

Week 2

Colossians Study 1

Last week we did an overview of Colossians. We wanted to know why Paul wrote this letter to these people. Paul was in prison when he wrote this, in fact Ephesians and Philippians were also written from his last imprisonment, so they are frequently referred to as the prison epistles. If Paul believed it was important to write this letter to these people as he was imprisoned for preaching the gospel, an imprisonment that ultimately ended in his death, then it is to which we should pay close attention.

We noted that the Colossians were geographically situated in Asia and there were a number of false religions and cults nearby, probably these believers had left these cults and been converted to Christianity.

Some false teachers were confusing them by mixing Gnostic teachings into the truth of the gospel. These teaching were like all false religions; they had a list of dos and don'ts, which would get you to heaven.

You can look at my website if you want to review last weeks' lesson at www.lightformypath.org.

Colossians 1:1

This is almost the same greeting Paul used in the letter to the Ephesians and from it we know for certain Paul is the author. We also learn here that Paul is an apostle by the will of God. That is, God called him for his task as an apostle.

The word apostle means "one who is sent". Paul was not one of the original apostles who followed Jesus but he was especially called by God-remember the Damascus Road conversion? Acts 9:1-6 and Acts 26:12-18. What has God called you to do? Is the way you spend your life according to the will of God?

Paul included Timothy in this greeting as well. Paul had met Timothy on his second missionary journey while he was in Lystra. Timothy probably came to belief in Jesus through Paul's ministry because Paul later called him "his son in the faith" 1 Timothy 1:2. He traveled with Paul as a kind of assistant and was with him there in the Roman prison.

Colossians 1:2

Paul called the people saints, that means literally "set apart" ones, that includes you if you have committed your life to Christ.

Grace; God's unmerited favor; peace, refers to the peace Christ made between God and us by His death on the cross. Jesus came to bring reconciliation and peace. Friend if you do not know the grace of God, I doubt you would know the peace of God. Only God can give grace and peace, wonderful gifts to His people. Do you experience God's grace and peace in your daily life? I refer to an internal state because most of our lives are troubled and chaotic, the peace that passes understanding comes from God as His gift in the midst of the trouble of life. Jesus said, "in this world you will have trouble, I have overcome the world". How do you get this peace? It is a gift of the Holy Spirit given to you when you bow your knee to Christ and accept His wonderful free gift of salvation.

Colossians 1:3-5

Paul gave thanks to God for these believers and for the obvious life change they were experiencing. Do you remember what Jesus said would be the main sign that people would notice about believers?

Their love for each other and that is what Paul is commending. He was also thankful for their faith. Faith is; leaning your entire being in absolute trust. Well if you are leaning in absolute trust, you must have chosen someone who is trustworthy to lean on and who more than Jesus? That is what they were doing. The amount of faith is not so critical as the object of your faith.

I could have all the faith in the world that a good luck charm would keep me safe as I walked into a lion cage at the zoo. Faith in the wrong person or thing could be fatal.

The Colossians were trusting in Jesus and loving God's people, which is exactly what believers are supposed to do. These believers were looking forward to heaven because they had believed the gospel. If you have believed the gospel, you are on your way to heaven and nothing can interfere. Remember these people were being subjected to all kinds of heresy, just like we are today but they were trusting the gospel that had come to them via the ministry of Paul.

