

COLOSSIANS

BOOK BIBLE STUDY

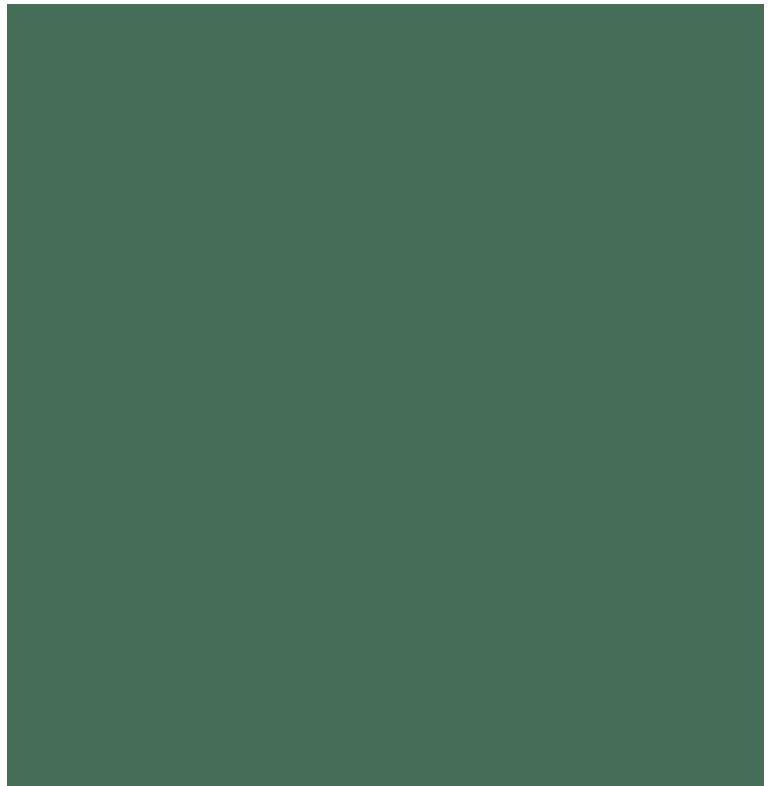


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**INTRODUCTION
TO
COLOSSIANS**

The Christian Church at Colosse was one which Paul himself had not founded and which he had never visited. He classes the Colossians and the Laodiceans with those who had never seen his face in the flesh (2:1). But no doubt the founding of the Church sprang from his directing. During his three years in Ephesus the whole province of Asia was evangelized, so that all its inhabitants, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord (Acts 19:10). Colosse was about one hundred miles from Ephesus and it was no doubt in that campaign of expansion that the Colossian Church was founded. We do not know who its founder was; but it may well have been Epaphras, who is described as Paul's fellow-servant and the faithful minister of the Colossian Church and who is later connected also with Hierapolis and Laodicea (1:7; 4:12, 13). If Epaphras was not the founder of the Christian Church there, he was certainly the minister in charge of the area.¹

Epaphras had paid Paul a visit in Rome (see below) and informed him of the state of the churches in the Lycus valley. While much of the report was encouraging (1:8; 2:5), one disquieting feature was an attractive, but false, teaching that had recently been introduced into the congregation and which, if it went unchecked, would overturn the gospel and bring the Colossians into spiritual bondage. Paul's letter was written as a response to this urgent need.²

Colossians was written to a negligible Phrygian Christian community almost two thousand years ago, and yet it still speaks relevantly today. It gives witness "to the finality, adequacy and all-sufficiency of the cosmic Christ—by whom and for whom all things were made, in whom they cohere, and with whom in God the life of the Christian and of the Church is hidden." That truth will never go out of date.

But the situation facing the Colossians is also similar to ours today. They faced opponents who challenged and belittled the sufficiency of Christ and their hope. Christians today live in a secular society, which regularly scoffs at Christian faith. Many Christians in the West have become increasingly uncertain of their faith and consequently hold it uncertainly. ...When Christians do not understand their faith, they are likely to water down the gospel and accommodate it to cultural expectations. They will cut out any offending articles of faith or append specious ones more in accord with the fashion of the age. Paul wrote to the Colossians to help them grasp ever more firmly who Christ is and the rich glories of all that God has done in him.

