



COLOSSIANS

SET YOUR MIND ON CHRIST

Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. - Col 3:2-3

Theme & Study Outline

Thankful His Gospel is Growing

Share your experiences growing crops or fruit. Read Mark 4:26-29 to find a picture of how God’s kingdom spreads and grows. The apostle Paul’s gospel preaching reached many places during his three-year stay at Ephesus, even to people he did not meet. The Christians at Colossae are one example. However, Paul knew the spiritual dangers they faced, especially from false teachers. He writes to make sure they are fruitful and continue growing, relying on the gospel’s power.

Set Your Mind on Christ

- I. **Thankful His Gospel Is Growing**
 - A. The Fruit of the Gospel (1:1-12)
 - B. The Hope of the Gospel (1:13-23)
- II. **Contending for His Gospel**
 - A. Paul’s Contending (1:24-2:5)
 - B. The Colossians’ Continuing (2:6-19)
- III. **Focused on His Work & Your New Life**
 - A. Sharing in His Death and Life (2:20-3:4)
 - B. The New Self: Renewed in the Image of Christ (3:5-17)
 - C. Christ-Like in Your Household & Vocation (3:18-4:1)
- IV. **Working Together for His Gospel’s Cause**
 - A. In Mission Minded Living (4:2-6)
 - B. In Christian Fellowship (4:7-18)

The Fruit of the Gospel (1:1-12)

1:1-8

Relate exactly how the gospel spread and grew. List at least two things which describe it is as living and active.

Find at least four things we can expect to happen when the gospel is spread. Share how you have witnessed those things happen in your life or church body.

1:9-12

Discern Paul’s ministry goals and method for achieving them.

Discuss your church body’s goal(s) and how it achieves the same things. What role do you play in achieving those goals?

The gospel is bearing fruit and growing in the entire world. -Col 1:6

From the day we heard about your love, we also have not stopped praying for you. -Col 1:9

The Hope of the Gospel (1:13-23)

“The Father rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”
-Col 1:13-14

False teachers use “persuasive speech that sounds reasonable.” (2:4)
Colossian false teachers evidently employed buzzwords to make people feel they had a superior gospel. Find the following buzzwords which Paul properly applies to Christ. “fullness” “complete” “knowledge” “power”
Catalog some modern religious buzzwords.

Compare this portion of Colossians with Eph1:15ff.

1:13-14

These verses are the gospel in a nutshell. Expound on them. Scan ahead to find additional succinct explanations of the gospel.

Scan through previous verses to find these topics: The Trinity, salvation through faith, good works.

1:15-20

This Son of God is... (List seven things and explain the significance)

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

What does each thing above say about the foolishness of adding something extra to the gospel of Christ?

Compare this with the description of Christ in the Nicene Creed. Use what is found in 1:15-23 to fully explain the person of Christ.

1:21-23

Find at least three things in this section to highlight God’s grace.

- Colossae was a hundred miles inland from Ephesus in the Lycus Valley.
- It was once a great and prosperous city, known for wool trade. But it began to decline by Paul’s time as nearby Laodicea and Hierapolis grew.
- Paul had never visited the church (1:4, 2:1).
- It seems likely that Epaphras had founded the church (Col 1:7). He likely brought the gospel there after meeting Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:10).
- Paul had been held at Caesarea for over two years before he finally appealed to Caesar in the summer of 58 AD. He then sailed to Rome for trial (Acts 25:10-12; 27:1). News of his appeal would certainly have spread.
- At this time, Epaphras was serving the Philippian church. (Phil 2:25-30)
- The Philippians had sent Epaphras to help Paul in prison (Phil 4:18).
- Epaphras then reported to Paul the controversy taking place at Colossae.
- Epaphras had become sick and nearly died (Phil 2:27).
- So, Paul sent Tychicus out with three letters: One to Ephesus, another letter to be taken 100 miles inland to the Colossians, and the letter to Philemon.
- Paul intended his letters to circulate beyond these cities (Col 4:16).
- An earthquake ruined much of Colossae not too long after this letter arrived.
- The ruins of ancient Colossae remain mostly unexplored to this day.
- However, this dwindling city still shines through the gospel it helped spread.

The Colossian Church’s History



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-Col 3:2

Contending for the Gospel

Share your experience of what happens to a neglected garden. Read Mark 4:1-20 to see what might work against the gospel seed. Even though the gospel is living and active and grows all on its own power, people can be fooled into relying on a different gospel. Paul takes his mission and the spiritual dangers seriously. After he sowed the gospel seed, he continued to “admonish and teach with all wisdom.” (Col 1:28)

Paul’s Contending (1:24-2:5)

1:24-29

Paul became a minister of the Church for the Gentiles. Review Acts 26:9-18.