What do I mean when I say "gospel"? Here is Paul's own definition found in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures". The literal meaning of the word gospel is good news and we know the good news Paul delivered to the Corinthians and to which he refers in his letter to Colossae is that Jesus a perfect life, He was crucified with all the wrath of God against my sin, your sin and all of mankind laid upon Him and He died, three days later He rose from the dead, having conquered sin and death. He offers eternal life to you as a free gift with the only proviso that you admit you need it. If you are convinced you can pile up enough good deeds to get into heaven, I have a question, how much is enough to offset your sin? The only sure way to eternal life in heaven is God's way. The good news. What about the good news after you are saved? Jerry Bridges has written an excellent book called THE GOSPEL FOR REAL LIFE; Turn to The Liberating Power of the Cross Every Day is the subtitle. Why do you need to "preach the gospel to yourself every day" as he says? The authors tells us that the good news of the gospel, that we have been forgiven and "raised up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms" does not begin when we die but right now. He talks about a person who said they failed God so often that even though she was sure God loved her, she wasn't sure He likes her. Do you feel insecure or guilt ridden in your relationship with God because you are not living up to even your own standards? The bible is clear, God accepts you, not on the basis of your personal performance, but on the perfect righteousness of Jesus. And that is good news.

Colossians 1:6

Clearly the good news or the gospel was spreading, and Paul said bearing fruit, meaning it was changing hearts and lives all over the known world. Nothing can stop the spread of the gospel, it is supernaturally moving throughout the world even today

Colossians 1:7

In our overview last week we said we were assuming Epaphrus had founded the church in Colossae and at the time of this writing was in Rome with Paul, even perhaps a prisoner. Paul described Epaphrus as a fellow bondservant who is a servant of Christ. In the Roman Empire a bondservant was a special class of slaves. These people had been freed by their master but had chosen for any number of reasons to remain "bonded" to this person, so a bondservant was a servant by choice. How does this apply to believers? We have been freed from the consequences of our sin, freed from guilt and freed from eternal death by Jesus Christ and so out of our gratitude and love for our Savior we choose to be

His, to do His will rather than our own. I choose to be a bondservant of Christ, He has freed me but I want to serve Him, out of my love for Him not out of duty.

Paul was also telling the people of Colossae that Epaphrus was speaking to them under or on the authority of Paul and so they could trust what he had taught them, this was to further protect them from the teachers of heresy. If false teachers came in their own authority then they were to be ignored.

A context note here; the letter to Colossae and the letter to Philemon were written about the same time and sent to the same place; Philemon's home where the church was meeting according to Philemon 1:2, most likely the Colossian church is what is referred to here.

Colossians 1:7

Just a word about this love of believers; it is a gift or the fruit of the Holy Spirit, actually the first one mentioned in the list in Galatians 5:22. Remember this is not an emotion; it is a choice, the choice to do the right thing for another person even at my own inconvenience and it is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit in my life. If you allow the truth about this gift to sink into your heart you will find it much easier to love the unlovely, love is not a feeling, it is a choice.

Colossians 1:9

Well Paul had mentioned he was praying for these believers, as he was those in Rome and Philippi. Who were they again? Paul said they had heard the gospel resulting in faith, hope and love for the saints, which was the proof they had believed.

Have you ever been told by someone they were praying for you? If you are wondering how to pray for any believer, open to the first chapter of Colossians and there is the answer. This is a pattern for prayer, to pray for you or for intercession for other believers.

Notice Paul said he constantly prayed this prayer, and so we can see this as an example for our own lives. Paul tells us in another place to pray without ceasing and he is setting the example for this. This little sentence is about persevering.

The first petition of this wonderful prayer is for the people to have a complete understanding God's will for their lives, this is a practical prayer. We need to know God's will for our lives so that we can live a meaningful life and fulfill our purpose. Our Christian lives cannot be lived effectively on emotion and feelings, no, it has to involve a conscious effort if it is to have impact on everything we say and do and think. Also we need spiritual wisdom to live this life. It is one thing to know what God's wants you to do but you also need to know how to do it. And be sure of this; whatever God wants you to do, He will give you the wisdom to do it, if you will ask, better yet have someone else praying for this spiritual wisdom for you at the same time. When I think of spiritual wisdom I think also this is a request to help understand the scriptures, and God has promised this help too. I love the scripture promise I used to open the program, you will hear a voice behind you saying "this is the way, walk in it", Isaiah 30:21. Do you realize the immensity of this promise? Here is the Creator of the Universe, the Sovereign God of all the earth who is saying to you; ask Me I will direct you. God is not only loving but all wise and He knows the best way for you.

