

Colossians

Group Leader Discussion Guides



VERSE BY VERSE MINISTRY
TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

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Instructions to Leaders

Purpose

These discussion guides are intended for use by leaders of home groups, Sunday school classes or other small group Bible study programs. By following these guides, leaders can direct a group through a rich discussion of the material presented in the accompanying audio lessons and listening guides.

Format

Each lesson is designed to support a 90-minute discussion period, though the lessons can be shortened. Leaders are encouraged to read through the entire discussion in advance of each meeting, making note of which topics or questions will be used.

Tips for a successful discussion

1. Don't distribute the discussion guide to the group members. Students should rely on their listening guides or other personal notes taken while listening to the audio.
2. Encourage every student to listen to the audio lesson in advance. The discussion material is written with the assumption that everyone has heard the audio.
3. Don't feel pressured to cover all the material in the discussion guide. Permit meaningful discussion to continue even if it means the group won't get to every question.
4. Use the questions in the guide to stimulate new discussion when the group goes quiet or to get a discussion back on track when it has gone too far "off topic."
5. Look for opportunities to turn the discussion toward personal application whenever possible, but only after the underlying Biblical truth has been understood.
6. Feel free to add your own points for discussion or draw questions or topics from the group itself.

Lesson 1A

Overview

The focus of this lesson is on introducing the principle characters and issues of the book of Colossians, and the sufficiency of the gospel for salvation and living. We will also look at Paul, the man, and how his life experience influenced his ministry and message to this church.

Paul has three concerns as he begins to address the church;

1. To establish his authority with the church,
2. To contend gently with their acceptance of false teachers and their teaching,
3. To establish a proper understanding of Christ and the grace of the Gospel.

Discussion Topics and Questions

1. Read Philippians 3:4-6
2. What are some of the ways Paul describes himself here as he looks back at himself pre-conversion?
3. Read Acts 7:54-58 and Acts 22:20. What do we learn about Paul in the first passage (and by his own admission in the second passage)?
4. Read Acts 9:1-5.
5. What was the purpose of Paul's journey to Damascus when he met the Lord?
6. Whom did the Lord say Paul was persecuting?

7. How do you think it affected Paul's post-conversion ministry to understand that he had been persecuting his Lord?
8. In what ways did Paul change? In what ways did he stay the same?
9. How does his passion and concern for this church and the issues it faces reflect the passion he had when he was still persecuting the church?
10. Read Colossians 1:2.
11. Why is it important that Paul doesn't limit his audience to the elders of the church?
12. How would knowing that Paul wrote to everyone (rather than just the leadership) make a difference to you, if you were a member of that church?
13. Read Colossians 1:3-6. Their faith is in whom? That faith springs from what?
14. Where did they first hear about Christ?
15. What is their faith bearing all over the world? How does that fact prove their faith to be trustworthy?
16. How would you explain the word "gospel" to an unbeliever?
(The word gospel is defined as "the glad tidings, or good news of salvation through Christ." More specifically, "the proclamation of the grace of God manifest and pledged in Christ." If you were to combine those definitions you might say, "The truth in God's word that His grace for salvation's sake is made complete in Christ.")

17. Read 2Corinthians 5:20b-21. These verses condense the gospel message to what simple message?
18. Read Colossians 1:5. How does this verse describe the gospel?
19. Read John 1:1-2, 14. What connection do these verses make between Christ and the word?
20. Read 1John 5:20. How does the end of 1John 5:20 describe Christ?
21. If you combine the truths from the last three verses, where then do we find the true God and eternal life – the gospel?
22. Read Revelation 19:11-15. Knowing the word of God is Christ manifest for us in this age, what follows the word of God (v.14)? What is the purpose of the sword (v.15)? Who will rule the nations with an iron scepter (v.13)?
23. If the Word of God is sufficient to command the armies of Heaven and strike down nations and rule them with an iron scepter, is there any way in which it is insufficient for our instruction?

Lesson 1B

Overview

This lesson follows Paul's teaching on how the word of God reveals God's will and shows us how to live in a manner worthy of our Lord. These topics and questions are more personal than Lesson 1A and may drive deeper, more emotional discussion.

Discussion Topics and Questions

1. Read Colossians 1:9-11
2. Where do we find the knowledge of God's will, spiritual wisdom, and understanding?
3. What special revelation is required for understanding God's will?
4. How are you doing at knowing God's will? How can you make strides in that area?
5. How are you doing at living a life worthy of Him, according to His will as revealed in His word? How can you improve in that area?
6. What kind of fruit (on earth) is God bringing from your obedience to His word?

7. False teachers, including gnostics, had come into the church at Colossae bringing “new revelation,” which added works as a requirement for salvation. Paul called their philosophy empty deception according to the traditions of men and the principles of this world. Can your group identify any false, man-made doctrines that are commonly taught in Christian circles today? Can you find Scripture that would contend with this false teaching?

