



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

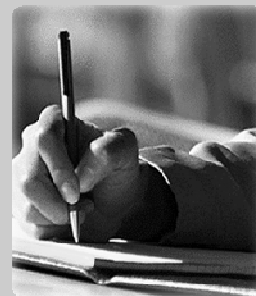


HG74: Living In Christ (1/6)
Our Identity In Christ

Colossians 1:1-14

Home Group Study Notes

9th September 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

The Olympic and Para-Olympic Games have given us some amazing experiences over the summer: euphoria and heartbreak; tears and laughter; joy and sadness. Out of all that you have seen and heard, share with your Home Group the person you most identify with (such as their: discipline; character; talent; or personality).



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1: Think about where your Colosse might be and share with your Home Group what is happening during the coming week. Afterwards, share some suggestions with each other that will enable you to remember, and live out, your true Christian identity when the going gets tough.

2: Read Colossians 1:5 and then look up Romans 5:2-5; Galatians 5:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:3 & 5:8 and compare Hebrews 10:22-24 to learn more about Paul's favourite trio of 'faith, hope and love.'

3: How do you distinguish between anticipating God's will before he calls us, and doing our own thing first and then asking God to bless us when we've done it?

Many more people have influenced me for the gospel over the years. I learned more of the gospel from my pastor, Frank Oliver, when I was one of seven involved in planting an evangelical church in Sunderland, who instilled in me a love for God's word that I've never lost. Nigel Walker, the vicar at my home church; Paula's dad; my tutors at Oak Hill Theological College; Peter Isherwood, my training incumbent ... I praise God for men and women like Epaphras who faithfully teach the Word of God – and so should you, in whichever form they come into your lives.

5) Our Maturity In Christ, vs 9 - 14: Some people have described the Christian life as a rollercoaster ride. Up and down all the time, but I don't think it was meant to be like that, yes, we have our highs and lows, of course we do – that's life. However, our Christian life should be more like a Carousel, a few ups and downs, but, pretty much, staying on the same level.

Going the distance: But Paul wants them to press on towards maturity. He prays for God: *'To fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding'* vs9. The purpose? *'That you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work ... being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might'* vs10-11. Are we to be happy, peaceful and contented? Not in the first instance, rather, that we may have *'great endurance and patience'*, vs11. Now it has to be said that these are not the kind of virtues, which our culture values, are they?

Understanding the bigger picture: Paul prays that these Christians will go the distance of faith. To do that, they need to be helped to understand the bigger picture of what God is doing in their own lives and in their community. Paul prays that the Colossians might have spiritual vision to grasp and hold onto the purposes of God in Christ. Without such spiritual insight, they will lose their way. They will live merely for the here and now. That may be a prayer that I'd want to pray here. Like the Colossians, we too need spiritual insight, stick-ability and endurance to 'go the distance' with joy. This joy is inspired by the Holy Spirit the kind that gives us strength. Remember our text for 2010? Nehemiah 8:10: *'The joy of the Lord is your strength.'*

Conclusion: Some of you may have seen, or heard about, the film *Saving Private Ryan*. It recounts a story from WW2, post D-Day in France, when incredible American resources are used to rescue one soldier, Private Ryan, since all his brothers have already been killed in action. Many men lose their lives to save this one man. In a moving scene, towards the end of the film, the dying Captain of the rescue platoon, played by Tom Hanks, says to Ryan: *'Earn this. Earn what has been done for you.'* In the final scene of the film, we see Private Ryan as an old man. He is visiting the graves of some of those who had given their lives for him and he is asking himself this pointed question: *'Was I good enough? Was I good enough for all that has been done for me?'*

Are you good enough? Are you good enough for all that Jesus did for you? Am I good enough? Am I good enough for all that Jesus did for me? The truth is, we were never good enough. He died for us, not because he was following orders, but simply because he loved us. Jesus showed to each of us the greatest mark of being a Christian: Love. *Greater love has no man than he lay down his life for his friends.*

We were never good enough. He did it for us. It cost him his life, how have you lived yours in return? Out of our sheer gratitude to him, we are called to lay our lives down for him, daily and consistently following Jesus because 'love so amazing so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.' That is what is entailed in pleasing him 'in every way' and 'every good work', vs10. And that is knowing our identity is in Him, working towards our growth and maturity that increases our identity in Christ because of: *'The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for (us) in heaven'* vs5.

Notice this is love for all the saints, not just people whom you happen to personally like. It's always easier to love people just like yourself isn't it? Have you ever thought that if everyone were just like you they'd be no problems at Emmanuel? In my case it would mean, as Andy mentioned last week, that everyone would be talking and no-one listening. But joking aside, what real faith produces is a love for all the saints. God's purpose, through the Gospel, is to produce a new community from a damaged humanity and a loving society out of a hateful world.

