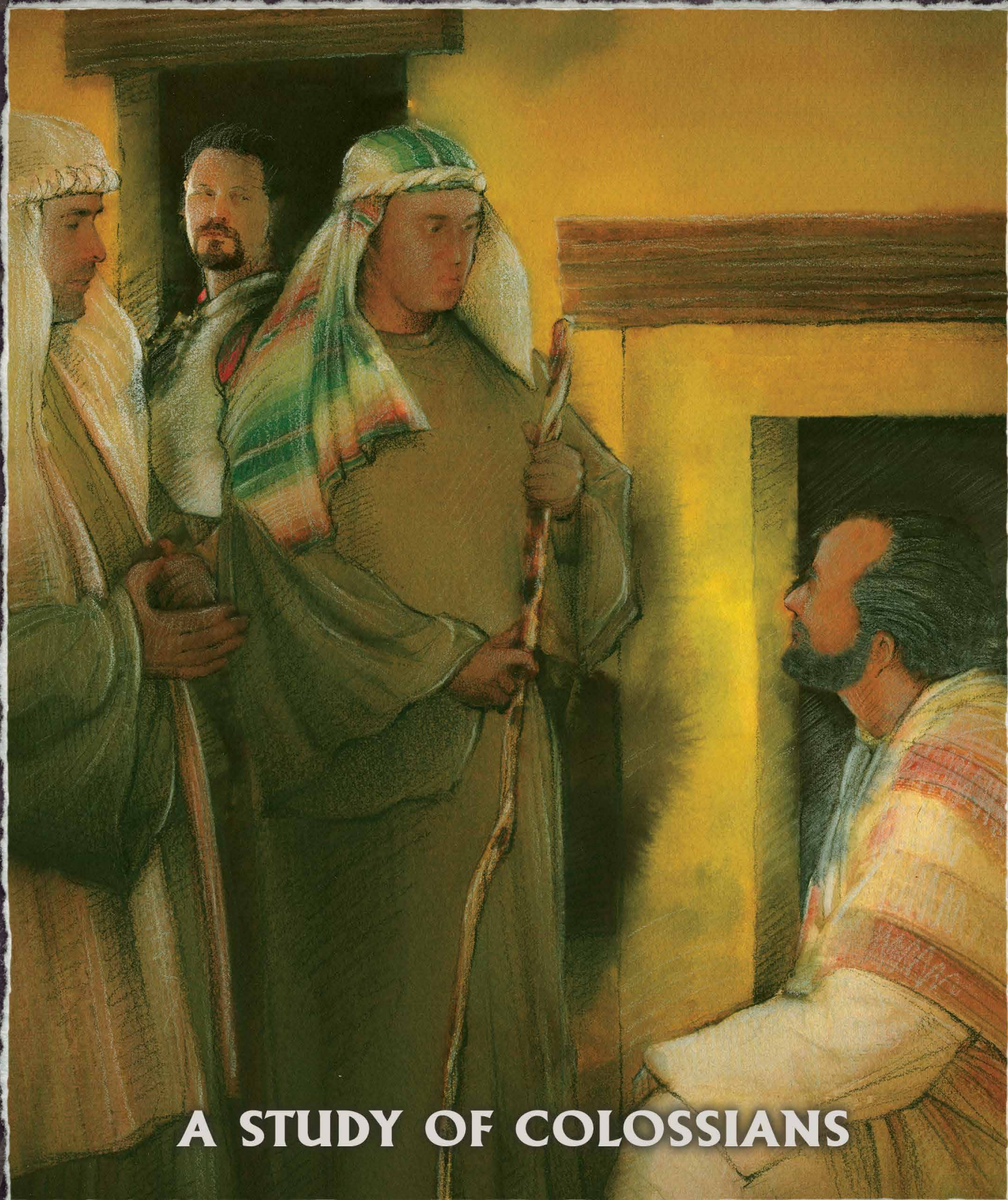


Christ in You



A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

WRITTEN BY TOM KELBY

Christ in You

A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

Written by Tom Kelby

Original illustrations, layout and design by Mark Yaeger



handstotheplow.org

Copyright© 2005 by Hands to the Plow, Inc.

*Published by Hands to the Plow, Inc.
P.O. Box 567 • Webster, WI 54893
715-349-7185*

First printing, 2005

ISBN: 1-930914-07-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in whole or in part, or stored in a retrieval system, transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher.

Unless otherwise indicated,

*“Scripture taken from the HOLY BIBLE: NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®.
Copyright© 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society.
Used by permission of The Zondervan Corporation.”*

The “NIV” and “New International Version” trademarks are registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by International Bible Society.

*“Scripture quotations marked “ESV” are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright© 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers.
Used by permission. All rights reserved.”*

“Scripture quotations marked “TEV” are from The New Testament in Today’s English, ©American Bible Society, 1966.”

“Scripture quotations marked “Amplified” are from The Amplified Bible, Old Testament copyright© 1965, 1987 by The Zondervan Corporation. The Amplified New Testament copyright© 1958, 1987 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.”

“Scripture quotations marked “Weymouth” are from The New Testament in Modern Speech Translated by Richard Francis Weymouth

I dedicate this book to the men who pray together with me on Thursday mornings. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" Psalm 133:1 - TK

I dedicate this book to my sons, Luke and Jack. I feel truly blessed to be traveling on this journey with you two. I cherish your love for Jesus and your desire to draw nearer to God in every way. I love you both very much. - MY

ABOUT THE COVER

The book of Colossians is one of Paul's four "prison epistles". Most scholars believe that Paul was under house arrest in Rome at the time he wrote this letter as well as the letters to the Philippians, Philemon and the Ephesians, hence the label "prison epistles". The purpose of this letter was to encourage the Christians in Colosse to hold firm to the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Paul was heart broken at the realization that the people were being deceived by "fine-sounding arguments" taught by false teachers that had infiltrated the church.

The exciting, and typically challenging, part of designing an illustration for this Bible Study series is trying to develop a compelling image that captures a relevant moment in time - something that God orchestrated a long time ago in a far away land that holds true to us in the here and the now. Tom and I talked through the possible chain of events that took place prior to Paul actually putting quill to papyrus. We landed on the idea of recreating the scene where Epaphras (standing on the far left), a distraught leader in the church in Colosse, finally made his way to Paul (sitting down) in Rome with the unfortunate news about the disintegration of the church in Colosse. Here is where the creative license is definitely applied - there was a run away slave named Onesimus (standing next to Paul) who had previously found his way to Paul in Rome and was acting as Paul's servant at the time. Onesimus had run away from his master, Philemon, who was a church leader in, you guessed it, Colosse. It is believed that Onesimus, as well as another man named Tychicus, actually delivered Paul's letter back to the church in Colosse. I wanted to place Onesimus in the scene to connect him to the delivery of the letter which was God's clever plan from the outset. I also added a Roman guard in the background to give a subtle understanding that Paul was definitely under arrest and the possibility of him personally delivering the message to the people was not plausible at that time. I liked the idea of an indignant look on the guard's face to indicate that there was a definite contrast to the ways of the "worldly" and the followers of Christ (more of my creative license was utilized here). To him, the concern about a bunch of religious zealots was pure foolishness and Paul's imprisonment was a result of this same foolish behavior. We should be thankful that Paul was so "foolish".

The back cover illustration was provided to give a better understanding of the geographical relationship between Rome and Colosse. I also incorporated the potential paths that Onesimus and Epaphras may have traveled to get to Paul in Rome. Onesimus, being a run away slave, probably stayed in the shadows by traveling on land as far as he was able while Epaphras took to the faster route by ship.

I owe a great deal of thanks to my dear friends, John Guist and Dick Bartz. John is a long time friend and a pastor at South Metro Vineyard (formerly Victory Vineyard) in Burnsville, Minnesota. He and three other gentlemen from the church obliged me in the initial photo study that was the foundation for the finished artwork. Dick is a dear friend who provided the costumes and props that aided in the authenticity of the final piece. It is definitely a blessing to have wonderful friends who are always eager to help out a brother - thanks, guys.



Mark Yaeger

PREFACE

I can't tell you how excited I am that you are about to spend an extended period of time in the book of Colossians. This book's simple message is the answer to the tiredness, the weakness, the fruitlessness, the guilt and the failure experienced by so many Christians. This book's simple message, if accepted by faith, ALWAYS leads to joy, contentment, peace, rest and productivity.

I would encourage you to read this book slowly and carefully. As the truths soak into your head and your heart, grab hold of them by faith; make them yours, for, if you are a Christian, that is what they truly are.

May God give you all that he desires in the weeks ahead. Grace and peace to you.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom". The letter "T" is large and stylized, with a horizontal line extending to the right. The letters "o" and "m" are written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Tom Kelby

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

There are four parts to this eight-week study: Scripture reading, study questions to answer, study notes to read, and a weekly journal to record insights the Holy Spirit has taught you. All four are important. You will not get nearly as much out of this study if you skip any of the four. Also, do the lessons in order. Paul builds on his arguments in each verse. We need to follow the process he follows, for we will miss basic truths that are foundational to our understanding if we jump ahead.

Here's how I would recommend using this book:

On day one of each week, read the appropriate verses in Colossians we have printed in the book. We have printed the actual verses in this study book for three main reasons. First, we believe you will be able to more freely write notes and questions in the margins, which is something you may not be comfortable doing in your "everyday" Bible. Second, most Bibles break down the verses for the reader, even titling the different sections. We have printed the verses without these breaks as it is important that you dissect the passage for yourself. Finally, many Bibles include study notes. These are helpful, but they can keep you from "wrestling" with the passage yourself.

Read the passage slowly. Once you have read through the passage, read it through a second time. God has a great deal he would like to show you in his word. As you read, ask the Lord for wisdom. Why is this passage significant? What is the truth Paul is trying to get across in this passage? How do the thoughts in this passage relate to those in the verses before it? We have printed the passages with enough spacing so that you have the room necessary to write your thoughts and questions regarding the passage, however, do no writing your first time through the passage. Simply read the passage slowly. Your second read-through of the passage should be different. This time, pay close attention to the themes Paul is developing. Circle repeated words or phrases. Underline major themes. Break the passage down into smaller sections and title these sections. Write down other verses that relate to truths Paul is teaching in this passage. Avoid the use of a Bible commentary or the notes in a study Bible at this point. Do the work yourself. The Lord will give you wisdom.

On days two through five, answer the study questions. The questions will often bring you to other passages that will further illuminate the verses you are studying.

On day six, read the study notes. These notes will give you my perspective on the passage. Oftentimes in the notes you will find verses referred to, but not printed. These verses are important. Please take the time to look these verses up. It will help you in your overall understanding of Scripture.

Finally, after you've read the notes, write down any truths the Holy Spirit has taught you over the previous week.

You will find an additional section for notes in the back of this book.

Week One

INTRODUCTION

WEEK ONE

Introduction

DAY ONE

What would you like to see happen in your heart and life as a result of this study?

Write a prayer to the Lord, asking him to do those things you have asked.

DAY TWO

Who wrote the letter to the church in Colosse, and who was with him at the time of writing?
Colossians 1:1

In which New Testament letters do you find this same pairing of names in the introduction?

Who was the letter addressed to? *Colossians 1:2*

What was this church known for? *Colossians 1:3-4*

Paul commends the church for “the love you have for all the saints” (verse 4). This means their love for the church extended beyond their own individual church. What actions might have led to them developing a reputation like this?

What were the readers to do with the letter after they read it? *Colossians 4:16*

Where was Colosse located? (Use the maps located in the back of your Bible. The maps you will want to refer to are the ones depicting the travels of Paul. You may also refer to the illustration on the back cover of this book.)

What towns were located near Colosse? *Colossians 2:1; 4:13; 4:16*

The apostle Paul was not the person who first brought the gospel to Colosse. A man named Epaphras did. Where was he from, and what was Paul's opinion of him? *Colossians 1:7-8; 4:12-13*

Do you, like Epaphras, share Christ with those who do not know him? What would godly disciples say about you?

Epaphras was with Paul (probably in Rome) when the letter was written. According to Paul, how did this man spend his time? *Colossians 4:12-13*

Would others say that you spend your time in this way?

Epaphras is also mentioned in the book of Philemon. How does Paul describe him in that book? *Philemon 23*

Why do you think Paul describes him in this way?

WEEK ONE

Introduction

WEEK ONE

Introduction

Epaphras probably became a Christian while Paul was in Ephesus – the leading town in the same province Colosse was located in. Describe Paul’s work in Ephesus. *Acts 19 and 20*

DAY THREE

Why do you think Paul sent Tychicus to carry this letter to Colosse? *Colossians 4:7-8, 18*

What else did Tychicus do for Paul? *2 Timothy 4:12; Ephesians 6:21-22; Titus 3:12; Acts 20:1-5*

Who accompanied Tychicus to Colosse? *Colossians 4:9*

How does Paul describe this man in this verse?

