning believers? How do you see these characteristics growing and maturing in your life?
3. Do you pray regularly for God to fill you with His knowledge and discernment? How is your life affected as you see Him answer that prayer?
4. How has your life changed as you have matured as a believer and where do you still see a need for continued growth?
5. How has growing and stretching in your spiritual journey led to greater and better fruit for the Gospel?

Write-In-Question(s):

NOTES

Week #3—COLOSSIANS 1:15-18

Jesus Is _____

May 19, 2019

CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

If you were asked what lies at the center of your world, how would you respond? What is the thing(s) that drives your decisions, practices, morals… life? The apostle Paul challenges us to assess what or who is at the center of our life by making bold statements about the identity of Jesus. In fact, Colossians 1:15-16 is one of the strongest statements in the Bible about the divine nature of Christ. Jesus is not only equal to God, He is God. But he tackles more than that.

Paul addresses the various mixing of philosophies, religions and belief systems by making it crystal clear that Jesus is in the center of all things, not us, other prophets, or other philosophies. Paul refutes the misconceptions about matter being evil by arguing that God could not have created an evil world because He cannot create evil. The apostle addresses the syncretic belief that Jesus is just one of many intermediaries between man and God and that there are many other ways of salvation.

In response to this, Paul makes three profound statements about Christ and His relationship to deity, creation and the church.

1. **Jesus is the image of God -** Col. 1:15 (Jesus' relationship to **deity**) The word "image" means "likeness, manifestation, or replica." Paul uses this word intentionally knowing that in his readers' minds, they see it as a dye or stamp that was able to make exact reproductions. What a great way to describe Jesus' relationship to the trinity. [To learn more about the relationship of Jesus and God the Father, read John 1:18, John 14:9, Hebrews 1:3 & 2 Corinthians 4:4)
2. **Jesus is the firstborn and catalyst for creation.** Col. 1:16-17 (Jesus' relationship to **creation**) Paul's term "hold together" is similar to Hebrews 1:3. He is reminding the believers in Colossae that Jesus is the cohesion that keeps all things together and although things may sometimes look like they are falling apart, Jesus prevents it from falling into complete chaos. If Jesus were to remove His sustaining power, everything would dissolve into disorder.
3. **Jesus is the head of the church.** Col. 1:18 (Jesus' relationship to the new creation/church)Jesus is the head of the church, therefore, he brought forth the Church and gave it life through his death and resurrection. Church leaders are to surrender ultimate leadership to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the One who leads and determines the teachings and practices of the church.

RESPONSE

These new believers in Colossae were just like many Christians today who struggle to make Jesus the priority in their life and as a result give in to the belief of multiple paths to heaven and even questioning the true deity of Jesus. Paul realizes this will make the Colossian church susceptible to the many false teachings, so he takes them back to the basics of who Jesus is. So how do you respond to the three truths about Jesus? Do you find yourself wavering in doubt as to their truthfulness? If so, see this as an opportunity to dig in and allow this to be a time of growth and maturing of your faith and don't be afraid to ask the difficult questions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you explain the Trinity to someone who asks?
2. Why did Paul think it was such a high priority to make these bold statements about Jesus to the Colossians?
3. What role did Jesus have in creation? What is his role now in relation to creation according to Colossians 1:15-18?
4. When have you experienced Jesus "holding all things together"?

Write-In-Question(s):

NOTES

Week #4—COLOSSIANS 1:19-23

Gospel +____ = Salvation

May 26, 2019

CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

We looked last week at Jesus' relationship to God, creation, and the church. Paul continues in these bold statements about the person of Jesus in vs 19 by refuting the Greek belief that Jesus could not be human and divine at the same time. He plainly states that God is pleased to live in Christ and it is through Christ that everything is being reconciled. Christ's death cleared a path for anyone who chooses to trust Christ to be saved. Paul personalizes it all in vs 21 by saying, "this includes you", and reminds the Colossians of their journey from death in sin to life in Christ.

As you make your way through this section, it may be helpful to unpack what "reconcile" means in this context. The NIV Commentary states, "Reconcile suggests removing all enmity between God and the human race and effecting in humankind a condition of submission to, and harmony with, God." Take a minute to see the word "reconcile" used in other contexts like Rom 5:10-12, II Cor. 5:18-20, Eph. 2:11-18.