¹ Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1975). *The letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (electronic ed., pp. 93-94). Philadelphia: The Westminster John Knox Press.

² Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1261). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

When Christians have little confidence in their faith, they will be overly tentative in their claims and easily shaken by challenges. Paul hoped to fortify the Colossians in their assurance of the hope they had in Christ. The letter affirms that God's creation has a divine purpose, which is brought to fulfillment in and through Christ. It affirms the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as the fullness of God and as our Creator and Redeemer.

When Christians do not live with a deep sense of gratitude for what God has done for them in Christ, they will become engulfed in anxieties and will be tempted to look for security in something other than Christ. Paul repeatedly urged the Colossians to be thankful for the victory already won for them by Christ's cross and resurrection. Salvation can be found only in Christ, and Christians do not need something else or something more. The cross brings redemption, the forgiveness of sin, and triumph over all the powers that would oppress human life. Every believer is made complete when placed under the complete claim of Christ, and all the spiritual ills of our world find their only cure in him.

When Christians live no differently from those around them who do not know God or who defy God's commands, they bring discredit to their faith and cause others to think that their claims are false. The letter to the Colossians argues that Christians must not only be solidly grounded in their faith. They must also be ethically above reproach. Discerning, confident, grateful, and ethical Christians lead lives worthy of the Lord, are pleasing to God, and will bear spiritual fruit in a spiritually blighted world. Paul intends in this letter to help form this kind of believer.³

³ Garland, D. E. (1998). *Colossians and Philemon* (pp. 32-33). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.



COLOSSIANS
1:1-14

GREETING

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

THANKSGIVING AND PRAYER

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. ¹¹ May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.



COLOSSIANS
1:1-14

1:3-5

What about the Colossians was Apostle Paul thankful for?

In what way does a confident hope of heaven strengthen “love for the saints” and “faith in Jesus?”

1:5-8

How do these verses describe the arrival and progress of the gospel among the Colossians?

The gospel, “the word of truth,” was bearing fruit and increasing among the Colossians. What might be some reasons for the gospel not bearing fruit and increasing?

1:9-12

Apostle Paul, now in prison, expresses his love for the Colossians through his prayer for them. This prayer expresses the Apostle’s high wishes for them. It’s a prayer by which we can measure our spiritual progress, as well as a model of how we can pray for others. List out the things that he prays about for them. What do you notice about the progression of ideas here?

vv. 11-14 is interesting in that the first half invokes a series of strong realities all of which are intended to lead the Colossians to do what? Why would this be important for the Colossians? [Note the emphasis on knowledge here: “heard and understood” (1:6), “learned it” (1:7)].

1:12-14

Here, Apostle Paul summarizes the promises of the gospel in brief. What do you notice about what he lists here?



1:1-14

Identify five or six marks of a healthy Christian (or church) based on this passage. How am I doing in each of these areas?

COLOSSIANS

1:1-14

1:3, 9

The church in Colossae was composed of believers whom Paul had never met, yet these statements suggest that he prayed frequently for them (vv.3, 9). We also see him affectionately addressing them as his “faithful brothers in Christ” (v.2). Reflect on the depth (and breadth) of Paul’s love and concern that is highlighted here. How much more should we pray for our brothers and sisters who we are surrounded by today! How can you become more like Paul in increasing your sphere of concern and compassion beyond yourself?

1:6,10

According to these verses, “bearing fruit and increasing” (v.6) and “bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (v.10) are characteristics of the gospel and Christians alike. How has this manifested in your life?



COLOSSIANS
1:15-29

THE PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

PAUL'S MINISTRY TO THE CHURCH

²⁴ Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, ²⁵ of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶ the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. ²⁷ To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. ²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.



COLOSSIANS
1:15-29

1:15-20

This passage is considered one of the higher peaks of the New Testament. Christianity isn't simply about a particular way of being religious. It isn't about a particular system for how to be saved here or hereafter. It isn't simply a different way of holiness. Christianity is about Jesus Christ; and this poem, one of the very earliest Christian poems ever written, is as good a place to start exploring it as any. This is what the Colossians needed to know, and we today need to rediscover it.