What more can we learn about this man in the letter to Philemon? *Philemon 8-21*

DAY FOUR

Paul does not say why he wrote this letter, although hints can be found throughout the book. It appears false teachers were confusing the saints. Based on the following verses, what were the false teachers teaching the saints in Colosse? *Colossians 2:4, 8, 16-23*

What is the Christian to do in regard to false teaching and false teachers?

Titus 1:10-16; Hebrews 13:9

WEEK ONE

Introduction

Paul uses strong words in addressing the Christians in Colosse. What gave him the right to speak to the church in such a way?

DAY FIVE

Read Colossians 1-4, preferably in one sitting. Don't take any notes as you read, just take the time necessary to slowly read the chapters. When you are finished, write any thought these chapters leave you with in the space below.

DAY SIX

Read the study notes.

INTRODUCTION

This letter has captivated my heart. I think about its message frequently. It has changed the way I think about Christ. It has changed the way I think about myself. I have been a Christian now for over 30 years, yet there are things within this book that I have never heard before. That is not to say that no one ever told them to me. I simply never *heard* them. I missed the simple message of this book.

This is not a long book. And it is not laden with technical terms as are other New Testament books like Romans or Hebrews. But what it lacks in length and complexity, it more than makes up for in impact. This is a radical book. It is, as the word radical means, "marked by a considerable departure from the usual or traditional". Those who grasp its message are "tending or disposed to make extreme changes in existing views, habits, conditions, or institutions".¹

The letter entitled "Colossians" was written by Paul to "the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse" (Colossians 1:2). These "holy and faithful brothers" (the Colossian church) were to read the letter, and then pass this letter on to the church in neighboring Laodicea.

After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans ... Colossians 4:16

¹ Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, Publishers, 1972), p. 705.

WEEK ONE

Introduction

Of course, the letter has traveled far beyond the two churches originally designated by Paul: it has been read, pondered, memorized, discussed, delighted in, preached about, and acted on by churches in all parts of the world. Within this letter a glorious mystery is unveiled; the knowledge of which will change your life. This mystery can be seen in other New Testament books, but never so clearly as it is seen here.

But that is getting ahead of the story. If we're to get the most out of this letter, we must gather as much background information as possible. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, in their excellent book, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, explain the great importance of starting with the background information before attempting to interpret the meaning of an Epistle.

... there is one thing that all of the Epistles have in common, and this is the crucial thing to note in reading and interpreting them: they are all what are technically called occasional documents (i.e., arising out of and intended for a specific occasion), and they are from the first century. Although inspired by the Holy Spirit and thus belonging to all time, they were first written out of the context of the author to the context of the original recipients. It is precisely these factors – that they are occasional and that they belong to the first century – that make their interpretation difficult at times.

Above all else, their occasional nature must be taken seriously. This means that they were occasioned, or called forth, by some special circumstance, either from the reader's side or the author's. Almost all of the New Testament letters were occasioned from the reader's side (Philemon and perhaps James and Romans are exceptions). Usually the occasion was some kind of behavior that needed correcting, or a doctrinal error that needed setting right, or a misunderstanding that needed further light.²

What was the occasion that called this letter forth? Why did Paul send it? A little digging in the pages of our New Testament will provide us with some helpful answers. These answers will take us much further in our study of Colossians than if we just jumped right into the letter.

THE FIRST COLOSSIAN CHRISTIAN

The gospel must make inroads at some time and in some way to each area of the world. It is an elementary truth, but a truth most Christians have never considered. The church has not always existed in your present location. Someone, probably someone you do not know, brought it there. In Colosse, Epaphras was that person. Paul reminds the Colossians of this fact in the letter's introduction.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:7-8

Where did Epaphras first hear the gospel? The most likely scenario is that he heard it during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus.

It was Paul's habit to begin in highly populated cultural centers. He would preach the gospel, a church would be established, and he would trust the new converts to bring the gospel to the surrounding area.

Ephesus was certainly a prime location for this strategy. A highway ran from Ephesus all the way to the Euphrates River. Towns of all shapes and sizes were to be found along this east-west trade route. Colosse, 100 miles east of Ephesus, was one of these towns.

It was neither a large nor an important town, though it had formerly been both; it had been upstaged by its near neighbors Laodemia, ten miles away, and Hierapolis, six miles beyond that. The letter indicates that Paul, who seems to have concentrated on major centers of population, had not visited the town himself ...³

2 Gordon D. Fee, Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 48.

3 N.T. Wright, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), pp. 21-22.

Colosse and Ephesus were both part of the Roman province of Asia,⁴ thus commerce between the cities was regular. In other words, once the gospel gained a foothold in Ephesus, it was only a matter of time before the church would also be established in Colosse.

Paul spent three years in Ephesus,⁵ “probably from A.D. 54 to 57”.⁶ While there he taught “publicly and from house to house” (Acts 20:20). He “had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9). Was Epaphras (the first Colossian Christian) among the number attending these daily discussions? It is quite possible. If so, he had a rare privilege indeed, spending two years in the Apostle Paul’s Bible school.⁷

THE CHURCH IN COLOSSE

Precisely when Epaphras first preached the gospel in his hometown⁸ and the surrounding area is not known. But we do know that by the time of Paul’s letter to the Colossians, churches were established in Colosse and its two neighboring towns: Laodicea and Hierapolis. The initial preaching of the gospel and the establishment of the churches in these communities happened in less than six years.

The church grew and developed a reputation for their faith and the love they had for “all the saints” (Colossians 1:4). But there were also serious issues that needed to be addressed; issues so serious that they demanded the apostle’s intervention. The situation was so urgent that Epaphras made a journey to find Paul and tell him all about the church and the situation found within it.

Briefly, the church in Colosse seems to have been infiltrated with false teachers whose “fine sounding arguments” (Colossians 2:4) were deceiving the church. These false teachers were using “hollow and deceptive philosophy” (Colossians 2:8) to draw the Christians after themselves. They were pulling the Christians toward works and away from reliance on Christ. These false teachers called into question the Christian’s normal eating and drinking habits and the days on which they did, or did not, worship. Beyond merely questioning the Colossian Christians’ behavior, the false teachers established new laws which the Colossian Christians were to keep. The false teachers also delighted in “false humility and the worship of angels” (Colossians 2:18) and talked extensively about what they had seen spiritually. According to Paul, these teachers had “lost connection with the Head” (Colossians 2:19), that is, Christ.

Epaphras hurried to Paul’s side because it appears the church was turning from his leadership and was following these teachers. They were submitting to the rules the teachers brought with them – rules which included avoiding many good things which God intended for his people’s pleasure.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teaching. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Colossians 2:20-23

Legalism never brings holiness. Its foul fruit is bondage and disunity. No church is immune from its attacks. We need to constantly guard against the seductive message of works. It will take root whenever and wherever it can.

Paul dealt with legalism often. Many times, he could not personally go to the churches in trouble. This did not leave him weaponless. He had prayer, he had his pen, and he had trusted friends.

I’m sure Paul would have loved to travel to Colosse himself and spend time with these troubled saints. But he could not. He was in prison at this time.

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Colossians 4:18⁹

4 The province of Asia is not the same area as is found within the continent of Asia. The province of Asia was a Roman province in the western-most portion of modern day Turkey.

5 See Acts 20:31.

6 A. Skevington Wood, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 12.

7 The Amplified New Testament expands on verse nine, stating that Paul “went on holding daily discussions in the lecture room of Tyrannus from about ten o’clock till three”. If correct, this would be during the hottest part of the day, when the lecture hall was probably not in use. This would also be during the time of day when many people were resting rather than working. If this were the case, a large number of people could have heard him on a daily basis.

8 See Colossians 4:12.

9 See also Colossians 4:3 and 4:10.

WEEK ONE

Introduction

Paul does not indicate where he was in prison. At least three possibilities have been raised. Some believe Paul wrote this epistle while he was imprisoned in Caesarea.¹⁰ Others believe Paul wrote this while he was imprisoned in Ephesus. This is possible and has many points in its favor; however, this view is difficult to prove, as no Scripture clearly indicates that Paul was ever imprisoned in Ephesus. Perhaps the majority of scholars believe Paul wrote this epistle while he was under house arrest in Rome.¹¹

*The traditional theory, and the one still most generally held, is that Paul was in Rome when Colossians was written. The Epistle should therefore be dated about A.D. 62, during Paul's first Roman imprisonment.*¹²

But no matter where Paul was imprisoned, he was unable to travel to Colosse at this time. The only solution was to write a letter to the church.¹³ Since the church would not heed Epaphras's warnings, perhaps they would listen to Paul himself.

THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Tychicus, one of Paul's helpers, carried this letter to Colosse. This faithful brother was sent by Paul on journeys he could not make himself.¹⁴ Tychicus was from the province of Asia,¹⁵ the same province Colosse was located in, but most likely was not from Colosse itself, as Paul would have mentioned this fact in his greeting.

Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts.
Colossians 4:7-8

Tychicus's traveling companion, Onesimus, was from Colosse. But while Paul obviously placed a great deal of trust in him, he was certainly not trusted in Colosse, for he was a runaway slave. He had apparently run away from Philemon, his owner in Colosse, and, in God's providence, ran to the city where Paul was being held as a prisoner. Somehow, he met Paul and met the Lord. After his conversion, Onesimus helped Paul a great deal in his ministry. But now Paul was sending him back to Philemon.

Paul does not describe Onesimus as a runaway slave in his letter to the church in Colosse. Instead, he tells the church that Onesimus is "one of you" and a "faithful and dear brother".

He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here. *Colossians 4:9*

However, Paul did not trust that these words alone would clear Onesimus's name in Colosse. For that reason, he wrote another letter, the letter to Philemon, in which he pleads Onesimus's case. This letter was not addressed to the entire church. It was addressed to Onesimus's owner.

I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, who became my son while I was in chains. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he has become useful both to you and to me.

I am sending him – who is my very heart – back to you. I would have liked to keep him with me so that he could take your place in helping me while I am in chains for the gospel. But I did not want to do anything without your consent, so that any favor you do will be spontaneous and not forced. Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good – no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

10 See Acts 23:23 - 26:32.

11 See Acts 28:30-31.

12 Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 11, Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 166.

13 Colossians is one of four prison letters Paul wrote (Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon). Three of these letters (Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon) were apparently sent at the same time and with the same messenger. The letter to the church in Philippi would not have been sent with these three letters, as Philippi was located across the Aegean Sea from the province of Asia.

14 See also Titus 3:12.

15 See Acts 20:4.

Week Two

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
ἡμάτος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφεός
τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγαπίοις καὶ π
εληφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ χάρις ὑμῖν κα
ἡνὴ ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ
οῦ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ] πάν
οὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, ἀκούσαντες
τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάν
οὺς ἁγίους διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν
ἐθηκεῖμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
ἀκοηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀ
τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ παρόντος εἰς τὸ

DAY ONE

Read *Colossians 1:1-14* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

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

²*To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse:*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

³*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,*
⁴*because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—*⁵*the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel*⁶*that has come to you. 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.*⁷*You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,*⁸*and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

⁹*For this reason, 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.*¹⁰*And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,*¹¹*being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully*¹²*giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.*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.*

DAY TWO

Read *Colossians 1:1-2*

In verse one Paul calls himself “an apostle of Christ Jesus”. Using a dictionary or Bible dictionary, look up the word apostle and write the definition below.

What is an apostle's job? In other words, what is the apostle supposed to do? *Ephesians 4:11-13*

How did Paul become an apostle? *Colossians 1:1; Ephesians 4:7-11; Acts 13:1-4*

WEEK TWO

Colossians 1:1-14

WEEK TWO

Colossians 1:1-14

Reread the three passages in the question above. Which members of the Trinity do you find involved in the process of Paul becoming an apostle? What, precisely, did each member that is listed do?

In which of Paul's 13 letters do you find him introducing himself in this way? In which letters does he not introduce himself in this way?

Why do you think Paul included this fact in so many of his letters? Why might he have included this fact in this letter?

Paul was writing this letter to the “holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse” (verse 2). As we saw in the introduction, the Colossian Christians had not been behaving in a holy or a faithful manner. In fact, they were listening to false teachers and making decidedly unholy choices. Why, then, would Paul call them holy and faithful? See *Hebrews 10:10*; *Ephesians 5:25-27*; *Colossians 1:21-22*; *1 Peter 2:19*

Paul blessed the Colossian church with grace and peace. Where does this grace and peace come from? What is its nature? *John 14:27*; *1 Corinthians 1:3*; *Philippians 1:2*; *Colossians 3:15*

Do you believe this blessing was primarily ornamental, serving as a kindly greeting, or was it functional, serving as a call for God to literally bless the church with much needed grace and peace? See also *Luke 10:5-6*

Is this something we can practice today?

DAY THREE

Read *Colossians 1:3-6*

Paul's prayers for the Colossians began with thanksgiving. What two things did Paul thank God for in regard to the church in Colosse?

What do the following verses teach us about thanksgiving?

Psalms 50:23

Philippians 4:6-7

Colossians 3:17

Colossians 4:2

Is thanksgiving a part of your life? Would those who know you best describe you as a thankful person? Would God describe you in that way?

According to Colossians 1:4, the Colossian church was known for its faith and love. Where did their faith and love come from?

