

Colossians

Hearts United in Love

Focal Verses: Colossians 2:1-15¹

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will: **CONTRAST** the deceptive philosophies of true faith discussed in *Colossians*; are **ENCOURAGED** by being rooted and built up in Christ; and **EMBRACE** our new standing in Christ as a guard against false teaching.

In Focus

Both Pastor Freeman and Rev. White were passionate about God, and God’s people, but they had two very different approaches to reaching people for Christ. Pastor Freeman believed love was an action word, and Christ’s work is demonstrated in how we treat other people who are created in God’s image. He was known to give resources to those in need, lead marches, challenge civic leaders to be held accountable, and push legislative policies, based on the Bible, he believed would make his community better. Rev. White, on the other hand, had a different pastoral perspective. He believed the church’s primary job was to save souls by living a righteous life as a witness for others to see. He was confident the most important thing he could do was preach the Gospel from the pulpit on Sunday morning and encourage his congregants to live right and tithe faithfully—while also holding fundraising events to raise money for overseas missions.

Pastor Freeman wanted to involve Rev. White in his campaign to stop racial profiling and hold police officers accountable. Rev. White said he was not interested, but he was looking forward to having Pastor Freeman preach at his church during Black History Month. Late one Saturday evening, Pastor Freeman called Rev. White. He said, his son, Harris, while making his regular delivery of hot meals to elderly members of his church, was held at gunpoint, tased, and arrested—because he allegedly “*fit the description of a suspect.*” He shared with Rev. White perhaps some police officers needed their souls saved, and asked him to come to the next campaign meeting.

¹ Excerpt From Precepts for Living® Dr. Vince L., Bantu

When we champion different philosophies, like Pastor Freeman and Rev. White, how do we keep our approaches rooted in Christ?

Keep In Mind

⁶As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him,⁷rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (Colossians 2:6-7 NKJV)

Lesson Text

Colossians 2:1-15

1 For I would that ye knew how great is my conflict for you and for those at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,

2 that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love unto all the riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may acknowledge the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ,

3 in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

4 And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words;

5 for though I am absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, rejoicing and beholding your order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ.

6 As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him,

7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, following the tradition of men according to the rudiments of the world, and not in accordance with Christ.

9 For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

10 And ye are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power,

11 and in whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ.

12 Ye are buried with Him in baptism, wherein ye also are risen with Him through the faith wrought by the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.

13 And you, being dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses,

14 blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. He took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross;

15 and having despoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

The People, Places and Times

Gnosticism: Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis* (guh-NO-seese), meaning “*knowledge*”. The Gnostics separated physical matter from thought. They concluded matter was evil and formulated the idea the possession of knowledge was the only requirement for salvation. This is why they did not want to attribute humanity to Jesus Christ because to them, material things were evil. Paul stresses in Him (Jesus Christ as He appeared on earth) “dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). Jesus was truly God in the flesh (John 1:14). As a result of their philosophical concepts—the body is evil, for example—the Gnostics ignored or diminished the significance of the historic facts of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ simply because they were so apparent and too easy to understand. To them, all the secrets of God were in the mind or appearing in an immaterial identity.

Circumcision. Circumcision is the cutting off the foreskin. Jewish baby boys are circumcised at eight days old by mandate of Mosaic Law (Leviticus 12:3). Circumcision marked males as belonging to God, and it was supposed to be more than an outward sign, signifying complete devotion to God (Deuteronomy 10:16).

When Gentiles began turning to Jesus, a big discussion arose as to whether Gentile Christian men needed to be circumcised. Paul pointed out uncircumcised Gentiles had come to Christ simply by grace through faith. No one came to Christ through anything else. Because no one was able to keep the Law to perfection, it was obvious that the Law, including circumcision, did not save anyone.

Today, many baby boys are circumcised, but not for religious reasons. Studies have shown circumcised males are less likely to spread sexually transmitted diseases and other potential conditions, so sometimes circumcision is done for health reasons.

Background

The first readers of the letter to the Colossians fell into one of several groups of early Jesus followers attempting to determine their identity during a dynamic time. The Jesus movement had provided a new lens to these believers for understanding the Torah (*the Law in the Hebrew Bible*), the prophets, and the traditions that had been passed down to them for generations. These traditions included rituals, such as circumcision, went all the way back to Abraham, the first patriarch.

