

FIRMLY ROOTED

Keys to Studying Colossians

Introduction

With Christian living running counter to the world's practices and beliefs, following Christ can be a never-ending challenge. And after some time, such a challenge can begin to wear down even the most devout disciple. Thankfully, the Scriptures are filled with encouragement after encouragement, all meant to lift our spirits when we are overwhelmed and disheartened.

Perhaps the encouragement is needed because of a hostile environment to the Christian, as was the case with the Thessalonians. Maybe it was needed on another level, as in Hebrews 10, where individual encouragement spurs the Christian to love and good works. Or, as is the case with the Colossians, encouragement is needed to help a Christian community to feel secure and confident in their faith and salvation (Co. 2:2; 4:8).

Purpose

To understand why Colossians was written, we consider the words of the apostle who wrote the letter, as well as the prayer life of the one who planted the Colossian congregation. The writer, who is Paul, says these disciples are to find encouragement in a "full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge" of Christ (Co. 2:2). Later, Paul mentions Epaphras, who originally preached the gospel to the Colossians (1:7), as one who is praying diligently for the Colossians, that they would "stand perfect and fully assured in all of the will of God" (4:12). From these verses we realize the Colossians aren't feeling very confident of their Christianity, and Paul pens this letter to change that. They need to be fully assured in their faith.

Author

The apostle Paul wrote this letter (Co. 1:1). While some debate this, there is more than one verse which suggests a Pauline authorship. Consider Paul's ending, where he acknowledges how he himself is personally involved with this letter (4:18; Cf. 1 Co. 16:21; Ga. 6:11). Also note how Paul mentions several other Christian workers such as Timothy, Epaphras, Demas, Luke, Mark, and Onesimus (Co. 4:9-14); all of whom are widely known in Paul's evangelistic efforts and other writings.

Audience

Paul writes to a Christian audience, "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ at Colossae" (Co. 1:2). Though he initially mentions the Colossians, Paul later writes of the disciples in Colossae in the same breath with the Christians in Laodicea and Hierapolis (2:1; 4:13). Paul also instructs this letter to be shared with Laodiceans (4:16). Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis are three cities closely located within the Lycus River Valley of first century Asia/ Phrygia. Considering Paul's intent, this letter is really for the Lycus Valley Christians.

Date of Writing

Written between 60-62 AD.

Key Words

Wisdom – 6 times

Knowledge – 5 times

Colossians 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

Colossians 1:28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 2:2-3 that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:23 These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Colossians 3:10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Colossians 4:5 Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time.

Key Concepts

Firmly Holding to Your Faith. With “full assurance” being Paul’s focus, he reminds the congregation of their need to endure firmly in the Lord, rather than being moved from their faith. Paul emphasizes this throughout the letter with the phrases “attaining of all steadfastness” (1:11), “continue in faith firmly established and steadfast” (1:23), “stability of your faith in Christ” (2:5), and being “firmly rooted” in Christ (2:7). These Christians can be convinced of their standing before God through a true knowledge of him, if they only hold fast to the original message they received.

In Christ. The prepositional phrase “in him,” is common in this letter. “In him,” that is, in Christ, is Paul’s description of one’s spiritual relationship with God. If one is in Christ, then one is forgiven (1:14), reconciled to God (1:22), having known the will of God (2:3), made complete (2:9), and made alive through baptism (2:11-12). If you are in Christ, you are spiritually blessed and favored by God.

A Bunch of Nobodies. If Paul and Epaphras want the Lycus River congregations to be grounded in the faith and fully assured, then who are the ones disrupting these churches in the first place? The answer is found in chapter two, in what I call the Nobody Chapter. Paul makes it clear to these Christians that nobody should convincingly mislead them (Co. 2:4), nobody should take them captive with the teachings of the world (2:8), nobody should condemn them regarding Jewish rituals (2:16), and nobody should make them feel inadequate because they aren’t active in the extreme religious practices/experiences of others (2:18-23). These influences are disturbing the disciples and Paul deals with this source of discouragement in the second chapter.

Why You Should Study Colossians

Colossians is so specific to its original audience, yet it doesn’t lose a rich application to today’s Christian. The Colossians were affected by the criticism and opinions of others, and it robbed them of their joy in Christ. This can definitely be the case for us today. But when we begin to have our faith shaken, Colossians reminds us of how simple Christianity really is: just follow Jesus by holding fast to a true knowledge of his word, finding comfort in his blessings and assurances.

What You Can Do

First, between now and the next post, read through Colossians a few times, in its entirety. It should only take about 15 minutes. This will help you see the flow of the letter as well as understand the overall context.

Second, mark some of the concepts, phrases, or words of Colossians in your Bible. Mark the key words and key concepts mentioned earlier in this post. For example, mark the “nobody” phrases in one color/style, then in another color/style, mark the “in Him” passages that were noted. Next mark the phrases describing the concept of firmly holding on to the faith in another color/style. You should also mark the phrase “full assurance” found in 2:2 and 4:12.