



IN CHRIST ALONE

THE SUPREMACY OF JESUS CHRIST, IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

“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.” (Col. 2:6-7)

These studies were prepared using the following resources:

Colossians: Focus on Christ. Luci Shaw, Fisherman Bible Study Series.

Paul for Everyone: Prison Letters. Tom Wright.

Colossians, Philemon. Peter T. O'Brien, World Biblical Commentary.

Bible studies available at <http://sermons.dpc.org.au/Colossians.pdf>

Colossians & Philemon: so walk in Him, John Woodhouse.

All Scripture quotations are taken from the NIV 1986.

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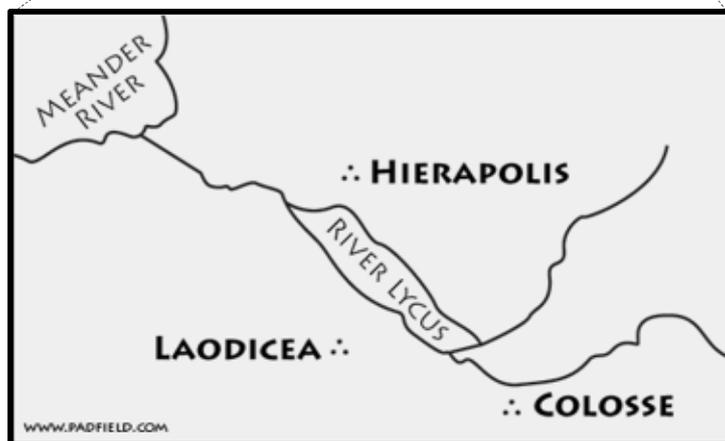
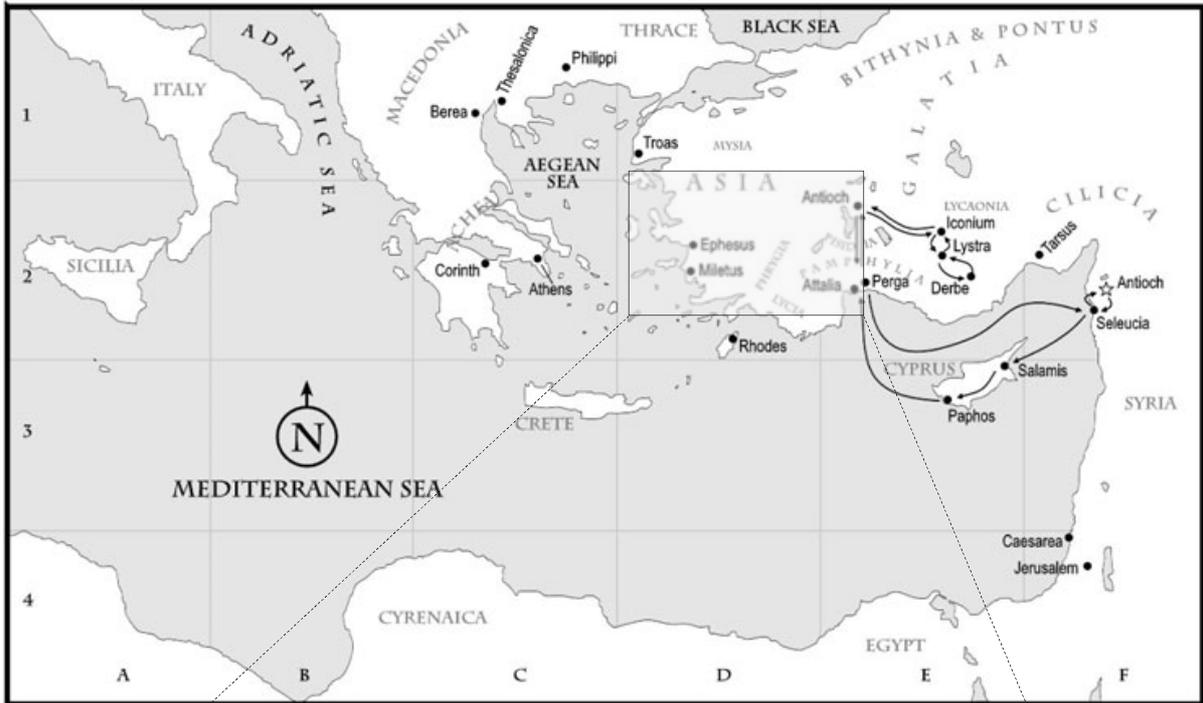
STUDY 1



THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

*“All over the world this gospel is bearing
fruit and growing, just as it has been
doing among you since the day you heard
it and understood God’s grace
in all its truth.” (1:6)*

Where in the world is Colossae?



Welcome to Colossae!

Just imagine living in the Roman city of Colossae. Like many key cities, Colossae sits next to a river and has highways streaming through it. Around 15kms down the road is a bustling city called Laodicea. Further along is the city of Hierapolis. These three cities all nestle together in the beautiful Lycus valley about 150km from the coastal city of Ephesus.

Because of the fertile valley and trade routes, Colossae is a pretty busy place, with a good number of traders and visitors in the city at any one time. With a bustling marketplace, it's a commercially active place. But Colossae is also a very *religious* city. There is a whole 'menu' of gods to choose from - Ephesian Artemis, Laodicean Zeus, Selene, Demeter, Helios, and Athena. Furthermore, like all key cities in the Roman Empire at the time, the Emperor Nero is venerated to almost god-like status – he is the “lord” of the Empire, the one who brings prosperity and maintains the peace of Rome. You still remember the edict that Nero sent out proclaiming that sacrifices were to be made at the pagan temples, to commemorate him becoming Emperor.

Added into the mix is a large population of Jews who live in Colossae. Thousands of them. They stick out like a sore thumb because they don't worship the pagan gods, and certainly don't venerate Nero as “lord”. In a way, you're the same – you don't worship Nero as some sort of demi-god. You belong to a new group called ‘Christians’. But, unlike most of the Jews in Colossae, you believe that the Jewish Messiah has come to earth and done some history-making things. You sometimes call him “Christ Jesus the Lord”. By that you mean “King Jesus, the real Emperor”. In the marketplace of ideas and “lords” – you believe that *only one is the true Lord*.

You became a Christian after Epaphras told you the gospel – the proclamation that Jesus is the crucified and resurrected Lord of the world. You can still remember the time Epaphras came back so excited after his trip to Ephesus, where he heard about Jesus from someone called the Apostle Paul. Paul spent some time at Ephesus and started a church there by proclaiming the Jewish Messiah and all his wondrous deeds.

Epaphras returned to Ephesus to see Paul again and to report on the state of the church in your city. A former slave named Onesimus has just returned to Colossae, and guess what – it turns out that the Apostle Paul has sent a letter to the Christians in your city! You hope that the letter will help strengthen your faith, and the faith of your fellow Christians. After all, there's a lot of pressure. There are so many spiritual options getting in your face, it's hard to not feel like you've maybe rushed into this too quickly. Are you missing out on all the fun? Are you just being stubborn in insisting that this Jewish Messiah is *the* Lord? And is faith in Jesus *really* all you need to be right with God? Is it really that *simple*?

You're keen to hear what Paul makes of all this.

The next day, the Christian elders in your city call you to Philemon's courtyard, where Paul's new letter will be read. Everyone's there. Young and old. Rich and poor. Slaves and masters. Someone stands up, and removes the letter from a leather travel pouch. This is what you hear. . .

Read Colossians 1:1-14

1. In a world of so many “gods” and “lords”, what impact would the opening verse have on you?

2. This letter comes from both Paul and Timothy (v. 1). Epaphras is the one who first preached the Gospel to the Colossians (v. 7). So why is only *Paul* called an “Apostle”?

