**BCM Bible Study –Jan 19-20, 2022**

**Colossians 1:1-14**

The letter of Colossians was written by Paul, while he was imprisoned, to the church at Colossae, which interestingly enough he had never visited. It seems like Epaphras visited Paul in prison to tell him of the progress of the gospel in the region of Colossae, and also to get his advice on dealing with false teaching he was encountering. This is a letter written out of love and concern for the church of Colossae and trying to make sure they understand the truth of the Gospel.

Where have you seen false teachings like this impact modern-day churches?

* How have you seen leaders attempt to correct them?

Introduction: **Read Colossians 1:1-2**

It can be easy for us to glaze over the introduction to Paul’s different letters, yet Paul here is introducing himself, Timothy, and his cause to a group of people who he has never met and is going to challenge in some of their beliefs. Even as it is just the letter’s greeting, it does contain theology as well.

* What do you learn about this letter from the introduction? About Paul?
  + What is the significance of Paul referring to himself as “an apostle of Christ by the will of God,”?
  + “Paul writes to them because they already accept his authority, which derives from the gospel he has been called to preach, a gospel they have learned from Epaphras.” (Garland)
* How does the tone of this brief introduction prepare you for the rest of the letter?
* Paul does much work to remind the people of their ultimate identity in Christ and what that means for them now. If someone began a correction to you with this, how do you think that you would respond?

“Paul adopted the custom in ancient letter writing of offering a prayer of thanks to the gods and transformed this convention by expanding it and filling it with Christian meaning… Paul never trots out some stock, all-purpose prayer but carefully tailors it to the situation of the church he is addressing.” (Garland)

Thanksgiving: **Read Colossians 1:3-8**

* What are the three specific things that Paul thanks the Lord for here?
  + *The faith of the Colossians and how that has led to a love for one another, how the Gospel is sprouting and growing everywhere (including Colossae), and the foundation for the Gospel which Epaphras has given them.*
  + The traditional belief held is that Paul was imprisoned in Rome when he wrote this letter, meaning that news of the Colossians’ faith had traveled about the same distance (1,323 miles) as the drive from Blacksburg, VA to Austin, Texas!
* Paul seems to really hone in on the terms of faith, love, and hope; attributing the three terms to the Colossians. How does the presence of all three of these add to your understanding of the Colossian church and how they followed Jesus?
  + Which one of these words would you most associate with yourself and your personal relationship with Jesus? Why?
  + “Faith, hope, and love are mentioned numerous times in Scripture as a sort of ‘apostolic shorthand’ for genuine Christianity. None of these qualities can be manufactured by man; they all come from God.” (Hughes)
* Epaphras is a significant figure in the course of this letter’s writing. Let’s look at a few other references to him: **Read Colossians 4:12 & Philemon 23.**
  + These are the only other two mentions of Epaphras in the Bible.
  + Epaphras likely came to faith during Paul’s ministry in Ephesus and was somewhat responsible for the spread of Christianity to the Colossians.
  + How does the multiplicative nature of faith here impact how you view your life?
* Who is somebody that causes you to praise and thank God for his work in their life?
* How has the gospel been “bearing fruit” (v6) in and around you lately?
  + Are there any places nationally or internationally where you know that the gospel has been bearing fruit?

Paul's Prayer: **Read Colossians 1:9-14**

Paul’s “prayer was a beautifully constructed tapestry that makes a perfect model for the fabric of our own prayers. His example tells us how to pray for the knowledge, and then for the conduct, of the Church.” (Hughes)

* Is it surprising to you that Paul’s prayer for the church at Colossae is about knowledge and conduct? Why?
  + Why does Paul make sure to pray for them in this order? What benefit does this have for the Church?
  + “The knowledge that Paul has in view has nothing to do with some secret lore… For Paul, understanding God’s will involves recognizing how Christ is the fulfillment of God’s redemptive purposes (1:27, 2:2), how God’s salvation is open to all people, and how God intends for Christians to live in whatever situation they find themselves.” (Garland)
* What do you think of the way Paul prays for the believers in Colossae here? How does it compare to the way you pray for people?
  + Would any of Paul’s prayers here be too high of a standard or unattainable?
* How does Paul contrast life with and without Christ in v12-14?
* Even though Paul has not met any of these people, he does seem to have such a deep, honest care for them. How can we seek to cultivate a similar heart for believers around the world?
* Which of the things Paul prays for the Colossians here would be most meaningful for somebody to pray for your life right now?

“The situation facing the Colossians is also similar to ours today. They faced opponents who challenged and belittled the sufficiency of Christ and their hope… Discerning, confident, grateful and ethical Christians lead lives worthy of the Lord, are pleasing to God, and will bear spiritual fruit in a spiritually blighted world. Paul intends in this letter to help form this kind of believer.” (Garland)

**Challenge**: Over the next week, use Colossians 1:9-14 as your prayer model. Spend time praying for your family group, friends, other believers, family, etc. from this passage. **OR** Spend time praying that God would help you grow in each aspect of faith, love, and hope.