There are three things in particular which the poem points us to about Jesus Christ and about what God has done in and through him. First, it's by looking at Jesus that we discover who God is. He is "the image of God, the invisible one." Nobody has ever seen God, but in Jesus he has come near to us and become one of us. If there is somebody sitting in the next room, I can't see him because there's a wall in the way. But if there is a mirror out in the hallway, I may be able to look out of my door and see, in the mirror, the mirror-image of the person in the next room. In the same way, Jesus is the mirror-image of the God who is there but who we normally can't see. We may be aware of his presence; many people, many religions, many systems of philosophy have admitted there is "something or somebody there." But with Jesus we find ourselves looking at the true God himself. The great thing about that is that the more we look at Jesus, the more we realize that the true God is the God of utter self-giving love. That's why this poem comes right after Paul's prayer that the Colossians will learn how to be grateful to God.

Firstborn of all creation. It would be wrong to think in physical terms here, as if Paul were asserting that the Son had a physical origin or was somehow created (the classic Arian heresy) rather than existing eternally as the Son, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in the Godhead. [...] What Paul had in mind was the rights and privileges of a firstborn son, especially the son of a monarch who would inherit ruling sovereignty.

Colossians 1:15-20 is a poem (or at least poetic prose) about Christ, which many scholars believe to be a hymn of the early church. This poem appears to revolve around the first word of the Hebrew Bible, "in the beginning" (one word in Hebrew), which contains within it the words for "first" and "head." [...] Generally in the Old Testament "firstborn" means the son who was born first ... That child had a leading place in the family. [...]

Again "firstborn" will not mean the one born first, but the one who will be the leader or the greatest. [...] Now we see why a poetic person steeped in the Old Testament might use the term "firstborn." He was already thinking in terms of "heads" and "beginnings" or, in other words, of the number one place in the universe and in redemption. Drawing on the language of Psalm 89:27, he points to Christ as the one who is number one in God's family, God's designated "heir"

and the ruler next to God. [...] So Paul is using the language about a firstborn son metaphorically, as the Old Testament does. Jesus is not presented as a creation of God or as a child of God born through some goddess (as was common in pagan mythology), but as the chief of God's family, whether the old family of creation or the new family of redemption.

According to the poem of verses 15-20, Jesus was and is the place where true God and true humanity meet. Now we see the result; that in his death God and the human race were brought together, were reconciled. Now, astonishingly, we are free to approach the living and holy God without a stain on our character. That is the heart of Paul's gospel.

But the effects of the gospel don't happen automatically. Christians, who have come into this experience of being ushered into the presence of the holy God, can't simply sit back and do nothing. They must "keep firmly on"; they must now take responsibility for their own growth to maturity in faith. Like a house being built up brick by brick, secure in the knowledge that the foundations have been properly laid, Christians must develop their life of faith, hope and love (see verses 4-5) on this foundation and not somewhere else. Becoming a Christian can't be a one-off experience which then remains just as a memory of a wonderful moment. It must be something which continues day by day. Without that "keeping firmly on," even the original experience may seem remote and strange. You may start to question whether it was "real" or not in the first place. But if you "continue" you will know it is, because as the building grows and takes shape it will show by its stability that the foundations are indeed there, and are solid.⁴

1:22-25

The scandal of this message is difficult for Christians of a later era to imagine. To proclaim a crucified Messiah is to talk nonsense. Crucifixion was a gruesome punishment administered by the Romans to "make an example" out of rebels or disturbers of the Pax Romana. As a particularly horrible form of public torture and execution, it was designed to demonstrate that no one should defy the powers that be. Yet Paul's gospel declares that the crucifixion of Jesus is somehow the event through which God has triumphed over those powers. Rather than proving the sovereignty of Roman political order, it shatters the world's systems of authority. Rather than confirming what the wisest heads already know, it shatters the world's systems of knowledge.

