CHRIST PREEMINENT

the word of truth - colossians 1:1-8

FOR THE FACILITATOR

Background

In the letter to the Colossians Paul is writing to a church he has never visited (2:1). The church in Colossae was planted by one of his trusted associates, Epaphras (1:7), who was also a native of Colossae (4:12). Nevertheless, Paul feels a profound sense of responsibility for them as a steward of the gospel for all Gentiles (1:25). He expresses concern that the Colossians are unsure if they really understand all that they should, or know the whole story of the gospel (2:2). While he insists that the Colossians have received the true gospel from Epaphras, he also recognizes that because of their potential doubt, they are in danger of being influenced by false teachers (1:5, 7, 2:4). He begins his letter by thanking God that all the signs of the influence of the true gospel are present in their community (1:3). Like everywhere else the hope of the gospel is faithfully proclaimed, in Colossae, many believed and began to live lives of love (1:4-5).

The Big Idea

Paul, as an apostle, instills confidence in the Colossians by approving of the fruit he sees in their lives and by verifying the faithfulness of their church founder Epaphras.

Fallen Condition Focus

When we are not sure we know or understand the truth we are susceptible to false teachers.

Christ Centered Solution

We can be “subjectively” confident that we possess the truth because the grace of God in the true gospel is powerful to produce hope, faith and love in Christian individuals and communities. We can be “objectively” confident that our messengers communicated the truth if they are approved of by an Apostolic witness. In the early church the authoritative witnesses were the Apostles commissioned by Christ. Today we possess this same witness in the Scriptures.

FOR THE GROUP

Launch

Have you ever been put in a situation where you had to rely on someone you weren't quite sure was trustworthy? Or, have you ever experienced a time of vulnerability or uncertainty that led you to put your trust in someone you shouldn't have? Tell us the story or describe the experience.

Transition Statement

In relationships and in life we hate feelings of uncertainty. We dislike these feelings so much that in times of uncertainty we are especially vulnerable to clinging to anyone that promises us a "sure thing". The same is true in our spiritual lives. If we are unsure about the truth of the gospel and our standing with God, we are especially vulnerable to being manipulated by untrustworthy influences. Today we want to consider how God works among his people to instill confidence that they possess the truth.

Explore

Apostolic Authority - Read 1:1-2

1. Look over Paul's greeting. How might the various elements serve to encourage a church dealing with uncertainty?

The Power of the Gospel - Read 1:3-5a

2. Paul's prayer of thanks mentions three theologically significant concepts: Faith, Love and hope. How would you define each of these as they are used in the Bible and how do they relate to each other?

The Word of Truth - Read 1:5b-8

3. Paul indicates Epaphras planted the Colossian church in verse 7. How might it have affected the church in Colossae that it was not planted by an Apostle?
4. How does Paul describe Epaphras and his message? What is he trying to emphasize?
5. Why might it be significant for the Colossians to hear that the gospel had the same effect in their community that it is having all over the world?
6. Summarize the various ways Paul is trying to instill confidence in the Colossians that they received the true gospel from Epaphras.

Apply

7. Have you ever felt uncertain about the people you learned Christ from? Or have you ever felt unsure about whether you rightly understood the message? How did that affect your relationship with God?
8. In what ways do you see the gospel increasing and bearing fruit in your life and community? How does this help give you assurance that what you believe is the truth?
9. How confident are you in your ability to compare the Bible to what is being said by teachers you are exposed to in our culture?
10. What would it look like for our community to be engaged in promoting the fruitfulness and increase of the gospel?