(Examples might include the Prosperity Gospel, legalism in various forms, worship of Mary or other figures rather than Christ, etc.).

(Leader Note: Gnosticism had significantly influenced the early church, so it may be helpful to read up on this belief in advance of your group time in case you receive questions about this topic. Information about Gnosticism can be found on Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org) or at your local library.

Lesson 2A

Overview

The Creator of Heaven and Earth has reconciled believers to God. He has further charged us with the ministry of reconciliation and the work of discipling new believers.

We established in the past two weeks that the Gospel is sufficient for salvation and for godly living. In this lesson we explore more of the purpose and pattern of a life that has been reconciled to God.

Discussion Topics and Questions

1. Try reading Colossians 1:23 first followed by verse 22, replacing the word “yet” with the word “then.” What meaning can we take from reading Paul’s words in this order? Do you think he meant it this way?
2. According to verse 23, in what “faith” must I continue, firmly established, steadfast and unmoved?
3. Last week, we defined that word “gospel.” Now, what does “faith” actually mean?

(Strong’s Concordance defines faith as: “Conviction of the truth of anything, belief; in the New Testament a conviction or belief respecting man’s relationship to God and divine things, generally with the included idea of trust and holy fervor born of faith and joined with it. Relating to God, the conviction that God exists and is the creator and ruler of all things, the provider and bestower of eternal salvation through Christ. Relating to Christ, a strong and welcome conviction or belief that Jesus is the Messiah, through whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God.”)

4. Why do we need faith?

5. Pastor Armstrong taught in Lesson 2A that “the Body of Christ is appointed to suffer.” (Romans 8:15-18). Read 2Timothy 2:8-10. For whom do we suffer? Why?
6. Read Matthew 28:19-20. What name do we commonly give to this passage?
7. Review the following ideas as lead your group on a discussion of the true purpose and meaning of the Great Commission:

The definition of disciple from Strong’s Concordance: one who follows precepts and instructions, a learner or pupil. The word baptize comes from the Greek word baptizo. The word baptizo was used by the Greek poet and physician Nicander in his recipe for making pickles. In preparing to pickle vegetables, Nicander said the vegetable must first be “dipped” (i.e., bapto) into boiling water and then “baptised” (baptizo) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution., but the first word (bapto) is temporary, while the second (baptizo) is a permanent immersion. Remember, when the term “baptism” is used in the New Testament, this word usually refers to our spiritual union and transformation by faith in Christ (i.e., the baptism of the Holy Spirit) rather than to our water immersion which follows faith (see Mark 16:16: “He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.”).

(Optional) As a visual aid, bring a whole pickle in its jar of juice. As you remove the pickle from the jar, explain this is what it means to be baptized (spiritually speaking, in Christ by His Spirit). This was once a cucumber, and it still is, but it now has a new nature. You can’t separate the cucumber from the brine anymore. Every flavor, every seasoning is intermingled within the cucumber until you can’t even call it a cucumber anymore. It is a new creation. It has been thoroughly baptized. We need to first have faith in the gospel in order to baptize others with its truth.

8. In what ways can Christians fulfill the Great Commission? In the verses from Matthew 28, where do you think Jesus places the emphasis?
9. What kind of suffering can we expect as we go about the work of making disciples?
(Leader Note: Let the group discuss this, but if participants begin to describe suffering outside Biblical parameters, call them back to scriptures like Matthew 5:11, and Luke 6:22. Not all suffering is for the sake of the gospel.)
10. Read Ezekiel 3:17-21. How can you apply this scripture to the Great Commission from Matthew 28:19-20? How is speaking this kind of truth (even in love) bound to cause you to suffer?
11. Read Acts 5:40-41. How does this both instruct, and encourage us as we consider our responsibilities?
12. Name reasons why it is beneficial for the Body of Christ to suffer in the name of Christ.

Lesson 2B

Overview

This lesson explores the full impact of our salvation, particularly in the area of Christian liberty. Be prepared to handle difficult matters delicately, including allowing for differences of opinion over what behaviors and indulgences are permissible in the Christian walk.

Discussion Topics and Questions

1. Read Colossians 1:13. From what domain did Christ rescue us?
2. Read Colossians 1:21. What three things characterize us when we were under the authority of darkness?
3. Read Ephesians 2:1-3. How else do these verses characterize us before we believed in the gospel?
4. Read Colossians 2:9-13. Name all the things listed in these verses that happened to us when we believed the gospel message. Look for the words “with Him” and “in Him.”
5. From past weeks, we defined the Gospel in 2Corinthians 5:20-21. How do all the things you just read in Colossians 2 accomplish reconciliation with God and overcome the condition we were in previously?
6. Read 1John 2:23-24; 3:24; 4:15. What does it mean to be “in Him?”