Indeed, I want you to know how much I am struggling for you. -Col 2:1

Find several reasons why you can say Paul didn’t take any credit for the fruits of his ministry. Evaluate how well we reflect this truth when talking about ministry and ministers of the gospel today.

1:28-29

Note once again Paul’s ministry goal and the methods he used to achieve it. Discuss which of Paul’s ministry methods your family or church can grow in better emulating.

Evaluate the “goals” your church body seems to have.

2:1-5

False teachers in Colossae were evidently teaching about “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3) found apart from Christ. These false teachers were deceiving people “with persuasive speech that sounds reasonable.” (2:4) We will examine these teachings further in part III of our study. Brainstorm some different topics and arguments which false teachers use today to persuade people to turn away from Christ.

All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him (Christ). -Col 2:3.

Explain how each argument crumbles when you put Christ as the ultimate source of wisdom and knowledge.

The Colossian's Continuing (2:6-19)

You received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, by being rooted and built up in him, and strengthened in the faith.
-Col 2:6-7.

2:6-7

Paul urges the Colossian Christians to put down spiritual roots. Explain why this is so vital and how it is done.

Brainstorm some ways Christians actively take ownership of their maturing in faith and not just rely on the "struggling" (2:1) of others.

For all the fullness of God's being dwells bodily in Christ. -Col 2:9

2:8-10

Explain how "philosophy," "human tradition" and "the basic principles of this world" can all work against the simple gospel.

Note: Paul takes the spiritual buzzword "fullness" and helps us realize we already have everything in Christ. Explain what we have.

Read Genesis 17:9-14 to determine exactly who circumcision was for and its purpose. Read Gal 5:2-4 to see the danger in insisting on circumcision as necessary for salvation.

2:11-12

Identify what covenant we have that is far better than the old covenant of circumcision given to Israel.

2:13-15

There are several vivid gospel pictures here. Relate your favorite.

"Do not let anyone who enjoys false humility... tell you that you are disqualified from the prize. ... he is puffed up."
-Col 2:18

2:16-19

Circumcision, unclean foods, and the Sabbath were not just "human traditions." They were part of the Old Covenant with Israel. Share some ways the Old Testament ceremonies had value and explain how they foreshadowed the Christ.

"Do not let anyone judge you in regard to food or drink, or in regard to a festival or a New Moon or a Sabbath day." Explain what this means for our worship life today. What does it *not* mean?

Have you experienced false teachers who pretend to be humble but are puffed up?

What is a good response to this type of false teacher?

Angel worship and visions made some people "puffed up." They even taught that a lack of these things "disqualified you from the prize." (Compare 1:12) What similar things might people try to add to the gospel today?

Share what deceptive teachings you feel are the most vital to speak against today. Use Col 2:3 in formulating a response.



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Focused on His Work & Your New Life

Can you share a time when you received a new position or new status in the workforce and it came with new clothes? If not, can you share a time you made a major wardrobe shift in your life? A Christian has been brought from death to life, from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of Christ. That means a new life and new image.

Sharing in His Death and Life (2:20-3:4)

Share some historical and modern examples of asceticism.

2:20-23

Define asceticism. Explain what makes it appear like a wise religious teaching. Deduce why Paul is right in saying it fails to accomplish its goals.

Discuss why it might be such an appealing teaching in our culture.

3:1-4

Scan through the previous chapter to determine exactly how and when a Christian has died and risen with Christ.

Your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Col 3:3-4

Explain what it means to “Seek the things that are above...set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.” How might this be misapplied to mean a life of asceticism? Pinpoint what makes it so different from asceticism.

Describe what “your life” now looks like as a baptized believer.

The New Self: Renewed in the Image of Christ (3:5-17)

Compare this section with Eph 4:20-32

3:5-7

Differentiate between separating from the world and “putting to death what is worldly in you.” List the six things we are to put to death and explain how this is done in Christian living.

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Use Col 1:8-11; 1:18a; 1:23; 1:27; 2:6-7; 2:10a; 2:12; 3:3 to elaborate on how we put on the new self.

3:8-11

Instead of purging ourselves of material things Paul list six abstract things we are to get rid of. Identify what they all hold in common.

Find several things which describe our new status.

3:12-15

New self, new image, new clothes. List at least seven things we are to “put on.” Identify what they all hold in common.

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Evaluate how well this is done in your church body and household.

3:16-17

Paul had listed six things we are to get rid of (3:8-9). List six things which ought to flow out of us in their place. Pinpoint their source.

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Christ-Like in Your Household and Vocation (3:18-4:1)

3:18-21

Analyze what often makes a family fall apart. Give examples of how the new self is evident in a Christian home.