Paul makes a startling statement about the gospel's influence in verse six. What is it?

WEEK TWO

Colossians 1:1-14

WEEK TWO

Colossians 1:1-14

What does this tell you about the universality of the gospel message?

What were Jesus' expectations regarding the proclamation of the gospel? *Matthew 28:18-20*;
Matthew 24:14; *Acts 1:8*

Just how successful will this proclamation be? *Revelation 7:9-14*

DAY FOUR

Read *Colossians 1:7-8*

In verse seven, Paul refers to Epaphras as a "dear fellow servant". The literal Greek word translated "servant" here means "slave." Paul uses the same word to describe Tychicus in Colossians 4:7. What would the life of Jesus' slave look like?

What specific things might change in your life if you saw yourself as a slave of Jesus rather than merely his follower?

DAY FIVE

Read *Colossians 1:9-14*

The Colossian Christians were confused about many things. That is why Paul was writing this letter. In these verses, Paul shares with the church how he and his companions were praying for them. What, specifically, were they praying for? *Colossians 1:9*

Why did Paul and his companions pray in this way? What did they expect to happen as a result of these prayers? *Colossians 1:10-12*

According to verses 13 and 14, the Christian has been rescued “from the dominion of darkness” and has been brought “into the kingdom of the Son he loves”. From your experience, what are the characteristics of these two very different kingdoms?

DAY SIX

Read the study notes.

COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

As we have already discussed in the introduction, the Apostle Paul probably wrote the letter to the Colossians while he was imprisoned in Rome. While his living situation in Rome was certainly far from ideal, at least he was not writing from a cold prison cell; he lived in his own rented house. A soldier guarded him, but Paul had freedom to entertain guests, to write letters, and, as we will see in this chapter, to pray.¹

Paul did not write this letter himself. Instead, he spoke it, and his words were recorded by a secretary. This was Paul’s typical method of “writing.” He did, however, usually write a greeting in his own hand at the end of his letters to prove that the letter was genuine. Such a greeting may be found at the end of this letter.

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you. Colossians 4:18

As we should expect with any book in the Bible, there are no wasted words or phrases here. Each word has meaning, for each word is “God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16). Therefore, to get the most out of this letter, we must read it slowly and carefully. We must not rush through the letter or we will certainly miss something of great importance.

WEEK TWO

Colossians 1:1-14

¹ See Acts 28:16 and 30.

WEEK TWO

Colossians 1:1-14

THE INTRODUCTION

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God ... Colossians 1:1

Paul begins the letter by reminding the saints that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus. The thought is obviously quite significant to Paul, for he reminds his readers of this fact in nine of the 13 letters that bear his name. Why did he do this? It certainly wasn't for his benefit. Paul was quite secure in who he was. He did it so the church would receive the letter as it should be received. This wasn't a letter from just anyone. It was a letter from a sent one; a person specially gifted and commissioned by Jesus to bring strength and growth to the church.²

It's important to know that Paul did not appoint himself as an apostle. Paul was made an apostle "by the will of God". God willed that Paul would be an apostle, and Christ, in response to God's willing, made Paul an apostle and gave him as a gift to the church.³ The Holy Spirit activated Paul's apostleship by calling Paul to the work of an apostle and by sending him out.⁴ And because the Godhead had established Paul's apostleship, the church should receive him and his counsel as they would receive the Lord Jesus himself.

An apostle is not an officer in the body of Christ. The church is not an institution in the sense that a corporation is. It doesn't have presidents and chief operating officers and layers of middle management and entry-level personnel. It doesn't have worker bees and drones. It is a body. And it is a charismatic body; it is gift and grace based.⁵ The body functions as the gifts within the body are used and accepted. Paul was not writing this letter as the "president" of the church in the province of Asia to those beneath him. He was writing this letter because, as one of God's sent ones, he had a gift which would be of great help to the church in Colosse if they would receive him and this letter as such.

Paul is not alone as he writes this letter. He feels that it is important to say that this letter is from Timothy as well.⁶ But while Paul included Timothy in the introduction, the words are Paul's; that is why he uses the personal pronoun "I" throughout the letter.

As we have already discussed, Paul begins the letter by describing himself as he truly is – an apostle. He also begins by describing the church in Colosse as they truly are.

To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse ... Colossians 1:2

Paul is not trying to flatter the Christians in Colosse. He is speaking the truth. Even though the church has, to some extent, been deceived by false teachers, the Christians in Colosse are, nonetheless, "holy and faithful brothers". Notice, Paul describes who the Colossian Christians are on two levels: who they are in relation to God, and who they are in relation to other Christians.

First, Paul describes who the Colossian Christians are in relation to God; they are holy. Holy is a fitting description of any Christian, even if that Christian does not know or believe this to be true, and even if that Christian's outward actions are unholy.⁷ When we confess Jesus as Lord, we are made holy.

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:10⁸

Remember, the believers Paul is writing to have, to some extent, been seduced by false teachers. These teachers have convinced many of the Colossians that they are not holy enough. These Colossians have been led to believe they need to add works to their faith to produce holiness. Paul disagrees with the false teachers. He says, in essence, "You don't need to become more holy. I'm convinced you're already holy."

Second, Paul describes who the Colossian Christians are in relation to other Christians; they are faithful brothers. The Colossian Christians are not, as they have been led to believe, sub-standard Christians. They are already trustworthy brothers, not only with each other, but also with Paul.

2 See Ephesians 4:7-16.

3 Again, see Ephesians 4:7-16.

4 See Acts 13:2-4.

5 The term charismatic has been applied to certain churches, but all churches are actually charismatic, for grace and gifts have been given to all in the body of Christ.

6 Timothy is included by name in the salutations in 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

7 This inward holiness inevitably leads to holy actions on the outside.

8 See also Colossians 1:21-22.

They are members of the same family as Paul and partakers with him in Christ's divine nature.

But the brothers are more than just holy and faithful. Paul also reminds them that they are "in Christ".

To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse ... Colossians 1:2

Colosse was, according to one commentator, "the most unimportant town to which Paul ever wrote a letter".⁹ But the primary location Paul thought about when he thought about the Christians in Colosse wasn't Colosse at all. It was the Colossian Christians' true locality – "in Christ".

This phrase is deeply significant, and will be examined in much greater depth as we work through this book. Watchman Nee, author of the much loved book, *The Normal Christian Life*, liked to use a simple illustration when preaching to explain the meaning of this phrase.

*Many a time when preaching in the villages of China one has to use very simple illustrations for deep divine truth. I remember once I took up a small book and put a piece of paper into it, and I said to those very simple folk, "Now look carefully. I take a piece of paper. It has an identity of its own, quite separate from the book. Having no special purpose for it at the moment I put it into the book. Now I do something with the book. I mail it to Shanghai. I do not mail the paper, but the paper has been put into the book. Then where is the paper? Can the book go to Shanghai and the paper remain here? Can the paper have a separate destiny from the book? No! Where the book goes the paper goes. If I drop the book in the river the paper goes too, and if I quickly take it out again I recover the paper also. Whatever experience the book goes through the paper goes through with it, for it is still in the book."*¹⁰

The Christian, like the paper, is put into something else. The paper was put into a book. The Christian is put into Christ. The Bible is very clear about this.

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body ... 1 Corinthians 12:13

You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ. Galatians 3:26-27

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Romans 6:3

When Paul thought about the Christians in Colosse, he thought about their position in Christ. And he was careful to remind them of their lofty position. If they would but grasp this truth, their problems with the false teachers would be over.

Notice, in these first few introductory comments, Paul is doing two things: he is building up the church, and he is undoing the arguments of the false teachers.

THE BLESSING

Before Paul moves into the body of the letter, he blesses the church with the same blessing found in each of his letters.¹¹

Grace and peace to you from God our Father. Colossians 1:2

These are not just kind words. Paul is, by faith, pronouncing a real blessing on the church. Blessing the people was one of the privileges God gave to Aaron and his sons.

The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them:

""The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.""

9 William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 92.

10 Watchman Nee, *The Normal Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1977), p. 44.

11 This same blessing may be found in all 13 of the New Testament letters written by Paul. In First and Second Timothy, however, Paul includes the word "mercy" along with his blessing of grace and peace.

WEEK TWO

Colossians 1:1-14

“So they will put my name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.” Numbers 6:22-27

Notice how the blessing worked: as the priest spoke a blessing out, he put the Lord’s name on the people, and the Lord himself blessed the people. The priest had no inherent power within himself to bring about change. However, his pronouncing a blessing over the people moved God to bring true blessing upon the people.

Could it be that believers today, as royal priests,¹² have also been given the privilege of blessing? Could it be that we too can enter into the blessing process? We can and we should – not as part of some mechanistic ritual, but as a faith-filled participation in God’s work.

Paul made a regular practice of blessing the church. He was anxious to see his Father’s blessings poured out in another brother or sister’s life, and he would, by his blessing, ask God to do exactly that. This blessing wasn’t some strange ritual Paul went through. It was by faith. By faith he asked God to bless the Colossians with grace and peace. Grace is, among other things, God’s power and presence at work in our lives and situations. Wouldn’t you like a little more grace in your life? Peace is the inexplicable inner calm and contentment, which, according to Philippians 4:7, guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. It is the “quiet waters” (Psalm 23:2) beside which our soul is restored.

Both grace and peace are essential in the life of the individual believer and in the church. As God’s priests, he is inviting us – no, more than that, expecting us – to enter into his work here on earth. I am so glad God has allowed us to enter into his blessing process. We are truly his coworkers.¹³ He wants to work in and through us to bring his blessing to others.

PAUL’S PRAYERS FOR THE CHURCH

Paul moves from the blessing to a description of how he and the brothers with him pray for the church.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you ...
Colossians 1:3

The church in Colosse has problems. But rather than focusing on the problems, Paul begins with thanksgiving. In thanking God for the church, Paul is following a pattern God himself established as a most effective way of approaching him.

“He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.” Psalm 50:23

Thanksgiving is an essential component of our prayers, for it is honoring to the one we love. Not only that, thanksgiving “prepares the way” so that God might show me his salvation (that is, it prepares my heart so that I might be able to see the help he is going to bring to the situation I am praying about). There is something quite significant here. Thanksgiving isn’t just related to God. It’s related to me. It prepares me to see God’s work in regard to the issue I am praying about. But God is doing more than just preparing me to see his work. As I thank him, he is preparing others to receive the work of God I have been praying about. We need to be a thankful people. We must be thankful. God moves in a thankful atmosphere.

Now what did Paul and the brothers thank God for in regard to the Colossians? They thanked him for two things.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints ... Colossians 1:3-4¹⁴

Faith in Christ may be described as vertical; it expresses our relationship with God. Love for all the saints may be described as horizontal; it expresses our love for the church. Both of these must be present in the life of the Christian. Jesus’ prayer in John 17 expresses this quite well.

¹² See 1 Peter 2:9 and Revelation 5:10.

¹³ See 1 Corinthians 3:9 and 2 Corinthians 6:1.

¹⁴ Paul thanks God for the same two things in Philemon 4-5 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”
 John 17:20-23

Do you see it? Faith in Christ leads to love for each other. It must, for God has poured his love into our hearts.¹⁵ If we do not love our brothers and sisters, how can we say that we know God, for God is love?

The Colossians' love was not just for the church in Colosse. Paul says that their love extended to “all the saints” (Colossians 1:4). In this, the Colossians demonstrated the typical first century understanding of the church. The early church knew they were part of something much bigger than themselves, and they demonstrated a love for all the saints, no matter where they were.

Paul did not normally write to individual churches. He most often wrote to the church in a city, or the churches in a region. He thought, first and foremost, of the church as all the Christians within a particular city or region. We tend to do the opposite. We think of the church in terms of our individual fellowship first. Often, we have no relationships with our fellow Christians within our own town. We don't think of them as our brothers. We treat them more like distant cousins.

We must learn from the Colossians. Their example is worth imitating. Our love must extend to all the saints. When our love extends, we'll find that our faith will also grow, for we'll see that God is doing far more than we previously were aware of.

Where did the Colossians' faith and love come from? It didn't come from the Colossians themselves. It sprang “from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven” (Colossians 1:5). What is this hope stored up for us in heaven? It is, as Paul says in verse 12, “the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light”. In other words, faith and love are part of our heavenly inheritance – a part we are able to use and enjoy today! I love how faith and love come to us. They don't dribble out from heaven. They spring. Upon your acceptance of Christ, heavenly faith and love vault into your life. And they don't lose their springy quality once you have them. Faith leads to more faith. And God's love leads to more love.

This is the power of the gospel. We put our faith in Christ and we are changed. No longer are we earthly men and women, bound by our earthly conditions. We are heavenly, with heavenly traits operating in our lives.

As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. 1 Corinthians 15:48

Notice, Paul has not said one word about the Colossians' weaknesses. He has talked about their strengths. These are strengths Paul expected to see in all Christians, for wherever the gospel is preached and accepted, lives change.