⁴ NT Wright; *Paul for Everyone: Prison Letters*. 150, 155.

All of this is understandably baffling to Paul's hearers in the ancient Mediterranean world. Jews, who have suffered long under the burden of foreign oppression, quite reasonably look for manifestations of God's power: signs like those done by Moses at the time of the exodus, perhaps portending at last God's powerful deliverance of his people again from bondage. The Messiah should be a man of power, manifesting supernatural proofs of God's favor. Greeks, with their proverbial love of learning, quite reasonably look for wisdom: reasonable accounts of the order of things presented in a logically compelling and aesthetically pleasing manner. The Christ should be a wise teacher of philosophical truths. But no! God has blown away all apparently reasonable criteria: the Christ is a crucified criminal.⁵

1:24-29

I am filling up (Gk. *antanaplēroō*) what is lacking (Gk. *hysterēma*) in Christ's afflictions does not imply that there is a deficiency in Christ's atoning death and suffering on the cross, which would contradict the central message of this letter and all the rest of Scripture as well (cf. Heb. 9:12, 24-26; 10:14). Christ's sufferings are in fact sufficient, and nothing of one's own can be added to secure salvation. What was "lacking" in Christ's afflictions was the future suffering of all who (like Paul) will experience great affliction for the sake of the gospel, as Paul described, e.g., in 2 Cor. 1:8-10.⁶

⁵ Richard B. Hays, "1 Corinthians," *Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997) 30-31.

⁶ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 2295). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.



COLOSSIANS
1:15-29

1:15-20

Who is Jesus according to this passage?

cf. JOHN 1:1-3 (ESV)

¹ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

What did God do through Jesus? For what purpose?

1:21-23

Compare Apostle Paul's description of the Colossians in v.21 to the following passages:

EPHESIANS 4:17–19 (ESV)

¹⁷ Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. ¹⁸ They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. ¹⁹ They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.

ROMANS 1:21–24 (ESV)

²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.

What can you conclude from the progression of ideas in these three passages?

How are you presented before God, and how was this made possible?

1:15-23

If the “cosmic Christ,” supreme in creation (vv. 15-17), is indeed supreme in redemption (vv. 18-22), what assurance does this give regarding the “hope of the gospel?”

Given all that God has done in Christ, what remains for us to do?

1:24-29

Apostle Paul makes the astounding statement that he rejoices in his suffering. What did Apostle Paul suffer for?

What are all the reasons he cites in this passage that makes his suffering more than worth it?

Think about this phrase: “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” How does this phrase succinctly capture the essence of the gospel?

1:28-29

What is the goal and substance of gospel ministry?

These two verses describe what may be perceived as a lot of tiresome effort. Why would Apostle Paul not see it that way?



COLOSSIANS
1:15-29

1:18

“...so that in everything he might be preeminent.”

Take a moment to examine Jesus’ place in your life. Is Jesus reigning as preeminent king and master? If not, how did Jesus become relinquished to a lower position in your life? How can you guard yourself against the forces that seek to unseat Jesus from his position of supremacy?

1:21

Paul states that in our previous condition, we “were alienated and hostile in mind” toward God. Prior to becoming a Christian, in what ways were you “hostile in mind” toward God? If this is indeed true, then it suggests that renewing our minds after we become Christians is critical (cf. Romans 12:1-2). What are some old ways of thinking that you still need to alter? What are some steps you can take to renew your mind?

1:21-23

Given the “hope of the gospel” that you have, what would it mean to “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast?” What are the things that threaten to shift you from the hope found in the gospel?

1:28-29

In what ways are you engaged in this kind of ministry to others? In what ways have you been the recipient of this kind of ministry? Who were the people involved?



COLOSSIANS 1

- Read Colossians 1.
- Summarize the theme of the sweeping grandness of the scale of the gospel, of Jesus and of Christian calling.
- Write a prayer of thanksgiving, confession and commitment.

1. The Colossians were a group of Christians who lived in the city of Colossae in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey). They were a mix of Jews and Gentiles, and they were known for their strong faith and devotion to Christ.



