

INTRODUCING COLOSSIANS

For the next 12 weeks or so we will be going through Paul's letter to the Colossians. While many of you slow down during the summer months and only meet twice a month, there will be a study prepared for each week for those who don't want to slow down. I would encourage all group members to stay in the Word this summer. Don't forget the Bible reading schedule we put out every quarter. And even if your group doesn't meet every week during the summer, you may still use these studies to take you through Colossians.

The Format of this Study.

I ask that you read through Colossians several times in your preparation for the study. Ask lots of questions of the text. Write them down in a notebook. Asking questions is the most important first step in studying your Bibles.

These handouts will have some basic questions to guide your preparation and discussion. Make this an individual journey as well as a group one. Don't worry if you do not find answers to all your questions—that is part of the process.

In some studies we have put in sections that give more explanation of the harder concepts. We are calling these "Going Deeper." They will be in shaded fonts. Don't worry if you do not understand all that is being said in these areas. Soak in what you can and don't worry about the rest.

As usual, Leah Witt will be helping write these studies. Also, it is my privilege to have my son, Luke Slavin, help with them also. He is in an intern position at Grace. For some crazy reason he wants to be a pastor! Encourage him when you see him.

The Church of Colossae

Colossae was located 120 miles east of Ephesus in the Lycus River Valley in ancient Phrygia, part of the Roman territory of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It was one of a triad of cities in the area (the other two being Laodicea and Hierapolis), resting at the foot of Mount Cadmus. It is part of the same group of towns about whom Jesus dictates letters to the Apostle John in Revelation 2-3. As you read the letter, you will see that Paul was not the first one to take the Gospel to them—Epaphras was (1:7). In fact, many Colossian Christians had not even met Paul yet (2:1). Some believe that Paul never went to Colossae—instead, he was probably in the seaport city of Ephesus where so many people had to travel to do business. More than likely that's how he met so many of the people he greets in Chapter 4.

The Problem in Colossae

It appears that someone had come in among the Colossian church proclaiming a perverted teaching on the identity and work of Christ. Paul doesn't really tell us exactly what this teaching was; we simply get his correction to it. This correction can be seen

quite clearly in 2:6-15, which confirms for us that whenever heresy creeps into the church, it usually starts with the identity of Christ and the purpose of His work on the cross. Jesus is usually demoted from His rightful place as God and salvation is no longer by faith alone, but by some form of works. Colossians shows us that this is clearly heresy.

Colossians: The Supremacy of Christ ***Colossians 1:1-8 Praising God for Faith, Love, and Hope***

We start this study by looking at Paul's *grateful* heart to God for the Colossians' growing faith.

Read 1:1-2

GOING DEEPER

Paul gives his standard introduction that appears in most of his letters. There are two features worthy of pointing out about this introduction.

First; Paul addresses the Colossians in verse 2 in a way that could lead to confusion. Notice the three different translations below:

To the ***saints and faithful brethren*** in Christ (NASB)

To the ***holy and faithful brothers*** in Christ (NIV)

to the ***saints, the faithful brothers and sisters*** in Christ (NET)

The interpretive question is how to translate the Greek word *hagiois*. This word is a plural adjective of *hagios*, which simply means *holy*. When Paul uses it in the plural, it can be translated as *saints*, which simply means "*holy ones*." In English, the word "saints" is a noun, not an adjective. So, this leads to some potential confusion.

The first translation above could be interpreted as two groups of people being addressed, "*saints*" and "*faithful brethren*." This is potentially confusing for those from Church traditions where saints are a special group of people.

The second translation is addressed to brothers who are both holy and faithful. This assumes that the two plural adjectives *holy* (*hagiois*) and *faithful* are modifying the noun *brothers*, thus making it one group of people being addressed.

The third version translates the first adjective as a noun (*saints*), and then with the use of a comma, it further describes these saints as faithful brothers and sisters (it takes the

Greek word for brothers as referring to both genders, which is a correct way to translate this).

I believe the second and third translations are the correct ways to translate this—one group of people is being addressed: **believers who are both holy and faithful**. To call these believers “saints” is a fine translation, but it can create some confusion. Hopefully this explanation hasn’t increased the confusion.

The **second** feature to be pointed out in the introduction is much simpler: Paul greets them with the phrase “*grace and peace to you.*” A common greeting among Greeks/Romans was to say “**grace to you.**” A common greeting among Jews was **peace** (Hebrew = *shalom*). Paul, knowing his audience was a mixture of both cultures, used both greetings.

Read 1:3-8

1. Notice in verses 3-5 the use of the words *faith*, *love*, and *hope*. These are some of Paul’s favorite words (see 1 Corinthians 13:13). Discuss the relationship between the phrases below:

1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

1:4 because ***we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus*** and of ***the love you have for all the saints***—

1:5 ***the faith and love that spring from the hope*** that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel

1:6 that has come to you. (NIV)

- How would you respond to someone who says that *as long as your faith is sincere, it doesn’t matter who your faith is in?* Why does our faith have to be in Christ alone? Give a definition of what it means to “put your faith” in Christ.

- How does love for all the saints flow from faith in Christ? Should it be natural for a believer in Jesus to love other believers in Jesus? What does that look like?

➤ What is the relationship of both faith and love to hope (compare other translations). What do you suppose this hope is that is stored up for us heaven? (If you have time, read through Romans 8:18-25) Do you give much thought to this hope in your day to day life?

➤ Would other believers who observe your fellowship group make this observation, described in these verses, about your faith, love and hope?

2. Paul says that the Gospel is being spread throughout all the world (verse 6). Paul then says that the Colossians learned the faith through Epaphras (verse 7). Go around the group and briefly share about the person(s) primarily responsible for telling you about Jesus.

3. What other questions about this section of Scripture did you come up with in your studies?

End the study by noticing how Paul opens this paragraph in verse 3: ***“we always thank God for you . . .”*** Are you truly grateful for those who are sitting around you today? Have you told them that?