



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Bible Study Notes: The Most Important Things

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Our Capitol Bible Studies are going strong again this year. Here are this week's notes. If you work in or near the State Capitol I hope you will join us at our gathering this week. See below for the time and location.

INTRODUCTION

Last week, we resumed our study through Paul's Letter to the Colossians.¹ This little book of the Bible, written in about A.D. 60 by the Apostle Paul, has a great deal to say to us today. Like the Colossians, we too live in a culture with multiple religious and philosophical perspectives constantly competing for our attention. And, like them, even those of us who call ourselves Christians can, if we are not careful, inadvertently err by combining biblical (i.e. actual) truth with false teaching. Thankfully, God inspired the writing of Colossians to guide us, as it has guided millions throughout history, to stay focused on those things that are most important in life and to avoid those things that might deceive or distract us.

Today, let's review Colossians Chapter 1, which we studied in detail last year, focusing on the key themes found therein.

KEY THEMES IN COLOSSIANS 1

The first chapter of Colossians expounds on two essential theological truths that everyone needs to know and understand.

1. THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Many people today think of Jesus as an influential religious leader or a wise teacher, but most do not ascribe to Him the honor that is rightfully His. Even some churchgoers think of Christ only on Sunday mornings when He is mentioned by their pastor or priest. Colossians 1 makes it eminently clear, though that Jesus was the physical embodiment of the one true

God, and as such is worthy of our constant worship and affection.

Colossians 1:15-18 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.²

Notice that Colossians 1 continually refers to Christ in the present tense, even though it was written decades after his death and resurrection. This is because Jesus is not just a historical figure, but is alive and ruling now. As such, He is willing and able to give good things to those who seek Him today.

Are you seeking to know and honor Jesus Christ? Does He have "first place" in all areas of your life (v. 18)? The Bible declares that everyone, even powerful political leaders, will one day have to give account for how they responded to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.³ On that day, the question will not be whether we were good Republicans or Democrats or conservatives or liberals. It will not even be about how other people thought of us. When we stand before God the question will be about our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.⁴

EVEN POWERFUL POLITICAL LEADERS WILL ONE DAY HAVE TO GIVE ACCOUNT FOR HOW THEY RESPONDED TO THE KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

Unfortunately, many of us find it much easier to live life our way and only later ask God to bless our actions,

WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY/FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS

**LEGISLATORS: WEDNESDAYS @ 8:00 AM, ASSEMBLY RULES COMMITTEE ROOM
STAFF/LOBBYISTS/OTHERS: THURSDAYS @ 12:00 NOON, CAPITOL ROOM 125**

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instead of letting Him lead us. As someone has said, most of us want to serve God, but only in an advisory capacity. We would do well though to heed the warning of the brilliant 17th century theologian John Calvin, who cautioned us against making God in our own image.

“Mingled vanity and pride appear in this, that when miserable men do seek after God, instead of ascending higher than themselves as they ought to do, they measure Him by their own carnal stupidity, and neglecting solid inquiry, fly off to indulge their curiosity in vain speculation. Hence, they do not conceive of Him in the character in which He is manifested, but imagine Him to be whatever their own rashness has devised. This abyss standing open, they cannot move one footstep without rushing headlong to destruction. With such an idea of God, nothing which they may attempt to offer in the way of worship or obedience can have any value in His sight, because it is not Him they worship, but, instead of Him, the dream and figment of their own heart.”⁵

Though Calvin’s language is harsh, we dare not miss his point. God is supreme, and as such we must seek to know Him as He is. Colossians shows us that we come to know Him most by looking to and yielding to Jesus Christ.

2. THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

A second major theme of Colossians 1 is the power of the gospel. In Colossians 1:21-23, Paul explains what this gospel is all about.

Colossians 1:21-23 “And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of **the gospel** that you have heard ...

The gospel, we see here, is the good news that though we are all separated from God by our sins (“*you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds*”), God loves us (!) and thus came as Jesus Christ to die for our sins (“*He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death*”) and to enable us to have eternal life with Him (“*in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach.*”). Our part is simply to place our trust solely in Christ (*if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast*) and this good news (*not moved away from the hope of the gospel*).⁶ As pastor and author John Piper eloquently summarizes it, the gospel is the wonderful news that “the wisdom of God has ordained a way for the love of God to deliver us from the wrath of God without compromising the justice of God.”⁷

“THE WISDOM OF GOD HAS ORDAINED A WAY FOR THE LOVE OF GOD TO DELIVER US FROM THE WRATH OF GOD WITHOUT COMPROMISING THE JUSTICE OF GOD.” – JOHN PIPER

We need to be careful to make sure that we rightly understand this good news. Paul warned the Colossians that there was a great deal of false teaching circulating in his day, and no doubt there is even more so in ours. A proper understanding of the gospel is central and foundational to a right relationship with God and the joy and peace He offers.

Some Christian missionaries once visited Mahatma Gandhi, and he asked them to sing him one of their hymns. “Which one?” they asked. He replied, “Sing for me the one that best expresses what you are preaching. It took them a moment to decide, and together they sang the classic hymn called “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.” They made a wise choice.⁸

1. When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died;

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- my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.
2. Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ, my God;
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.
 3. See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown.
 4. Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were an offering far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.⁹

At this point, many understandably ask how it can be that easy. What about good works? What about loving others? That is a very good question, the answer to which Paul alludes in Colossians 1:5-6.

Colossians 1:5b-6 “the word of truth, the **gospel**, which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.”

Notice that the gospel is like a powerful seed that always “bears fruit” and “increases” in the lives of those who open their hearts to it. When someone truly comes to God through Jesus, He will gradually transform them to be more and more like Christ. Our good works, and a better life for us, are the wonderful outcome of the gospel at work.¹⁰ Thank God that He loves us as we are, but He also loves us too much to let us stay that way!

CONCLUSION

The supremacy of Christ and the power of the gospel are central messages of Colossians 1. We each need to

ask ourselves if we are letting this divine and timeless message guide our life. Are we trusting fully today in Jesus Christ and his payment for our sins? Do we desire to honor God and show our gratitude for His grace? If so, we are extremely blessed and are well on our way to becoming “complete in Christ” like the first-century believers living in Colossae (Colossians 1:28).

¹See our website for last week’s introduction to Colossians.

²*New American Standard Bible : 1995 update*. 1995 (Col 1:15). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

³We may infer this from Colossians 1:16. See also Philippians 2:9-11, Romans 14:9-12, 2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Timothy 6:15.

⁴John 3:16-18, 36; 1 John 5:10-12

⁵John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.4.1.

⁶Paul also explains the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4.

⁷John Piper, *Desiring God* (Multnomah, 2003), 61.

⁸Warren Wiersbe, “The Preaching of the Cross,” 1991.

⁹*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, text by Isaac Watts, 1674-1748.

¹⁰1 John 3:8-10, 5:18