COLOSSIANS
2:1-15

¹ For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face, ² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

ALIVE IN CHRIST

⁶ Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, ⁷ rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. ⁹ For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰ and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. ¹¹ In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.



COLOSSIANS
2:1-15

2:1-5

Christianity, says the old slogan, is Christ. Put him in the middle of your picture of the world, and the world will stop spinning in incomprehensible circles and begin to make sense. Find him, and you've got the treasure. It may take you a while to get it all out of the treasure chest and inspect it, but when you do you'll find — so Paul is saying in verse 3 — that all the wisdom and knowledge that ever there was finds its full meaning in him. He is, quite simply, what it's all about.⁷

2:6-9

See to it that no one takes you captive (Gk. *sylogōgeō*, commonly used of the plundering of cargo from a ship). The false teacher(s) in Colossae pose a very real threat to the church. [...] The term “philosophy” was used much more broadly in the ancient world than it is today. Josephus, for instance, could call the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees “philosophies.” Even a magician could be called a philosopher. Paul is not making a blanket condemnation of the traditional Greek philosophical schools (e.g., Platonism, Stoicism, Aristotelianism, etc.). His remarks are focused on the particular factional teaching being disseminated at Colossae. He makes the incisive claim that this teaching is not only empty deceit but that it has been inspired by the elemental spirits (Gk. *stoicheia*) of the world. *Stoicheia* is sometimes translated “the basic principles” of the world and then interpreted to be something like the fundamental principles of pagan religion. In the ancient world, however, the term *stoicheia* was widely used for spirits in Persian religious texts, magical papyri, astrological documents, and some Jewish texts. Paul is likely using it here to refer to demonic spirits; it is the equivalent of “rulers and authorities” (vv. 10, 15).⁸

2:11-13

From Paul's radical perspective, circumcision in the flesh had become little more than a tribal brand. [This] ground of Jewish confidence, is a meaningless sign unless it signifies a cleansed heart; and he goes on to argue that the cleansed heart can only come from Christ.⁹

⁷ NT Wright; *Paul for Everyone: Prison Letters*. 150, 155.

⁸ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 2296). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁹ Garland, D. E. (1998). *Colossians and Philemon* (p. 147). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.



COLOSSIANS
2:1-15

2:1-5

What were some of Apostle Paul's concerns and wishes for the Christians in Colossae and neighboring cities?

The ancient Greek culture prized wisdom and special knowledge above all other things. Yet, no amount of human wisdom could figure out God's plan for reconciling the world to himself through the cross of Christ. That simply had to be revealed. Think about what Apostle Paul claims about this truth – "God's mystery, which is Christ."

Think about this fact in light of what Apostle Paul says in v.4 and v.8. Different philosophical schools have come and gone since the time that Apostle Paul penned these words. In what ways has the Gospel of Jesus proven to be the treasure of wisdom and knowledge that surpasses them all?

2:6-9

What are some ways that the Colossians can ward off the lures of false philosophy?

2:6-9

Reading ahead to the rest of this chapter, we can see why the false teaching that Apostle Paul was concerned about would sound like “plausible arguments” (v.4). What was the content of the false teaching?

**What does Apostle Paul call religious observances compared to Christ?
What is he trying to convey through this?**

Why would the Colossians have been attracted to establishing a set of regulations and religious rituals for their newfound spiritual life?

2:8-15

Given the nature of the false teaching (i.e., a call to observe Old Testament ritual, and especially circumcision, as a mark of God's people), how does Apostle Paul's summary of the gospel address this notion that you need something in addition to what Christ has done?



COLOSSIANS
2:1-15

1:28-2:5

What can I learn from Apostle Paul's struggle for the brothers and sisters at Colossae? How does this compare with what I struggle with?

2:6

What are the things that I need to do to be "rooted and built up in him and established in the faith...abounding in thanksgiving?"

2:12-14

Consider the utter sufficiency of Christ demonstrated in these verses.

What are some modern-day equivalents of false teaching or practices that try to eclipse the centrality of Christ in a Christian's life?