Also, the message of Jesus as Lord and hero/ Savior challenged the boundary separated two groups. The first group was the Judeans or Jews who understood themselves as a part of a historical lineage included the characters in the Hebrew Bible and was linked to Torah observance, Temple worship, and the land of Israel. The second group were the Gentiles. These are families of people whose history was linked to other narratives, practices, and places. Despite their differences, the message and movement of Jesus brought together these very different tribes and made them into one community. Paul encourages this community to eliminate the unhealthy boundary separating them. The author also continues to urge them to adopt a radical love ethic.

Paul, however, was concerned about them developing a healthy, external boundary between the community and the forces which attempt to destroy the harmony and love they share. Negotiating both boundaries was of primary importance, as they forged their new identity together.

In Depth

Shared Values (Colossians 2:1–5): The author shares the community has access to the true spiritual treasures of wisdom and knowledge, but those treasures are linked to the community's values. Two values resonate throughout this, and other letters written by Paul: love and faith. In this passage, unity through love is the key which grants access to the best God has to offer humanity. God's treasures are hidden in Christ and activated by individuals loving each other. The passage suggests the treasures of true wisdom and knowledge cannot be accessed alone, but they must be sought together in community. This is directly connected to faith. The faith the community shares is deeply rooted in Christ, but its strength is measured by

how the Colossians weather challenges together. ***Why is it important for us to receive God's truth in community rather than in isolation?"***

2. Shared Vision (Colossians 2:6–12): The author suggests the Colossians should be focused on one thing: development in Christ. The passage also implies this type of development and growth does not happen solely at an individual level. The second person plural pronouns “in the Greek text, translated as “you” mean “you all,” highlight the fact the writer is imploring the community to grow together. Two keys to growing together in Christ are the ability to ignore voices undermine growth and to challenge traditions which prevent development. The standard for growth is Christ, which is immeasurable, because all of whom God is in Christ. Therefore, that goal should prevent them from paying attention to the progress or lack thereof of others around them, because they recognize that they can only reach such a goal themselves by the power of God. Such power is available through a dedication, and faith which can see the invisible and believe the impossible. This type of faith grants access to the type of power which can raise the dead. Believers know this power because it has lifted them from spiritual death into sharing Christ's life. ***What does it mean to be “spiritually circumcised?”***

Shared Victory (Colossians 2:13–15) The image of Christ's victory and the erasure of the record of sin against believers is particularly powerful because it takes the language of the empire and turns it on its head. Christ is portrayed as disarming the forces of oppression and triumphing over them like a Roman emperor would celebrate victory over enemies. Christ does not replace the oppression with His own but instead renders oppression itself as ineffective. Christ conquers what has attempted to conquer the community, and the community shares in that victory. This shared victory is also captured in the idea despite our trespasses and sins, through faith, God has made us alive together with Christ.

The author uses the idea of “*uncircumcision of flesh*” to represent a very contentious issue used by members who had been circumcised to oppress those members of the community who had not been circumcised. The author employs this specific example to illustrate Christ's victory from cosmic forces in spiritual places to the human forces in local places. This is the victory that believers share. ***How have you seen Christ's victory show up in your life?***

Liberating Lesson

All cries for unity are not created equal. From political discourse to church disagreements, unity is frequently evoked as the preferred position often without any justification. It is especially dangerous when unity is synonymous with uniformity. This is treacherous when calls for unity

demand individuals to give up their identity, look past their injury, or to support wrong with complicity. To this end, unity should not be sought for its own sake. Unity, instead, should be a tool for promoting a cause that is working to bring about the reign of God in the world.

True unity in love looks like criminal justice reform, mentoring young people, providing healthcare for the sick, standing up for the safety of the marginalized, mobilizing disenfranchised people to wield their right to vote, etc. If a community, even a church community, cannot build unity around destroying oppression and uplifting those in need, then perhaps they are not looking for the sort of unity Jesus taught us.

Application for Activation

1. Building boundaries is important both in collective and individual life. The people with whom we choose to build community tell us about who we are. Who are the five people with whom you have the least number of boundaries? How do you manage the boundaries? How do you keep others from infringing on those boundaries?

2. In any relationship, it is important to place boundaries to both protect and limit the relationship. Write down two relationships where you need to do a better job of managing the internal boundaries. Where do you need to improve the external boundaries that define the relationship?"

Closing Prayer

Week of 15 June 2024

Daily Bible Readings



Monday – Mark 1-3

Tuesday – Mark 4-5

Wednesday – Mark 6-7

Thursday – Mark 8-9

Friday – Mark 10-11

Saturday – Mark 12-13

Sunday – Mark 14