3) Our Hope In Christ, vs 5: How do you keep going on in your faith year in and year out, beset with problems and, perhaps, a less than perfect church? What keeps you fired up? Paul writes that it is: *'the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven'* vs5. There are all sorts of side-benefits when you become a Christian. You get a sense of purpose, joy, peace and happiness. But you can also get a lot of these feelings by drinking too much or by taking drugs. If God just wanted us to be happy, he wouldn't have sent us a Saviour; he would have sent us a prescription for Prozac!

But why do we need a Saviour? In a nutshell, the Bible teaches that heaven is a perfect place, a place that is holy and where no sin or wrongdoing is able to enter. And, because of that, only people who are perfect will ever be able to enter there and, no matter how good we might think we are - we are all imperfect people. And this is why God sent Jesus - to bridge the gap between imperfect man and a perfect God. So the hope of heaven doesn't apply to everyone, it applies to those who commit their lives to Jesus. It's conditional not all encompassing.

And there's something important we need to remember: whatever benefits we receive from the gospel now, and they are considerable, are only foretastes of what is to come. The biggest benefit of all won't come until we see Jesus - it is stored up for us in heaven. The best is yet to come. Whatever we have received already, will pale into insignificance ...

4) Our Growth In Christ, vs 6 - 8: Vs6 reminds us that *'all over the world this Gospel is bearing fruit and growing'*. There is an echo here of the 'Be fruitful and multiply' theme that harks back to the book of Genesis. Back then, mankind disobeyed (I'm not going to discuss as to whether Eve duped Adam or whether Adam should accept responsibility) but what we do know is that both a curse and chaos were brought into God's world. Now, through Jesus, God is reversing that curse which one-day will mean there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

Paul is confident that the Gospel of Christ is growing and increasing. How? It is increasing through hearing the 'word of truth' vs5. Evangelism entails verbal proclamation, words. We live in an image conscious age, with brand names and jealously guarded logos. If Christians were to only use symbols - a cross or a fish, for instance - and don't explain them, the gospel isn't heard. And then it isn't 'understood' vs6. The Gospel is something we need to hear. Vs7 adds that the gospel is something we therefore learn. The Colossians heard it from Epaphras. In our culture today (often referred to as a post-modern culture but, I'd want to suggest that we are a post-Christian culture) we need to give people the opportunity to learn the gospel: *Alpha, Home Groups* etc. Christian stability depends on having good foundations and both learning and understanding the gospel.

I learned the gospel from a succession of Sunday school teachers when I was growing up in the Independent Methodist Church. This continued when I joined the youth group. I heard the gospel many times during my life, and probably made a mental commitment to following Jesus, but I never gave him my heart. If I had, I wouldn't have strayed away from him when I left school and became involved in some of the people/things I did. However, during a crisis time in my life when my best friend committed suicide, it was my knowledge of what I had learned, over many years as a child and teenager, that enabled me to trust in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

4: Look at all the characteristics of Christian maturity mentioned in vs9-13. Suggest some practices that will encourage spiritual maturity. As a group, agree on your top five tips for that will encourage one another to press on.

5: Read through Paul's prayer again, vs3-14. What can you learn from his example about how to pray more Biblically for the members of your Home Group and the wider church? How would this shape your pray when praying for: 1) A young mum at home with her children; 2) Someone working in a stressful business environment; 3) A teacher facing an OFSTED inspection; 4) A teenager going away to university for the first time; 5) Someone mourning the loss of a loved one?

6: On one side of a piece of paper, write down the names of those who have been an Epaphras to you - the people who have taught you the Gospel. On the other side, write down those whom God has placed in your life to whom you can be an Epaphras. Spend some time thanking God for the people who have invested so much in you and pray that God would help you to be an Epaphras to someone else - that their lives would be marked by the identity that knowing Jesus brings.



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



HG74: Living In Christ (1/6) *Our Identity In Christ*

Colossians 1:1-14

Home Group Sermon Notes

9th September 2012 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction: We begin a new Home Group series on the NT book of Colossians, entitled: 'Living In Christ.' This is a timely study as we seek to respond to Bishop Stephen's *Transforming Presence* initiative, recognising that our fulfilment is found in Jesus Christ alone for, as the Apostle Paul writes in 1:27: "... *Christ (is) in you, the hope of glory.*" And, it is because of the centrality of Christ that Paul wrote about how fullness and freedom, joy and fulfilment can be found in our Christian lives, through Christ, which enables us to live distinctly different lives wherever God has called us to serve him (school; college; work; rest; play and at home).