Reflect on the summary of the gospel in this passage. Note the expression “with him” and all that is ours because of our union with Christ so that what is true of him becomes true of us. What effect does this have on how I view my life?

Reflect on the burden of unpayable debt and the expression, “canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.” How has this transformed my life?



COLOSSIANS
2:13-23

¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

LET NO ONE DISQUALIFY YOU

¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸ Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, ¹⁹ and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

²⁰ If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— ²¹ “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” ²² (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? ²³ These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.



COLOSSIANS
2:13-23

2:16-23

Paul lists a variety of ways the false teachers had tried to disqualify the genuine believers in Colossae. Asceticism translates the Greek word for “humility” (tapeinophrosynē). Paul probably had in mind fasting and perhaps also the taboos mentioned in v. 21. Worship of angels involves invoking angels for help and protection from evil spirits [...] about visions. Some form of visionary experience and, thus, mystical insight was offered as part of the false teaching.¹⁰

¹⁰ Crossway Bibles. (2008). *The ESV Study Bible* (p. 2297). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.



COLOSSIANS
2:13-23

2:18

Why would they have been attracted to “worship of angels, going on in detail about visions?” What is the connection between such fascinations and a “sensuous mind?”

2:20

What does the phrase “with Christ you died” mean in light of vv.13-15, and how does this address the false notion that the Colossians must observe a bunch of dietary regulations and observe certain sacred days?

2:20-23

Interestingly, Apostle Paul states that the false teaching of legalism and mysticism is “of the world,” and that those who follow such teachings experience no true help in “stopping the indulgence of the flesh.” How is this true?

Why do you think these Colossians would be attracted to re-establishing a set of rules and regulations for their newfound spiritual life? What might they gain by doing this? What might they lose in the process? (cf. v.23)



COLOSSIANS
2:13-23

2:17

Apostle Paul, in highlighting the supremacy of Christ, points out that all contending religious rituals which seek to take up center stage in one's life are merely "a shadow of the things that [are] found in Christ" (see v.16). What contemporary "religious rituals" have taken up center stage in your spiritual life and, in the process, relegated Jesus to a lesser position?

How can you maintain Jesus as the supreme reality in all aspects of your life?

2:20

The phrase “died with Christ,” when read in light of vv.13-15, leads us to the significance of Christ’s death, where we discover that the necessary price for our sin has been fully paid for. In effect, Apostle Paul is asking the Colossians, “Why are you reverting back to following those inferior principles and patterns of this world?”

What patterns of your life have you reverted back to, when Christ has in fact purchased your full release from them?



COLOSSIANS 2

- Read Colossians 2.
- Summarize the chapter in terms of Christ's all sufficiency for our life and salvation.
- Write a prayer of thanksgiving, confession and commitment.



COLOSSIANS
3:1-17

PUT ON THE NEW SELF

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



COLOSSIANS
3:1-17

3:1-4

In light of the danger presented in chapter 2, what truths and what focus does Apostle Paul call the Colossians to instead?

Why is it fitting that we “seek” and “set our minds” on things above?

3:5-17

Notice the recurring expressions here: put off, put on. What does this imply about the Christian's ability to make choices?

The choice they are to make to put on the new self is based on a reality that has already taken place. i.e., Apostle Paul is not saying that they need to try harder to simply be more moral people, but he is asserting that something has happened. What is that new reality, and how is it mentioned in this passage?

3:10-17

What are the qualities of “the new self” (v.10) listed in this passage? What does it mean to “put on” these qualities that one does not possess?

Note the references to Jesus in this section. What does this tell us about how these qualities are to take root in a believer’s life?

Why would it be important to “above all these put on love?”

What would it take to let the “word of Christ dwell in you richly?”

What is the significance of the repeated exhortations to be thankful?

Note that the qualities listed here are relational. Envision a community of believers living out these verses. What would it feel like to be a part of such a community?



