

Bible Study Guide

Term 1 2020

COLOSSIANS
ONWARD
IN CHRIST

Introduction to Colossians

*This term we'll be studying the relatively short but tightly-packed book of Colossians. Colossians is a letter written about **AD 62** by the apostle **Paul** (see Acts 9 for his origin story) to the Christians in Colossae.*

***Colossae** was a town in what's now southwest Turkey. It had previously been a significant trading centre, but by the time of the letter was in decline. A few years after the letter was written, the city was destroyed by earthquake. Today, it's buried under dirt.*

*There's no record of Paul ever going to Colossae. But his ministry in nearby Ephesus about AD 52-55 had a wide impact (see Acts 19:10). It seems that the Colossian church started after the Colossian man **Epaphras** heard the gospel in Ephesus and took it back to his hometown (Col 1:7 & 4:12). So Paul is writing to a church he didn't plant and has probably never met!*

At the time of writing, Paul was in prison in Rome. He wrote his letter to the Ephesians about the same time, and has a lot of similar content.

*Key verses: **"So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness"** (Col 2:6-7)*

Study 1: Colossians 1:1-14

Read Colossians 1:1-2

1. How does Paul describe himself, and how does he describe his readers?
2. What kind of tone do these descriptions set for the letter?

Read Colossians 1:3-8

3. What do verses 7-8 reveal about the relationship between Paul and the Colossian Christians?
4. Faith, hope and love are a trio of key ideas for Paul. Draw a little diagram of how they are related in these verses.

(continued overleaf...)

Read Colossians 1:9-14

5. Paul gives a detailed account of how he prays for the Colossians. Fill in the blanks below to unpack the flow of ideas.

Paul asks God to...

V9b

...so they will...

V10a

-
-

...which involves:

V10b

-
-
-
-

V10c

V11

V12a

6. In verses 12b-14, Paul talks about an amazing transfer that has happened for his readers, and for all followers of Jesus.

- a. Where were they previously?
- b. Where are they now?
- c. What blessings come with this new position?
- d. Do you see yourself in this way? Why or why not?

7. Consider the overall picture of the Christian life in this section.
 - a. What is completed already?
 - b. What is ongoing?
 - c. Why would it be important not to mix up (a) and (b)?

Responding to the passage overall:

8. Does anything in this passage relate to the growth area you have chosen for 2022? Or, does anything here help you in choosing a growth area?



9. Think about your individual prayer life, our small group, and our church overall. When do we pray and give thanks for other Christians? How about Christians that we've never met? What opportunities do we have to grow in this?
10. Write down 1 or 2 examples of faith and/or love shown by someone in your group. Pray and give thanks to God for those things together.
11. Pray for your group life this year using the points in verses 9b onwards.

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 2: Colossians 1:15-23

1. If someone asked you “who is Jesus?”, how would you respond in 1-2 sentences?

Read Colossians 1:13-20 (*this gives a few verses of context*)

2. Underline or write down each time Paul uses the words ‘all’, ‘every’ and ‘full’. What point is Paul making?
3. What is Jesus’ relationship to God?
4. What is Jesus’ relationship to the created universe?
5. What is Jesus’ relationship to the church?
6. In what ways is Jesus “firstborn”? What does this mean?
7. How does the picture of Jesus in these verses compare to your answer to question 1? Are there key ideas that are different?

Read Colossians 1:21-23

8. In verse 21 Paul says more about his readers' previous state in the "dominion of darkness" (v13).
 - a) What aspects of this condition does he highlight? Do any of them surprise you?

 - b) Do you agree with this description of what you would be without Jesus? Do you think of your non-Christian friends, relatives, neighbours this way?

9. In light of these verses:
 - a) What do we need to do to be reconciled to God, presented as holy in his sight and free from accusation?

 - b) Is doing this your highest priority in life? What other things get in the way or distract you? What can help us maintain focus?

Reflect on the passage as whole

10. Does anything in this passage relate to the growth area you have chosen for 2022? Or, does anything here help you in choosing a growth area?

11. Spend some time in prayer, simply praising Jesus for his exalted position over all things.



Notes & Prayer Points

Study 3: Colossians 1:24 – 2:5

1. Can you think of a time when there was a secret – a mystery – that other people knew about and you wanted to know about?

Read Colossians 1:23b – 2:5

2. Find the places where the word “mystery” is mentioned in this passage
 - a) What has happened to the mystery?

 - b) What is the content of the mystery?

3. Paul says quite a lot about himself in this passage, but his own reputation is actually not his ultimate concern. What does he say about:
 - a) His role and identity

 - b) His activity

 - c) His intentions and goals

In the rest of chapter 2, Paul will warn against false teaching that was infiltrating the Colossian church. The exact details of it are unclear, but it seems to have involved a claim that Paul’s gospel message was insufficient. False teachers were arguing that to be “mature” and “complete”, believers needed extra, special wisdom and knowledge which was only available from them. They may have been pointing to Paul’s suffering in prison as evidence that his gospel was inadequate to reach full maturity.

