

**“So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”**

**Colossians 2:6-7**

## The Letter to the Colossians



8 bible studies

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St John's  
Maroubra

# Introduction to Colossians

## What about it?

The letter is written by the Apostle Paul from prison in Rome some time around 60 A.D. to believers in the city of Colossae. The city had several population groups including a minority of Jewish settlers some of whom had been there since the second century B.C. The evangelism of the area was carried out by Paul assisted by a number of co-workers (see Acts 19), so we know that Paul himself did not plant the church there.

Different scholars use different ways of dividing up Colossians (and all books of the bible). In these studies we will use the following:

1:1-2	Prescript
1:3-14	Paul's prayer
1:15-23	The person and work of Christ
1:24-2:5	Paul's ministry
2:6-23	False teaching and it's antidote
3:1-4:1	Christian life
3:1-4	Since we have new life in Christ...
3:5-11	Turn away from...
3:12-17	Live in a "kingdom" way
3:18-4:1	Instructions on life within the Christian household
4:2-6	Further instructions
4:7-18	Personal notes and final greetings

## Theme

The Colossians Christians were under attack by mystical teachers who wanted to give them the full deal—mysticism and all. Paul wanted them to stick with Christ alone.

## References

For a very brief overview: The New Lion Handbook to the Bible or The New Bible Commentary or The New Bible Dictionary

For an affordable commentary:  
Colossians and Philemon (Tyndale New Testament Commentary; Series: Tyndale New Testament Commentary, \$19.95 at Koorong)  
Message Of Colossians and Philemon, (the Bible Speaks Today; Series Bible Speaks Today)

For a serious commentary, but one that leaves your bank account somewhat lighter:  
The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians F.F. Bruce (Borrow this one unless you are really serious about studying Colossians, however it does give background and more depth on the tricky bits. It is currently \$69.95.)

## Study 8: Colossians 4:2-18 Personal Notes and Final Greetings

Colossians 4:2-6—Further Instructions

1. 4:2—What do you think Paul is wanting the Colossians to be watchful about?
2. Is there a link between v2&3—is it the same idea, or different ideas?
3. What one thing is Paul mainly concerned about in this section (4:2-6)?
4. How can the Colossians help Paul with it? (4:2-4)

### Going Deeper...

On Prayer.....do we pray that God would open up opportunities for his message to be known through us?

Why not?

Or if so...how? Give us some examples to follow.

5. What are they to do in their own context? (4:5-6)

### Going Deeper...

Describe a conversation 'full of grace'. What is it like? Can you remember when someone spoke to you like that?

Colossians 4:7-18—Final Greetings

Among all this personal news, is any of it newsworthy to us?

Focus on Epaphras for a moment (4:12-13 and 1:7-8) - what might we learn from him?

Pray, being watchful and thankful!!!

1. Open your eyes and give thanks for what you see.
2. Pray for the message of Christ to go out from us individually, from our church, in all the world.
3. Pray for clarity for ourselves and our preachers (we all know they need it!)
4. Pray for opportunities and helpful words in the opportunities.

## Study 7 (cont.)

### Going Deeper...

What happens when these household relationships don't work? D

Does the obedience of one party depend on the other party in any way?  
Does obedience by one party help the other? How? Does disobedience  
make it difficult for the other party?

What can you do if you are in one of these relationship pairs and are  
doing your best to obey Paul, but the other person is not even trying?

Pray, you may have a lot to pray about tonight!

## Study 1: Colossians 1:1-14 Paul's Prayer

Starting Up....

Welcome to Colossians.....why not start by looking at 1:-2 and 4:7-18 and see if you can paint something of the picture of who was receiving this letter, and who was behind it.

Colossians 1:3-8

Paul's Prayer of Thanksgiving

Some very important terms are used here that need to be understood. (We can't assume everyone will agree on what they mean just because they are so familiar.)

Word	References	What is it?
Gospel	1:5 & 6 (see also Col 2:13 & Rom 1:16-17)	
Word of truth	1:5	
Grace	1:6, 12-14	

1. How do 'faith', 'hope' and 'love' (1:4-5) fit in a believers life ?  
(Optional: Read the article on 'Faith' in the New Bible Dictionary.)

2. What does it mean for the gospel to 'bear fruit'? (1:6)

### Going Deeper...

What fruit would Paul be thankful for in your life if he was writing to you?  
(Take a moment and write a couple of things down for yourself...)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## Study 1 (cont.)