Here's a brief synopsis of this week's passage – Col. 1:19-23

- God was pleased to have all his fullness live in Jesus (v.19)
- God was pleased to reconcile himself with humanity through the blood of Christ (v.20)
- The purpose of the reconciliation is so we can be presented as holy, unblemished and free from accusation. To be reconciled means that we must have been alienated or separated from God. (v.22)
- Paul is reminding his readers and us today that if we have been covered by the blood of Christ and have been reconciled to God, he gladly PRESENTS you as clean. (v.22)

RESPONSE

Think of what life would be like without being saved. Would life look differently for you if you were not a follower of Jesus, one who had been brought from death to life in Christ? Perhaps we should all arise each morning and read these few verses reminding us of how much God loves us and is pleased to offer you redemption through Jesus. Examine the way in which God is pleased to provide reconciliation to you. Don't miss why He wants you to be reconciled and have a serious conversation with yourself about what your response has been and how it could be different if you embraced the fact that he is pleased to offer you grace.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are the "truths" in these verses that give you hope?
2. What do you make of God's delight in presenting us as holy and blameless (without blemish and free of accusation)?
3. Take time to write down one sentence describing your reconciliation with God. This will allow you to share your faith story quickly, naturally and with words that sound like you!
4. According to Col. 1:22, what is the purpose behind God's reconciliation with people? It's important for us to understand "why" because in most cases the "whys" in scripture point back to God's love for his creation.

Write-In-Question(s):

NOTES

Week #5—COLOSSIANS 1:24-28
Christ In You
June 2, 2019

CONTEXT

Paul suffered. He lived a life full of affliction, pain and heartache. When many people think of Paul they think of someone who got beat, thrown in jail, and much more. Yet Paul continued to share "the mystery" that lived inside him, and shared more about this "mystery" that lived inside the people in Colossae as well as in all of us today.

Colossians 1:24-25 is really about suffering for the Lord. Paul talks about how Jesus suffered for us, died, and rose again. As a follower of Christ, Paul suffered as well. However, we see in Colossians that Paul rejoices in the suffering he endured because it meant he was able to make the word of God fully known.

In Colossians 1:26-27, Paul talks about this idea of "the mystery"; ESV Study Bible reads, "The Mystery does not refer to something mysterious or to a secret ritual. Rather, Paul is speaking of God's unfolding plan for the world and, above all, his plan of redemption through the Messiah." The word "mystery" was written twice in two verses, so we can only assume Paul wants to highlight this idea that the mystery inside of us is indeed Christ in us and is the hope of glory.

RESPONSE

My 11 month old son, Paxton, just learned to share his Cheerios with his mother and me. He takes some cereal, smiles, and offers us some of his left-overs. He is very proud of himself and it's adorable. We don't eat every time he gives us food, but we fake it and it makes him so happy knowing he shared with us. Something I learned as a young kid was, "sharing is caring". This last part of scripture is all about sharing the name of Christ to all. We do this through wisdom, knowing the Word of God, and sharing the character of Christ.

Colossians 1:28 (NLT) says, "So we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ." Paul talks about Christ's suffering and how he himself has suffered for the name of Christ to encourage the Church to tell everyone about our Lord. The part that says, "We want to present them to God" is interesting because it really means to pray for those who do not know Him yet. Jesus suffered on the cross for all of us, Paul suffered in different ways to share the name of the Lord, so what will we do for the name of the Lord? Sharing is caring, and if we have Christ in us, do we care enough to share of His love?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Paul uses the word "Mystery"? What is the Mystery?
2. What holds you back from sharing with your co-workers, friends, or even family members about Christ?
3. Who in your life needs Christ in them? Take time, be specific, and pray.