COLOSSIANS
3:1-17

3:2

**“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”
What are some of the “things that are on the earth” that fill your mind
and consume your heart?**

3:5, 8

**Christian life is not merely setting our hearts and minds on things above. It
also requires that we “put to death” and “put them all away” —referring
to what we need to do regarding sins. Notice the words that Paul uses
which carry a sense of urgency in dealing with our sins. What are the
benefits of approaching sin with the attitude prescribed by Paul? What are
the dangers of having a resigned acceptance of sin in our lives? What steps
can you take to put to death “what is earthly in you?”**

3:9-10

Apostle Paul affirms that Christians “have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self.” Why, then, do you think some Christians still live in their old lifestyle? Verse 10 says that the “new self” is being “renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” How can you be renewed daily to faithfully reflect the image of Jesus?

3:12

Of the virtues listed in verse 12, which one do you feel the greatest urgency to foster and why?

3:13

Paul tells us to forgive “as the Lord has forgiven you.” Reflect on the degree of God’s forgiveness for you. Considering this, who do you need to extend forgiveness to?



COLOSSIANS
3:18-4:1

RULES FOR CHRISTIAN HOUSEHOLDS

¹⁸ Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. ¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. ²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. ²¹ Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. ²² Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. ²⁵ For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

¹ Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.



COLOSSIANS
3:18-4:1

3:18-4:1

The wives, as free and responsible agents, are asked to voluntarily submit themselves to their husbands since this is entirely proper (fitting has a Stoic ring to it but the motivation is entirely Christian). In the Lord means within the new fellowship of those who own Christ as Lord. Submission points to the wife's calling to honour and affirm her husband's leadership and to help him exercise his role within the family. It is not an absolute surrender of her will, for Christ is her absolute authority, not her husband. Nor is there any suggestion that the wife is naturally or spiritually inferior to her husband. The parallel is the husband's duty to love his wife. He is commanded to love her and this is not simply a matter of his having affectionate feelings or being sexually attracted to her. Rather, it involves his unceasing care and loving service for her entire well-being (cf. Eph. 5:25-33 where Christ's love for the church is to be the model for the husband's love for his wife). Christlike, sacrificial leadership by the husband will keep the ultimate good of his wife in view at all times. He, like godly leaders in other spheres, will seek to lead by serving. Accordingly, husbands are not to be embittered against their wives, whether in thought, word or deed.¹¹

The command that slaves must obey their masters in everything is jarring to those who now consider the institution of slavery to be abhorrent. In the first century, however, it was an entrenched reality that the early Christians could neither change nor ignore. Paul does not sanctify slavery with these commands but subtly undermines its very premises while encouraging obedience as an expression of loyalty to the family group.

(1) Paul addresses slaves as responsible human beings when most regarded slaves as little more than animated machines (see commentary on Philemon). One does not impose moral obligations on animals or farm implements. By assigning them moral duties, Paul treats them as morally responsible individuals. ...

(2) Most took for granted that slaves were morally incapable of deciding to do good. They assumed slaves were helplessly controlled by their passions and steeped in villainy. Consequently, they needed to be handled as if they were witless children. But Paul treats Christian slaves as morally independent individuals fully capable of Christian virtue. God will not overlook their wrongdoing just because they are slaves who are supposedly not responsible for themselves. They are responsible for themselves. Being in the miserable condition of slavery and even being a victim of injustice does not excuse returning evil for evil, or even halfheartedness for evil.¹²

¹¹ Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1274). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

¹² Garland, D. E. (1998). *Colossians and Philemon* (p. 248). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.



COLOSSIANS
3:18-4:1

3:18-4:1

List the relational duties listed in this passage.

- Wives
- Husbands
- Children
- Fathers
- Bondservants
- Masters

Scholars have noted that the duties listed for wives, children and servants are balanced by the corresponding duties of husbands, parents and masters, and that this is remarkable for its time. Imagine a household in which the parties listed here lived out their relational duties according to this text. What kind of home would result?

What is at the root of broken relationships and dysfunctional families?

What can be said about Apostle Paul's varied exhortations to different categories of people?

What are some lessons regarding the workplace we can draw from this passage?



COLOSSIANS
3:18-4:1

3:18-4:1

Christianity elevated the standard of all the relationships listed in this passage because the primary focus (and audience) was God rather than people. How does your interaction with people around you measure up to these standards? Are there ways that you could be spiritualizing neglect and irresponsibility in some relationships in your life?