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. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit. Colossians 1:6-8

When Epaphras brought the gospel to Colosse, the people changed. That's the fruit of the gospel. The changes in the people in Colosse were the very same changes we see whenever the gospel is preached today. Praise God for the power of the gospel.

In verse three, we saw that Paul and his friends began their prayers for the Colossian Christians with thanksgiving. In verse nine, we see their prayers moving from thanksgiving to petitioning.

¹⁵ See Romans 5:5.

WEEK TWO

Colossians 1:1-14

For this reason, 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. Colossians 1:9

Why did Paul and his friends pray this way? We must remember that the Colossian Christians were confused. False teachers had wormed their way into the church and clouded their minds. The simple gospel they had accepted earlier and that had changed their lives was not so simple any more. Now it included works. When Epaphras brought news of this to Paul and his companions, they sprang into action, praying non-stop that God would give these dear Christians a knowledge of his will. The saints in Colosse had been following the false teachers' wills; they had obviously confused this with God's will. Paul and his friends were asking the Lord to give these confused saints a clear knowledge of his will. They needed spiritual wisdom and understanding; otherwise, they would be spiritually ruined – swallowed alive by legalism.

Clearly, the Colossian Christians were not filled with an understanding of God's will. But what if they were? What if they were full, to the very top, of this knowledge? What would happen then? Paul can barely contain his excitement as he considers this thought.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. Colossians 1:10-12

Did you see what a fullness of the knowledge of God's will leads to? It leads to a life that is worthy of the Lord – a fruitful, pleasing life. It leads to strength. It leads to endurance and patience. And it leads to great joy. All these things spring up (there's that word again) in the life of the one who is full of the knowledge of God's will.

Are any of these things missing in your life? If so, the remedy will be found in the prayer we find Paul outlining here. I encourage you, by faith, to pray it right now.

“Lord, fill me up with a knowledge of your will. I ask for spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

We don't have to spend the rest of our days mired in the quicksand of mediocrity. We've been saved from that life.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Colossians 1:13-14

God has rescued us from darkness. The Son's kingdom is a kingdom of light and knowledge. Let's walk in that light.

In him was life, and that life was the light of men. John 1:4

DAY SIX (CONTINUED)

This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me....

Week Three

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
ἡμάτων θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφεός
τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς
ἐλφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ὑμῖν κ
ῆνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ
οῦ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ] πάν
οὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, ἀκούσαντες
τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάν
τοὺς ἁγίους διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν
ἐθηκεμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
ἀκοηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀ
τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ παρόντος εἰς τὸ

WEEK THREE

Colossians 1:15-23

DAY ONE

Read *Colossians 1:15-23* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and 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.

²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²²But 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— ²³if 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.

DAY TWO

Read *Colossians 1:15-20*.

Using today's verses, describe Jesus as completely as possible. Who is he? (There are at least nine truths about Jesus listed here).

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____

How do these truths add to or change your understanding of who Jesus is?

Why do you think Paul focuses all his attention on Jesus in this passage? What might this say about the attention the Colossian church was giving toward him?

What does a lack of attention toward Jesus result in? *Hebrews 2:1-3; Hebrews 12:3*

What is the antidote to this problem? *Hebrews 12:2-3*

DAY THREE

Read *John 1:1-18*.

How do these verses describe Jesus? By what names or titles is he called?

How do these truths add to or change your understanding of who Jesus is?

What similarities do you find between the truths highlighted in this passage and those found in *Colossians 1:15-20*? Any differences?

WEEK THREE

Colossians 1:15-23

WEEK THREE

Colossians 1:15-23

DAY FOUR

Read *Hebrews 1*.

How do these verses describe Jesus? By what names or titles is he called? How does God the Father describe Jesus in this passage?

How do these truths add to or change your understanding of who Jesus is?

What similarities do you find between the truths highlighted in this passage and those found in *Colossians 1:15-20*? Any differences?

DAY FIVE

Read *Colossians 1:21-23*

What was your condition prior to your acceptance of the salvation that is found only in Jesus? *Colossians 1:21; Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:1-3*

What is your condition now (if you are a Christian)? *Colossians 1:22; Hebrews 10:10; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 21; Isaiah 1:18*

Do you believe this about yourself?

Why do you think Paul emphasizes the need to “continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel” (verse 23)? What might this say about the condition of the church in Colosse? What might this say to those today who are trusting in an experience they had with Christ from long ago, but who have not “continued” with him?

In verse 23, Paul says that the gospel “has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven”. Prove this by the following verses.

Titus 2:11

Romans 1:18-20

Psalms 19:1-4

Based on the verses you have just read, how you would respond to someone who said, “God is not fair in demanding all people everywhere to place their faith in Jesus. After all, some people have never heard the gospel.”?

DAY SIX

Read the study notes.

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Who is this Jesus we have given our lives to and into whose kingdom we have been brought? The answers to this question may be found throughout the Bible, for all Scripture testifies about Jesus.¹ However, even amongst so many pages devoted to Jesus, certain passages stand out. Colossians 1:15-23 is one of these passages.²

This passage appears at this point in the letter because Paul knew that the church was quickly losing connection to its Head – Jesus Christ. We must remember that the Colossian Christians’ perception of Jesus had been clouded. This clouding began when two things occurred: first, when false teachers, who had already “lost connection with the Head” (Colossians 2:19), began teaching the church in Colosse, and second, when the church began listening to these teachers and their “fine-sounding arguments” (Colossians 2:4).

These false teachers convinced the Colossian Christians that they were not holy enough, and that they needed to add works – many works – to their faith.³ This works-based theology, which

¹ See Luke 24:25-27, Luke 25:44, and John 5:39-40.

² Two other “stand out” passages in regard to Jesus are John 1:1-18 and Hebrews 1.

³ The false teachers seem to be teaching an early form of what would eventually be called Gnosticism. The Gnostics’ teachings were based on “secret knowledge,” which was only given to “the privileged few.”

WEEK THREE

Colossians 1:15-23

has “an appearance of wisdom” (Colossians 2:23), is not wise at all. It is completely opposed to Jesus and to the finished work of redemption and to his ongoing high priestly ministry and to righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

The remedy to this problem starts with Jesus. His name and person must be lifted up. And that is what Paul does here.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. Colossians 1:15

If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus, for he is the image of the invisible God. He perfectly makes the Father known, for he is the perfect impression of the Father.

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known. John 1:18

The 12 disciples knew Jesus, but they wanted to know the Father as well. Would Jesus, they wondered, show the Father to them? Jesus’ answer reveals this same truth.

“If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.”

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.”

Jesus answered: “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?” John 14:7-10

Jesus is the perfect image of the Father. If you know him you also know the Father. If you don’t know him, you don’t know the Father, for, apart from Jesus, God is invisible to man. There is a beautiful passage in Revelation describing the new Jerusalem, a city I will one day call my home. In this city, the sun and moon are not needed as sources of light. What lights this city? It is the truest light: the light of God’s glory. The question is, how is this light seen? Read the following passage carefully.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. Revelation 21:22-23

Did you see it? The light is seen through Jesus the Lamb. Even in the new Jerusalem Jesus will still be showing us God. We will always see God the Father’s glory through the Son.

Notice that Jesus is not just the image of the invisible God; he is the firstborn over all creation. He is not the firstborn in the sense that God the Father “birthed” him. Jesus, like the Father and the Holy Spirit, is eternal. Jesus is the firstborn in the sense that he holds the honored position of the firstborn. As firstborn, he is the rightful heir of and over everything.

But Jesus is not only the heir; he is also the creator of everything.

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. Colossians 1:16

Jesus made everything,⁴ and, notice, he made it for himself. What a tremendous thought. Why did Jesus make the animals? Why did he make the land? Why did he make the stars? Why did he make man? Why did he make the church? He made them all for himself. He made his own inheritance!

What about the thrones, powers, rulers and authorities Paul mentions in this verse? What is their significance? The false teachers loved to talk about angelic beings and their place. Second and

⁴ See John 1:3.

third century Gnosticism, of which these false teachers were forerunners, taught that there was a great hierarchy of angels between man and God. These angels were to be worshiped. While it is not clear how developed this angelic hierarchy was in Colosse, it is clear that the false teachers worshiped angels. This is evident from Paul's command in Colossians 2:18.

Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.

My guess is that the false teachers in Colosse talked about different thrones, powers, rulers and authorities that exist between man and God. They were convincing the Colossian Christians that they could not ignore these angelic beings. These angels must be worshiped.

Here, in Colossians 1:16, Paul quickly puts angels in their right position. They are not worthy of worship, for Jesus made everything, including "thrones or powers or rulers or authorities", and he made them for himself.

What about Jesus' relation to evil rulers, powers and authorities? Are they outside of his control? Do they somehow diminish his glory? Not at all. They exist, as H.C.G. Moule wrote in *Colossian Studies* (published in 1898), "to serve His will, to contribute to His glory. ... Their whole being, willingly or unwillingly, moves ... to Him; whether, as His blissful servants, they shall be as it were His throne; or as His stricken enemies, 'His footstool'".⁵

The thought that all things were created by Jesus and for Jesus has great significance for each Christian personally. If you have ever wondered about your significance, wonder no longer. Jesus purposely made you for himself. If you have ever wondered about your worth, wonder no longer. Jesus purposely made you for himself. If you have ever wished you were someone else, wish no longer. You were purposely created – just as you are – by Jesus and for Jesus. He made you the way he made you because he wanted to. He didn't have to; he wanted to. And because Jesus made you for himself, you will only find your joy with him and in him, for that is what you were created for. He is who you were created for.

There is not one inch in the entire area of our human life about which Christ, who is Sovereign of all, does not cry out, "Mine!" - Abraham Kuyper⁶

Since Jesus made everything for himself, only in him does anything function correctly and keep functioning correctly.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Colossians 1:17

Jesus is the firstborn. He is above all. Outside of him, nothing has value or purpose. Outside of him, nothing is in order. But in him all things – your life, your family, your finances, your job, your health, your future – hold together. What power our Lord holds. It is beyond compare. According to Philippians 3:21, his power "enables him to bring everything under his control". Since he is able to bring everything under his control, nothing is outside of his control. We can trust him with anything, for only he is able to control all things and hold all things together.

What about the church? Does the church also hold together in him? Is it somehow outside of his control? Good news! We need not worry about the long-term health of the church, for the perfect leader is already the head of the church. His name is Jesus.

And he is the head of the body, the church ... Colossians 1:18

Jesus is more than just the head of the church. He is the builder of the church. And he has promised that the church will not be overwhelmed by evil.

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. Matthew 16:18

⁵ Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 11, Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 182.

⁶ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2004), p. 137.

WEEK THREE

Colossians 1:15-23

Of course, it would be naïve to suggest that every church is functioning well. The Colossian church, for instance, was in grave danger. But the head of the church was obviously well aware of this. That's why we have this letter to the Colossians. Jesus himself commissioned its writing.

We sometimes think that Jesus has just set the church in motion and is now sadly watching it lose its strength and glory, much like a child who has spun a top and is now watching it wind down before it finally quits spinning and falls to the floor. Just the opposite is true. In the same way Jesus built the church, he is building the church. In the same way Jesus led the church, he is leading the church. In the same way Jesus fed and cared for the church, he is feeding and caring for the church.⁷ The church is in good hands, his hands, and the church will fulfill its mission, for the Lord will settle for nothing less. He has promised success.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”
Acts 1:8

Trouble will come to the church. It will come at different times and in different ways, but rest assured that Jesus knows what is coming and he knows how to deal with anything that will come. He is always the victor, and because we are in him, we share in this victory.

In everything Jesus is the first. Even in the receiving of resurrection power, Jesus precedes us.

... he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. Colossians 1:18

Jesus is the “firstfruits” of the resurrection.⁸ His bodily resurrection is proof that we too will be bodily resurrected. We didn't experience his resurrection power first. He did.

Remember, Paul isn't writing this down. He is talking, and his secretary is writing all this down. I imagine that he's pacing as he talks, pouring out fact after fact about our Lord and his greatness. And he's not through yet.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him ... Colossians 1:19

What makes God happy? Jesus does! The Father has withheld nothing from the Son. It gave him – and still gives him – great pleasure to invest all of himself in the Son. What is Jesus missing? Nothing. All God's fullness dwells in him. When you've seen Jesus, you've seen all there is to see. As the Son, he has inherited all of God's fullness. So many will not acknowledge this fact. They insist that Jesus was a good man ... and nothing more. He is more. He is God. It displeases the Father to say that Jesus is not God, for it pleased God to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus. All Scripture testifies to this fact.

The master plan of salvation is all worked through Jesus.

... 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.
Colossians 1:20

All things are reconciled to the Father through Jesus.⁹ The power of the curse (that is, the universal inclination to destruction and evil that was brought about by Adam's sin), as far reaching as it is, was undone by the power of the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus didn't just work salvation for mankind. Its efficacy is greater than even that. It reconciles everything else to God as well. All creation needs reconciliation to God, for all creation is under the curse. The full realization of creation's redemption will not be seen until man is finally walking in all the glory God originally intended. Until that time, creation waits.