7. Read Romans 10:8-11. How do these verses tie together what you've learned about the word, Christ and our salvation?

Leader Note: You have discussed the Gospel and the sufficiency of God's word with your group for the past few weeks, so this would be a good opportunity to gently offer an invitation to anyone who may feel led to profess faith in Christ to this group.

Remember, even a person who has attended church for many years may never have believed the Gospel nor made a profession of faith, so leave room for this possibility in your group.

8. Read Romans 14:1. Pastor Armstrong gave some examples of "disputable matters" in this week's lesson, which came directly from the verses in Colossians. For example, we are free to eat anything we like (Acts 10:9-15), but we are not free to use food in sinful ways, as in gluttony (Proverbs 23:19-20). We are free to drink alcoholic beverages (numerous references), but not to the point that we become drunk (Ephesians 5:18, Proverbs 23). Can the group list other disputable matters in which the Christian has liberty?

9. Read 1 Corinthians 8:10-12 from the NLT:

But you must be careful with this freedom of yours. Do not cause a brother or sister with a weaker conscience to stumble. You see, this is what can happen: Weak Christians who think it is wrong to eat this food will see you eating in the temple of an idol. You know there's nothing wrong with it, but they will be encouraged to violate their conscience by eating food that has been dedicated to the idol. So because of your superior knowledge, a weak Christian, for whom Christ died, will be destroyed. And you are sinning against Christ when you sin against other Christians by encouraging them to do something they believe is wrong.

10. Read Romans 14:14 printed here from the NLT:

"But if someone believes it is wrong, then for that person it is wrong."

11. Based on these two passages, what two things should always restrain our freedoms?
12. Read 1 Corinthians 8:8-11. What can happen to a brother when we don't exercise restraint?
13. Is there a place in your life where you have been mastered by your freedoms? Is there anyone watching you who could be "destroyed" by your exercise of freedom? Who, and how could that happen?
14. Paul says that no one is to judge us in terms of our salvation based on disputable matters – those things over which we may disagree but which God's word doesn't restrict. We are free to enjoy all these things, but are they always beneficial? Are there any freedoms that members of your group are feeling led to forgo in light of today's teaching?

Lesson 3

Overview

Paul turns to discussing the importance of living a life consistent with faith, including restraining the flesh against temptation..

This lessons explores temptation and the power of the Spirit God's word to withstand temptation.

Discussion Topics and Questions

1. Read Ephesians 2:10. For what were we created?
2. Read Romans 6:13. What should we stop doing? What should we do instead?
3. Read Romans 12:1. How are we to present our bodies to God? Why?
4. In this week's audio Pastor Armstrong said, "Our body doesn't matter except in how it's used by Christ." How does that statement compliment the verses you just read?
5. What happens to the works God prepared for us if we don't offer our bodies to the Lord?
6. As we go about doing the works that God prepared in advance for us to do, we struggle with one predominant issue. Read Colossians 3:5, 8. Sum up (in one word if possible) what usually troubles us.

7. Read Ephesians 6:12, 17. Where does the temptation to sin often come from?
With what specific weapon do we fight according to verse 17?
8. There are two more things to remember that will give us help in the battle. Read 1Corinthians 10:13. What will God give us? Why has He given it to us? Focus on the end of verse 13.

Leader Note: The NIV uses the phrase “stand up under it,” which is a better picture, because these verses teach God doesn’t remove the temptation but helps us to overcome. Think of it like remaining under the weight of a heavy burden but having the strength to lift and carry it. It might be beneficial to explain this to your group.)

9. Read 2Corinthians 10:5. What other method do we have at our disposal to fight the war against sin.
10. Pastor Armstrong taught, “What God asks us to do is yield to Him. It’s not that we can’t but that we won’t.” How do the verses from the Corinthian letters show that to be true? Are we helpless in the battle? What is our struggle really against?

Leader Note: This is an opportunity to teach your group to use their Bibles in a very practical way. Choose a sin (an everyday issue like driving over the speed limit). Explain to the group the root of this behavior is a willful rebellion. Point them to a concordance (perhaps in the back of their Bible) and show them how to find relevant verses by looking up the topics of “rebellion” or “obedience.” You might use the verses from 1Samuel 15:23, and Romans 13:1-7 or perhaps Romans 13:1. Locate Romans 13:1 and show the group how to follow the cross-references found in that verses, perhaps 1Peter 2:13-14 or Mark 12:17. These verses can be written on note cards and carried in a purse or wallet so that when the temptation arises, they can be used

to take rebellious thoughts captive against that temptation, giving strength to yield to God's word.