Write-In-Question(s):

NOTES

Week #6—COLOSSIANS 2:1-7

Be United, Strong & Thankful

June 9, 2019

CONTEXT

The Apostle Paul begins the second chapter (vs. 1-7) of his letter to the church at Colossae with two extremely important messages. Arguably, his most important reminder to followers of Christ is this: "As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in him and established in faith" (vs. 6-7). One of Paul's primary purposes in writing this letter was to contrast some of the dangerous and destructive teaching from others who were opposing the true message of the gospel of Jesus Christ (vs. 16-23). Thus, Paul felt it extremely important to remind all Christians in Colossae to be rooted, established, and built up in their faith – firm in their convictions of truth. This faith, according to Paul, requires significant action and is the purpose for the wording "walk in him."

Secondly, Paul wanted to remind Christians that if they are rooted in Christ, "...their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love" (Col. 2:2). In other words, one natural result of being part of a group of believers who are all rooted and established in Christ, is unity in the church. This unity will bring "full assurance" of understanding, wisdom, and knowledge of Christ according to the Apostle Paul. These things (understanding, wisdom, and knowledge) are not optional for the Christian who wants to stand firm in his/her faith in Christ. Such traits will ensure we are not "deluded with plausible arguments." In other words, a firm foundation in Christ and unity in the church leads to true faith and understanding.

RESPONSE

These verses are an important reminder to the church today that being rooted in Christ is not optional for Christians. We live in a society that places demands on our attention and focus – telling us if we don't keep up, we will be left behind. It screams, "You must have the newest iPhone, or you will soon become obsolete." Society expects us to follow the daily happenings in American politics through Twitter feeds and Facebook. We are constantly bombarded with messages telling us we are not good enough if we don't have the newest this or that. Yet, while Paul lived in a different context than modern day United States, his message would likely remain the same, which would be to "Stay rooted and established in your relationship with Jesus Christ"!

While we holler an "Amen!" to Paul's message, how many of us take the time to truly be rooted in our Savior and Lord? How many of us check the news or social media each morning before we pick up God's word? How many of us touch base with our co-worker or boss before thanking God for the gift of another day? Also how many of us become energized by the constant back-and-forth or meaningless arguments rather than resting in the unity God designed for the church? Paul's message is especially important in the world we live in today.

The good news is our Lord is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). When we are rooted and established in His love, we can truly be knit together in love.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What are some practical things believers can do today to ensure they are "rooted and established" in Christ? Think outside the box of the traditional "read our Bibles and pray" comments. While these things are certainly true, there is more that God desires from His followers in order to be rooted in Him.
2. What would it look like for ECF (or any church for that matter) to be full of individuals whose hearts are being encouraged and knit together in love (Col 2: 2)? How would this unity advance the influence of the church both locally and globally? Be specific in your answers.
3. The Apostle Paul is clear in these verses that understanding, wisdom, and knowledge are vital for a thriving relationship with Christ. How can we pursue these traits in our context and culture?

Write-In-Question(s):

NOTES

Week #7—COLOSSIANS 2:8-15
Dead, Buried, Raised & Empowered
June 16, 2019

CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

Deceptive philosophy was a problem for the church in Paul's day and is certainly a problem we find ourselves facing today. Sometimes the deception is subtle and hard to recognize. It can be buried within traditions and common ideas found in our culture and even within the faith community. Paul wants the Colossians to know that any philosophy that doesn't have the truth of Christ as the centerpiece is hollow and empty. After warning them to not be taken captive by hollow and empty ideas, Paul reminds the Colossians about the essential truths found only in Christ.

1. When Christ died on the cross and was buried in a tomb, the sinful nature of fallen humanity was put to death and buried as well. (vs 11)
2. When Christ was raised to life, humanity was raised as well. (vs 12)
3. In Christ we have been forgiven and included in the life of the Trinity. Therefore, in Christ, there is no condemnation. (vs 13-14)

The powers and authorities, the forces at work within this world, would convince us that something more was needed, our debt has not been cleared, Christ's work was not complete. Paul challenges these lies with the truth of Christ's triumph. Christ is central.

Knowing the Bible, going to church, doing good deeds, serving others, tithing, worship, baptism, communion, prayer, and fasting are all important parts of living out our faith but they are not central. At the center is Jesus and the transformative power of his life, death, and resurrection.