1) Our Identity In Christ, vs 1 - 2: What gives us our identity? Genes; family background; education; job? Obviously, all these factors have a bearing, but our identity is not to be found in our circumstances, though there's no doubt many things affect that we are as people. But what is crucial is that by being in Christ. I am simply no longer the person I was, defined by my upbringing, schooling or former occupations and where we come from just isn't all that important. What gives me my identity isn't just where I live or where I come from; rather it is who I am and to whom I belong. It is being in Christ that makes all the difference.

Paul an Apostle: When Paul wrote his letters he always introduced himself as 'Paul an apostle' vs1. The word apostle literally means 'sent one'. The Latin equivalent is missionary. At one level, every Christian is a sent one; we've all been sent by the risen Jesus into the world. But there is an exclusive sense to this word too. When Paul says he is an apostle, he means he is someone who has seen the risen Lord through his conversion on the Damascus Road. He is an apostle, by the 'will of God' vs1. He had seen the risen Jesus and had been personally commissioned by Him.

In Christ at Colosse: Paul is writing to the '*holy and faithful brothers in Christ*' vs2. Originally, this term was reserved for the Jews, but in Colosse there are now Jews and Gentiles. People with diverse backgrounds and experiences are now accepted as the people of God. Churches are not supposed to be monochrome, full of like-minded people I think they are meant to be international in flavour. I don't believe in Black churches or white churches I believe in colourful churches and I think this is what the Bible teaches. Paul goes onto address them as '*in Christ at Colosse*'. Just as we are 'in Christ at Billericay'. The moment we forget that we are meant to be Christians living in the world we are in big trouble. This is our time, our place, our purpose, and our commission, just as it was for the Christians in Colosse.

Paul writes from prison: If it was the will of God for Paul to be an apostle, it follows that it was God's will for him to be in prison, too. Whilst in Rome, Paul used his imprisonment as a time to think and write. Colossians was written around AD62-63, the same time as Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon. Paul actually found a writing ministry when he was in prison for the Gospel - I don't suppose he would have willingly signed up for that, but he realised it was the will of God that he should be in prison at that particular time.

To be a success, to be a winner, surely that is the will of God? Isn't it God's will for me to always healthy, wealthy and wise so I can 'name it, claim it and then frame it?' But here, Paul is in prison by the will of God.

What is your prison? Are you in circumstances you would not choose for yourself? Illness, heart-break, redundancy, bereavement, the onset of old age? Whatever your prison is, you've got to believe that God can use it for His purposes, just as he did for Paul - Romans 8:28.

Living where God has placed us: Colosse was a fairly insignificant place, situated in the Lycus Valley, now part of modern Turkey. The church in Colosse faced different circumstances from Hierapolis and Laodicea, both just a few miles up the road. The church at Colosse had seen better days. We need to learn to live where God has placed us, because where God has placed us has a bearing on how we maintain our witness. And witness, is not about history or the occasional foray into un-chartered waters, it's the day-to-day, ongoing, regular, engaging with our neighbours and community.

Our identity as a Christian is in Christ. I am a new creation (no more in condemnation) with a changed destiny because Christ has stepped into my life. In him I have resources I did not have before. I have access to 'grace and peace' vs2. The resources I need to live the Christian life do not come through merely human agencies. God our Father supplies what we need to live the life he has designed for us. He gives us our identity. That is why Paul can later say, there is: '*no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all*' (3:11).

2) Our Fellowship In Christ, vs 3-4: Paul continues, '*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you*' vs3. Paul often begins his letters in this way. When you received a letter from Paul, you knew he was going to bring some painful things to your attention! But he is not just interested in telling it like it is. He knows these Christians need encouragement, so he tells them why he is grateful to God for them. I think we could learn a bit from Paul's example here. Next time you have a disagreement, why not, instead of just 'shooting from the hip', offer words of encouragement instead? Don't know what to say? Paul thanks God for their faith in Christ, their personal trust and commitment to Him a Lord and Saviour. That's not a bad place to start is it? But what makes the church at Colosse is this: they are gospel people. Differences in practise and approach to life and worship are insignificant compared to proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This created an unbreakable bond between Paul and the Colossians: and so it should be between each one of us.

Love for one another: Let me ask a question: *How do you know somebody is a Christian?* Because they made a profession of faith, or because they are a church member or attend church on a regular basis? The Bible doesn't teach that being known as a Christian is about profession or membership, though they are both valuable expressions of faith, rather, as Jesus said in John 13:35: *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love for one another.* Paul confirms this in vs4 when he talks about how they are known for their love for the saints. Faith in Jesus produces a love for the people of God, fellow Christians, which comes from the Holy Spirit, vs8. It is a new affection for a group of people with whom, at one time, you would not have been seen dead with. Isn't that true? Go on – admit it!

Sometimes it seems as though some Christians never want to spend any time with the people they are going to be spending eternity with! Actually, Church is meant to be the privilege of the redeemed, not the punishment you have to undergo in some sort of Protestant purgatory before you go to heaven.