

Colossians Study # 2



Reading and Reflecting
on God's Word
Together

Colossians for Today

Welcome to a new study series that is designed to help you take a fresh look at the letters of the Apostle Paul.

To illustrate how effectively Paul's letters relate to our world today we will use the Contemporary English Version (CEV) as our recommended text.

For your convenience the CEV text of Colossians is being provided in a separate booklet. You will also need access to a complete Bible of whatever translation you ordinarily use.

Colossians is about the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

In this second chapter Paul emphasizes that Christ is the foundation for life.

Paul says, "Plant your roots in Christ and let him be the foundation of your life." (Col. 2:7)

Not the Headless Horseman

A gross image that emerges from time to time in mythical stories is that of a headless body that is still showing signs of life. On one level the idea is absurd and unbelievable but on another level it is grotesque and frightening.

In a way Paul taps into that image here in Colossians. It is obvious that the head represents the control of the body. The body does what the head directs or requires. There must be a head for the body to function. Useful as the various parts of the body may be, they are unable to fulfill their function without the direction of the head.

Christ, Paul asserts, is the head of the body. It is he who must provide direction and control. And that direction and control will be consistent with who he is.

In fact, Paul asserts that the strength of the body comes not from the joints and the muscles but that it actually comes from the head.

Christ gives the body strength by coordinating the activity of the various parts of the body. For Paul this image applies both to us as individuals and to all believers together in the church. Christ is to be our head controlling who we are. Christ is also the head of all his people - the church.

This is what it means to belong to Jesus Christ.

"Growing Christians"

Paul's declaration, "Plant your roots in Christ and let him be the foundation for your life" (Col. 2:7) offers us a very compelling image.

It reminds us that in Christ we have a completely new beginning. The implication is that Christ then provides the necessary nutrients that allow us to grow into what we are intended to be.

Of course, one only plants something in order that it might grow. The objective is that we would in Christ continue to become healthier, stronger and more mature.

The suggestion in this image is not just that we should take our beginning from Christ but that once planted in Christ he would become the very foundation of our life. We are to thrive in Christ. We are intended to stay rooted in Christ.

Paul offers two further words of advice for his readers in Colossae. They are directed to be strong in their faith and also to be grateful. (2:7)

I once saw a picture used in a Christian brochure that captured this concept in a very powerful way. The Christian life was depicted as a healthy sapling growing out of the dead stump of a tree that had been cut down. The old was gone and the new was beginning to flourish.

"Plant your roots in Christ."

Colossians, Chapter Two

First, read through the whole chapter.

Then, reread the text - pausing at intervals to make sure you understand it.

A Simple Outline

Vss. 1 - 7. Paul's concern for reader's spiritual welfare.

Vss. 8-23. Freedom from human regulations.

8-15 Warning about false teachers

16-19 False teachers rejected

20-23 False teaching explained

Some notes that may be useful:

vs. 1. Laodicia was about 11 miles from Colossae. Letter to be read there also.

vs. 2. re. "mystery". See Col. 1:26 and Romans 11:25.

vs.9 This refers to the divinity of Christ.

vss. 11-13 Paul redefines circumcision in a specifically Christian way.

Vs. 18 re. "who worship angels." This expression is unique to this verse and is not explained in detail but is linked to seeing visions or claiming to see visions.

Christ's resurrection is an important theme in Colossians. We will focus on it in greater detail in our next study in this series.

For Reflection and Discussion

Approach these topics on two levels. First, you are encouraged to make them a matter of some searching personal reflection. However, they are also intended to spark group discussion.

Paul stresses our need to be rooted in Christ (2:7). He links that image with our need to grow (2:10 and 2:19).

Why do you think the image of growth is important for Paul to emphasize?

What does Paul tell us to make the source of our growth?

Can you think of ways that you (or believers today) need to grow?

In his letter Paul introduces the concept of Christ as the head of the body (1:18, 2:10 & 2:19).

Note: In I Corinthians 12: Paul really elaborates on the image of the church as the body . But here in Colossians the emphasis falls specifically on Christ as the head of the body.

How is that emphasis appropriate to the argument that Paul is presenting in Colossians?

Traditional Presbyterian worship forms sometimes included the phrase "Christ the only King and head of the Church". Do you think that it is important to stress this truth often in the church today?

Paul speaks of the charges against us as having been "nailed to the cross" (2:14). This image is unique to Colossians.

Note: Though we commonly associate the piercing with nails as part of crucifixion, as in fact it was, there are actually only three specific references to the nails relating to Christ's crucifixion in the New Testament. These are in John 20:25, in Acts 2:23 and here in Col. 2:14.

Do you think that this image is too graphic to be useful in describing what Christ achieved in his death and resurrection?

Do you think that this image can be used effectively in presenting the grace of Christ in our world today?

In Chapter 2 Paul emphasizes that some things seem spiritual but are really based on human values rather than godly ones. (2:23).

What things did Paul put in that category?

Are there risks of our doing the same thing in the church today? What sorts of things might we be at risk of treating in this way.

As time permits you may want to consider:

In a way Paul's whole message in Colossians is an expansion of what he says in Col. 1:15-20. How does he build on this in this second chapter?