3. From verse 2, list at least four facts about those to whom this letter was written.

(a) _____

(b) _____

(c) _____

(d) _____

4. Paul and Timothy had probably never met their readers in Colossae (see 1:7-8). How then could they all be “brothers”?

5. Paul was grateful that the Colossians had a reputation for what two qualities (v. 4)? Which quality comes first and how does it produce the second?

6. Paul gives the Colossians his bigger perspective as a missionary. He says the “gospel is bearing fruit and growing” everywhere it goes (v. 6). What does that mean? What will that look like at the local church level?

7. If Paul were writing to our church or Bible Study Group, what evidence of gospel “fruit and growth” might he find? Be specific.

8. According to verse 9, what was Paul's highest prayer priority for the Colossians? Discuss how important this need is in our everyday Christian lives.

9. Look at verses 10-12. What four ways should God's will be bearing fruit in our daily living? Have a go at putting these goals in your own words.

10. What two realms are contrasted in verses 12-14? How might your life be different *without* the life that comes through the gospel?

This is a letter from a man in chains (4:10, 18). Does Paul sound despondent? Does he complain about his lot in life? No! As a servant of King Jesus he gives thanks that the Colossians have heard and believed the gospel of the true Lord. And not only have they *believed* it, they are being *changed by it* as they live under the lordship of Jesus. This change is especially evident in how they love each other.

Faith in the good news about Jesus brings new life. But here's the thing: this new life keeps bearing fruit and growing throughout all of our lives. Not just during the first few years of being a Christian, but all the time! Though they (and we) live in a marketplace of options and "lords" that compete for our heart's devotion, living under the Lordship of King Jesus brings a way of seeing the world that can't be compared.

Why not pray that we all would grow in knowledge, love and thankfulness to God, because of the gospel of King Jesus!

STUDY 2



THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

Colossians 1:13-23

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” (1:17-18)

300 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000 000

That's how many stars are in the known universe. Give or take a few "0"s.

That's a lot!

Every day the discoveries of science confirm how big, beautiful and complex our universe is. But the wonder of the universe isn't a recent discovery. For as long as human beings have been able to observe this creation, we've been witnesses to its incredible kaleidoscope of power.

It's so breathtaking that humans have always asked big questions, like where does all this beauty and power come from? Why is it here? Why are *we* here?

In our reading today, Paul offers some surprising answers to those questions.

Paul started the letter by giving thanks for the remarkable change that had happened in the lives of the Colossian Christians. That change had nothing to do with how intelligent or moral they were. It had everything to do with the magnificence of the one who saved them. Their new Lord, Jesus Christ, is no ordinary saviour – he's the preeminent creator and sustainer of the world and the one who shed his blood to reconcile us to God. This Lord, unlike others, has real power.

Whatever lies ahead for the Colossians – whatever temptations and trials - they must understand more deeply the one who has rescued them from "the dominion of darkness".

Read Colossians 1:13-20 (NIV 1986)

¹³ For he has

rescued us from the dominion of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,
¹⁴ in whom we have redemption,
the forgiveness of sins.

¹⁵ He is

the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn over all creation.

¹⁶ For by him all things were created:
things in heaven and on earth,
visible and invisible,
whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;
all things were created by him and for him.

¹⁷ 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
and the firstborn from among the dead,

so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,

²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things,

whether things on earth or things in heaven,

by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

1. The word “he” appears in verses 13 and 15. Who is the first “he”, and who is the second “he”?
2. What might it mean for Jesus to be “the image of the invisible God” (v. 15a)? What are the implications of this for us when we get into a general discussion with a person about God?
3. Jehovah’s Witnesses claim that verse 15 teaches that Jesus is himself a created being. What do you think of this idea? Is there anything in verse 16 which contradicts their view?
4. Verses 15-17 especially describe Jesus’ relationship to all creation. What does this mean for how we view the future?
5. Look at verse 18. What is “the church”? And what might it mean for us if Jesus is the “head” of it?

