

Colossians

New Life: Full and Free

Introduction

I have several middle-aged friends who have bought computers as gifts for their parents. My friends have thought that this would open up new opportunities for their parents; they had visions of their parents surfing the net and emailing family or reconnecting with long-lost or distant friends. Sometimes that is what has happened. Unfortunately (and maybe predictably), many of these computers sit unused because the parents of my friends have not learned how to use it.

Paul tells the Colossians that a similar problem can arise in our spiritual lives. He says that as Christians we have everything we need to live lives that please God: we have the fullness of Christ. But many of us don't know what that means or don't know how that can make a difference in our lives.

In this study, we will look at what Paul teaches about all that is ours in Christ. ~D.S.

Power Tools

Col. 1:21–2:15

Observe & Interpret

1. *Read Colossians 1:21–23.* In these few short verses, Paul describes our past and our present and sets out a course of action for us. How would you express each of these in your own words? Why do you think Paul finds it necessary to mention each of these things?
2. *Read Colossians 1:24–2:5.* What verbs does Paul use to describe his life as an apostle? Are any of these words surprising to you? Paul says that he 'struggles' for the church. How do you think he struggles or labors for the church from such a distance?

Study Notes

Question 3

•Paul uses an unusual image in verse 24. F. F. Bruce offers one possible explanation for this text: *"At the back of Paul's mind there may be the rabbinical concept of the messianic birth pangs which were to be endured in the last days.... Jesus, the Messiah, had suffered on the cross; now his people, the members of his body, had their quota of affliction to bear, and Paul was eager to absorb as much as possible of this in his own 'flesh.'"* (F. F. Bruce, p. 83)

•Bruce notes that in verse 28, Paul counters the claims of some of the false teachers who believe that a special kind of spiritual knowledge is available only to a few people: "The repetition of 'everyone' is emphatic. There is no Christian teaching that is to be reserved for a spiritual elite. All the truth of God is for all the people of God." (Bruce, p. 87)

Question 4

For example, R. C. Lucas writes that Paul's main concern in 2:1–3 is for the unity of the church. Paul is concerned that if people believe the false teachers it will cause some to feel superior to others: *"Therefore [Paul's] special concern for the Colossians is that they should continue to be united in love. He writes specifically to encourage ...them to stick together.... The apostle recognizes that lasting unity depends upon truth as well as love."* (Lucas, p. 82)

Question 5

*Circumcision is the removal of the foreskin and was required of all Hebrew men in the Old Testament. It was foremost an act of obedience. It also served as an outward sign of the inward reality that the man was dedicated to God. It symbolized that he and his household were chosen by God to receive grace.

3. What are the things Paul says he has been called to share or to teach? What does he say motivates his ministry?

4. Do you see any connections between what Paul teaches and what inspires him in his ministry?

5. *Read Colossians 2:6–15.* In the first few verses (6–8), Paul encourages the Colossians to stay on course, to continue to build on the foundation they have in Christ and warns them about teachings that are different from what he knows they were taught. Then (in verses 9–15), Paul reminds them again of what is theirs as Christians. Why is it important that these things are already realities?
 - You received Christ Jesus

 - You have been given fullness in Christ

 - You were circumcised*, in the putting off of the sinful nature

 - You have been buried with him in baptism

 - You have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God

 - You have been made alive with Christ

Study Notes

Question 6

F. F. Bruce writes: *"...Christians by their union with [Christ] participate in his life. If the fullness of deity resides in him, his fullness was imparted to them.... Moreover, the one with whom Christians are united, and in whom they are filled, is the 'head of every principality and power.'"* (Bruce, p. 102)

Question 7

• R. C. Lucas suggests that these false teachers may have offered a more profound spirituality through following their teachings. But Paul counters that everything we need for our life with God is already accomplished and available to us: *"Is it that the visitors offered a deeper experience of dying and rising with Christ leading to a new release from the clinging power of sin? But writes Paul, in your conversion/ baptism, you were 'circumcised,' you were 'buried' with Christ, you were 'raised' with him. All this lies in the past. What Christ then did, the Christian now shares with him."* (Lucas, p. 100)

• F. F. Bruce writes of our burial with Christ: *"It involves the reckoning of one's former self with its desires and propensities to be dead, as a necessary prelude to putting on the new nature—putting on Christ himself in his resurrection life. What the believer puts off is 'the whole personality organized for, and geared into rebellion against God.'"* (Bruce, p. 104)

Question 8

Lucas writes that our life in Christ brings with it *"...not only the forgiveness of all our sins but also deliverance from all the powers of evil. We cannot speak of the enjoyment of one of these privileges without the other."*

6. How would you describe “the fullness of the Deity” that Paul says dwells in Christ (v. 9)? (Think of the attributes of God or of the names of God we see in Scripture.) Paul says that we have received “fullness in Christ.” In what ways do you think Christians should see evidence of this fullness in their lives?

7. Paul uses the images of circumcision and burial to describe how Christians are freed from the control of their sinful natures. How can these images (and knowing that they are already realities in the life of a believer) help Christians as they face temptation?

8. Paul says that we were also raised with Christ. How do verses 13–15 describe what this “resurrection life” looks like?

12. What is 'good news' for you in this passage? (What specific insight or encouragement has God given you as you have looked at these verses?) Close by thanking God for these things and asking him to help you live a life that reflects the truths you have learned.

Notes

Bruce, F. F., *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1984.

Lucas, R. C., *Fullness and Freedom: the message of Colossians and Philemon*, InterVarsity Press, 1980.