RESPONSE

The definition of the word philosophy is a theory or attitude held by a person or organization that acts as a guiding principle for behavior. Consider your "guiding principle for behavior". Is it Christ centered? Or does it center on the traditions and principals of culture? Take some time to reflect on the reason behind your actions. Are our actions hollow and empty or are we motivated by the incredible work Christ has done for us through salvation?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Col 2:11 explains that Christ got rid of our old nature, self ruled by the flesh. How has your life changed as a result?
2. Why do you think it is so important for us to grasp the idea that we share in the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, becoming united with Him?
3. Col 2:10 explains that in Christ we have been "brought to fullness". What do you think that means?

Write-In-Question(s):

NOTES

Week #8—COLOSSIANS 2:16-23
Jesus + Counterfeit Gods
June 23, 2019

CONTEXT

It is so easy to fall into the trap of legalism or being overly religious to take our focus off Christ. According to Paul, the reality is Christ. Dependency on anything else for our salvation simply leaves us arrogant, prideful and disconnected from Jesus, who is the true source of our redemption. Perhaps a quote from Tim Keller's book, *Counterfeit Gods*, is the best way to introduce this section in which Paul is warning against legalism.

In his book, Keller states, "An idol is something that we look to for things that only God can give. Idolatry functions widely inside religious communities when doctrinal truth is elevated to the position of a false god. This occurs when people rely on the rightness of their doctrine for their standing with God rather than on God himself and his grace. It is a subtle but deadly mistake…. Another form of idolatry within religious communities turns spiritual gifts and ministry success into a counterfeit god…. Another kind of religious idolatry has to do with moral living itself… Though we may give lip service to Jesus as our example and inspiration, we are still looking to ourselves and our own moral striving for salvation…. Making an idol out of doctrinal accuracy, ministry success, or moral rectitude leads to constant internal conflict, arrogance and self-righteousness, and oppression of those whose views differ."

(Timothy J. Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope that Matters)*

RESPONSE

We can be on our guard of these three threats to our freedom in Christ:

1. Those who judge you by external factors (v. 16,17).
   a. Jesus fought passionately for us to know that God looks upon the heart above all else. Focusing on the external leads to legalism.
   b. Legalism brings us to rules and regulations. Grace brings us to Christ.
   c. Legalism makes us divisive and focuses us on the wrong thing.

2. Beware of those who advocate a different authority (v. 18,19).
   a. The heretical teacher without contact with Christ has cut himself off from all sources of spiritually vitality.
3. Beware of those who hold you to their man made restrictions to find favor with God (v. 20-23)
   a. This threat is similar to asceticism rather than legalism. Asceticism is more of a self-imposed denial of something we desire or have an appetite for in order to obtain value from God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between legalism and holding each other to God's standards?
2. What idols or false gods do you tend to have to resist the most?
3. Do you tend to judge others and their salvation by their external behaviors? Discuss this challenge.

Write-In-Question/s:

NOTES

Week #9—COLOSSIANS 3:1-11
The New Life
June 30, 2019

CONTEXT

The Apostle Paul and his coworker, Timothy, wrote this letter to the church at Colossae (v. 1), a small city in Asia Minor (modern Turkey). Paul had not visited Colossae, but had received reports from Epaphras who was the missionary who most likely founded the church there (1:7).

Paul speaks positively of the Colossian's faith, love, and hope (1:4-5). Here Paul acknowledges the Good News is bearing fruit and growing in them (1:6). However, Epaphras had apparently brought Paul news of serious problems at Colossae—problems with false teachings that some scholars today have labeled "the Colossian heresy." Paul is writing this letter to help the Colossians deal with those problems (see Col. 2:4, 8, 13-16, 18; Col. 3:5, 8, 18—4:1).

While Paul dealt with their problems one by one, he first sought to ground the Colossian Christians solidly in the basics of the faith with Christ at the center (see Col. 1:15-20 and 2:6-7, 9, 13b-19). If these Colossian Christians could better understand the nature and mission of Christ, his character, and what he came to do for them, that understanding would give them a firm footing to deal with the problems Paul was concerned about.

In chapter 2, Paul told the Colossian Christians they had been buried with Christ in baptism and raised with him (2:12), for they had been dead in their sins, but Christ "made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses" (2:13).