6. “He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead” (v.18b).
Do you notice any tension within this statement?

As Paul teaches the Colossians about Jesus, notice verses 15-17 focus on Jesus being the creator and purpose of the universe. Verses 18-20 then speak of Jesus’ work in bringing reconciliation into the creation. We see the ‘old creation’ giving way to the ‘new creation’ by means of reconciliation.

7. Looking again at verses 19-20. How is that reconciliation achieved?

Paul gives us a picture of Jesus restoring, in a sense, the complete reign of God over his creation. Though the creation had been plunged into chaos because of evil and sin, through Jesus’ death and resurrection a “new creation” has been heralded: a new heavens and a new earth where Jesus reigns completely over all.

Therefore, having new life in Jesus means the Colossians are a part of what Jesus is doing to bring peace and order to the universe under his lordship.

This means to be a part of the church is to be part of God’s new creation that is breaking into the world through the power of the Spirit! What a mind-blowing idea!

But Paul’s not done . . .

Read Colossians 1:21-23 (NIV 1986)

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour.

²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation—

²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

8. Paul can confidently say that the Colossians have been reconciled to God through Christ. But what *kind* of faith is saving faith?

9. If these verses were all the Scripture you had, what would they tell you about the lengths to which Jesus went, to reconcile us to God? What impact does this sacrifice of the exalted firstborn Son have on you?

10. Jesus died in the past to ‘present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation’ in the future (v.22). Why might some people be tempted to walk away from Christ and live under another “lord”?

Paul has shown the Colossians that Jesus is no run-of-the-mill Lord. He’s the agent through whom creation came into being. He’s the one who holds it all together. He’s the one who came into creation, died for sin, and was raised to life. In short, Jesus is the creator of the old creation which was spoiled by sin, and the creator of the new one which is marked by reconciliation.

How incredible that the Son of God who started the universe would become *part* of it, in order to save those he created from destruction and to reconcile them to the Father!

This is God’s big plan. A gracious plan. A loving plan. And it’s clearly seen in action in the midst of God’s people – the church. Therefore the Colossians, like us, should ‘continue in our faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel’ (v.23).

STUDY 3



THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST

Colossians 1:24-2:5

“My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ.” (2:2)

So far in this letter, the Apostle Paul has thanked God for making such a big difference in the lives of the Colossian Christians. Paul said their new life came when they believed the gospel – the good news about Jesus. Having believed in him, they are now “bearing fruit and growing”. They are changing to more reflect the character and purposes of Jesus himself.

Then Paul showed that the gospel message is significant – not just because it’s a message that changes lives, but because of what it says about Jesus: that he is God the Son, the creator of the world, and the one who reconciles people to God.

But he’s more than that. He’s the “firstborn from the dead” (1:18) – the first person in God’s plan to rise from death, never to die again. The resurrection and ascension of Jesus is God’s way of saying: *Jesus runs this place.*

King Jesus is supreme over all.

His rule is especially shown in a group of people – the church. The church is simply people who live under his Kingship, by believing and obeying the gospel.

In today’s reading, Paul (who writes this letter in prison) explains his sufferings as a man who proclaims King Jesus. He also makes it clear to the Colossians what he is hoping to achieve through his suffering and struggles.

Read Colossians 1:24-29 (NIV 1986)

These verses are especially tricky. Below we have spread out the verses to help us unpack what they are saying:

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you,
and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking
in regard to Christ's afflictions,
for the sake of his body,
which is the church.

²⁵ I have become its servant
by the commission God gave me
to present to you the word of God in its fullness—

²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations,
but is now disclosed to the saints.

