

ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Small Group Bible Study

Paul's Letter to the Colossians (Part II)

SERIES INTRODUCTION

In Part I of our study in July, we learnt that the Gospel according to the Apostle Paul was the true Gospel – the word of truth that testified to the supremacy and therefore sufficiency of Jesus Christ as the Creator, Revealer, and Redeemer. He is the source of eternal life and witness for the Colossian Christians that Paul was writing to.

In Part II of our study this month, Paul categorically exposed the false teachings and practices that had wormed their ways into the Colossian Christian community; seeking to displace Christ and the Gospel from being the sole centre of their faith and conduct.

What were those false teachings and practices? How were they undermining the confidence that the Colossian Christians had in Christ and the Gospel? What was their present standing in Christ? How were their godliness challenged? What did Paul exhort them concerning truth-living as God's chosen and holy people?

3 Aug

Don't Be Taken Captive

Colossians 2:6-19

10 Aug

Died and Raised with Christ

Colossians 2:20 – 3:4

24 Aug

Put Your Earthly Nature to Death!

Colossians 3:5-14

Don't Be Taken Captive

COLOSSIANS 2:6-19

GENERAL SURVEY

TOPIC

KEY VERSE

MAIN PERSON/S

KEY IDEAS & QUESTIONS

Introduction

It is hard to keep balance and focus when our lives are off-centred; in particular, off-centred from Christ and the Gospel. Other teachings, traditions and trappings come into the equation, confusing us from the core that matters. Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians with an apostolic zeal to expose the heresies that undermine their faith and confidence in Christ alone, and to point them to Jesus' identity, his authority and his saving work for them and certainly for us who have believed as well.

For Study and Discussion

1. Receiving Christ (2:6-9)
 - a. Having received Christ as Lord, what should we continue to do? (v6)

 - b. How should we do it? (v7)

 - c. What potential dangers are there if we do not do it? (v8, Rom 16:17-18) Name some false teachings that can deceive us today.

 - d. Instead of being deceived, we are to rely on Christ the sole source of truth (v8). Do we?
 - i. Who is Jesus in his bodily form? (v9)

 - ii. What does his identity speak of his authority? (v10)

Discipleship Pointer:

Living in Christ may not be easy. It is often easy to be deceived or simply distracted by the deceptions of this world where we live. Therefore, let us be rooted in Christ:

- Let us not just hear the Gospel but practise it! (James 1:22-23).
- Let us do things to strengthen our faith (v7)
- Let us be overflowing in thanksgiving (v7)

2. Remaining in Christ (2:10-15)

Paul calls us to rely on Christ. But why should we? We should because we are in Christ. Being in Christ means that we:

- a. have fullness (v10) – what does this mean?

b. are circumcised (v11) – not physical circumcision. What kind of circumcision do we have?

c. are baptised (v12) – how is baptism link with Christ's crucifixion and resurrection?

d. are made alive through the forgiveness of sins (v13). How? (vv14-15)

3. Submitting to Christ (2:16-19)

As a result of receiving and remaining in Christ the Saviour, we are called to submit to him as Lord as well.

a. How are we to handle the judgement of others (particularly Christian) about our Christian religious practices or lack of them (i.e. what we eat or drink, our festivals, etc.)?

b. We can have confidence in Christ alone because:

i. We know what the true ultimate reality is: these practices or Christ's salvation? (v17)

ii. We know the spiritual state of the people who demand such practices. What is their spiritual state? (vv18-19)

c. Does this mean that we can eat and drink, attend any religious festival as we like? The Apostle Paul dealt with food offered to idols in other letters. Look at the following passages and from them see the principles that Paul applied in those situations; principles that we can use when we face our own complicated situations.

i. 1 Corinthians 8:4-13

ii. 1 Corinthians 10:19-23

Discipleship Pointers:

As Christians, we are in Christ – circumcised of our sinful nature – baptised into his death and resurrection so that we no longer dead in sin. The power of sin longer controls us.

- Do we know this?
- Do our lives reflect this?

How do we handle conflict with other Christians on secondary matters of faith doctrines and practices? Do we just condemn them for their differences or do we try to apply some of the principles that Paul used?

Died and Raised with Christ

COLOSSIANS 2:20 – 3:4

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In Colossians 2:6-8, Paul's concern for the Colossian Christians was that they were not to be taken captive by false teachings, but instead to be rooted and nourished in Christ for spiritual fullness and maturity. He elaborated this concern in 2:9-19, and concludes with a climax in 2:20 – 3:4. As we hear his explanation and exhortation, may we gain insight into the foundation for Christian growth and living, and into what God wants for us to leave behind and to focus ahead.

