

Colossians – Session 1

Big Idea

“The book of Colossians is about trusting in the right things. Or to be more exact, about trusting in the right person, Jesus Christ... The Colossians were trusting in the wrong things and the way to be Christian was to trust in Jesus” – Terry Muck (in *Colossians*, NIVAC).

Where is Colossae?

Colossae is a small town just north of the Mediterranean Sea. It was about 10 miles from Laodicea and 15 miles from Hierapolis – both of those towns were bigger centres and they appear in this letter. Note too Ephesus, to the west, which is the church that received the book of Ephesians.



Questions

1. Look at Colossians 1:3-6. How are faith, hope and love connected? What does the Gospel produce in believers?

Faith in Christ Jesus means that we have the hope of heaven which itself produces love and deepening faith.

The Gospel produces faith, love, hope and fruit (good works) in us.

2. Follow the thread through Paul’s prayer discussion in 1:9-14. What does he pray on their behalf? Why does he pray it? What does that look like? What does that produce? What do we have to be thankful for? ** How can we apply these insights as we pray for others?

Paul prays that believers would be filled with knowledge of God’s will and all spiritual wisdom – So that – we will live a life worthy of the Gospel.

What does that look like? We bear fruit in good works, growing in relationship with God by His power. That produces gratitude, endurance and patience.

He has rescued us from darkness, redeemed us and forgiven our sin.

We can directly pray this prayer for other believers, or focus on various points. We do well to pray for health in our church pastoral prayer time; we would be wise to also pray for our spiritual health and maturity.

3. Look at Paul's description of Jesus in 1:15-20. What does this teach us about Jesus and the world?

Jesus is God and everything was created by and for Him. Think 'inheritance law,' not 'birth order' when you read 'firstborn.' The point is not that He was first to be created – He is God so He is NOT created – but that He is head over all – the one who receives the fullness of the Father's blessing.

4. How does Paul describe the Gospel in 1:21-23?
What's the relationship between God's action and our response?

We were separated from God on account of sin, but we have been reconciled to God and made 100% holy, assuming that we stand firm in faith.

We were alienated from God and on our own would not have turned to Him. HE though acted in mercy to rescue us and respond in faith. We don't earn it, we receive it.

"The word *prōtotokos* ("firstborn"), while often used in the literal sense of the first to come from the womb, takes on a metaphorical significance based on the ancient attribution of pre-eminence to the first to be born"
– Douglas Moo

5. The hope of glory is Christ in you (v. 27). What does that mean for how we live?

Whatever you do, wherever you go – Jesus is with you, to strength and to guide. That knowledge should also impact our relationship to sin – why go there if Christ is in us?

6. Read 1:28-29. You can pray for me by praying for God's help as I focus on those things.

28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me (Col 1:28-29 NIV). = my mission statement

7. Look at 2:1-5. What are the purposes of ministry?

Encouraging believers, uniting them in love, cultivating maturity, guarding against false teaching.

8. "Continue to live in Christ, rooted and strengthened Him, rather than being taken captive by the 'wisdom of the world' because Christ as God is sovereign over all" (2:6-10). Why is that counsel important in this day and age? What are some of the 'hollow philosophies' and 'human traditions' that we face?

The world has lots of 'wisdom' but it doesn't always line up with God's. We need to focus on His wisdom.

'God helps those who help themselves.' 'Everything's ok as long as no one gets hurt.' 'Get rich or die trying.' 'We determine right and wrong.'

9. How is circumcision a helpful metaphor when thinking about salvation? Why is baptism a helpful metaphor? (2:11-12).

Circumcision involves cutting off a piece of the body – salvation involves removing the sinful nature – ie., 'the flesh.'

Baptism is a picture of dying and rising with Christ – down into the grave and up again to life. It also pictures the purifying nature of salvation too.

10. Consider 2:13-15. How does Paul describe the Gospel here? What did God do? What did we do?

We were dead in our sins, but God made us alive with Christ. He forgave all our sins and triumphed over anything that would accuse of us being less than perfect in God's eyes.

11. Colossians 2:16-23 again warns against empty philosophy/man-made religion/humanism. Where do you see these expressed in our culture?