²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles
the glorious riches of this mystery,
which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

²⁸ We proclaim him,
admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom,
so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

²⁹ To this end I labour,
struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

1. If Paul thinks of Jesus as the “head” of the church (which is his “body”), what’s the link between **Jesus**, the **church** when **affliction** comes?
2. In many people suffering produces bitterness and self-pity. Why does Paul have a radically different response to suffering?
3. Paul serves Jesus by serving his ‘body’ – the church. Looking at verses 25 & 28, what is Paul’s main task as he serves Jesus?
4. In verses 26 & 27, Paul mentions a “mystery”. What is it?
5. Why is ‘Christ living in us’ described as “the hope of glory”? How else might it be described?

Jesus suffered to save people from sin. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus gathers his people together and loves them and cares for them.

They are like a body. He is the head. When the body is afflicted, Jesus is moved. Remember in the book of Acts, Jesus appeared to Saul and said “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Acts 9:4). In a sense, to afflict the church, is to afflict Jesus. The ‘head’ is not disconnected from the body!

As part of ‘the body’ (the church) Paul shares the gospel, and as he does he meets with suffering too. It’s part of what it means to stand up for the truth in a fallen world. The gospel goes on. And, though it might be difficult, suffering for the sake of the gospel goes on too.

Paul has suffered for the sake of spreading the Gospel. There is more suffering to come. And yet it makes him rejoice!

In your Bibles read Colossians 2:1-5

6. Paul says he’s “struggling” for the Colossians and for the Christians in Laodicea. What do you think this struggling might be? Why is he struggling for people he’s never met? Have you ever ‘struggled’ for anyone else?

7. Look at 2:2. Paul speaks in more detail about how he hopes to benefit the church. Describe what it might be like to be a part of a church that is like this.

8. Paul's been talking about the supremacy of Jesus (vv. 15-20) and his God-given ministry to the church (1:24-2:5). Looking at verse 4, why is he saying all this?

9. In your opinion, is being a follower of Jesus easy or hard? Is it possible to have the 'easy' bits without the 'hard' bits?

Paul is a man on a mission. And because of that mission he's in prison. He suffers. His life isn't easy - it's *hard*. But there's also joy in the midst of it because in giving his all for Jesus, he know he's walking in Jesus' footsteps. Jesus suffered for the good news. So does Paul.

But it's all worth it because God's plan to bring new spiritual life is unfolding right in front of Paul's eyes. And it's beautiful because the result is Jesus Christ dwelling in the hearts of people of every nationality, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Or as Paul puts it: "Christ in you, the hope of glory".

Paul's wants the same thing Jesus wants: that his people might grow into spiritual maturity (v. 28) and have "the full riches of complete understanding" (2:2). As we conform our lives to the character and purposes of Jesus we'll want those things too. Even when it's hard. Sometimes, *especially* when it's hard.

STUDY 4



FULLNESS IN CHRIST

Colossians 2:6-23

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.” (2:9-10)

Thus far in his letter Paul has covered a lot of ground. He has given thanks for the growing faith of the Colossian Christians. He's told them his prayer for them is that they'll keep growing in faith, love, knowledge and hope. He's told them about how magnificent their new Lord is. And he's made it clear why he (Paul) is so committed to sharing the good news about Jesus.

But Paul knows they need to be very clear how **sufficient** their new Lord is to make them right with God. Jesus is not just *magnificent* – he's *sufficient* to fill their lives with the life, love and hope they need from God. Now they follow Jesus, they need nothing else.

But that's not how many people in Colossae see things.

Colossae, if you remember, is a melting pot of values and worldviews. A place where ideas meet and mix. In the middle of all this, to proclaim that faith in King Jesus is enough to make them right with God, is simply *ludicrous*.

It's clear from today's reading that some Jews (and perhaps people from other religious traditions) thought the Colossians needed more than 'just Jesus'. To them, it had to be **Jesus + something else = a full life**.

Not according to Paul.

Read Colossians 2:6-15

5. Verse 12 says the Colossians have “been buried with him” (Jesus), and also “raised with him”. What in the world does that mean?

6. What did circumcision mean to the Jews? According to verse 11, what was the circumcision “done by Christ” and how does it bring us freedom?