4. How does today's passage counteract any claims that the gospel of Jesus isn't enough?

5. What kind of "extra knowledge" and "fine sounding arguments" might tempt us to move on from the gospel today? How can we resist them?

Look again at Colossians 1:24

Reading this section in light of the false teaching mentioned later in the chapter also helps us understand this tricky verse. The false teachers were claiming there was something lacking in the Colossians' spirituality. In fact, all that is "lacking" in the gospel is the need to proclaim it far and wide. Paul uses the same Greek words in Philippians 2:30 when he says that Epaphroditus "filled up what was lacking" in the Philippians' gift to him. There was nothing deficient about the gift itself, but Epaphroditus was the one who delivered it to its recipient. Paul is using the same language here for his gospel-delivery ministry. It's him, rather than the false teachers, who is "filling up what is lacking". And when he suffers in the process, he is walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

6. Paul mentions that he rejoices in suffering for the gospel.
 - a) Why would he do this? Can you find hints in the passage?

 - b) Should we rejoice when we suffer for belonging to Jesus? Why? How?

Reflect on the passage as whole

7. Does anything in this passage relate to the growth area you have chosen for 2022? Or, does anything here help you in choosing a growth area?



Pray for those worldwide who suffer for the gospel, and that we would rejoice when we experience opposition to our faith.

Notes & Prayer Points

- b) How can we tell the difference between someone guiding us in how to “live a life worth of the Lord, pleasing him in every way” (1:10) and someone using outdated or man-made rules to judge or disqualify us (2:16-23)?

Although we don't know the full details of the false teaching in Colossae, we can still benefit from the great truths Paul uses to oppose the false teaching. He shows the sufficiency of Christ in several ways.

5. Fill in the table below to unpack the blessings we have in Christ:

Verses	<u>In Christ</u> , we have...	which means we don't need to... <i>(consider other verses too)</i>
9-10		
11-12		
13a		
13b-14		
15		

Reflect on the passage as whole

6. Does anything in this passage relate to the growth area you have chosen for 2022? Do any of the “in Christ” blessings above particularly empower you in your area of growth? Has the passage revealed some *wrong* ways of pursuing growth, which you need to avoid?



Send each other out with the words of Colossians 2:6-7.

Notes & Prayer Points

Study 5: Colossians 3:1-11

Having dealt with the danger of false teaching, Paul now picks up the positive statements he made about our life in Christ, and unpacks their implications for how we live.

To recap, **read Colossians 2:9-14**

1. Briefly list what Paul says here about the state of Christian believers

Read Colossians 3:1-4 where Paul picks up this thread of ideas.

2. Paul gives a few commands here. (They are general in nature and he'll spell out details in later verses.) What reasons does he give for setting our hearts and minds on things above?
3. Do you see yourself the way Paul describes here?
If not, what holds you back?

Read Colossians 3:5-11

We discover here that “earthly things” (v2) refers not to the mundanities of physical life, but ungodly behaviours that belong to our old pre-Christ identity.

4. The command “put to death...” (v5) is very stark. How does it relate to the previous verses?
5. Look at the list of behaviours in verses 5, 8 and 9.
 - a. Does anything in this list surprise you?

- b. Now that we belong to Christ, these things have no logical place in our lives. But until Jesus returns, all of us are in the process of ridding ourselves of these things. For you, which of them are you most susceptible to?

6. What reasons for change does Paul give in this section?

7. How do you think verse 11 connects with the previous verses?

8. How does his passage relate to the growth area you have chosen for 2022?



Notes & Prayer Points

Study 6: Colossians 3:11-17

1. Imagine two random humans H1 and H2. Fill in the blanks below to create examples of typical, worldly human relationships.

- a) H1 and H2 are likely to treat each other with kindness
if H1 is a _____ and H2 is a _____
- b) H1 and H2 are likely to have hostility and distrust between them
if H1 is a _____ and H2 is a _____

Today we pick up the second half of Paul's teaching about how to live as those who are in Christ. In the first part of chapter 3 he focussed on what to "take off". Now, we hear what to "put on", especially in the context of Christian community.

Read Colossians 3:11-17 (*deliberate overlap with last week's reading*)

2. What point does verse 11 make about the Christian community?
3. Verse 11 lists some deeply-entrenched divisions from the first century. Can you re-write the verse with some 21st-century examples?

"Here (in Christ's church), there is no _____ or _____,
_____ or _____, _____ or _____,
but Christ is all, and is in all"

4. How are Christians described in verse 12? What's your reaction to being described this way?
5. Divide up the virtues in verses 12-14 amongst your group. Have each person choose a colour for their assigned word, and give a reason why.
- *compassion* • *kindness* • *humility* • *gentleness* • *patience*
 - *forbearance(putting-up-with)* • *forgiveness* • *love*

6. Which of these things do you find hardest to live out? Why?

7. How do the truths from verses 11 and 12 help us in putting on these virtues within the Christian community?

8. Look at verse 15. What do you think it means for the peace of Christ to “rule” in our hearts? (Not “fill”, “comfort” or “soothe”!) Consider the surrounding sentences. What’s one way to put this into practice?