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

⁷ See Ephesians 5:29.

⁸ See 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.

⁹ Notice, Colossians 1:20 uses the word “through” when speaking of Jesus. See 1 Corinthians 8:6, Ephesians 2:18 and John 14:6 for an explanation of this word's relation to Jesus and his work.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. Romans 8:18-23

What a day it will be when we finally see creation as God intended it! Oh the blood of Jesus — its power is far beyond all we will ever know. King David knew this. He knew that salvation was greater than he knew.

But as for me, I will always have hope; I will praise you more and more. My mouth will tell of your righteousness, of your salvation all day long, though I know not its measure. Psalm 71:14-15

The measure of salvation extends beyond you. It extends beyond the Christians you know. It extends beyond the church. It extends to “all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven”. Of course, this does not mean that all people will be saved. It means that the measure of salvation extends far beyond just people. It includes all creation — trees, rocks, dogs, grass, mountains, and dirt. Oh the power found in the blood of Jesus! Its efficacy is far beyond our ability to grasp. Aren’t you glad?

Of course, this thought doesn’t make all men glad. Jesus is hated by many. They live as God’s enemies,¹⁰ working against him. I was once God’s enemy. I worked against him. Now, I can’t stop praising him. This change was all brought about by Jesus.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 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 — if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel ... Colossians 1:21-23

Because of Jesus’ death and my faith in him, I am no longer God’s enemy. I have been presented to God, not as God’s enemy and not as a worthless sinner, but as I truly am: “holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation”. If you are a Christian, you are holy — not because of your works, but because of Jesus’ work. This truth is taught throughout the New Testament.

And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:10

This truth is also taught throughout the Old Testament.

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.” Isaiah 1:18

The false teachers in Colosse were telling the Colossian Christians that they were not holy. They told them that they needed to add something to Jesus in order to become holy. The Colossians were, step by step, being moved from the hope held out in the gospel. Paul tells them, quite clearly, that they must continue in their faith.

... if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel ... Colossians 1:23

Salvation that is abandoned is no salvation at all. A mark of true Christianity is continuance in the faith. Paul’s warning to the Colossians is that they must not let go of their faith. They must continue. This same truth is also found in second John.

Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. 2 John 9

¹⁰ See Romans 5:10.

WEEK THREE

Colossians 1:15-23

Epaphras hadn't preached an incomplete gospel in Colosse. The Colossians had been taught the true gospel – the very same gospel that Paul proclaimed everywhere he went.

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. Colossians 1:23

Of course, Epaphras and Paul alone weren't responsible for the preaching of the gospel. God has seen to it that his grace appears to all men.¹¹

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. Titus 2:11

The grace of God had appeared to the Colossians. Would they now abandon that grace and accept another gospel? The Lord had Paul write this letter to prevent that very thing. To this point in the letter, Paul has been carefully laying a foundation. The foundation he has laid has exposed the false teachers' gospel for it is – no gospel at all. Now that this foundation has been established, Paul is ready to talk more specifically about how the true gospel works in day-to-day life.

DAY SIX (CONTINUED)

This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me....

¹¹ See also Psalm 19:1-4 and Romans 1:20-32.

Week Four

COLOSSIANS 1:24-29

Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
ἡμάτων θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφεός
τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς
ἐλφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἀγάπης ὑμῖν καὶ
ἡνὴ ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ
ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ] πάντοτε
οἱ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, ἀκούσαντες
τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας
τοὺς ἁγίους διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν
ἐθηκεμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
ἀκοηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀλήθειας
τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ παρόντος εἰς τὴν

WEEK FOUR

Colossians 1:24-29

DAY ONE

Read *Colossians 1:24-29* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

COLOSSIANS 1:24-29

²⁴Now 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. ²⁵I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— ²⁶the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. ²⁷To 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.

²⁸We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. ²⁹To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

DAY TWO

Read *Colossians 1:24-25*

Paul had already suffered a great deal for the church in Colosse. What was his response to those things he had suffered? *Colossians 1:24*

Why do you think he would he do this? *Matthew 5:10-12*

Has this been your response to the things you've suffered for Christ and his church?

What was Paul's response to anticipated future sufferings?

Why would Paul call the things he personally was suffering "Christ's afflictions"? *Colossians 1:24*; see also *Jesus' words in Acts 9:1-4*

In verse 25, Paul calls himself a servant of the church. According to the following verses, what else does Paul say that he is a servant of? *Romans 1:1; Ephesians 3:7*

Do you consider yourself a servant of these three things? Would others consider you a servant of these three things?

Can a person serve one of these three things and not the others?

What can we learn from Jesus in regard to living as a servant? *Matthew 20:25-28; John 13:1-17; Philippians 2:5-11*

DAY THREE

Read *Colossians 1:25-27*

As a servant of the church, Paul was given a specific commission by God. What was this commission? *Colossians 1:25-27*

What is the “mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints”?

Why do you think this mystery had been kept hidden for ages and generations?

WEEK FOUR

Colossians 1:24-29

WEEK FOUR

Colossians 1:24-29

What does the phrase “Christ in you” mean to you? *Colossians 1:27*

What do you think this phrase meant to Paul? Was this phrase symbolic to him, or did its meaning go beyond this? *Galatians 2:20*

DAY FOUR

Read *Colossians 1:27*

Describe the importance Jesus placed on his being “in” the believer. *John 6:53-59; John 15:1-8; John 17:20-26*

Was this phrase symbolic to him, or did its meaning go beyond this?

What are the differences you would expect to see in the life of one in whom Christ lived?

DAY FIVE

Read *Colossians 1:28-29*

According to Colossians 1:28, Paul’s goal was that “we may present everyone perfect in Christ”. What, specifically, did he do so that this might be accomplished?

“Perfect in Christ” means mature. Based on Colossians 1:24-29, what might be the difference between a mature believer and an immature believer?

Where did Paul find the energy he needed to effectively labor for the church? *Colossians 1:29; Philippians 4:13*

If this was the case with Paul, why is this not the case with every Christian?

What do you think activates this energy in the Christian’s life?

DAY SIX

Read the study notes.

COLOSSIANS 1:24-29

As Paul moves into the main theme of this book, he feels compelled to remind the Colossians that the gospel’s arrival in Colosse had not been easy.

Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you ... Colossians 1:24

Why would Paul remind the Colossians of this fact? Possibly because they had forgotten the tremendous cost that had been paid for them to receive the gospel, and therefore did not see it as something precious that needed to be guarded.

Paul did not want the Colossian Christians to think that the gospel simply appeared in Colosse. He wanted them to know that a great price was paid that they might hear the gospel, accept it, and continue in it.

Even though Paul had never visited the small town in person, the gospel’s arrival in Colosse had, nevertheless, come at considerable personal expense to him. The price to bring the gospel to an area always includes a measure of suffering, of course, but in the province of Asia, the province in which Colosse was located, that suffering was so intense that Paul and his companions were nearly overcome.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul testifies to the extraordinary difficulties he and his companions faced in the province of Asia.

WEEK FOUR

Colossians 1:24-29

WEEK FOUR

Colossians 1:24-29

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11¹

While Paul feels compelled to remind the Colossian Christians of the sufferings he underwent for them personally, he makes it clear that he does not regret the sufferings he endured for them. Quite the opposite is true; he rejoices in the sufferings. In fact, he is willing to suffer even more for the saints in Colosse.

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. Colossians 1:24

Before we move on, I want you to notice how Paul discusses the sufferings that he personally experienced for the church in Colosse. Notice that Paul calls the sufferings "Christ's afflictions". When a Christian suffers for the sake of the church, Jesus himself is suffering, because we are his body and he is in us.² Paul discovered this truth when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus. At that time, Paul was persecuting the Christians, yet Jesus said to Paul, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5).

William Barclay, in his commentary on the book of Colossians, explains this passage quite well.

Paul begins this passage with a daring thought. He thinks of the sufferings through which he is passing as completing the sufferings of Jesus Christ himself. Jesus died to save his Church; but the Church must be upbuilt and extended; it must be kept strong and pure and true; therefore, anyone who serves the Church by widening her borders, establishing her faith, saving her from errors, is doing the work of Christ. And if such service involves suffering and sacrifice, that affliction is filling up and sharing the very suffering of Christ. To suffer in the service of Christ is not a penalty but a privilege, for it is sharing in his work.³

The message for the Colossians is a sobering one: "Christ himself suffered in order to bring the gospel to you." And that suffering was continuing, because, as he indicates in verse 24, Paul was continuing to fill up in his flesh what was still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions.

Paul gladly suffered for the church because he was its servant.

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 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. Colossians 1:24-27

Here Paul lets us in on a secret of the successful Christian life. In verse 23, Paul indicates that he had become a servant of the gospel. In verse 25, we read that he had become the church's servant. Here we find fulfillment, at least in Paul's life, of Jesus' words from Mark 10:43-45: "... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Could the same be said of you?

As a servant, Paul's specific commission from God was to present God's word to the Colossians in all its fullness. The phrase "in its fullness", as used here, does not refer to many truths about God. It refers to one specific truth; it is the very essence of God's truth for man.

1 See also 1 Corinthians 15:32 and 16:8-9.

2 Christ's afflictions are complete in terms of redemption. No additional suffering is needed to pay for your sins. However, "for the sake of his body", that is, for the sake of the church, Jesus is still suffering.

3 William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series: The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1975), p. 126.

This wasn't a truth that the Old Testament saints knew. Abraham did not know it. David did not know it. Elijah did not know it. Even the angels did not know it.⁴ It was a secret, or, as Paul calls it in verse 26, a mystery – a mystery that had been kept hidden for ages and generations. God purposely did not reveal this mystery before the time of Paul. He wanted to keep it hidden. Paul goes on to tell the Colossians that this mystery had glorious riches within it. What is this great mystery that God had kept hidden for ages and generations? Like an artist pulling the tarp off a sculpture the entire world has been longing to see, Paul unveils this long-hidden mystery with three simple words: "Christ in you".

"That's it?" you might say. "That doesn't seem to be such a great mystery. What's the big deal about Christ being in you?" Don't you understand? If you are a Christian, CHRIST IS IN YOU. The Planner, Maker and Sustainer of this universe, the one who measures the expanses of the heavens with his hand, the one who holds all the oceans in the hollow of his hand, the one who knows every hair on your head, the one who feeds lions and ravens when they are hungry, the one who knows every bird in the mountains, the one who raises up kings and sets them down again, the one who heals the blind and lame and leprous and grieving, the one before whom every knee will bow, the one with the name above all names, is living, as a good friend of mine likes to say, between your ears and behind your eyes.

Do you know this mystery? Almost every Christian would say yes, but few seem to walk with the power of the risen Christ in them. If Christ is literally in you, you should think differently, shouldn't you? If Christ is literally in you, you should talk differently, shouldn't you? If Christ is literally in you, you should pray differently, shouldn't you? If Christ is literally in you, you should love differently, shouldn't you? If Christ is literally in you, you should walk differently, shouldn't you?

Do you?

*Those who are content merely with the objective phases of our faith, of the Cross of Christ and His Resurrection, are failing fearfully. To neglect the subjective side demonstrates that we are dreadfully deceived. "The demons also believe and tremble" at the great objective facts of the Gospel of Christ; but it is surely only those who have felt His blood, and daily depend upon His living power and authority who believingly rejoice.*⁵

Paul's understanding of Jesus was, from the very beginning, of the risen Jesus. This was how he always thought of him: currently reigning, currently working, currently being persecuted, currently building his church, and, note this, currently living in and desiring to work through every member of the body of Christ.

This last thought, that Jesus is currently living in and desiring to work through every member of the body of Christ, is the theme of this great book and must become the theme of our lives. If we are to be successful in any way in this Christian life, we must know that Christ is in us and living through us. This was a theme of Jesus' prayer in John 17.

"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

"Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them." John 17:20-26

⁴ See 1 Peter 1:10-12.

⁵ Albert Hughes, *Renamed* (Philadelphia, PA: The American Bible Conference Association, 1935), p. 33.

WEEK FOUR

Colossians 1:24-29

Where did Jesus say that he would live? He said it would be “in them”. Paul lived his life with this simple thought dominating him.

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:19-20 ESV

Paul didn’t live any longer. It was Christ living in and through Paul. Notice, Paul said that the life he “now lived” he lived by faith in the Son of God. This means his day-to-day activities were truly the living Christ’s activities. Paul’s faith in Christ was not just in the events that happened on Calvary. It was in the living Son of God who was, day-to-day, living in him, and working through him.

What happens when a person believes – truly believes – that Christ is living in him? What does it do to that person’s confidence? Just look what it did to Paul’s confidence.

I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:13

Paul knew he had no limits, because Christ has no limits. Christ’s limitless strength, infinite love and boundless energy were at work in Paul, not because Paul himself was so strong, loving, or energetic, but because Christ himself was in Paul.

Paul’s labors for the church didn’t focus on religion, good works, or self-help techniques. They focused on a person – Jesus.