Now, Paul spells out some of the implications for the lives of the Colossian people, since they have been raised with Christ:

1. They need to seek the things that are above (v. 1-3).
2. They need to put to death their worldly behavior, such as sexual immorality and covetousness (v. 5).
3. They need to put away such things as anger, wrath, malice, slander, and shameful speaking (v. 8).
4. They need to speak truthfully to each other—truth rather than lies (v. 9).
5. They need to remember that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek—neither circumcision nor uncircumcision—neither barbarian nor Scythian—neither bondservant nor freeman—for "Christ is all, and in all" (v. 11).

RESPONSE

"Christ is all, in all" (vs. 11b) really sums up Paul's heart in sharing all these problems with the church in Colossae. When our footing is in Christ and Christ alone, we not only overcome hindrances and distractions, but we live in a such a way that enables His spirit to fully lead us and be the basis of who we are and who we want to be. The tension in trying to preserve a "balance" between who we think we are and who He has made us to be, goes away all together. This release may seem like the most simplistic response to Paul's specific instructions, but I believe it's the simplicity of Jesus, His work on the cross, and His continued work in us that truly sets us free, if we allow it, of course.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you "seek the things that are above" compared to "things that are on the earth" in your every day routine?
2. Is Paul requiring the impossible by asking us to not covet? Do we have control over our feelings?
3. In verse 9 Paul addresses lying, which is condemned strongly in scripture (10 Commandments and Proverbs 6:17, to name a couple...) so we know the seriousness of it, yet we create justifications of our own for doing just that. Why is this such a difficult, dynamic/habit to bring under control?

Write-In-Question/s:

NOTES

Week #10—COLOSSIANS 3:12-17
Clothed with…
July7, 2019

CONTEXT

It's easy to forget who we are. My mother always used to say as I went out the door as a kid, "remember who you are!" I must say, it was in those times of *identity amnesia* that I got into the most trouble. Well, Paul knows identity amnesia is a recipe for stirring up problems with one another. Unity seems to be at the heart of this part of Paul's message. He starts this section by reminding them of their identity in Christ and calling them to live in that identity.

Col. 3:12 states clearly that as a child of the King, Jesus….

1. You are chosen by God
2. You are set apart for God's purpose (**Holy**)
3. You are loved by God

A result of living out our new identity in Christ is when the virtues brought on by the Holy Spirit become a part of the fabric of who God made us to be. We are now dressed and ready to live for Christ. Our new identity is more than just behaving differently. These virtues come as a result of a transformed heart and mind. Our goals are less selfish and lean towards selflessness. We seek unity rather than divisiveness. We seek to forgive rather than hold grudges. We seek peace rather than unrest in all aspects of our lives. Oh, and whatever we do, we do it all in the name of Jesus, the source of our identity.

RESPONSE

Take a long and prayerful look at all the virtues listed in these few verses. Take each statement and ask yourself if you are naturally living it out in your life. For example, ask yourself, "Am I showing humility in all aspects of my life?" Ask the Lord to show you the areas where you struggle. Spend time on this reflection and, if you are really brave, ask someone you trust to walk through them with you, giving them permission to point out strengths and weaknesses. Often we are blinded to many behaviors that if brought to our attention, we can, in humility, change.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do the virtues listed align with the fruit of the spirit in Galatians 5:22?
2. Discuss what it means to "let the peace of Christ be in control of your heart".
3. Discuss what Paul meant by "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly".

Write-In-Question/s:

NOTES

Week #11—COLOSSIANS 3:18 - 4:1
Golden Rule Relationships
July 14, 2019

CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

Let's face it, we were created to be in relationship with one another, yet, meaningful and fulfilling relationships can be a lot of work. Remember, God saw that it was not good for Adam to be alone. As much as we are created to be in relationships we can also screw them up pretty easily if we don't put effort into them. Paul knew that in order for the church to be healthy, it was necessary for personal relationships to be healthy so he addresses three important relationships that comprise the majority of primary relationships… Husband/wife – Parent/Child – Slave/ Master (or employee/employer).

