**Sermon Based Small Group Discussion Questions**

**Being Rooted and Growing in Christ: Paul’s letter to the Colossians**

Contending in a Rival Kingdom (Colossians 1:1-14)

You might want to read the letter of the Colossians together and then focus on a few choice questions below. Why do that? Well, pretend that you are that church in Colossae. You have just begun to form into a Christian community. Everything is new. There is not much to copy. You are learning as you go. Paul sent the letter and it was to be read to them all. They would have all gathered in a home to listen to someone read it. Give it a shot.

1. What of the message was maybe new to you?
2. What seems to be the big theme of the letter? What does Paul’s prayer say about the purpose of the letter?
3. Our series is titled Rooted and Growing in Christ? Why pick that title? What do you think is the connection between being rooted and growing in Christ? What verses in the letter shed a light on that theme? Can you connect the themes of rooted in and growing to OT passages (you should be able to since the image is very much OT like—think of images of Israel and how God imagined them to be in the world).
4. Paul contrasts the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of light in verse 13 and 14. What is the significance of that comparison? How does that shape Paul’s teaching and encouragements in this letter?
5. Bonus discussion: Discuss some interpretive questions about reading and applying a biblcial text. The goal of the question is to sensitive you to the challenge of reading, interpreting, and applying a text for today. A good discussion should lead one to grow in humility toward the text and to trust the Spirit who can bring insight.
   1. How important is it to understand the Roman context into which this letter is written?
   2. Could we understand the nature and value of what is being taught in this letter apart from knowing the historical context? Why?
   3. Is it even possible for us to get a good enough handle on the historical uniqueness of the ancient text and its times so that it message is useful for us today?
   4. To understand the meaning and implications of the message today do we need to understand our particular context? Why?
   5. How do we connect the “two historical horizons” (then and now) in some way as to be of benefit for us today?
6. The sermon built upon the insights of Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat who together wrote the commentary: Colossians Remixed-Subverting the Empire. They assert that this letter is a direct assault on the Roman Empire. They offer four characteristics that are common to all empires even empires today. Discuss. Are these characteristics true of perhaps our Western Empire? In what way?
   1. Systematic Centralizing of Power (i.e. the paterfamilias—rule of the Father)
   2. Economic and Military Oppression (i.e. Road building and executions)
   3. Promotion of the their Message (i.e. Pax Romana)
   4. Capture the Imagination (saturated society with Roman ways)
7. I used an image that Richard Middleton used to describe Walsh and Keesmaat wrote:

This book is a Molotov Cocktail lobbed into the midst of contemporary biblical studies and the American Empire….It demonstrates how a faithful reading of Colossians addresses, head on, our contemporary idolatry of consumerism and the postmodern suspicion of truth that characterizes our culture.

How does Paul throw, metaphorically speaking, Molotov Cocktails into the Roman Empire?

1. How discerning are you about the Empire you dwell in? Are you as discerning as Paul? Are you as ready to throw a Molotov Cocktail? Do Christians today seem more like the “frog in the kettle” or more like “a Kinder-Morgan Protester.”
2. Is the gospel political? How so? What do you think about the idea of the separation of church and state? What do you see as good examples of Christians involved in politics? Bad examples?
3. Molotov’s are fueled by some accelerant. What might be the cocktail mix of Paul’s Molotov (3:12ff). Where have you thrown your latest cocktail or where could you?