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. Colossians 1:28

Paul pushed, prodded, warned, encouraged, and taught with one goal in mind: that he might present everyone perfect in Christ. Do you see the connection we are to have with Christ? The relationship the Christian has with Christ and that Christ has with the Christian goes far beyond closeness. It is tremendously invasive. We are in him, and he is in us.

“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him.” John 6:56

Paul’s goal was not just that the Colossians would understand this closeness. His goal was that the Colossians might be presented to God as perfect in this closeness. “Perfect?” you might say. “Isn’t Paul expecting a bit much out of these saints?” No, he is not. The word perfect, as used in this context, means “mature.” Paul’s goal was that these believers in Colosse would live and function as fully-grown believers, mature in their understanding and living out of the gospel; mature in their understanding that they are in Christ, and Christ, likewise, is in them.

Like a drill sergeant anticipating the general’s review of his troops, Paul anticipated, perhaps with some trepidation, the Lord’s review of the Colossians.⁶ As one who was intimately involved in their spiritual growth, he didn’t want to be embarrassed at this review, and he didn’t want the Colossians to be embarrassed either. He put all his wisdom and energy into these saints (more truly, Christ put all of his wisdom and energy into those saints), that their presentation before the Lord might be a joyous occasion.

And Paul didn’t focus his efforts on only the most promising of the saints in Colosse, either. He focused on “everyone”. The word “everyone” appears two times in the NIV text in verse 28, but it actually appears three times in the Greek. Paul is emphasizing that this “mystery” he is proclaiming is not for a select group of super-religious Christians. Unlike the false teachers, who reserved their teaching for just such a select group, believing that only the spiritually-gifted could grasp the truths they were proclaiming, Paul emphasizes that the mystery of the gospel is for all – men, women, young, old, rich, poor, intelligent, not-so-intelligent, free and slave. Paul’s goal was the same for everyone – that they might grow into mature, confident believers living their lives on this earth with the knowledge that they were in Christ and he was in them, and thus, that they would be confident at Christ’s coming.

⁶ The thought that the Lord would one day review all he had done was always on Paul’s mind. See 1 Corinthians 3:10-4:5.

The *Today's English Version* of the New Testament brings this thought out well.

We warn and teach everyone, with all possible wisdom, in order to bring each one into God's presence as a mature individual in union with Christ.
Colossians 1:28 TEV

Are you a mature individual? The answer to this question cannot be assumed based on the number of years you have been a follower of Christ. Sadly, many people who have been Christians for years are still spiritual infants. The Hebrew Christians to whom the letter to the Hebrews was written definitely fell into this category.⁷ Conversely, many relatively new Christians are mature.

Where does this maturity come from? It does not come from great struggle or striving. It comes from our knowledge of the work Christ has done and is doing and our faith in him. In other words, it comes from our union with Christ and our knowledge of that fact. Paul labored that the Christians in Colosse might know these truths.

To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.
Colossians 1:29

Even Paul's words about his own labors testify to the power of this mystery he is presenting in this book. Notice how Paul struggles for the church; he struggles, not with his own energy, but with Christ's energy. What a great secret! Paul did not use his own energy. He did not use his own strength. He relied on Christ. This is where his faith was. If Paul, great as he was, had attempted to do Christ's work on his own, he would have failed, for only Christ can do Christ's work.

That is the secret of the Christian life: the believer recognizing that Christ is in his life, and living with that thought dominating his life. Jesus never planned to help you live a better life. He wants to live your life for you.

Consider your own life. Do you, like Paul, struggle with all of Christ's energy? Have you tapped into all of his energy that's in you? Or, like many Christians, are you living life more like a miser, trying to ration out Christ in you. It won't work. We must labor using all of Christ. He will not be rationed. Like the oil in the widow's jar, which continued to flow freely even as she poured it into dozens of other vessels,⁸ Christ's life and energy in us will never run dry. We can pour out everything we think we have, and there will always be more, for Christ is infinite. His love never runs dry. His power never runs dry. His grace never runs dry.

I hope this encourages you, for it encourages me – Christ is in you! Just think about your potential. It staggers the mind. Christ is God's riches. In him are hidden "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). I am in him. He is in me. What a powerful union that is! Alone, I can do nothing. But I am not alone, for Christ is in me. Do you know this truth? Is it in your heart? Is this the Christianity you have known? Is this the Christianity you believe the world needs?

In his delightful book, *Victory in Christ*, Charles G. Trumbull, editor of *The Sunday School Times* from 1903 to 1941, shares a story that bears repeating.

At a student missionary convention which I had the privilege of attending, we who were congratulating ourselves as being on somewhat higher ground than the ordinary church member in that we were willing to expend of our time, energy, and money to attend a missionary convention and share in our Lord's program for the evangelization of the world, were confronted over and over again, through one speaker after another, with a rather uncomfortable question, "Is your kind of Christianity worth sending to the non-Christian world?"

Not, "Is Christianity worth sending?" There is no question as to that. But what about your kind? – the kind you showed by your life this morning, yesterday, last week, last year. Is that what the non-Christian world is waiting for, what is needed to revolutionize lives there?

WEEK FOUR

Colossians 1:24-29

7 See Hebrews 5:11-14.

8 See 2 Kings 4:1-7.

WEEK FOUR

Colossians 1:24-29

Now there is a kind of Christianity worth sending to the non-Christian world. It is the kind that Jesus Christ lives, the kind that He has always lived. And the Christianity that Christ Himself lives is the only kind worth sending.

The kind of salvation that Jesus offers is the only salvation worth offering to anyone. So the kind of Christianity that Jesus lives, moment by moment, is the only kind of Christianity worth living.⁹

Is this the kind of Christianity you have experienced? If not, today's your day. Put your trust in Christ in you. It's all he's looking for out of you. That's exactly what he said in John 6:29.

"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

God's work for you is to put your faith in Christ; not just faith in the work he did 2,000 years ago, but faith in the work he is doing today; not just faith in him apart from you, but faith in him inside of you.

Recently, I was talking with some believers and a man said, when referring to Adam in the Garden of Eden, "Could anything be better than walking with God next to you?" I smiled and said, "The only thing that could be better would be walking with God inside of you." And that is precisely what we have in Christ.

DAY SIX (CONTINUED)

This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me....

⁹ Charles G. Trumball, *Victory in Christ* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1976), pp. 7-8.

Week Five

COLOSSIANS 2:1-10

Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
ἡμάτος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφεός
τοῖς ἐν Κολύττας ἁγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς
ἀδελφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῇ ἀγάπῃ
ἡνὴν ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ
τοῦ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ] πάντοτε
οἱ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, ἀκούσαντες
τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας
τοὺς ἁγίους διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν
ἐθηκεμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
ἀκοηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας
τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ παρόντος εἰς τὴν

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

DAY ONE

Read *Colossians 2:1-10* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

COLOSSIANS 2:1-10

¹*I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally.* ²*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,* ³*in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.* ⁴*I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.* ⁵*For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.*

⁶*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,* ⁷*rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.*

⁸*See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*

⁹*For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,* ¹⁰*and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.*

DAY TWO

Read *Colossians 2:1-3*

Why do you think Paul wanted the Colossians to know how much he was struggling for them (this is now the second time he has brought this fact to their attention)? *Colossians 2:1*

What was Paul hoping his struggles for the church in Colosse and Laodicea would accomplish? *Colossians 2:2-3*

Read verse two carefully. Why does Paul want the saints to be encouraged in heart and united in love?

What does this say about the importance of believers gathering together?
See also Hebrews 10:24-25

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

In verse three, Paul declares that he wants the believers to “know the mystery of God, namely, Christ”. What might be the difference between knowing Christ, as Paul advocates here, and merely knowing about Christ? *See also Acts 19:13-16 and James 2:18-22*

What are some evidences that a person truly knows Christ? *John 15:1-17; Romans 8:16; Galatians 5:22-24; 1 John 3:24; 1 John 4:13*

According to verse three, what two things are hidden in Christ?

How do you think these things which are hidden in Christ can be accessed by the believer? *See also James 1:5-8*

DAY THREE

Read *Colossians 2:4*

Paul told the Colossians these things “so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments” (Colossians 2:4). In verse eight, Paul provides a good explanation of what these “fine-sounding arguments” actually are. What are they?

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

Paul did not rely on the fine-sounding arguments of the world, although he fully recognized man's affinity for them. What, instead, did he rely on? *1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5*

In Galatians 5:11, Paul, in discussing the gospel he preaches, refers to "the offense of the cross". What do you think he means by this?

What did this decision to preach in the way he did personally cost Paul?
1 Corinthians 11:23-29; Galatians 5:11

What has the preaching of the gospel cost you?

DAY FOUR

Read *Colossians 2:5-7*

What do you think Paul meant by saying that he was present with the Colossians in spirit?
Colossians 2:5

Why do you think Paul mentions this fact?

According to verse five, Paul delighted in seeing two things in the church. What were they?

What are some signs that a church is orderly? *Colossians 2:5; 1 Peter 4:10-11; 1 Corinthians 14:26-40; Hebrews 10:23-25; Hebrews 13:17 and others*

Disorder in the church is a sign of something. What is it? *James 3:16*

What indications do we have that the church in Colosse was disorderly at this time?

Paul mentions that he delights in seeing “how firm your faith in Christ is”. Don’t all Christians have firm faith in Christ?

Using Colossians 2:6-7 as the basis of your answer, describe what this firm faith in Christ looks like. *See also Galatians 2:20*

If you are a Christian, would your kind of faith be described as “firm”?

Where does a Christian get this kind of faith?

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

DAY FIVE

Read *Colossians 2:8-10*

According to verse eight, what can take the believer captive?

Has this ever happened to you? If so, how and when?

The believer is not to depend on “human tradition and the basic principles of this world”. What, instead, is the believer to depend on?

How, practically speaking, does this happen? *John 6:29*

Do you believe this is a once-for-all-time choice, or a daily decision? Please explain your answer.

Is that where your dependence has been over the last few days ... months ... years?

Verses eight and nine are connected by the word “For”. Why would Paul connect the truth that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” with the truth we have been examining in verse eight?

Who else shares in Christ’s fullness? *Colossians 2:10*

What should be the practical implications of this truth?

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

DAY SIX

Read the study notes.

COLOSSIANS 2:1-10

“I have never in my life envied a human being who led an easy life; I have envied a great many people who led difficult lives and led them well.” – Theodore Roosevelt¹

If living a difficult life well is worthy of envy, then Paul’s life is worthy of the greatest envy, for he never chose the easy life. Any romantic notions we might have of the gospel work are quickly dispelled as we read about his labors for the church in Colosse.

I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. Colossians 2:1

Paul was struggling, as we learned in our last lesson, so the believers in Colosse might be presented to God as mature in Christ. Maturity is the goal for every believer. God is not interested in perpetual babyhood among his family members. As one of my friends likes to say, a five-year-old pushing a plastic lawn mower behind his father as he mows the yard is cute. An 18-year-old doing the same thing is not so cute anymore – it’s sad. We are to grow up in our salvation once we have tasted that the Lord is good.²

We must remember that, by the time this letter arrived to them, the believers in Colosse were in a pretty beleaguered state. The false teachers had surrounded the believers with their presence and smothered them with their teaching. Consequently, the life and glory of the gospel was being squeezed from the church. Any time legalism is embraced, which is exactly what the believers in Colosse were doing, joy and unity are lost. Joy is lost because joy is only found in Jesus, and these believers were looking to their works instead of Christ’s work for their life, fulfillment and holiness. Unity is lost because legalism is based on performance, not on grace; it elevates one person over another.

The believers had slipped into immaturity.³ This is a terrible condition, but it is, fortunately, reversible. What is the antidote to this dreaded condition? It should not surprise any of us. The answer is Jesus.

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. Colossians 1:28

This, the proclamation of Jesus, is the work Paul struggled at with all Christ’s energy. He admonished and taught with one goal in mind: the maturing of the saints. Of course, the maturing of the saints does not happen overnight. It is a process. That process is outlined in Colossians 2:2-3. Read these verses slowly, for there is a great deal packed into them.

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, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2-3

1 Quotations of Theodore Roosevelt (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2004), p. 11.

2 See 1 Peter 2:3.

3 See Hebrews 5:11-14. The Hebrew believers, like the Colossians, had also “slipped” into immaturity.

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

When Jesus is proclaimed, the saints are encouraged in heart and united in love. These two are connected. You cannot have one without the other. The proclamation of Jesus naturally encourages the heart, because the message of Jesus is not about what we have to do, it is about what he has already done. It is not about who we are or were. It is about who he is. The proclamation of Jesus naturally results in being united in love, because “God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit” (Romans 5:5) and has supernaturally joined all believers into one family. The proclamation of Jesus stirs up this love that is already in the believers’ hearts, causing believers to naturally express their love to their fellow Christians. The Weymouth translation of the New Testament translates the phrase “united in love” as being “welded together” in love. What a great picture! This is the kind of love that doesn’t break under pressure, for, as with individual pieces of steel that are welded together into one unit, when we are welded together in love, we are stronger together than if we are apart.