Colossians 1:9-14 Paul's Prayer of Petition

A couple of other terms to check out...

Word	References	What is it?
Redemption	1:14	
Forgiveness	1:14	

1. What does Paul ask the Father to do for the Colossians?  
Why does he ask for this? (1:10)  
(Note: These relate to the way that the Colossians are to live, a subject that Paul will return to in more detail later in his letter, it is not theoretical!)

2. Knowing God's will has practical consequences for the Colossians. What does Paul want for them? (1:9-12)?

3. What motivations, goals and way of life does Paul desire for his readers?

### Going Deeper...

Would a non-Christian see you as different from the norm?  
In what ways?

And would they see your church differently?

4. What has the Father done for the Colossians? (1:12-13)

5. What have believers been rescued from and what have they come to? (1:13-14)  
Does your experience feel like coming from darkness to light?  
Why?...Why not?

### Prayer

1. What can we learn about prayer from Paul's prayer? Think about its structure, content, and purpose.

2. Following Paul's basic outline for this section, write a prayer for your congregation or home group for the term. Maybe you could pray it each week this term?

## Study 7: Colossians 3:18-4:18

### The Christian Life — Part 3

#### Starting Up

Do you think it's important that Christians receive really practical instruction on how to live in Christian households? Or should the general instructions about how to live as a Christian be enough?

Colossians 3:18-4:1: Instructions on Life within the Christian Household  
The basic household unit where Paul was writing was structured with husbands, wives, children and slaves. All of these people are addressed, and each relationship is addressed from both sides. For each instruction look at why it might be needed.

Do you think the instructions addressing particular problem areas? Bat this around for a minute, recognizing this is largely speculation.

1. What does it mean for a godly wife to submit to her husband?  
Why is it 'fitting in the Lord'? (You might like to read 1 Cor 11:3; Eph 5:21-33)

2. What sort of love is a godly husband to show towards his wife? (3:19) How can such love or harshness show in everyday life?

3. What sort of things might embitter or discourage children?

4. Does obedience to parents apply to adult children also? Should they obey their parents even when grown and independent?

5. Slavery isn't an accepted part of our society as it was in the ancient world and so the next pair of Master/Slave does not directly apply, however a parallel is frequently drawn between the relationship of Employer/Employee.

Are the commands to slaves relevant to employees? (3:22-25)

### Going Deeper...

How far should we put up with treatment from our employer when we have forms of legal protection and redress for wrongs? What principles should guide our decision?

## Study 6: (cont.)

5. Paul refers to the believers as 'members of one body' (3:15). How do the characteristics mentioned earlier (3:12-14) contribute towards that unity?
6. How is the church encouraged to develop peace and unity? (3:12ff)
7. What does it mean to do things 'in the name of the Lord Jesus'? (3:17)
8. Why is thanks given to the Father through Jesus? (3:17)
9. Thankfulness is important in Paul's mind (3:15-17). How should it be expressed?

### Going Deeper...

In Ephesians 5:20 Paul is even more emphatic about thanksgiving, urging his readers to be always giving thanks for everything! How can you work towards this level of thankfulness in your life?  
(Share some practical ideas with each other that you might like to try or things that have helped you.)

Pray!!!!

## Study 2: Colossians 1:15-23 The Person and Work of Christ

Paul has just prayed for the Colossians giving thanks and asking God that they may live a life worthy of Christ, their Lord. He finishes his prayer with Christ and his work of redemption. (Read v13-14 again...)

He now expands on the Son with a summary of who Christ is and what he has done.

Starting Up....

The Prince says...

"Jesus might be described as an under-privileged, working-class victim of political and religious persecution."

What view of Christian life do you think would follow this truth about Jesus?

Colossians 1:15-20 Lord Jesus Christ

Note: This section uses 'he' all the time rather than naming Jesus, but we can look back to the previous section in 1:13 to see that this refers to 'the Son' who is Jesus.

1. What is Christ's role in creation? (1:16-17)  
What are the implications of this for us?  
What about for our friends who don't believe in Christ?
2. What does it mean for Christ to be the 'firstborn' and the 'beginning'? (1:15 and 1:18)

### By the way...(if you want a diversion)

Was Jesus really 'born' – wouldn't that make him less than God? Created, not creator? Some sub-Christians sects claim this.