For Study and Discussion

1. Spiritual Emptiness "without" Christ

In 2:16-23, Paul exposed the false teachings and the false teachers who presumed to pass judgment on others.

a. What kind of rules and practices were advocated? (vv16, 18, 21, 23). What attraction might they have? (v23a)

b. What is the true nature and value of these rules and practices which Paul exposes?

i. 2:17 (c.f. Heb 10:1) -

ii. 2:22 (v8; cf. Mk 7:3-5, 18-19) -

iii. 2:23b -

iv. 3:2b -

c. Ultimately, do these rules draw their adherents towards Christ or not? (vv8, 19)

2. Spiritual Fullness "with" Christ

Paul's antidote against those false teachings is for believers to embrace four basic spiritual truths about their relationship with Christ. He connects the central events of Christ to believers' identity, status, experience and destiny.

a. Christ died. We "died with Christ" (2:20; 3:3; cf. Rom 6:6-7; 7:4, 6). What kind of death experience is Paul referring to? When did it happen?

b. Christ was raised. We have been "raised with Christ" (3:1; 2:13-15; cf. Rom 6:4, 11). What kind of life is Paul referring to? When did it happen?

c. Christ is hidden now. We are now "hidden with Christ in God" (3:3). What does this mean? Should we then hide our Christian identity and profession from the world?

- d. Christ will appear again. We will “appear with Christ in glory” (3:4). How does the New Testament describe the blessing of this future glory for believers (Phil 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2)?
- e. The four truths above undergird Paul’s key exhortation “Set your hearts ... set your minds...” (3:1-2).
 - i. What does it mean to set the heart / mind on “things above” and not “earthly things”? (cf. Phil 3:18-21). Consult different Bible translations if you can.
 - ii. What would be examples of “heavenly things” and “earthly things” in 2:16-23 and 3:5ff (esp. 3:5, 12)?
 - iii. How do the above truths help us reject the claims of false teachings in 2:16-23?

Discipleship Pointers

Paul’s attack on false teaching and the true focus which he calls Christians to pursue is saturated with the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ to meet our spiritual need, growth, experience and acceptance before God. To add something else to Christ is to subtract from that supremacy and sufficiency and leads ultimately to spiritual suicide.

1. It is in relation to Christ that the false teaching is crippled and foolish.
 - a. It does not depend on Christ (2:8) and is disconnected from Him (2:19). It is focused on:
 - Shadow and not substance (reality) - Christ Himself.
 - Man-driven philosophy and not God-given revelation.
 - Puffed up self-effort and self-achievement to deal with sinful desires.
 - Material, transient things and not spiritual, eternal realities.
 - b. The Colossian heresy finds possible parallels that could infiltrate the church today. Believers may find one of the following categories attractive.
 - Legalism: A focus on rules, practices, observances or methods to regulate Christian living and increase acceptance with God. They may demand what God does not require, or prohibits what God permits. They may be overtly or subtly imposed on others (especially those who come under our spiritual oversight).
 - Mysticism: A preoccupation with subjective experiences for their own sake, perhaps marketed as “spirituality” that helps us to be more fully in touch with God (e.g. visions, dreams, contemplative methods that seek to induce a spiritually heightened state). When shared with others, it could carry the subtle message that one has more intimate access to God, or has further direct revelation from God, and others without such spiritual experiences are missing something in their Christian life.
 - Asceticism: A rigorous discipline (“harsh treatment”, NIV) of the body (e.g. abstinence of some bodily need or diet) that is supposedly more effective in dealing with sinful desires, or put one in a more spiritual state to connect to God.
2. It is “in” and “with” Christ that we find the source of spiritual power and fullness to live before God acceptably and to be freed from a worldliness manipulated by men and / or hostile spiritual powers (2:8, 20).
 - a. We depend on and are connected to Christ by participating in His death, life, present concealment and future glory. Our identity, status, worth and destiny (past, present, future) are all inseparably bound to His. He Himself is “our life” (3:4; Gal 2:20).
 - In conversion, we died and separated from the old Adam, the old way of life, the fear of evil powers, rules, rituals and superstitions. We were raised to new life to belong to the new Adam, to a new and living hope (1Pe 1:3).
 - In present concealment from the unbelieving world, our spiritual life and union with Christ is secured in God and lived in the presence of God.

- In future glory, our faith and loyalty centered on Christ will be vindicated and we will be shown to be the real followers of Christ, the real people of God.

- b. Especially for new believers, the assurance of our identity and union with Christ is foundational for discipleship and growth just as it was for the young Colossian church.

- c. Hence, the only right way and basis to live the Christian life is a heart-commitment and a mind-set which focuses on Christ and His priorities and values, and which manifests in concrete and fitting ways in daily life and relationships.