7. What “human traditions” and “basic principles of this world” seduce people away from following Jesus? Why are they so powerful?

Paul is trying to get the Colossians to see that through faith in Jesus they have already died to their old lives. They’ve been “cut off” from their old life of trying to be right through rules and striving. It didn’t work. Now the fullness they seek deep inside is found only through Jesus. They have been caught up in his new life and his new rule over the world.

That means a few things. Let’s see what . . .

Read Colossians 2:16 -23

It's hard to know exactly what false views were being presented to the Christians in Colossae. The reality is that many different "do this and you'll get that" religious views were buzzing around.

What is clear is that some people were telling the Colossians that to achieve a greater 'fullness' or level of spirituality, a simple faith in Jesus was not enough.

But Paul says "don't believe it".

We can't create a "full life" with God simply by ticking off a list of rules. All we can do is run to Christ, and entrust our hearts, lives and eternity to him. He died to bring new life into our fallen world. And he was raised so that we might live that brand new life and follow the risen King into the new world he has promised.

Jesus + nothing = a full life in relationship with God.

STUDY 5



RAISED WITH CHRIST

Colossians 3:1-17

*“Since, then, you have been raised with
Christ, set your hearts on things above,
where Christ is seated at the
right hand of God. (3:1)*

4. What does it mean that our life is “hidden with Christ in God”?

Paul is developing ideas that he began back in chapter 2. Back there he said that the Christian – the follower of King Jesus – has been united with Jesus in the most profound way. Jesus’ death for sin was *our* death for sin. His resurrection brings *us* new life out of death. His ascension to rule from heaven means that our life is caught up in his eternal rule over all. He is the exalted King whose love, power and glory permeate every day we have on earth. That’s just the way it is, for the Christian.

Because of Jesus our past has been changed, and so our present should also be different. Next Paul explains *how* it should be different - it’s about ‘wearing’ the life you’ve been given.

Read Colossians 3:5-11

6. Paul says we should “put to death whatever belongs to our earthly nature”. Does this contradict the fact that we’ve been “raised with Christ”? Explain.

7. How conscious and deliberate should this act of putting to death sinful desires and actions be? In what way is our human will involved?

8. Colossians 3:5, 8-9 lists several attitudes and actions that don't "fit" in our new Christian life. Let's pick three and see why these things have no place as we serve our risen King:

(a) greed (v.5)

(b) malice (v. 8)

(c) lying (v. 9)

Read Colossians 3:12-17

9. Scan the list of the qualities we are to "put on". How might these things help grow our church and keep it unified?

10. Is the 'putting on' of our new nature simply a matter of our personal decision and action? To what extent is a supernatural work of God required if we are to change?

11. How does verse 17 match up with verse 1?

Jesus gives a new life to his special people, by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. Through faith, God's people are united with Jesus, in his death for sin, and his resurrection to life. God's people are on a journey, following Jesus into the new world that his death and resurrection have heralded. From the right hand of the Father, Jesus is working all things according to his glorious plan. Our new life in Him is part of that unfolding plan: a journey of discovering our new identity and continually 'putting it on'.

We are to daily leave our old life behind in the tomb of Jesus– the old ways of sin and self-rule – and learn to walk a *different* way. To walk to the beat of a different drum, namely – the loving rule of Christ. As we follow him in the real world, we'll continually throw off the old habits, and put on the new self which has been made alive in Christ.

As we walk in him, bit by bit, his peace will envelope us. As the truth of Christ dwells in us, we'll encourage and challenge each other. And with thankful hearts we will follow the ruling King, and dress accordingly.

12. Is there anything you've thought about in this study that you can be genuinely thankful for?

STUDY 6



AT HOME WITH CHRIST

Colossians 3:18-4:1

*“Whatever you do, work at it with all
your heart, as working for the Lord, not
for men . . .” (3:23)*

Words are powerful things.

