

Finer Grounds

Colossians & Philemon Lesson 2: Introduction to Colossians

We spent the past week examining Paul's early life. Now we find him in prison for preaching the gospel. Most likely Colossians and Philemon were written during Paul's Roman imprisonment.

Read Acts 28:16, 30, 31 and describe Paul's imprisonment in Rome.

Because Paul was a Roman citizen, he was allowed certain freedoms. Even under "house arrest," he continued to preach and teach others. Paul was not one to waste an opportunity; many of his letters were written while in prison. He loved his brothers and sisters in Christ so much that he didn't want to waste one minute of the time God gave him on this earth.

Paul didn't use his circumstances, however bleak, as an excuse to focus on self. What are some of the excuses you let get in your way when it comes to doing God's work? How can you get past some of those this week?

It is likely that Paul heard of the church in Colossae from a slave he encountered named Onesimus (we will learn much more about his story when we arrive at Paul's letter to Philemon). There is no evidence to suggest that Paul had actually visited the

church at Colossae. The work was planted by Epaphras (Colossians 1:7). It was through Epaphras that Paul received reports about the Colossians (Colossians 1:8).

Colossae was once one of the greatest cities in the Lycos Valley, but after the Roman conquest it became no more than a "small town." (Olbricht and McLarty 10-11). In the beginning of the second century B.C., Antiochus the Great imported around two thousand Jewish families (Martin 17-29). While it is fairly evident that the main audience of Colossians was Gentile, this would have indicated that there were probably at least some Jewish converts in Colossae.

Colossae was located on a major east-west trade route. This would have meant that they were infused with cultural influences from many different areas. Paul alludes to the fact that many of the Colossians were converted from paganism. They would have been deeply entrenched in a world of idol worship and false religion.

Despite the challenges they faced, Epaphras brought a glowing report back on the church at Colossae. Read the following verses and describe the positive attributes of this church.

- Colossians 1:2

- Colossians 1:4

Finer Grounds

• Colossians 1:6

This congregation of believers was growing and bearing fruit. They were embedded in an ungodly and immoral society and yet they were a shining light to those around them. What an amazing testament to the power of the gospel!

What challenges does Christ's church face in your community today that hinder its growth? What can you do personally to help overcome these?

This letter is full of encouragement; however, Paul does take some time to warn against threats that will devour the congregation if they are not careful. He warns of false teachers and tries to impart the importance of knowing their obligations to their families. All of these issues are addressed within the major theme of the deity and sufficiency of Christ.

The main theme of Colossians is summed up in Colossians 1:16-18. Rewrite these verses in your own words.

There are several keywords Paul uses throughout this letter. Take some time to read through and mark each time these words (or their synonyms) are used. Try to read through the letter one time with each individual

word in mind. This will help you see the various themes and how they fit into the book,

Keywords:

- *Wisdom (SOPHIA): wisdom that God imparts to those who are close to Him*
- *Knowledge (EPIGNOSIS): knowledge or recognition, usually referring to God or Christ*
- *Faith (PISTIS): state of believing on the basis of the reliability of the one trusted; confidence*
- *Mystery (MYSTERION): not necessarily something unknowable but something hidden from those uninitiated*

*(Arndt,
Danker and
Bauer)*

Also pay special attention to the use of "all" and "in Him" (or before Him, through Him etc.)

What do we learn about each of these keywords from Colossians?

Wisdom:

Finer Grounds

Knowledge:

Faith:

Mystery:

All:

In Him:

Using as many keywords as possible, write a sentence or two describing the theme of Colossians.

Each time you read through this letter, be sure to keep the theme in mind. Remember, these were real people facing real problems, just like you and I. Also, as you continue to study the book of Colossians, draw as many parallels as you can between yourself and Paul's audience. The more you understand your similarities, the more this book will come alive with practical teachings you can apply to your everyday life.

Arndt, Willima, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. Chicago, 2000. Logos Bible Software.

Martin, Ernest D. Believers Church Bible Commentary: Colossians, Philemon. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993.

Olbricht, Owen D. and Bruce McLarty. Truth for Today Commentary: Colossians and Philemon. Searcy, AR: Resource Publications, 2005.