



Reading and Reflecting on God's Word Together

Colossians for Today

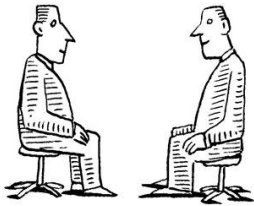
Welcome to a study series designed to help you take a fresh look at the letters of the Apostle Paul.

To illustrate how effectively Paul's letters relate to our world today we will use the Contemporary English Version (CEV) as our recommended text. 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 final chapter, in addition to his personal greetings, Paul has important things to say about prayer and about sharing the faith with unbelievers. The material on which we will focus most closely is in verses 2 through 6.

Talking with Unbelievers



Paul approaches this topic with the expectation that matters of faith and belief will always be part of our conversation with everyone. He is especially concerned that our conversations with unbelievers be approached in a thoughtful and sensitive way. Our objective, he observes, is to engage with them rather than to antagonize them. They should be attracted rather than repulsed.

Paul knows that it is always easy for a believer to sound angry or arrogant rather than pleasant and persuasive. In truth, he knows that it is not only easy for believers to sound that way but sometimes they may actually feel that way too.

Paul therefore commends to believers a conscious strategy of preparing themselves for such encounters. The objective is to make those conversations not only pleasant but also interesting. That sort of conversation seldom just happens. Paul thinks we ought to be prepared for those conversations even though we may not know who they will be with or when they will take place or what the spark will be that gets them started. We just need to be thoughtfully prepared.

"Giving up on prayer"

Sometimes believers "give up on prayer." By that I don't mean that they stop believing that God answers prayer but they just stop praying.

Sometimes this happens when life is going smoothly and it seems that the world is unfolding well whether we pray or not. And so we become careless.

Sometimes it happens when we are stressed and burdened. It isn't that we don't have needs to share with the Lord but we have invested so much of our energy trying to solve the problems that we have nothing left to give to praying. And sometimes, in such situations, we begin to think that perhaps God has abandoned us, at least for the moment, and that it might not do any good to pray anyway. And we stop praying.

Satan is always delighted when a believer stops praying. It means that before long the believer's close bond with the Lord will become eroded. And when that happens the believer becomes susceptible to other temptations as well.

Paul offers the blunt advice "Never give up praying." (Colossians 4:2) There are always things that we need to be praying for. There are always concerns for prayer for those who have a vision of faith.

Colossians, Chapter Four

First, read through the whole fourth chapter. Then, reread the text - pausing at intervals to make sure you understand it clearly.

A Simple Outline

Vss. 1 Belongs with the material at the end of chapter 3.

Vss. 2-4 Prayer and what to pray for.

Vss. 5-6 Sharing the faith with unbelievers.

Vss. 7-14 Greetings from some of the people who are with Paul.

Vss. 16-18 Instructions about reading the letter.

Some notes that may be useful:

vs. 7. Tychicus See Acts 20:4; Ephes. 6:21-22; 2 Tim. 4:12 & Titus 3:12.

vs. 9. Onesimus is linked with Colossae. He is also the slave that belongs to Philemon.

vs. 10. The reference to Mark indicates that he has regained Paul's favour. See Acts 15:36-41.

vs. 12. Epaphras, also mentioned in 1:7, brought the gospel to Colossae.

vs. 14. Identifies Luke as a doctor.

For Reflection and Discussion

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

Paul emphasizes the importance of prayer and suggests some things that the people in Colossae should be praying for. (verses 2-4)

Do you think that Paul's concerns about prayer are valid for us as well?

How do his prayer requests relate to our life in Christian community today?

Paul offers some very practical advice about the nature of the relationship that believers ought to have with unbelievers. (Verses 5-6)

From what Paul says in his letter how do you visualize the nature and extent of the contact between his readers and unbelievers?

Paul indicates that believers should have a conscious plan about how this contact should be carried out.

Do you think that what Paul suggests would be difficult to achieve?

Do you think that his suggestions are still valid for believers today?

In most of his letters Paul includes a number of personal greetings. In Colossians most of chapter 4 is devoted to greetings.

Aside from making the letter more personal, what are some of the benefits of these greetings to the church in Paul's day?

How might such greetings shape how we think about life in the church today?

In verse 16 Paul instructs his readers about sharing the letter with others. He also indicates that he wrote a separate letter to Laodicea which has not survived.

What impressions about the church in Laodicea do you get from Paul's references to it in this letter? (See Col. 2:1 as well as the context here. Laodicea is also mentioned in Rev. 1:11 and 3:14.)

Are you curious about Paul's letter to Laodicea and how important do you think it is that we do not have access to it today?

As time permits you may want to consider:

What, if any, distinctive insights have you gained, or been reminded of, as a consequence of this study in Colossians?