Reflect on the following:

“as is fitting in the Lord” (v. 18)

“for this pleases the Lord” (v. 20)

“fearing the Lord” (v. 22)

“as for the Lord” (v. 23)

“from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward” (v. 24)

“You are serving the Lord Christ” (v. 24)

“knowing that you also have a Master in heaven” (4:1)

What does my relational world say regarding my relationship with God?

Are there responsibilities in your life regarding which you have not
“worked heartily, as for the Lord and not for men?”



COLOSSIANS 3

- Read Colossians 3:1-4:1
- Summarize the theme of the gospel's effect on all human relationships and the community that God envisions for us to live in.
- Write a prayer of thanksgiving, confession and commitment.



COLOSSIANS
4:2-6

FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS

² Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison— ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

⁵ Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. ⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.



COLOSSIANS
4:2-6

4:2-6

What specific instructions about prayer can we find here?

What about prayer requires that one “continue steadfastly” in it?

Why is it important that God “open to us a door for the word” and how does this happen?

What specific instructions can we find about evangelism here?



COLOSSIANS
4:2-6

4:2-6

From the list of instructions for prayer, which aspect is most difficult? How can I grow in this?

How can you become more watchful? What about prayer requires that one “continue steadfastly”?

From the list of instructions for relating with “outsiders,” which aspect do I need to work on?

Paul urges the Colossians to be mindful and wise in their actions and conversations toward outsiders. Why would Christians need to be wise in answering people outside the faith? What does it mean to be wise in this way?

4:12

Who are the people that struggled on my behalf in prayers? Who are the people that God is calling me to struggle on behalf in prayers? What is required for this kind of struggling prayer?



COLOSSIANS
4:7-18

FINAL GREETINGS

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all about my activities. He is a beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts, ⁹ and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you of everything that has taken place here.

¹⁰ Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (concerning whom you have received instructions—if he comes to you, welcome him), ¹¹ and Jesus who is called Justus. These are the only men of the circumcision among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. ¹³ For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, “See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.”

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.



COLOSSIANS
4:7-18

3:5-4:6

Note the spheres of life that Apostle Paul addresses in this section and the centrality of Christ in them.

4:7-18

In this closing section, Apostle Paul sends greetings to or from a dozen people. There is something warm and human here at the end of this letter full of theology and instruction. List the ways that Apostle Paul addresses various people in this closing section. What does this show about Christian life and ministry?

In this list are two writers of the gospel, along with Apostle Paul. Think of this band of believers, and what bound them together in common passion. What has happened to them? How does the work of God progress throughout history?

4:18

“Remember my chains. Grace be with you.” This interesting non sequitur ends Paul’s letter to the Colossians. How can someone “in chains” possibly offer grace to others?



COLOSSIANS
4:7-18

List the people in your life that you can confidently call “a beloved brother,” “faithful minister,” “fellow servant,” “faithful and beloved brother,” “fellow workers for the kingdom of God,” “a servant of Christ Jesus.”

How has this list grown over the years? What is your response to this reality?

Paul ends his letter by relaying the greetings of his fellow workers for the kingdom of God (Aristarchus, Mark, Justus, Epaphras, etc.). What characterized these people? Do the same things characterize your life?

Consider the intimate fellowship and the sense of camaraderie that must have been fostered amongst these co-laborers. What opportunities do you have right now to join in the fellowship of working for the kingdom of God? How can you be more faithful in these areas?



COLOSSIANS 4

- Read Colossians 1-4.
- Reflect over how God spoke to you through this book.
- Write a prayer of thanksgiving, confession and commitment.

1. The Colossians were a group of Christians who lived in the city of Colossae in the Roman province of Asia. They were a mix of Jews and Gentiles, and they were known for their strong faith and devotion to Christ. The apostle Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians to encourage them in their faith and to warn them against false teachings that were circulating in the region. The letter is a powerful message of the supremacy of Christ and the importance of living a life of faith and obedience.