Let's do some word study; what does it mean to be filled with the knowledge of His will? The word knowledge here is the Greek word "epinosis". Remember Paul is writing to them regarding the heresy of Gnosticism, which literally means "supremacy of knowledge".

What does epinosis mean, here is the definition: "clear and exact knowledge" and Paul is praying that they will be filled with epinosis; the clear and exact knowledge of God's will. Another way to understand this is 'experiential' knowledge of His will rather than just knowing about. It also talks about 'revealed' knowledge. What about the word wisdom when talking about spiritual wisdom, 'Sophia' in Greek, means the application of knowledge, or God's viewpoint applied to daily life. "All spiritual wisdom and understanding" is the request, notice he qualifies the wisdom and says it is spiritual wisdom in contrast to human or natural wisdom. Paul is praying for these believers to have the ability to know and apply the revealed knowledge of the Word of God.

What does he mean by 'knowledge of His will', where would this kind of knowledge come from? It would come from the Word of God. This implies that they would be able to apply it to their own lives. He is going to great lengths to be sure they understand the difference between the knowledge of God and worldly knowledge.

What about the word understanding, Greek "suneisis" and why do we need to know this word. This word speaks to 'understanding moral and spiritual issues' it is not referring to intellectual understanding or natural human reasoning or education.

In light of all this what is the first petition of Paul's prayer; that spiritual truth be known and be applied generally to all of life and specifically to circumstances involving persons, places and things. It is a plea to God for guidance.

As you pray this for yourself or others what is required? Turn to Romans 12:1-2, a parallel passage, which sheds light, "I urge you by the living God that you present your bodies as a living sacrifice which is your reasonable worship. Do not be conformed to this world but, now here it is, be transformed by the renewing of your mind that you might prove the will God that is acceptable and true.

The emphasis here is do not keep on being conformed, so what was the danger in Colossae? The danger was that the thinking of the world, the false teaching, was shaping their thinking. What to do instead; keep on being transformed by the renewing of their mind? This happens through the word of God, keep on studying the word, keep on being filled that you may know the will of God, which is good and acceptable and perfect. The only way to know the will of God is to know His word, friends this is not a mystical experience, but that filling is a filling that comes from the word of God. If you keep on being transformed by the renewing of our minds by the study of the Word of God then we will be filled with a greater understanding and the ability to apply it to all life circumstances.

What is the purpose?

Colossians 1:10

The purpose of this prayer is a worthy walk, not just knowledge about God but a constantly transformed life that is a worthy walk. What is a worthy walk? Bearing fruit in every good work; this is in the present tense which means that we keep on bearing. If you walking a manner worthy of the Lord you will be bearing fruit in every good work.

What is fruit according Galatians 5:22?

Fruit is the result of the Spirit's work within the life. Back to our study of John for more information on fruit, John 15:16 tells us why we are to bear to fruit? To glorify God. John 12:24, tells how we bear fruit. There has to be that initial death to self as we come and bow to Christ then there is the constant death to self as you yield daily to the Holy Spirit. John 15 tells us about the tree that doesn't bear good fruit, it will be taken away. Fruit is the evidence of the life of Christ within and without fruit there is eternal death.

What does fruit prove according to John 15:8?

It proves you are a disciple, and also fruit glorifies the Father.

What is necessary to bear fruit, John 15:4?

The tree that bears no fruit is removed.

Wrapping this up; Paul is praying a practical prayer for believers who are being besieged by a culture, which is pressing them with false religion and worldly wisdom, which is no wisdom at all. After all God has told us that the wisdom of the world is foolishness. Friends, how can anything be more relevant to us today in a culture which is pressing us with false religion, immorality and death? I pray you will seek God's wisdom for your life; it is the only way to purpose and personal fulfillment.