



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.

The third chapter should be extended to include the first verse of chapter 4. In this chapter Paul emphasizes the importance of living the resurrection life.

Paul says, "You have been raised to life with Christ. Now set your heart on what is in heaven, where Christ rules at God's right side." (Col. 3:1)

"Selective Hearing"

I remember with vividness an occasion when a husband declared with all seriousness that the Bible says that wives should obey their husbands. He was not on the happiest terms with his wife at the moment and this was his final wisdom proclaimed in the presence of the minister. Their whole problem would be resolved if his wife would only do what the Bible said.

It seemed so simple, but obviously this man hadn't heard certain other things that the Bible had also said about husbands and wives. He exhibited no concern as to whether he was loving his wife as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it. He probably didn't even know that this was in the Bible too. He had heard what he wanted to hear and was happy to proclaim it boldly when it suited his purposes.

While this may be an extreme example of selective hearing it really did happen - I heard it with my own ears. And, he was not very pleased to be informed that he had only heard part of the story.

However, we all hear selectively on occasion. We grasp hold of a word or phrase without considering the context or what else might have been said on the subject.

We read the Bible to acquire God's perspective for our lives. However, it is crucial that we hear the whole story.

"Resurrection Now"

Christians have often found themselves contending with those who denied that Christ's resurrection actually happened. Paul's letter to the Corinthians indicates that this was an immediate issue in the first decades of the Christian Church.

Paul eloquently declared that the resurrection was an essential truth of the Christian faith. However, Paul's letter to the Colossians makes it clear that Paul viewed resurrection as more than just a matter of establishing a historical fact.

Paul was also not content just to stress the importance of Christ's resurrection for our future hope of heaven.

For Paul the resurrection of Jesus Christ was central to the life that every follower of Jesus Christ was called to live out each day of his or her life.

It is in knowing and experiencing the resurrection of Jesus Christ that we receive the wisdom and the power to give up our old way of life and live as new persons in Jesus Christ.

Every facet of the life of a Christian rests on and is transformed by the power of the resurrection. Being risen with Christ is not just a future hope it is our present reality.

"Christ is all that matters and he lives in all of us."

Colossians, Chapter Three

First, read through the whole chapter. In this case also include the first verse of chapter 4.

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

A Simple Outline

Vss. 1 - 3. What resurrection means.

Vss. 4-11 Controlled or controlling.

vs.11. Christ preeminent.

Vss. 12-17 God's love makes a difference.

Vss. 18-4:1 Rules for Christians

18-19 Wives and husbands

20-21 Children and parents.

22-4:1 Slaves and masters.

Some notes that may be useful:

vs. 3. re. "hidden with Christ". Describes our present status in Jesus Christ.

vs.3 "when he appears" refers to the return of Christ.

Vss. 18-4:1. Paul stresses the impact that Christ is to make on our personal relationships. He provides specific illustrations.

vss. 18-19 See also Ephesians 5:22-33.

vss. 20-21. See also Ephesians 6:1-4.

vss. 22-4:1. See also Ephesians 6:5-9.

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 significance of Christ's resurrection for all of life (3:1).

For Paul, Christ's resurrection is not just a fact of history but a foundation for the Christian life.

Do you think that it is difficult to grasp Paul's views about the resurrection?

Do you think that it is a difficult task to share his views in our current culture?
Why or why not?

Paul sees a relationship between faith in Christ and how we express our human sexuality (3:5).

How do we relate what Paul says to the view sometimes expressed today that faith should have nothing to say about such things.

Do you think that people in our culture today who would disagree with Paul are sometimes confusing "church" and "faith"?

Paul presents a view of Christian community that emphasizes mutual acceptance in Christ and the experience of peace (3:12-17).

How close does the church today come to living out this vision?

Paul writes about relationship between husbands and wives (vss. 18,19).

How would you summarize what you understand Paul to be saying?

Paul also has advice about the relationship between slaves and their masters (3:22-4:1). Some people feel that Paul should have condemned the very existence of slavery in society.

Why do you think that he did not do so?

Do you think that Paul would have defended the existence of slavery?

How do you think that slaves who may have heard what Paul had to say would have reacted to his counsel?

As time permits you may want to consider:

If you were going to share what Paul says in this third chapter of Colossians with a friend who was not a follower of Jesus Christ, what additional things do you think it would be important for them to know about Christ and the Christian faith?