9. Verse 15 ends with “be thankful”. In the context of this section, what sort of things might this involve thanking God for?

10. Verse 16 calls us to have the message of Christ dwell amongst us richly as we teach and admonish one another. What are some ways we can be doing that in our lives at All Saints:
 - a) On Sundays during the service

 - b) On Sundays before/after the service

 - c) In this small group

d) In our families

e) At other times?

11. Verse 17 sets a very broad scope for living for Christ – “*Whatever* you do...”!

a. What are some areas of your life that you tend to see as disconnected from Christ and irrelevant to your trust in him?

b. Acting “in someone’s name” means acting as their representative and being empowered by them. What would it look like to do these things “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him”?

12. Does anything in this passage relate to the growth area you have chosen for 2022?



Notes & Prayer Points

Study 7: Colossians 3:18 – 4:1

Flowing out of the overarching exhortation to “do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” in 3:17, today we see some specific instructions for people in particular household positions. This kind of “household code” is common in the New Testament and early Christian writings, demonstrating how much it matters to live Christianly in our home environment.

Some parts of today’s passage seem unattractive to modern ears. Our context differs in various ways, and some thoughtfulness is needed when we put this into practice, but if we see the Bible as God’s authoritative word, we can’t just ignore the parts we find difficult.

Read Colossians 3:17 – 4:1 (*deliberate overlap with the previous section*)

1. Look through this section for the words “lord” and “master”. How does this connect the section back to 3:17?
2. Paul is here giving different instructions to different people. How do you think this relates to what he said in 3:11?
3. What common features are found in the instructions to people in more powerful positions?

Household codes a bit like this were also written in this period by pagans and Jews. But Paul is not simply telling Christians to fit in with whatever standards the surrounding culture holds. (In the previous chapter, he strongly opposed submitting to merely man-made rules (2:20-22)). Paul writes a distinctively Christian household code, where the more powerful members have responsibilities as well as rights, and the less powerful members have rights as well as duties. The fact that he writes to wives, children and slaves shows they are fully-fledged church members with their own dignity and value. As we read this list we should consider the instructions to both sides of each ‘pair’ together.

Consider verses 18-19

Paul's instructions here to husbands and wives are very brief. You might like to read his fuller explanation of his reasoning in Ephesians 5:25-33.

4. If you are married: how do you think these commands should work out in practice today? It's a big topic, but can you think of one thing to aim for and one thing to avoid?

5. If you're not married but think you might get married in the future: How does this passage influence your decision about who to marry, or who to date?

Consider verses 20-21

6. In what ways can parents – especially fathers – embitter their children? If you're a parent, what things in your heart lead you to treat your kids this way? What truths do we need to lean on to change in this area?

7. If you're an adult who lives with your parents, how do you think this should play out in your situation?

(continued overleaf...)

Consider 3:22 – 4:1

The instructions to slaves and masters are much longer, probably because the issue with Philemon and Onesimus was playing out at the same time (See the book of Philemon and Col 4:9). Slavery was a basic economic structure in the first century and overturning it was unimaginable at the time. Though it was often exploitative, it wasn't racially based, and slaves sometimes became skilled and respected household contributors. Employment arrangements in our context are different, but we can still learn from what was written back then.

8. If you are an employee, how might you apply some of the principles here to your behaviour at work?

9. If you employ or supervise others at work, how might you apply some of these principles in your workplace?

Think about the passage overall and the way 3:17 underpins it all.

10. Does anything we've discussed today relate to the growth area you have chosen for 2022?



Notes & Prayer Points

Study 8: Colossians 4:2-18

In this section Paul wraps up his exhortations to the Colossian believers and returns to the topic of his own ministry and partnership with them, which he discussed in chapter 1.

1. Who are the people who have influenced you most in your Christian walk? What aspects of their lives and ministry made an impact on you?

Read Colossians 4:2-6

2. What do you think it means to be “watchful and thankful” whilst devoting yourself to prayer?

3. Paul is in prison (v3) but he doesn’t ask for prayer for his welfare. What does he ask for instead?

4. God uses his people to spread the news about Jesus.
 - a) What is the first step in the gospel-telling process?

 - b) Paul, as an apostle, has a particular task. What is it? Who has this kind of responsibility today?

 - c) The Colossian Christians also have a role to play. What is it?

- d) Verse 6 makes a point about all types of conversation.
- i. How does this relate to speaking about Jesus specifically?

 - ii. Are there areas where your conversation is *not* “full of grace”? What needs to change?

As the letter concludes, Paul returns to the relational context in which he’s writing to the Colossians. Clearly this was most “relevant” to the individuals involved at the time. But we can notice and be encouraged by some features of this interaction.

Read Colossians 4:7-18

5. Paul could simply have written “Greetings from A, B, C, D, E and F”. But he often adds a label or description to the names he includes.

a) How does he describe the various fellow Christians in this section?

- V7 _____

- V9 _____

- V10 _____

- V12 _____

- V14 _____

b) How does this compare to the way you refer to Christians you know? Would there be value in speaking more like Paul?

Notes & Prayer Points