3. What can we learn about God through Christ, and how do we learn it? (1:15-19)

## Study 2 (cont.)

4. In what sense is the church the body of Christ? And Christ the head? (1:18)

### Going Deeper...

What do we do at church reflects Christ being our head?  
How might the body ever revolt against the head?

Colossians 1:21-23 The Work of Christ for Mankind

Read Colossians 1:13-14 again....if Paul has just expanded on 'the Son', now he expands on 'redemption'.

1. What are the practical consequences of living in alienation from God as his enemies? 1:18  
What makes a particular behaviour 'evil'? 1:18

2. Verse 21-23.....If you were to describe the 'Steps to Reconciliation' from v.21-23, how many steps would you see their being and in what order?

Who made the first step?

What are our obligations in reconciliation?

### Going Deeper...

Does v23 mean we are condemned if we doubt or stumble in our Christian life? (See 1John1:7-9)

3. What does it mean to be holy? 1:22

4. Paul says that the gospel 'has been' proclaimed to every creature under heaven and yet it is obvious that even at that time (let alone now) many people hadn't hear it, so what can Paul mean? 1:23 (see also 1:6)

Finishing Up

???

## Study 6: Colossians 3:12-17 The Christian Life—Part 2

Starting Up...

Since we have a new life in Christ, we should all live in a "kingdom" way.

The previous study looked at 3:1-4. Try to summarise the main point of the verses in one sentence.

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Why is it important to think about the things that should be 'put on' at the same time as identifying what should be 'put off'?

Colossians 3:12-17 - Put on the New

1. What are the motivations for lifestyle changes? (3:12-13 and 3:13)

2. Paul urges believers to behave in certain ways, clothing spiritual bodies in much the same way as one would put clothing on physical bodies. What sort of 'clothing' is appropriate for a believer? (3:12-14)

3. How does the peace of Christ rule in our hearts? (3:15)

4. What does it mean for the word of Christ to dwell in us?

What does it mean for it to do so 'richly'? (3:16)

How do we bring the word to dwell in us?

### Going Deeper...

Think about God's word in your life. How do you encounter it and what does it do in your life? How can you improve the depth of its influence over your life?

Is 'teaching and admonishing' just for the minister and other leaders within your church, or is it for everyone to do? (3:16) How?

## Study 5: (cont.)

4. Within Christ the divisions that split society are to be put aside as well (3:11). Paul mentions several that occurred within the society that he knew.

What divisions exist within our society that can make their way into the church and threaten the unity of the church, which is the body of Christ (1:24)?

Can you recognise any divisions within the wider Anglican community?

Is it ever right to maintain a division? How do we decide whether the divisions are right or wrong?

How should we act when Christians differ?

Pray!!!!

Pray for godliness within your church, focusing on those things that may be in danger of causing divisions and breaking fellowship.

To Take Away (and eat at home)

In this study we have looked at several injunctions from Paul to do something about the process of putting off the old life and putting on the new. These are to set our hearts and minds on things above (3:1-2), to 'put to death' or 'rid' ourselves of various things (3:5-9) (and presumably to participate in the process of being renewed in knowledge (3:10). Paul expects us to be taking action!

What are you doing (and planning to do) to achieve these things?

## Study 3: Colossians 1:24-2:5

### Perfection in Christ

In the last section Paul finished by declaring that he had become a servant of the gospel of Christ. In this section he discusses what that means in general, and then with respect to the Colossian and Laodicean churches in particular.

Starting Up...

What will you say to Jim on Sunday when you tells you, 'I am perfect in Christ!'?

- A. Jim, you are right.
- B. Jim, you are a bighead.
- C. Jim, you are on your way.
- D. Jim, I am going to another church

Colossians 1:24-2:5 Paul the servant of the Church

1. What does Paul mean when he says that 'he fills up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions?'

- A. Is there a certain allotment of suffering for Christ before he returns?
- B. Was Christ's death not painful enough?
- C. Is there some real connection between the 'head' and the 'body'?

(Perhaps read Acts 9:15-16 and 2 Corinthians 1:6 for possible background.)

2. What has God commissioned Paul to do? How does Paul fulfill his commission? (1:25-29)

3. What is the message Paul presents? (1:25-27) Why is it called a mystery?

4. What does it mean for Christ to be 'in you'? 1:27  
(Read Romans 8:10-11 if you like.)

#### Going Deeper...

Is Christ in you???. How would you know?

5. What does Paul do in order to present everyone perfect in Christ? (1:28)

Note some ways in which you see each of these done in your church and in your home group. How do you fit in? How can and do you contribute?