These relationship verses (Col. 3:18 -4:1) are often referred to as part of the "household rules" of Colossians. Slaves fit into that category due to the fact that they were actually part of the household of which they were enslaved. It was estimated that between 35% and 50% of inhabitants in the Roman Empire at that time were slaves. The book of Philemon is written about a runaway slave named Onesimus who Paul converts and coaxes to return to his master Philemon but with the understanding that he is now a brother in Christ.

All of the relationships addressed are described as reciprocal. Both parties have a responsibility. A common parallel passage would be Eph. 5:21-6:9. It's worth reading this in tandem and don't miss that that Eph. 5:21 starts with mutual submission out of reverence for Christ. Being "in Christ" is what drives our attitudes and actions in our closest relationships. Jesus washed feet from a place of "being under" rather than "over". At the heart of our relationships should be an attitude of service, honor, respect and a willingness to speak life into the other party.

RESPONSE

How would your relationships change (for the better or worse) if you were to abide by the guidelines Paul puts out there? Many people find it difficult to set the bar high for their relationships and then realize that it will take work, leadership and humility to get them to that level. If this weren't the case, the divorce rate would not be as high as it is, even in the church. A close, honest look at what Paul is saying may just change the trajectory of some of our relationships. It's worth examining.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read Col 3:18-4:1 and Eph 3:21-4:9 and write down the responsibilities of each party. Then, in your community group talk through whether they're realistic, practical and possible in your relationships.
2. Out of all the directives that Paul gives in these verses, which ones do you struggle with and which ones make total sense? Discuss with your group and remember to discuss the heart of what Paul is addressing.
3. What role does pride play in how we deal with our relationships? How has pride and humility hurt or helped your various relationships? (Yes, this takes some transparency!)

Write-In-Question:

NOTES

Week #12—COLOSSIANS 4:2-18
People Not Programs
July 21, 2019

CONTEXT & OVERVIEW

As Paul concludes his letter, it's almost as if he is exemplifying the main point of the previous chapter, highlighting the very important relationships in his life and the life of the church. By name, he expresses gratitude towards those he serves and those he serves with. You can sense the joy in his words, and this is no small observation. Remember, Paul was writing from prison and yet, gratitude and love is overflowing as he talks about the people in his life. Paul is demonstrating the power that people and relationships can have as the final point of his letter.

We can get side-tracked pretty easily with all that has to be done. The obligations of our lives take maintenance and the "to-do" list grows, even when it comes to how we live out our faith. The structures, the programs, the rules, the activities, all the work of life can end up taking the majority of our energy, leaving little for the people and relationships we steward.

I remember taking part in a program at the first church my wife and I attended together. The program was for men and was designed to help them become better husbands and fathers. It was intense. There were daily readings, daily guided prayer times, weekly activities, and meetings with the group as well as an accountability partner. It was an 8-week program and I worked so hard to do everything that was asked of me and check all the boxes. I remember about midway through the schedule I was falling behind in my readings. I hadn't done the activity for that week yet. I was feeling all sorts of pressure from my accountability partner. I was overwhelmed. I ended up canceling a date with my wife in order to catch up and give a good report to my accountability partner the next day. My wife, rightfully so, pushed back and said, "What good are all of these things you're doing if they don't leave time for the very relationship they were designed to support?" I had lost sight of why I was doing this in the first place!

RESPONSE

Paul is reminding his readers that the Gospel is our invitation into the love of the Father, Son, and Spirit. We are saved from darkness and isolation in order to become a part of the light and love of the Trinity. With acceptance of that invitation comes a grand community who displays this love in relationship with one another and announces it as an invitation to others. The goodness of our God is his inclusion of us into his life. As we create the necessary structure around our efforts to share the Gospel centered on Jesus, and Jesus alone, may we not lose sight of the importance of people, not programs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Who are the important people in your life? Paul made an intentional choice, even in the darkness of a prison cell, to focus on the light of each relationship he cherished. In what ways are you grateful for the people you listed above?
2. Is there now, or has there ever been, a time when you have let the duty of programs (the work) eclipse the importance of people? Think through the details of this occurrence and try and identify what was the inciting incident that led to that happening?
3. Structure and programs are essential. It would be chaos trying to accomplish anything without them. What are some ways we can make sure that the structure and the programs serve the value of the people and relationships and not the other way around?

Write-In-Question:

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