Family/Group Moment

1. Rules and regulations are not necessary bad. Practising self-discipline and encouraging others to do so may often be a good thing. So how do we employ them in a positive way such that they do not enslave us to “earthly things” and distract us from Christ?

2. Can a Christian be so heavenly-minded that he is of no earthly use in the world for God (e.g. the work place, family, church, society)?

3. “We can guard against man-made religions by asking these questions about any religious group:
 - Does it stress man-made rules and taboos rather than God's grace?
 - Does it foster a critical spirit toward others, or does it exercise discipline discreetly and lovingly?
 - Does it stress formulas, secret knowledge, or special visions more than the Word of God?
 - Does it elevate self-righteousness, honouring those who keep the rules, rather than elevating Christ?
 - Does it neglect Christ's universal church, claiming to be an elite group?
 - Does it teach humiliation of the body as a means to spiritual growth rather than focusing on the growth of the whole person?”

(Excerpt from Notes on Col 2:22, 23; pg. 2012 in Life Application Study Bible: NIV. Illinois: Tyndale, 2005).

Put Your Earthly Nature to Death!

COLOSSIANS 3:5-14

GENERAL SURVEY

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Introduction

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature” (3:5-11). The Christian’s greatest enemy is not outside, but inside. It is the “earthly nature” which struggles to express itself in our attitudes and actions. We need to be alert, recognise that nature for what it is, and deal with its appearance immediately. How can you recognise the earthly nature? It’s that nature that has crept out whenever you sense yourself feeling anger or malice, whenever your thoughts wander to the impure, or your imagination to what you would do if you had a million dollars. And the time to deal with it is as soon as the first thoughts and feelings drift across your consciousness. How? Paul said, “Put (it) to death” (v5), and he further explained with the image of “taking off” the old self and “putting on” the new.” (Richards, 1990, p1009)

For Study and Discussion

1. What to Put away? Read 3:4-9.

Earthly nature	Are you subjecting yourself to such precarious situation(s)?	What are some possible situation(s) / place / time for you to commit such sin?	What must you do about it? Do you mean it?	Do you think you can manage it singlehandedly? Or should you seek help (1Peter 5:8)? What plan do you have to deal with it?
Sexual immorality	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Impurity	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Lust	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Evil desires	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			
Greed	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			

2. What to Put on? Read 3:10-14.

New self	What are some possible situations that prevent you from exercising these virtues?	How crucial / necessary is it for you to observe this virtue? [Rate "0" as low; "5" as high]	How must you do to remain in the Lord and keep these virtues? Do you mean it?	What could be the possible consequences for such sinning? (Spiritually / literally)
Renewal of mind (Rom 12:2)				
Holy				
Dearly loved				
Compassionate				
Kind				
Humble				
Gentle				
Patient				
Forgiving				
Love one another				

Discipleship Pointers

Sinning exists in us. "Who doesn't sin," we may say. But that does not warrant us the rights to sin, does it? Whenever we sin, especially deliberately, we obviously forget God, defy God, and show no fear of God. King David sinned despite being the chosen one! But the consequences and agony of one's sin often turns into self-condemnation, and long-lasting distancing from God.

Consider Psalm 38 which records King David's agony for his sin as he endures the discipline of God. Remember that God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:5-8, 11).

Let's be wise not to sin against God, but learn from the consequences of others who sinned.

- What does it mean to sin? Romans 7:20-23; 8:6-8
- What we must do so as not to sin? See Colossians 3:1-4; Psalm 1; James 1:13-14
- How do we overcome sin? 1 John 1:5-10

Perhaps one good way is to draw ourselves deeper in our walk with God with "Meditative Prayer", as describes by Richard Foster in his work, "Sanctuary of the Soul". Let the word of God saturate our mind and soul (Col 3:16; Ps 1), and let God's word constantly be the lamp to our feet, a light to our path (Psalm 119:105-6).

1. Take a short passage with no more than 15 verses.

2. Read it aloud once then be still for a few moments.
3. On the second reading, highlight any verses or phrases that speak to your condition. Do it with a prayerful heart, trusting God to lead you to focus on what you need.
4. Then be completely quiet for a few moments.
5. On the third reading, focus on the highlighted portion. Give full attention to any verse, phrase that stands out. Jot it down and meditate it throughout the day. Wait and listen in silence for the next 15 minutes after the third reading.

You might like to attempt this exercise with a portion of Psalm 38, or other passages seen in this study.

References

Richard J Foster. (2011). "Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer", a Renovare Resource. Intersity Press. USA.

Lawrence O. Richards. (1990). "Christ in the life", Colossians 3:5-11. "The Daily Devotional Commentary". Scripture Press Publications. USA.