

Colossians: Life in Christ

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SERVING OUR COMMUNITY AT WINANS AND THE WAY SCHOOLS: Each Thursday at 2pm, we distribute food bags from the FRC for kids and families at Winans School. If available to help out, even just occasionally, contact Pastor Brandon at brandon@mtbible.org. On January 14th, we'll provide muffins for the Way's Muffins with Mom. Muffins can be dropped off between 9am and 3pm Monday, January 13th at the church, or on Tuesday morning at the Way at 7:45am. If you can make some muffins, please let us know at info@mtbible.org.

CHRISTIAN ESSENTIALS: On the last three Sundays of each month, Pastor Kyle and Pastor Brandon will be leading a Christian Essentials class at 8:30am before church, exploring the essential beliefs of Christianity. We'll begin the first Christian Essentials class on what we believe about the Bible on January 12th. Whether you're a new Christians or interested seeker looking to learn more about Christianity, or a seasoned saint looking to deepen your faith, we hope you'll join us.

MBC101: Our winter session of MBC 101 will be at 8:30 on January 12, 19, and 26. This is for anyone interested in learning more about the church and/or seeking membership.

SCRIPTURE READING

Colossians 1:1-23

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Was there anything from the Scripture passage or sermon that was encouraging or challenging to you? Consider sharing these reflections with the group.

- The Apostle Paul and his ministry coworker Timothy wrote this letter to the church in Colossae, most likely while Paul was in prison. Colossae was a small and relatively unimportant city in Roman times, but it was known for its religious intensity. The Christian community in Colossae at the time of Paul's writing was mostly Gentile (non-Jewish), and they were steeped in the traditions and culture of Greek philosophy and religion. Their turning to Jesus as Messiah (Christ) and Lord would have led to their ostracization from the Greco-Roman culture around them. Based on Paul's letter to them, it seems that they were attempting to recover some sense of the religious practice and identity that they had before. In this, they were falling for the lure of some kind of false teaching that was based on mystical and apocalyptic elements of Judaism and the influences of Greek philosophy and religion.
 - How does this historical and cultural background help us understand Paul's letter to the Colossian church?
 - Given their former life in a city of religious zeal, why do you think these early Christians would have been tempted by a false religious teaching that was not centered on the person and work of the Messiah Jesus? What could they have been missing from their former life?
 - What sort of teachings, ideologies, or practices today tempt us to decenter our focus from Jesus as Messiah and Lord?

- Robert Wall summarizes Paul's letter to the Colossians in this way: "According to Paul, the theological center of 'true' religion must never be shifted from our ongoing participation in the life of the Risen Lord, because it is 'in Christ' that God's grace transforms people from death to life."¹
 - Why can't we deliver ourselves from the darkness of death in exile from God to life with God in his kingdom? What does God do for us in Christ alone that brings this deliverance? Consider Colossians 1:13-14 as you respond.
 - If our life in Christ is meant to be at the center of existence and the core of our identity, how can we determine whether or not we are practicing true religion or lifeless religion?
 - Do you think that the security of the life we have in Christ is an excuse to neglect religious practices? Why or why not?
- It was not all bad news in Colossae. Read Colossians 1:3-8. What does Paul give thanks for regarding the church in Colossae? How could the practice of this kind of thanksgiving help us when we are discouraged about the seeming slow or stagnant growth of the gospel in our own community?
- Read Colossians 1:9-14. What do you notice Paul praying for here? How might these prayers address the situation that the Christians in Colossae are facing? What can we learn from Paul's prayer here about how we should pray for our church and fellow Christians today?
- Read Colossians 1:15-20. This section is most likely an early Christian hymn. What does this hymn teach us about Christ Jesus? How should these grand statements about Christ's identity shape our perspective on life, the world, and our future?
- One perversion of both Judaism and Christianity at Paul's time was the dualistic thinking of Greek philosophy that set the material realm against the spiritual realm. How do we tend to separate our spiritual and physical life today (e.g. sometimes religious practice is seen as a purely spiritual thing on Sundays with no connection to our real world experience the rest of the week)? How does the hymn unite what we tend to separate out into the spiritual and physical realms? How does this hymn affirm hope for God's physical creation? How might all this shape how we think about our responsibilities in life as we anticipate the reconciliation of all things (v. 20)?
- Read Colossians 1:21-23. The focus here shifts to who the Colossians once were and what their new identity in Christ now is. What do you notice about their identity now? How does this inform how we should think about ourselves as Christians?
 - As we enter into a new year, how might we stay grounded in this identity and steadfast in our faith (loyalty) to Jesus and the hope of the gospel?

PRAYER

- Take time to pray for one another, our church, and our broader community. Consider talking about worries and/or goals for the coming year and bringing these things before God in prayer together.

¹ *Colossians & Philemon*, IVPNTCS, 24.