One student's example of using scripture note cards to curtail temptation: I find it helpful to purchase a small purse sized photo album in which to carry the note cards. Sometimes I have them in my purse, sometimes just in my car or in a place where temptation often strikes. When a season of struggle passes, one is usually hard on its heels, so I move cards out of the album and into a recipe box, adding new cards to the album as I need new weapons. By the time I've made a rotation, I have hidden God's word in my heart by having memorized those verses; therefore I am always armed should those temptations arise once more.

11. Concluding thoughts for discussion: If we aren't abiding in the word and it in us, then it is much easier for us to be lured away and taken captive by false teachers and outright enemies. When that happens, the church loses its effectiveness, because we are not submitting our bodies to the One who created us and to the works He prepared for us. Our spiritual act of worship is obedience and that is possible if we will learn to fight the spiritual battle and maintain focus on things above.

Lesson 4

Overview

The Creator of Heaven and Earth has reconciled believers to God. He has further charged us with the ministry of reconciliation and the work of discipling new believers.

We established in the past two weeks that the Gospel is sufficient for salvation and for godly living. In this lesson we explore more of the purpose and pattern of a life that has been reconciled to God.

Discussion Topics and Questions

1. Read 1 John 4:16. If God is love, and He is the source of love, how do we access that source?

(Leader Note: If the group stumbles on this point, have them read John 15:7 for clarification. God is love, we abide in love by abiding in the word and letting the word abide in us. The word is our source for love as the Holy Spirit causes it to live through us.)

2. In this week's audio Pastor Armstrong said that Bible study should not be an event. Explain what he meant, especially considering how the word is the driving force behind living a life of love for God and toward men.
3. Read Philippians 2:7 and John 13:3-5. If we follow Christ's example, what must you do in order to show agape love? (How does this support what you learned yesterday from Romans 6:13?)

4. Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. What does this add to what you just learned about becoming a servant?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

(Leader Note: Use the handout at the end of this lesson and follow these instructions.

6. Read the verses again and as you read, have the group list in each column the descriptions they hear in these verses. Then have them write the word “God” above each column heading like this:

GOD	GOD
Love Is	Love Is NOT

Have them read each column aloud together with the new heading. For example, the first one would read, “God is patient,” etc. Then have the group write above the word “God,” the words “I AM/I DO” or “I AM NOT/I DO NOT” like this:

I AM/I DO	I AM NOT/I DO NOT
GOD	GOD
Love Is	Love Is NOT

Now, have them read the columns aloud together with the “I” headings and finish with the words printed at the bottom of the page. These are the attributes of agape love. When we display these attributes, we reflect the word of God richly dwelling within us.

7. In what areas of our lives are we most tempted to sin, resistant to serving God or God's people, living in unrestrained freedom, etc. and how does the pursuit of agape help us?

(Leader Note: Give them a personal example to open the discussion. Obvious examples can be found in husband/wife relationships, sibling relationships, neighbor relationships, etc. Be sure to give examples of where study of God's word and the pursuit of agape love address these temptations.)

8. As he discussed the different ways we submit to one another in our audio lesson, Pastor Armstrong made the point that every group is called to be similarly self-sacrificial and to be loving and content regardless of the circumstances. When in a relationship with someone who is sinning, whose responsibility is it to show agape love?
9. How would it affect your ability to show agape love if you were in a period of time where you were not regularly reading and studying your Bible?
10. As you consider your roles in these relationships, to whom you ultimately submit?

(Leader Note: Be sure the group understands how ultimately, we submit to God, Who gave us these guidelines. Husbands, wives, sons, daughter, friends and employers inevitably fail us, but we obey God because God never will fail us.)

11. If you read Paul's remarks about love from the NIV you'll see that he says we are to "put on" love over all the virtues he mentioned in the prior verses. Love binds all those together and creates unity. As an article of clothing, what could love represent?

(Leader Note: Bring an overcoat or a robe that you can put on to demonstrate that all the things you are wearing underneath are bound and held in place by the outer garment. Ask a volunteer with a good sense of humor to read 1Peter 4:8 and as they do, remove your coat or robe and drape it over the other person's shoulders, then ask: "How does the coat/robe of love cover a multitude of sins for me, the one who has been sinned against?")

Hopefully, through your study of the book of Colossians you have come to see that we are all soldiers, working together, serving the Lord the same because we are the body of Christ. We are ambassadors for Christ saved with eternal purpose, called to live a life that mirrors Him, and there are eternal consequences for how we carry out this calling.

Our dwelling in God's word will be the lamp to our feet for what He would have us to achieve. False teaching seeks to throw us off the path and thwart God's eternal purpose. Nevertheless, love never fails. It never fails to create peace, or unity or to cover a multitude of sin's pain. There is only one Source for the kind of love that enables us to follow Christ's example, and that Source is sufficient for all our needs.

**Colossians
Discussion Guide
Lesson 4 Handout**

Love Is

Love Is NOT

Love never fails.