Paul sent this letter along with the letter to Philemon. Onesimus a former slave travelled back to Philemon “no longer as a slave... as a dear brother.” (Phm 16)

3:22-4:1

Slaves in ancient Rome often worked to pay off a debt. Apply this section to Christian employees and employers. Discuss what makes them so different as Christians.



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Working Together for His Gospel Cause

Describe your church body, its mission work, and summarize how it works together within the bonds of Christian fellowship. Discuss what is needed to keep that fellowship strong and faithful.

In Mission Minded Living (4:2-6)

4:2-4

Identify four things here which guide our prayer life. Discuss how you can increase each in your own prayer life.

Be persistent in prayer
...and pray for us.
-Col 4:2-3

Exercise: explore your church body’s website, magazine, or mission blogs to discover new areas of ministry to include in your prayers. Jot down three and include a plan to formulate regular prayer.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

4:5-6

Identify “the outsiders” you have contact with on a regular basis. Discuss what is meant by “make the most of your opportunity.”

Walk in wisdom in the way you act toward those on the outside, making the most of your opportunity. -Col 4:5

Agree or Disagree: “Most people I know would consider Christians to be gracious in speech and always with a good answer ready.”

Did Paul write Colossians?

- The evidence for its authenticity as a letter of Paul is both ancient and consistent so that there need be no doubt that Paul wrote it. It is found in one of the earliest manuscripts containing a collection of Paul’s letters, papyrus⁴⁶, which is dated around 200 AD. Note: some scholars argue the date for this manuscript collection to possibly be before 70 AD.
- Two ancient listings of the canon of Scripture, Marcion’s canon (c. 130 AD) and the Muratorian canon (180 AD) list Colossians as one of Paul’s letters.
- Irenaeus (b. 130 AD), Clement of Alexandria (b. 150 AD), and Origen (b. 185 AD) explicitly call it Paul’s letter.

In Christian Fellowship (4:7-18)

4:7-18

Scan through this closing portion to find examples of the following:

- ✓ The ancient version of a mission update.
- ✓ Urging to welcome people working together in fellowship.
- ✓ Evidence Paul knew gospel ministers with various cultural backgrounds.
- ✓ Mutual encouragement between gospel ministers.
- ✓ A positive report of a faithful missionary, contending for the flock.
- ✓ Mutual prayer between gospel ministers and the flock.
- ✓ Urging to greet nearby sister churches in fellowship.
- ✓ Instructions to build up the faith of those in fellowship.
- ✓ Urging for a gospel worker to remain faithful to his call to serve.

Paul lists ten people by name at the close of his letter. Summarize his purpose in mentioning each of them.

Share which of the above you would like to see more often.

Connection with other New Testament letters

- Closely tied with Philemon. The slave under discussion in Philemon, Onesimus, is sent with Tychicus, the letter bearer, and called “one of you.” (Col 4:17)
- Both Philemon and Colossians contain Timothy’s name in the greeting.
- Both Philemon and Colossians contain closing greetings from Aristarchus, Mark, Epaphras, Luke and Demas. (Col 4:10-14; Phm 23-24).
- Archippus is a “fellow-soldier,” (Phm 2) and told to fulfill his ministry (Col 4:17).
- Very likely sent along with the letter to the Ephesians. Tychicus, the letter bearer, is mentioned the same way in Eph 6:21-22 and Col 4:7-8.
- Some of the structure and themes parallel the letter to the Ephesians.

The value of this letter

- The message of Colossians is one of great practical value also for us 21st-century Christians. We also live in an age that puts a high premium on knowledge and learning. In our day, as in the apostle’s, human wisdom and learning are often allowed to sit in judgment over the Scriptures and over the gospel that the Scriptures reveal. Today’s so-called “higher criticism” resembles the Colossian heresy in its supposition that the “traditional” gospel is too simple and must be supplemented, or at the very least explained, by learned human scholars if we are to know God’s Word in its “complete” form. A more sophisticated kind of Christianity, we are told, is necessary for our 21st-century world.
- As children of God, we, of course, do not despise learning or exalt ignorance. But we cannot expect secular, human knowledge to solve the world’s ills, because that knowledge does not address and cannot cure man’s greatest problem—namely, sin. Only Christ can solve this problem. Knowing and trusting in him remains the ultimate answer, the ultimate spiritual wisdom. The unbelieving scholar may sneer, but in Colossians the apostle reminds us again that in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

-Hartyn J. Kuschel, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, The People’s Bible p. 108–109.

Defend why this letter is worth reading over and over.

Discuss the quote above and apply it to your life.

Review Colossians. Share what you will take away from this study.



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