

Walking in Christ - Colossians Overview

After what seems like months we're finally getting started on Colossians. Unfortunately, we'll have to do it remotely for the next few weeks or months due to the current coronavirus pandemic. However, I think we can all come out of this knowing Colossians (and thus God) better through this kind of study than if we'd just pursued Colossians in a normal church setting.

I'd still like to preach and teach through Colossians when we get back together, and I think that we'll be able to go even deeper into the book after having had this "preparation" time before we return to normalcy. :)

[Once again, pray for God's help, peace, and comfort during these troubling days, and ask specifically for his help as we read, discuss, and meditate on Scripture. Read Colossians out loud to each other, which should take between eleven and fifteen minutes.]

[I recommend using the attached PDF of Colossians from the ESV Bible, which has all headings, chapters, verses, and footnotes removed – just the text in a letter format, which is similar to what the Colossian church would have received from Paul back in the day.]

Observation Questions

1. Who wrote Colossians?
2. Why do you think Timothy is mentioned? Was he a co-author? Or did he have another role?
3. Who is this book (letter) written to?
4. Do you think the "saints and faithful brothers" are referring to two groups of people, or the same group?
5. Where was Paul when he wrote this letter? We don't know for sure which city he was in, though our best guess is probably Rome. To ask that another way: under what conditions did Paul write this letter?
6. Was Paul alone?
7. How does Paul know the Colossians and their current situation?
8. Had he ever been to Colossae?
9. How did the Colossians first hear the gospel?

10. Paul spent approximately three years in Ephesus teaching and preaching the gospel (Acts 19:8–10; 20:18-21, 31) Look at a map in the back of your Bible – how far is Colossae from Ephesus?
11. Who delivered this letter to the Colossians?
12. Did Paul write more letters than the thirteen that we have recorded in the New Testament? How do you know?
13. Did Paul actually physically, with pen in hand, write this letter? [This may be related to question #2.]

Outline of Colossians

While it is possible to understand a New Testament book like Colossians without fitting it into an outline, outlining the book can be very helpful to “see” what Paul was thinking and where he was going with his thoughts.

Did Paul have an outline in mind when he started dictating the letter to his amanuensis (scribe)? We don’t know for certain, but it’s not out of the question – surely he wasn’t just rambling!

Other than the opening greeting (1:1-2) and final greetings (4:7-18), I’ve found it helpful to think of the book in five main sections.

I’m guessing some of you would like the opportunity to think through this and look for those five sections for yourself. If you’re not in that group, I’ll add the “complete” outline at the end of this paper.

Beginning Exposition

Exposition essentially means to expose the biblical text, to see what’s there. We can do this by reading the text (over and over), asking questions of the text, and thinking about the text. Perhaps most importantly, we need to pray that God through his Holy Spirit would help us to understand the text, which we did at the beginning of today’s study.

We’ll get into this further and deeper in the coming weeks, but here’s a start:

As you were reading Colossians earlier, you may have noticed that Paul used the word “walk” or “walked” several times. Go back through the book and find each of those places. [Hint: There are four in the ESV.]

In each of those passages where he used the word “walk” or “walked,” think through and discuss with each other what Paul was saying.

1. What does Paul mean by “walk?” [Hint: In one of those passages he makes it really clear.]
2. What is the relationship between “knowledge” and “walk?” And “knowledge” of what, exactly?
3. Why did Paul write this letter to the Colossians? [I’m not going to give you this one right now, but if you think you’ve figured it out, send me an email with your answer.]
4. What is the main thesis statement of Colossians? [Hint: It’s almost certainly one of the “walk” passages.] Why do you think it’s the one you chose?

A suggested outline of Colossians

1. Greetings (1:1–2)
2. Continuing work of God the Father (1:3–14)
3. Continuing work of God the Son (1:15–23)
4. Apostolic mission of Paul (1:24–2:5)
5. Faithfulness of believers (2:6–4:1)
6. Eschatological (current times or last days) mission of the church to the world (4:2–6)
7. Final greetings (4:7–18)

Closing thoughts

To close, read Colossians 4:12–13 again. Notice that Paul says Epaphras is working hard and struggling on behalf of the church in Colossae ... by praying for them. This morning, let’s follow Epaphras’s example and pray for Sojourn Church and each other (by name), “that [we] may stand mature [in Christ] and fully assured in all the will of God.”