Can we really be 'perfect in Christ' in this life? (1:28)  
(compare Matthew 5:48)

### Study 3 (Cont.)

Who does the work in what Paul has described in this section? (1:29)

How do you see people changing as these things are done? (2:2-3)

What will this prevent? (2:4)

#### Going Deeper...

Think about your own church. What dangerous or deceptive ideas are present in society (and maybe even in the church) that are working against the church being united in love under Christ and growing in the knowledge of God?

How can you protect yourself and the church against these problems?

Pray about the problems your church faces and the ways in which you can protect yourself.

#### Order in Church

Paul is pleased with the orderliness of the Colossians. (2:5)

It is easier to see how disorder could be a hindrance at meetings, but can you go too far with order in meeting together?

Think about orderliness at your church. What aspects of the meeting are helped by orderliness and what aspects can be hindered by being overly ordered?

But why is Paul bringing up the order in the church here?

So what must all our order serve.....?

#### Take Away....

When Jim says to you on Sunday, 'I am perfect in Christ!', apart from telling him he's bigheaded, can you recommend him 4 ways to grow towards it?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

### Study 5: Colossians 3:1-11

#### The Christian Life—Part 1

In the previous study Paul warned the Colossians about several temptations they were facing that would distract them from Christ. Paul urges them that now they had a new life through Christ, they must turn from the characteristic activities of the old and towards a godly life as well as away from the characteristic divisions within 'the world'.

Colossians 3:1-4: 'Since we have new life in Christ...'

The first four verses set the context for the change from the old way of living towards the new.

1. How do we set our hearts (3:1) and minds (3:2) on things above?

2. What prompts us to do this? (3:1,3-4))

Refresh your memory on what you looked at in the last study by re-reading Colossians 2:13.

3. How are our lives are 'hidden with Christ in God'? (3:3)

Colossians 3:5-11: 'Turn away from....'

1. As a result of Christ's work in us Paul says to put to death what belongs to the 'earthly nature' (3:5).

What is the 'earthly nature'?

What sorts of activities characterise it? (3:5,8,9)

Why is greed a form of idolatry?

How could you summarise what is wrong with these things? What ties them together in their awfulness?

2. What is God's response to these activities? (3:6)

3. What is the process of change that happens to believers? (3:9,10)

#### Going Deeper...

Think about your life (or that of a Christian you know well). What changes did becoming a Christian make in your/their life? What about in your/their life since then?

If you have trouble identifying anything, you might like to ask a trusted friend for help.

## Study 4: (cont.)

Summary Questions (Do as many of these as you like)

1. What were the Colossians being judged by? Why should they ignore it? (2:16)
2. Why would there be pressure to keep various religious festivals? Why are these things worthless? (2:17)
3. How else were the Colossians being tempted to do things that were dangerous to their salvation? (2:18)
4. Angel worship may not be something we encounter often, but everyone can probably think of examples of people who showed false humility. What are the characteristics of such a person as described here by Paul? (2:18-19)

### Going Deeper...

What criticisms are levelled at our practices as Christians that tempt us to put our trust in them rather than in the unique saving work of Christ?

What rituals and ceremonies do we have in our Church?  
What special days do we celebrate? Why do we do this, in light of 2:16-17?

Are we tempted to betray our completeness in Christ with an extra religious appearance of false humility? How??

It is obviously bad to take the truth away from Christ (ie. say he is not God), but this passage shows it is just as bad to add things to him!!!! If you add to him, he can't have added up to enough!!!!

Read 2:6-7 and 2:8 to finish.

Pray!

## Study 4: Colossians 2:6-23

### False Teaching & It's Antidote

The experts all say that in the letter to Colossae Paul was battling a thing called "The Colossians Heresy!"

It is called that because they don't really know what it is.

Today—you get to be the expert. Let's go to work on false teaching (heresy).....and its antidote.

In this section Paul assumes some knowledge of Jewish law and custom from his readers as he uses arguments based around circumcision (Genesis 17:9-14) and the Law. You could also read the article on Circumcision in the New Bible Dictionary.

### The Heresy

Chase through the passage and compile all the things Paul seems to be writing against. Shuffle them around in your mind for a while and come up with a sect worthy of the Simpsons for weird false teaching. What does it look like?

### The Antidote

Chase through the passage and compile all the things Paul seems to be affirming. What does it look like?