

Finer Grounds

Colossians & Philemon Lesson 3: Colossians 1:1-1:14

This week we will begin our verse by verse study of the text of Colossians. While it is exciting to dig into the details, we must always remember this was written as a letter and was meant to be digested as such. I will begin each week by asking you to read the letter in one sitting; this shouldn't be too difficult since it is only four chapters. Doing this each week will give you a more full understanding of how the individual thoughts fit into the main ideas of the letter.

Read the entire letter to the Colossians

Many times as we read through the New Testament letters, we find ourselves skimming over the first few introductory verses; in doing this we miss the treasures found in these sections. We are going to spend our entire lesson this week focusing on Paul's introductory thoughts to the Colossians, in particular his prayer for this congregation.

Read Colossians 1:1-1:2

Paul begins this letter in his typical fashion: he identifies himself as an apostle and establishes his authority. He also combines the typical Greek greeting of "grace" with the typical Jewish greeting of "peace." This would have indicated that this congregation was a mixture of both Greek and Jew.

How does Paul describe the audience of this letter in Colossians 1:2?

The word saints (HAGIOI) that Paul uses here means "holy ones" or "ones set apart for a special

purpose." As the church we are set apart for God's purpose. Today is no different; our congregations of "saints" are still set apart for His purpose. Do we act like a single minded body working together for a common goal or are do our congregations function more like a social club that meets together on Sundays and Wednesdays?

What can you do this week to change the attitude and mood of your local congregation? How can you start striving to act as if you have been set apart for God's purpose?

Read Colossians 1:3-1:8

Paul was in constant prayer for his brothers and sisters in Christ. If you pay attention to all of the things and people he prayed for, it is difficult to see how he had time to do anything else. He understood the power of prayer, not only that; he knew what it meant to pray for the things that were in God's will. He also encouraged others to "pray without ceasing." (1 Thessalonians 5:17)

Read these verses and describe the circumstances of Paul's prayers.

- Acts 9:1-11

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- *Acts 14:23*

- *Acts 21:5*

- *Acts 28:8*

- *Romans 1:9-10*

This is just a small glimpse into Paul's prayer life. There are so many prayers that we could spend an entire quarter on this one aspect of his life. In the beginning of his letter to the church at Colossae, he spent some time telling them about his prayer of thanksgiving for them. Imagine what an encouragement it would be to know that Paul was saying a prayer for you.

Do you spend time thanking God for the faithful Christians he has put in your life? List some of the people who have had the biggest impact on your spiritual walk and be sure to spend time in thankful prayer for them this week. Be sure to let them know that you prayed for them!

Epaphras has informed Paul not only of the Colossians' faith in Jesus, but also of their great love for all of their brothers and sisters in Christ. This AGAPE love that Paul mentions here is not simply a

warm fuzzy feeling for someone. AGAPE is a fervent and active love.

Read the following verses. What do they tell us about AGAPE love?

- *1 Corinthians 13:13*

- *John 13:35*

- *Colossians 3:14*

- *1 Peter 4:8*

This congregation was not sitting idly on the sidelines; from the day Epaphras brought them the message of the gospel, they had been working diligently for the Lord. There was no stagnant Christianity here. They were consistently growing in number and bearing fruit.

Read Colossians 1:9-14

Even as well as this congregation was doing, Paul still petitioned God for greater growth.

According to these verses what specific things did Paul ask God to grant the Colossian church?

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Paul's prayers were filled with godly perspective. He wasn't asking for people to have material success or even good health; Paul was constantly concerned with the salvation others. He asked God to grant them qualities that would help them reach heaven and bring others with them.

Take another look at your prayer life. Do you spend as much time petitioning God to grant you and others spiritual success as you do asking for physical health and material prosperity? List some spiritually minded prayer requests for yourself and others that you can focus on this week,

There are many scriptures devoted to the importance of knowledge. In verse 9, Paul is praying for their knowledge to increase. Knowledge of God's will should be the foundation of our faith.

Read Romans 10:1-3. What does Paul say about zeal and knowledge?

Zeal alone cannot show us God's will. We must be searching the scriptures daily to understand what God expects of us. The acquisition of knowledge should never be simply an academic exercise though.

According to Colossians 1:10, what is the purpose of the knowledge gained?

As you read through the scriptures, the knowledge you acquire is useless unless you put it into practice.

You should be applying what you learn to your daily walk with God.

According to Colossians 1:11, this knowledge will also serve to strengthen the congregation so that they can attain steadfastness and patience. Steadfastness (HYPOMONEN) means the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty and patience (MAKROTHYMIA) is the state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome.

In what ways does knowledge of God's plan grant steadfastness and patience?

Towards the end of this section Paul uses the common scriptural contrast of light and dark. Jesus rescued us from the darkness. Colossians 1:14 says that "in Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Redemption (TEN APOLYTROSIN) is release from a painful interrogation, torture or captivity and forgiveness (APHESIN) is the act of freeing and liberating from something that confines.

I can't help but think that this statement would have had special significance to Paul during his prison term. The confines of sin are worse than any torture or captivity we can endure and Jesus has already suffered in our place. Because of His sacrifice we are released from the "domain of darkness."

As you go through your week, remember that because of Jesus you now have access to that glorious light! Pay special attention to your prayers this week. Make sure that they are filled with thanksgiving for Jesus' sacrifice and for the commitment of others; also be sure to ask for spiritual strength for you and your brothers and sisters in Christ.