When believers are encouraged in heart and united in love, something remarkable happens: they receive “the full riches of complete understanding”. Mark this, for it is highly significant. So often, people try to arrive at a full understanding of Jesus on their own. But that is impossible, for it only happens as we are united in love with our brothers and sisters. Indeed, I have seen, as I have taught God’s word in many different places, that God speaks in a heightened way to the saints when they are gathered together. Understanding comes more easily when the saints are united in love. The Holy Spirit makes his presence known in something that the New Testament writers called *Koinonea*. *Koinonea* is what the Holy Spirit brings when he glues believers together with himself as the glue. That glue is dripping with love, peace, healing and the knowledge of God. Those who refuse to fellowship will never reap the benefits of this and will be marked by immaturity and perpetual spiritual sickness.

The complete understanding we come to together is not a perfect understanding of all that is found within the Bible. It is a “mature” understanding of God’s truth – a settled conviction that everything we need is found in Jesus, “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”. When we finally come to this realization, we naturally run to Jesus, for we have come to fully realize that he is the source of everything we are, everything we have, everything we need, and everything we will be.

The false teachers had been claiming they had true “wisdom” with them. The Colossians had become enamored with this wisdom and were running after it. Here, Paul declares that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are in Christ. He says the same thing in his first letter to the Corinthians.

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God ... 1 Corinthians 1:30

The Colossian Christians had been deceived by “fine-sounding arguments”. None of these fine-sounding arguments focused on Jesus. Paul tells the believers not to be deceived by the innocuous blather of the false teachers. They are to see to it that they don’t wander astray. He tells them their faith needs to be firmly placed in Christ.

I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. Colossians 2:4-5

Notice, Paul mentions that he is present with the Colossians in spirit. This does not mean that he somehow “spiritually projected” himself into their midst. It simply means that, as a fellow believer with the Colossians, Paul’s heart was united with their hearts. He was one with them in spirit. Even from a distance, he could delight in their worship.

It is interesting that he mentions that he delights in “how orderly” the Colossian Christians are. When the church is well-ordered, everything is in its place: people walk in love with one another, encourage one another, and use their spiritual gifts to build one another up. When the church is well-ordered, people are not competing with one another, nor are they trying to take one another’s place.

Order is the opposite of disorder, which is what you find anytime Jesus is not at the center of everything.

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. James 3:16

The church in Colosse was, at the time of the writing of this letter, decidedly disordered. The saints’ view of Christ had been clouded, and whenever he is out of focus, everything else falls into disarray. Now, instead of trusting in the risen Christ, the saints were trusting in their own deeds. Now, instead of looking to him for their instruction, they were looking to false teachers who never should have been given a platform anywhere.

Of course, the church in Colosse was not the first church to wallow in disorder, nor will it be the last. The cry of God’s ambassadors must be, “Lord, bring order to your church.” This happens when Christ is proclaimed and people walk in firm faith in him.

We can even reduce this thought from the church to the individual. How orderly is your life? Are you envious of others? That promotes disorder. Are you ambitious for yourself? That, too, promotes disorder. Order is only found in Christ, for “in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17).

As God’s children, we should delight in God’s order. Far too often, however, we delight in controversy, taking sadistic pleasure in other’s failings. Paul did not do this. He encouraged the weak. And above all, he presented Christ, for when our faith is firmly in Christ then we are truly strong.

These next two verses tie into the ones we have just studied, and they are some of my favorites in the Bible. They are absolute keys to living the victorious Christian life.

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

As I have mentioned several times thus far, our faith in Christ must go beyond what Christ has done. It must also be in what he is doing today. That is what these verses are saying. In effect, Paul says, “In the same way you received Christ – that is, by putting your faith in the work he accomplished by his death, burial and resurrection – you must put your trust in Christ today. Your roots must go down deep into the living Christ. He is alive and seated at the right hand of the Father right now! He must become your life. You must trust that he is, by his Spirit, living in you today.”

Unfortunately, the gospel that most people have heard and reheard is the gospel that focuses everything on salvation from hell and salvation to heaven. Jesus came to do far more than just “give you a ticket to heaven.” He came to give you life – today!

Most Christians do not experience this life because they do not know that it is possible to live in Christ today. It is possible. In fact, it is expected. It is the normal Christian life.

“But I’ve tried and tried to be a better Christian,” you might say. “I can’t do it.” Ahhh, who ever said that you could do it? Maybe the reason you can’t live the “better” Christian life is that *you* were never meant to try to live the Christian life at all.

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

“How is the Christian life to be lived, then?” you might ask. “How do I live in Christ?” The surprisingly simple answer is found in verse eight.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Colossians 2:8

The answer is not dependence on “hollow and deceptive philosophy”. Hollow and deceptive philosophy does not necessarily mean philosophies that are easily recognized as false teaching, as might be the case with the false teaching the Colossians were accepting or Mormon theology or the like. It might be something more subtle - something like this: “If you focus your efforts on living the good Christian life, then you will succeed.” It might be something like this: “If you study your Bible for several hours a day, then you will become holier.” It might be something like this: “If you pray harder, you will see more results.” Notice: none of the examples I have given here seem inherently wrong. But all of them are, for all of them depend on “human tradition and the basic principles of this world” rather than on Christ.

And that is the answer we’ve been looking for – the answer to the question, “how is the Christian life to be lived?”. The answer is in simple dependence on Christ. We must depend on Christ to live “the good Christian life.” We must depend on Christ for our holiness. We must depend on Christ for the fruitfulness of prayer. Our spiritual “success” does not depend on what we try to do. That is hollow and deceptive. It leads people into bondage. Spiritual success is dependence on the living Christ.

Christ is the answer, because all the fullness of God rests in him. Nothing good or holy may be found outside of Christ; therefore, dependence on anything other than Christ is sin.

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. Colossians 2:9-10

Dependence on Christ is absolutely essential, for all God’s fullness rests in him. He is not missing anything that we might need. He is full. For the Christian, this is not a surprising thought. Paul’s next statement, however, that “you have been given fullness in Christ”, is positively shocking. Did you know this? You share in Christ’s fullness. You, too, are full.

This, then, is the news I have for you – Deity is present! Pentecost means that the Deity came to mankind to give Himself to man, that man might breathe Him in as he breathes in the air, that He might fill men. Dr. A.B. Simpson used an illustration which was about as good as any I ever heard. He said, “Being filled with the fullness of God is like a bottle in the ocean. You take the cork out of the bottle and sink it in the ocean, and you have the bottle completely full of ocean. The bottle is in the ocean, and the ocean is in the bottle. The ocean contains the bottle, but the bottle contains only a little bit of the ocean. So it is with a Christian.”

We are filled unto the fullness of God, but, of course, we cannot contain all of God because God contains us; but we can have all of God that we can contain. If we only knew it, we could enlarge our vessel. The vessel gets bigger as we go on with God.⁴

There is no need to talk about your weaknesses, for in Christ, you are full. There is no need to focus on the gaps in your life, for in Christ, you have no gaps. You share in his fullness. What a glorious thought! The very nature of God is within you!

...he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. 1 Corinthians 6:17

⁴ A.W. Tozer, *The Counselor* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1993), p. 68.

We would hear far fewer discussions among Christians about the “weak and impoverished church” if we all knew this to be true.

What higher position can we possibly be given? We have been given fullness in Christ! So often, our thoughts and words center on our insufficiencies. “I can’t afford that.” “I’m not strong enough.” “I don’t know how to do that.” “I’m not smart enough.” “I don’t have the patience for that.” “I’m too afraid to do that.” “I could never love them.” “I don’t have enough time.” “I’m too fat.” “I’m too old.” Why not, rather, focus on our fullness? Because that, my friend, is what we truly are.

DAY SIX (CONTINUED)

This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me....

WEEK FIVE

Colossians 2:1-10

Week Six

COLOSSIANS 2:10-23

Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
ἡμάτων θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφεός
τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἁγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς
ἐλφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ κληρονομήσαντες
τὴν χάριν ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ
τοῦ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ] πάντοτε
οἱ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, ἀκούσαντες
τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας
τοὺς ἁγίους διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν
ἐθηκεμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
ἀκοηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας
τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ παρόντος εἰς τὴν

DAY ONE

Read *Colossians 2:10-23* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

COLOSSIANS 2:10-23

¹⁰*and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.* ¹¹*In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ,* ¹²*having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.*

¹³*When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins,* ¹⁴*having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.* ¹⁵*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*

¹⁶*Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.* ¹⁷*These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.* ¹⁸*Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.* ¹⁹*He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.*

²⁰*Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules:* ²¹*“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”?* ²²*These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings.* ²³*Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.*

DAY TWO

Read *Colossians 2:10-12*

Who are these “powers and authorities” that Paul describes in verse ten? *See also Colossians 2:15 and Ephesians 6:11-12*

Describe Jesus’ relationship with these powers and authorities. *Colossians 2:10; Colossians 2:15; Colossians 1:16*

Why is this truth significant for the Christian to know and understand? *Ephesians 6:12*

WEEK SIX

Colossians 2:10-23

WEEK SIX

Colossians 2:10-23

What did Jesus say to his followers in regard to these powers and authorities (Jesus called them “snakes and scorpions” here)? *Luke 10:19*

Do think this truth applies to Christians today?

When doesn't the Christian have the ability to walk in this authority? *1 Peter 5:8-9; James 4:7*

The false teachers were probably teaching the Christians in Colosse that they needed to be physically circumcised (among other things) in order to be saved. In verse 11, Paul tells these Christians that they have already been circumcised. Describe this circumcision Paul refers to here. *See also Romans 2:28-29*

What does this circumcision remove from the believer? *Colossians 2:11*

What practical impact should this have on the believer's life?

DAY THREE

Read *Colossians 2:12-15*

Verses 12 and 13 are connected to verse 11. They describe when the Christian's inner circumcision took place. Please summarize these verses here. (Note: The baptism being discussed in these verses is not physical baptism into water. It is the Christian's "baptism" by the Holy Spirit into Christ himself – see 1 Corinthians 12:13. Baptism in water is a "picture" of the baptism being discussed here.)

What part do we play in this baptism into Christ? *Colossians 1:12*

WEEK SIX

Colossians 2:10-23

Are these truths presented as something that will happen to the believer or that has already happened to the believer? Why is this truth significant?

Romans 6:1-14 describes this baptism into Christ in greater detail. Summarize Paul's words in this passage.

If this is true, that is, if we have already been circumcised and have already died with Christ and have been raised with him to new life, why do you think so many Christians still struggle with sin?

What does Paul tell the believers to do in Romans 6:11? Have you ever done this?

How is the non-Christian described in the first half of verse 13?

How did Jesus describe the non-Christian in John 3:18?

How is the Christian described in verses 12 and 13?

WEEK SIX

Colossians 2:10-23

Verses 13-15 describe several specific actions God performed on behalf of the believer. What are they?

Why would it be important for the Christians in Colosse to know these truths?

Why is it important for you to know these truths?

Verse 14 tells us that the written code (the law as recorded in the Old Testament) has been canceled for the Christian. Based on this verse, why does the Christian need the written code to be cancelled?

How did God cancel the law?

What was the purpose of the law? *Romans 3:20; Galatians 3:24-25*

What replaced the law? *Romans 3:20-26; Galatians 3:24-25*

The law has been canceled for the Christian. Has it also been canceled for the non-Christian?
1 Timothy 1:8-11

If the written code has been canceled for the Christian, why do so many Christians, like those deceived by the false teachers in Colosse, still attempt to follow it?

What do you think the attempted keeping of the law results in?

Verse 15 mentions that Jesus “disarmed the powers and authorities”. Who benefits from this disarming and who does Satan still have authority over? *Ephesians 2:1-2*

Based on this verse, how would you describe the overall “fighting condition” of Satan and his demons, and his strength in comparison to the strength of the church “rooted and built up” in Christ?

DAY FOUR

Read *Colossians 2:16-19*

In verses 16 and 17, Paul provides a great explanation of what the religious festivals, New Moon celebrations and Sabbath days described in the law were all about. What does he call them here?

For the Christian, these things are reflections of our reality, but not the reality itself. What is the Christian’s reality? *Colossians 2:17*

Paul issues a strong warning in verse 18, what is it?

WEEK SIX

Colossians 2:10-23

How does Paul describe the false teachers in verses 18 and 19?

The false teachers had lost their “connection with the Head”. Who is the head?

How does the Christian maintain his connection with the Head? *Colossians 2:6-7; John 15:1-17*

What might be some warning signs that you have lost your connection with the Head?

DAY FIVE

Read *Colossians 2:20-23*

According to verse 20, what did the Christian die to?

When did this death occur?

What is the Christian not to do because of this death?

The false teachings the Colossian Christians were hearing had an appearance of something. What was it? *Colossians 2:23*

If the false teachings can't restrain sensual indulgence, what can? (Think carefully over the truths we have learned this week.)

DAY SIX

Read the study notes.

COLOSSIANS 2:10-23

CHRIST'S RELATION TO THE RULERS AND AUTHORITIES

We finished our last lesson with the wonderful thought that we have been given fullness in Christ. Paul follows this wonderful thought with another, equally wonderful thought, stating that Christ is "the head over every power and authority" (Colossians 2:10).