The Bible is filled with a whole range of words and concepts that evoke many feelings in people. There are some biblical words that even non-Christians love to hear – things like “love”, “hope” and “peace”.

However, there are *other* words in the Bible that catch people’s attention in a more negative way. Words like “submit”, “obey”, “reverence” and especially “slaves”. In an age of equality, rights and free choice, words like that don’t normally make people feel good.

For that reason, what Paul says in this part of the Bible could be offensive to you.

As Paul heads towards the end of his important letter to the Colossian church, he touches on aspects of our lives that are deeply personal: our home life and work life. Let’s approach this part of his letter with teachable and open minds as we seek to grapple with the pointy truths we find here.

Let’s read. . .

Colossians 3:18-4:1 (NIV 1986)

- 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 embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
- ²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favouritism.
- ^{4:1} Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

1. This list of commands (often called a “household code”) must be understood in light of the preceding context. Have someone **read 3:12-17**. What is on Paul’s mind as he transitions to talking about our conduct at home and work? How does that affect our understanding of this household code?
2. Paul’s first instruction is for wives to submit to their husbands. How do you feel when you hear this, especially when Paul says it’s “fitting in the Lord”?

To submit means “to place oneself under” someone or something. The reality is that “submission” is a requirement of all Christians. As we live under his lordship, Christ orders and structures his church and the lives of those who belong to it. Look up the follow verses noting who submits to who:

REFERENCE	THIS PERSON SUBMITS TO . . .	THIS PERSON
Hebrews 12:9		
Ephesians 5:24 (write both)		
Romans 13:1		
1 Cor. 16:15-16		
Titus 2:9		
1 Peter 5:5		
Ephesians 5:21		

As we come to terms with the idea of submission, we note that submission is a key feature of the whole Christian life! The way Christ structures and grows his people is not into a mass of free agents who do their own thing. Instead, submission or one kind or another is for every Christian because it pleases God, humbles us, and reflects the self-giving example of Christ.

3. The command to submit has an equally challenging counterpart in verse 19. The husband is called to love his wife. If he exhibits the qualities listed in 3:12-14, what would his love look like towards his wife? Does “submitting” to someone like this sound like slavery?

4. Consider the next pair of commands (3:20-21). What is a child’s responsibility to his or her parents? What is the motivation for this obedience?

5. The requirement that children obey their parents “in everything” places what obligation on the parents? What limit or qualification did Paul place on a father’s authority?

6. Read Paul’s negative warning in 3:21. In what *positive* ways can adults shape the development of the children around them?

Let's now look at what Paul says about slavery. In an age that knew nothing of social security payments and trade unions, often slavery was the only option for someone without family or prospects. When we hear about *slavery* it conjures up images of African-American slaves in chains. However, in Paul's time slavery was often not like this. Slavery was often contractual. In other words, there were Roman laws governing the general treatment of slaves and how long they could serve one master. Slavery in Paul's day was often more like having a very demanding job (not much fun at all!).

7. As we work for any kind of employer, whom are we really serving?
What difference should this realization make in the quality of our work?

8. Who does Paul give as an example to all employers (or "masters")?
What temptations do employers face in their treatment of employees?

While some might think this ‘household code’ is a bit outdated, consider what would happen if people did the *opposite* of what Paul commands . .

Who	Command given by Paul	What would the opposite look like?
Wives	Submit to your husbands	
Husbands	Love your wives Don't be harsh	
Children	Obeys your parents	
Fathers	Don't embitter your kids	
Slaves	Obeys your master/boss Obeys even when they're away	
Masters	Provide what is right & fair	

The new life that Christ brings to his people brings about new patterns of behaviour at every level. The ‘household code’ is an example of the care, concern and integrity we are called to have for each other as we all submit to Christ’s authority in everyday life.