Any time an action has the appearance of asceticism, but lacks any real Gospel motive, you're dealing with an empty philosophy. In a sense, Lent, practiced outside of true faith, is an example of this. The belief that humankind is the highest authority in life is also an expression of this – 'we stand in judgement over God' – instead of the other way around. He is sovereign, not us.

Colossians – Session 2

Outline

1. Through Jesus, God has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and made us citizens of the kingdom of light (1:1-14).
 - *13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. (Col 1:13 NIV).*
 - *10 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, being strengthened with all power (Col 1:10-11 NIV).*
2. Since Jesus is God, He is the highest authority when it comes to life and salvation (1:15-29).
 - *19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things... (Col 1:19-20 NIV).*
 - *28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. (Col 1:28 NIV).*
3. The world has its own ideas about life and salvation, but Jesus' way is better (2:1-23).
 - *8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority (Col 2:8-10 NIV).*

4. As citizens of the Kingdom, we should walk in Christ's way, rather than in our old ways.
 - *1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Col 3:1 NIV).*
 - *5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry (Col 3:5 NIV).*
5. We are called to live out the Gospel in everyday, practical ways.
 - *23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,*
 - *24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Col 3:23-24 NIV).*

Questions

1. Read Colossians 3:1-4. How do you 'set your mind on things above'? How does the Cross shape how we think of ourselves? How does eternity shape how we act now?

Heaven is the land of sinless minds. Virus-free thinking. Absolute trust. No fear or anger. Shame and second-guessing are practices of a prior life. Heaven will be wonderful, not because the streets are gold, but because our thoughts will be pure.

So what are you waiting on? Apply God's antivirus. "Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). – Max Lucado, *Next door Saviour*

We focus our attention on the things of God and on God's values.

Spiritually speaking, we died with Christ on the Cross, so it is no longer we who live but Christ in us.

Our eternal destiny is secure because of God's grace – we live in light of that grace in the meantime.

2. Look at Colossians 3:5-11. Which is the worst sin? Can you see vestiges of your old life clinging on for dear life? How important is it to get rid of them?

Trick question – all sin is sin. All sin is an affront to God. (For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it - James 2:10). Striking though to think that lying is comparable to sexual immorality and greed in spiritual terms. The Gospel – that saves us from all sin – is truly good news!

It is very important to get rid of those old vestiges of the old life. There's no pulling punches here – put them to death! – Paul says. (This is Paul's version of Jesus' command to cut off your hand if it sins. We need to work radically to get rid of the old self).

3. Read Colossians 3:12-17. What should Christians wear? What should motivate us? Which of these instructions stand out to you?

Christians should wear: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. (Col 3:12 NIV). And over all those, put on love! We are to be motivated by God's love for us – v. 12 – we are

chosen, holy and dearly loved; v. 13 – He has forgiven us; v. 17 – we do all things in gratitude to God.

4. Colossians 3:18-4:1 shows what this new life in Christ looks like on a very every day level. How can you apply these in your own lives?

Note v. 22 and apply it to the work place – the importance of working honestly and with integrity, not just when people are watching.

5. Look at Colossians 4:2-6. What are the characteristics of Christians pictured here?

Believers pictured here are devoted to prayer, watching for God's answers and thanking Him for His answers; they pray for their Christian leaders; they act wisely toward non-believers, being salt and light to them.

6. The conclusion in Colossians 4:7-18 gives us a really interesting insight into what the church in Colossae was like thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection. What can we learn from their church? How can we apply that at Langford?

The people mentioned at the end of Colossians are people – just like us. They variously succeed and fail and all need the grace of God. For many of the names, see Acts 20:4; for Mark, see Acts 15:37-39 – the fact that he appears here means that some reconciliation has happened; for Onesimus, see the book of Philemon, just before the book of Hebrews; 'dear Dr. Luke' is the author of the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts.

Note that the 'church' was not a building (v. 15) – 'the church' met in Nympha's house. This highlights the importance of the church as a body of believers informally applying the grace of God, being salt and light to the world.

PS – 4:16 refers to a letter to the Laodiceans. Some scholars speculate that that could be what we know as the letter to the Ephesians. That's possible, but more than likely, that letter has just been lost to time.

Hear Paul's chains, and you will understand that to be in affliction is no proof of being forsaken. Would you wear silken robes? Remember Paul's chains, and these fine clothes will appear to you more worthless than rags. – John Chrysostom