

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

Overview: Book Of Colossians

7-9-14

VITAL STATISTICS

PURPOSE: To combat errors in the church and to show that believers have everything they need in Christ

AUTHOR: Paul

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE: The church at Colossae, a city in Asia Minor

DATE WRITTEN: Approximately A.D. 60, during Paul's imprisonment in Rome

SETTING: Paul had never visited Colossae. Evidently the church had been founded by Epaphras and other converts from Paul's missionary travels. The church, however, had been infiltrated by religious relativism, with some believers attempting to combine elements of paganism and secular philosophy with Christian doctrine. Paul confronts these false teachings and affirms the sufficiency of Christ.

KEY VERSES: "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority" (2:9-10).

KEY PEOPLE: Paul, Timothy, Tychicus, Onesimus, Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras

KEY PLACES: Colossae, Laodicea (4:15-16) **SPECIAL FEATURES:** Christ is presented as having absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency. Colossians has similarities to Ephesians, probably because it was written at about the same time, but it has a different emphasis.

THE BLUEPRINT

1. What Christ has done (1:1—2:23)

2. What Christians should do (3:1—4:18) In this letter Paul clearly teaches that Christ has paid for sin, that Christ has reconciled us to God, and that Christ gives us the pattern and the power to grow spiritually. Because Christ is the exact likeness of

God, when we learn what he is like, we see what we need to become. Since Christ is Lord over all creation, we should crown him Lord over our lives. Since Christ is the head of the body, his church, we should nurture our vital connection to him.

MEGATHEMES

Christ Is God

Explanation: Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, Lord of all creation, and Lord of the new creation. He is the expressed reflection of the invisible God. He is eternal, preexistent, omnipotent, equal with the Father. He is supreme and complete.

Importance: Because Christ is supreme, our lives must be Christ-centered. To recognize him as God means to regard our relationship with him as most vital and to make his interests our top priority.

Christ Is Head of the Church

Explanation: Because Christ is God, he is the head of the church, his true believers. Christ is the founder, the leader, and the highest authority on earth. He requires first place in all our thoughts and activities.

Importance: To acknowledge Christ as our head, we must welcome his leadership in all we do or think. No person, group, or church can regard any loyalty as more critical than that of loyalty to Christ.

Union with Christ

Explanation: Because our sin has been forgiven and we have been reconciled to God, we have a union with Christ that can never be broken. In our faith connection with him, we identify with his death, burial, and resurrection.

Importance: We should live in constant contact and communication with God. When we do, we all will be unified with Christ and with one another.

Man-made Religion

Explanation: False teachers were promoting a man-made religion that stressed self-made rules (legalism). They also sought ritual growth by discipline of the body (asceticism) and visions (mysticism). This search created pride in their self-centered efforts.

Importance: We must not cling to our own ideas and try to blend them into Christianity. Nor should we let our hunger for a more fulfilling Christian experience cause us to trust in a teacher, a group, or a system of thought more than in Christ himself. Christ is our hope and our true source of wisdom.

Remove the head coach, and the team flounders; break the fuel line, and the car won't run; unplug the electrical appliance, and it has no power. Whether for leadership, power, or life, connections are vital! Colossians is a book of connections. Writing from prison in Rome, Paul combated false teachings, which had infiltrated the Colossian church.

The problem was "syncretism," combining ideas from other philosophies and religions (such as paganism, strains of Judaism, and Greek thought) with Christian truth. The resulting heresy later became known as "Gnosticism," emphasizing special knowledge (gnosis in Greek) and denying Christ as God and Savior. To combat this devious error, Paul stressed Christ's deity—his connection with the Father—and his sacrificial death on the cross for sin. Only by being connected with Christ through faith can anyone have eternal life, and only through a continuing connection with him can anyone have power for living. Christ is God incarnate and the only way to forgiveness and peace with God the Father. Paul also emphasized believers' connections with each other as Christ's body on earth. Paul's introduction to the Colossians includes a greeting, a note of thanksgiving, and a prayer for spiritual wisdom and strength for these brothers and sisters in Christ (1:1-12). He then moves into a doctrinal discussion of the person and work of Christ (1:13-23), stating that Christ is the "image of the invisible God" (1:15), the Creator (1:16), "the head of the body, the church" (1:18), and "the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead" (1:18). His death on the cross makes it possible for us to stand in the presence of God (1:22).

Paul then explains how the world's teachings are totally empty when compared with God's plan, and he challenges the Colossians to reject shallow answers and to live in union with Christ (1:24-2:23). Against this theological backdrop, Paul turns to practical considerations—what the divinity, death, and resurrection of Jesus should mean to all believers (3:1-4:6). Because our eternal destiny is sure, heaven should fill our thoughts (3:1-4), sexual impurity and other worldly lusts should not be named among us (3:5-8), and truth, love, and peace should mark our lives (3:9-15).

Our love for Christ should also translate into love for others—friends, fellow believers, spouses, children, parents, slaves, and masters (3:16-4:1). We should constantly communicate with God through prayer (4:2-4), and we should take every opportunity to tell others the Good News (4:5-6). In Christ we have everything we need for salvation and for living the Christian life.

Paul had probably never visited Colossae, so he concludes this letter with personal comments about their common Christian associations, providing a living lesson of the connectedness of the body of Christ.

Read Colossians as a book for an embattled church in the first century, but read it also for its timeless truths. Gain a fresh appreciation for Christ as the fullness of God and the only source for living the Christian life. Know that he is your leader, head, and power source, and make sure of your connection to him.