Paul is clear that the people who Christ saves are *equal* (3:11), but not all have the same role to play in God’s new family of people. Employees must work hard for their bosses, because it’s in that setting they can really show they’re serving Christ. Children must learn obedience to parents because it pleases God. Husbands must love their wives with the sacrificial love of Christ. And wives must freely choose to “place themselves under” their husband’s love and care.

In all these relationships, God works to display his love and compassion to a world that thinks that individuality and independence is the key to a fulfilling life.

Pray . . .

An extra bit about slavery . . .

Some people claim that Paul advocated slavery and didn't care about the abuse of slaves by their 'masters'. After all, if Paul didn't like slavery surely he would have said so?

Paul knew how prevalent slavery was in the first century. In a society where you couldn't get social security payments, slavery (which was sometimes contractual) was the only option available if you didn't have a family to support you. Paul realized this, and so instead of declaring an impractical *ban* on slavery, he taught that Christian slaves should "be subject to their masters in everything" (Titus 2:9), and that their masters should provide "what is right and fair" (Col. 4:1). Elsewhere Paul also indicates that if you can legally secure release from your position as slave, *go for it!* In 1 Corinthians 7:21 he says ". . . if you can gain your freedom, do so". He goes on to say that if you're *not* a slave, "*do not* become slaves of men" (v.23). Paul knew that you couldn't abolish an entire class of 'employment' overnight, so he gave instructions to slave and master alike to be fair with their side of the deal. Far from advocating slavery, Paul fought for fairness in the slave-master relationship and planted the seeds of love and freedom which later bore fruit in the abolition of slavery.

STUDY 7



TOGETHER FOR CHRIST

Colossians 4:2-18

*“ . . . stand firm in all the will of God,
mature and fully assured.” (4:12)*

This is our final look at Paul's letter to the Christians in Colossae. We hope that you've been challenged by what you've read and thought about. In this final section Paul passes on some final greetings, and gives some concluding instructions to the Colossians.

However, this section isn't just a random selection of commands and "hellos". As we read let's look out for important things that churches should be focused on.

Read Colossians 4:2-6

1. According to these verses, how important is the role of prayer in the church? How important is prayer to you?
2. What relationships did Paul want the Colossians to especially be concerned about? Why?
3. How can Christians 'be wise toward outsiders' (vv. 5-6)? What happens if we're not wise in how we interact with 'outsiders'?

But we also see here a special kind of connectedness between Christians. Just as John the Baptist jumped in Elizabeth's womb when she entered the presence of the pregnant Mary, so we can share in a unique and almost inexplicable connection with God's people. We are, after all, brothers and sisters in his eternal family – that's something to be enthusiastic about!

To finish our look at this letter, let's look at what Epaphras prays for the Christians in Colossae:

“He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”

7. What does ‘wrestling in prayer’ mean? Should *we* do that too?

8. Explain what you think each of these things mean:

“standing firm in all the will of God” _____

“mature” _____

“fully assured” _____

Series wrap-up

Paul began his letter to the Christians in Colossae by giving thanks for their faith and love that spring from the hope they have through the gospel. Though they live in a society filled with different answers to the big questions, believing the gospel of Jesus has brought about a big change in their lives and their outlook on life. Through the power and Spirit of King Jesus, God has been gathering his people together in Colossae and changing them.

But Paul knows the danger they face. The danger is that they'll be tempted to water down their Christianity, or walk away altogether. The remedy that Paul prays for is that they grow in their knowledge of God. He said,

“. . . since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

Epaphras (who first preached the Gospel to them) prays along the same lines – that they *“may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured.”*

Let's pray that we can be people who stand firm in the new life that gospel brings and grow as we follow Christ together.

- ✓ Pray we remember that Jesus is our sovereign King through whom and for whom all things were created.
- ✓ Ask God to give us strength and wisdom as our faith is challenged by the many ideas we face around us.
- ✓ Pray that we would seek to live according to God's will and live at peace with each other.
- ✓ As we have contact with people outside the church, pray that our words and works would be clear and gracious..