Do you realize that the one within you, Jesus Christ, is the head over *every* power and authority? No power exists that is outside of his authority. As he said to his disciples in Matthew 28:18, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

God the Father gave absolute authority to Jesus. His rule is total. The thought is quite significant to our understanding of how, as Christians, we are to live in this world, for we are embroiled in a battle against these same powers and authorities that Jesus is over.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Ephesians 6:12

Our struggle against the powers and authorities should never be from the perspective that they are in control. They are not. Christ is their head. They will struggle against us, but we must not see them as more powerful than they actually are. They have been, as Paul goes on to say in verse 15, "disarmed"

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:15

Of course, Jesus' interaction with the powers and authorities did not begin with his triumph over them by the cross. His interaction with the powers and authorities began when he created them.

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. Colossians 1:16

Whatever powers and authorities exist, exist because Christ created them. And he created them for himself. He is their head, whether they desire his headship or not. They will bring him glory, whether they desire to bring him glory or not.

The powers and authorities are meant, as H.C.G. Moule wrote in *Colossian Studies* (published in 1898), "to serve His will, to contribute to His glory. ... Their whole being, willingly or unwillingly, moves ... to Him; whether, as His blissful servants, they shall be as it were His throne; or as his stricken enemies, 'His footstool'".¹

1 Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 11, Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 182.

WEEK SIX

Colossians 2:10-23

Everything is under the control of our Creator and Lord and Savior and Master and Brother and Friend. He is not willing that anything, whether evil spirit or otherwise, would dominate those the Father has given to him.

UNTWISTING THE TWISTED

The arguments against the false teachers are unanswerable. If this is all that the Colossian church heard from Paul, it would be enough. Fortunately for us, however, it is not all the church heard from Paul. Paul is just warming to his task. In these next verses, he takes the false teachers' twisted teachings and untwists them.

The focus of the next section is circumcision, although it is not the type of circumcision the false teachers advocated.

In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.
Colossians 2:11-15

The false teachers in Colosse were apparently teaching the Colossian Christians that they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. This was an argument Paul faced constantly.² Like a broken record playing the same tired lyrics over and over, the false teachers had a "skip" in their teachings, repeating their misunderstanding of circumcision in every town they visited.

I love how Paul deals with their recommendations in this letter. Notice, he does not tell the Colossian Christians that they do not have to be circumcised.³ Instead, he tells them that they have *already* been circumcised. They may have not received an external circumcision, but that is completely irrelevant to the discussion of salvation, for, at the moment of salvation, they received an inward circumcision, the circumcision of Christ.⁴

This inward circumcision, like the external circumcision the false teachers were advocating, involves the cutting off of flesh. However, the flesh the inward circumcision cuts off is not part of your physical body; it is part of your spiritual makeup. The flesh this inward circumcision deals with is the sinful nature you were born with.

*... the word "flesh," as Paul uses it, seldom refers to the body ... but to a spiritual malady, a sickness of spiritual existence ...*⁵

This sickly part of every human's makeup is surgically removed at salvation, cutting its life-sapping connection and power from the believer.⁶

Paul's words must have brought great joy to the church in Colosse (and great relief to the men!). "We don't have to be circumcised! We've already been circumcised inwardly. Our sin problems have been dealt with!"

How does this inner circumcision take place? According to verse 12, it happens when the Christian is "buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God". The baptism being discussed here is not your baptism into water by the hands of another believer, but your baptism into *Christ* by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit performed this baptism when you put your trust in Jesus.

² See Acts 15 and the book of Galatians.

³ In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells the church that he wishes the false teachers would be circumcised – and this time, he hopes they cut everything off (see Galatians 5:12). Vulgar as these words may appear to be, we must remember that these words were inspired by the Holy Spirit. If you have ever wondered exactly what he thinks about false teachers who lead his saints into legalism, now you know.

⁴ The NIV text seems to indicate that Christ himself "performs" this circumcision, but the Greek text does not say this. It merely names this circumcision, calling it the circumcision "of Christ". Romans 2:29 says that the Spirit performs this inner circumcision. The Spirit, then, performs the circumcision of Christ.

⁵ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), p. 15.

⁶ See also Romans 2:28-29 and Philippians 3:3.

Did you know about this baptism? It's highly significant to understanding your life, your relationship to Christ, and your relationship to sin. At the point of salvation, you were dunked (that's what the word means) in Christ.

This baptism into Christ happened for me in 1971 or 1972. However, and this is highly significant, from God's perspective (which is the only perspective that counts) my union with Christ extends back to Christ's death on the cross. When I put my trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit baptized me into Christ's death. When he died, I died too. When he rose, because I was in him, I rose too.

Since the believer is in Christ, God reckons the death and resurrection of Christ to be that of the child of God. Just as sin and death do not have dominion over Him, neither do they have dominion over the Christian. The believer needs to believe this truth and to apply this positional reality to his practical experience: "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:11).⁷

The thoughts here are very similar to those found in Romans 6.⁸

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin – because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. Romans 6: 1-7

To say all this in another way, baptism into Christ is the "operating room" where your inward circumcision takes place. When you were placed into Christ, your old sinful nature was cut off of you. The natural connection sin had with you was completely severed.

Did you know this? Or does it seem sin still has a grip on you? The answer isn't in looking forward to a future victory over sin. It's in looking back to the victory that already took place.

Let's take this baptism into Christ even further. Knowing that we died with Christ, we should also know that we were raised with him. This resurrection life is something we are to enjoy today. We have new life in Christ now. Our sins have been forgiven. We do not have to earn forgiveness. As Christians, we have already been circumcised. It happened when we were baptized into Christ. We are, right now, alive with him.

When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Colossians 2:13-15

The Colossian Christians had forgotten (or never known) these truths. They had been convinced that they needed to do more to gain the victory over sin. Here, Paul is stating, in the clearest possible way, that the work has already been done. The Colossian Christians had already been circumcised. Their problems with sin had already been dealt with. They had already been given new life in Christ. The need for the church was to learn these truths and walk in them.

7 Robert G. Gromacki, *Stand Perfect in Wisdom: An Exposition of Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 109.

8 It would be well worth your time to study Romans 6 in depth. Our study book on Romans, *The Power of the Gospel*, may prove helpful to you.

WEEK SIX

Colossians 2:10-23

WALKING IN VICTORY

For the Colossian Christians, walking in the truth they now knew meant taking some specific actions.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Colossians 2:16-23

Paul's instructions are quite simple: don't let the false teachers judge you, don't let them disqualify you for the prize, and don't submit to their rules. Paul's advice was always to deal with false teachers as aggressively as possible. He never advised placating them. Consider, for example, his instructions to Titus:

For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach ... Titus 1:10-11

The weight of Paul's words to Titus is even stronger in the Greek.

“Silenced” translates a rare verb meaning “to close the mouth by means of a muzzle or gag.”⁹

False teachers, according to Paul, are to be given no place to speak. Their works-based theology doesn't just ruin the individual. It ruins whole households, which, when ruined, ruin whole churches. That is why the false teachers *must* be forcibly silenced.

“Must” (dei) presents this as a moral necessity for the welfare of the churches.¹⁰

According to Paul, the church's survival in Colosse depended on how the false teachers were dealt with.

Paul doesn't sugar coat the false teachers' faults. He says that they do not know what they are talking about, they have unspiritual minds puffed up with idle thoughts, they worship things they know nothing about, they have lost all connection with Christ, they are full of false humility, and they follow rules that do no good whatsoever.

What does this have to do with us today? After all, we don't have gangs of theologically impaired teachers roaming the countryside looking to infect blissfully unaware churches, do we?

Unfortunately, we do. In fact, Scripture indicates that this will *increase* in days to come.

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 1 Timothy 4:1-2¹¹

⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 11, Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 432.

¹⁰ D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 11, Titus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 432.

¹¹ See also 2 Timothy 3:1-9.

Legalism has never been eradicated. It preys on confused Christians everywhere. The answer for us is the same as the answer the Colossian Christians were given. We must learn who we are in Christ, we must stand firm in that truth, and we must not allow those who would teach otherwise to confuse us or the church.

We need to quit looking to the false teachers and to their kingdom. We died to their kingdom and its principles when we died with Christ. If we're looking for principles to live by, we need to look to our own kingdom; that is where the answers will be found.

And those principles – *our* principles from *our* kingdom – are exactly what Paul discusses in Colossians 3.

DAY SIX (CONTINUED)

This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me....

Week Seven

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
ἡμάτος θεοῦ καὶ Τιμόθεος ὁ ἀδελφεός
τοῖς ἐν Κολοσσαῖς ἀγίοις καὶ πιστοῖς
ἐλφοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τῇ ἀγάπῃ
ἡνὴν ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν.

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ
τοῦ ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ [Χριστοῦ] πάντοτε
οἱ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, ἀκούσαντες
τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας
τοὺς ἁγίους διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν
ἐθηκεμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
ὅπως ἀκοούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀλήθειας
τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ παρόντος εἰς τὴν

DAY ONE

Read *Colossians 3:1-17* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

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

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

DAY TWO

Read *Colossians 3:1-4*

Verse one begins with the phrase, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ". Obviously, this thought is quite significant. When were you raised with Christ? *Colossians 2:12-13; Romans 6:1-14*

The Christian is to take two actions based on this truth. What are they?

Do you think these are one-time actions Paul is recommending?

WEEK SEVEN

Colossians 3:1-17

WEEK SEVEN

Colossians 3:1-17

How can you do these two things?

Do you think it is possible to do these things if you don't know that you have been raised with Christ?

According to verse one, Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father right now. Where is the Christian right now? *Colossians 3:3; Ephesians 2:6*

What impact should this truth have on your life here on earth?

In verse four, Paul says that Christ "is your life". Is this true of all Christians?

What things in your life would change if you saw this as reality?

When Christ appears, the Christian "also will appear with him in glory" (verse 4). We already know that the Christian has been raised with Christ spiritually. What do the following verses teach us about our "physical" resurrection? *Romans 8:17-25; 1 Corinthians 15:50-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:10*

DAY THREE

Read *Colossians 3:5-11*

The word "therefore" in verse five connects this verse with the truths presented in verses one through four. What action is the Christian to take based on the truths revealed in the first four verses?

Who helps the Christian do this? *Romans 8:13-14*

Have you done this in your own life? Are you doing this in your own life?

How do you reconcile the need to take this action with the truth that our old flesh or sinful nature has already been put off of us? *See Colossians 2:11*

Based on Paul's words here, is there any reason sin should continue to have a hold on the Christian? In other words, whose fault is it if sin reigns in the life of the Christian?

What does Paul state about Christ in verse 11? Is this how you think of him? Does your life reflect this?

DAY FOUR

Read *Colossians 3:12-14*

How is the Christian described in verse 12?

What is the Christian told to do in verses 12 through 14?

Do you think it is possible to do this if you haven't obeyed God's commands as outlined in verses five through nine?

Who do you think helps the Christian do this?

WEEK SEVEN

Colossians 3:1-17

WEEK SEVEN

Colossians 3:1-17

The Christian isn't just to concern himself with his own life. How are we to treat fellow Christians?
Colossians 3:13

Would those who know you best say that you make a practice of doing these things?

The Christian is to take off those things that belong to the earthly nature. The Christian is to put on those things that belong to the heavenly nature. Which of these two natures should be the easier for the Christian to wear? Why?

DAY FIVE

Read *Colossians 3:15-17*

In verse 15, we read that we are to let the peace of Christ do something. What are we to let the peace of Christ do?

How can you do this?

In verse 16, we read that we are to let the word of Christ do something. What are we to let the word of Christ do?

How are we instructed to do this?

Do you do this?

How would life change for you if you consistently practiced verse 17?

DAY SIX

Read the study notes.

COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

What would happen if you took a very poor man – a man who has never known a time when he had enough to eat, or experienced the comfort of having a few extra dollars, or heard an encouraging word, or felt the warmth of a fire on a cold night – and, in a matter of moments, plucked him from the hardships of his day-to-day existence and placed him on the throne of a prosperous kingdom? How might the man's outlook on life change? How long would it take for the man to develop a throne-room mentality?

If the poor man's outlook on life would change in these circumstances, and it undoubtedly would, how much more should the new Christian's outlook on life change? Unfortunately, many Christians do not have a new outlook on life. While believing they are going to heaven, they, nonetheless, have an impoverished view of *who* they are, and they have an equally impoverished view of *where* they are (not where they will be someday, but where they are today – raised with Christ). The answer is not that the Christian needs a radical heart change. After all, that happened when we turned to Christ. He changed our hearts.¹ The answer is the Christian needs a radical change in focus. This is something Christ will not do for us. It is something we must do ourselves.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
Colossians 3:1-4

Paul states several facts in these verses: “you have been raised with Christ”, “you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God”, and “you also will appear with him in glory”. These facts are true for you as a Christian whether you know it or not. What is not stated as a fact is where your heart and mind is set. As believers, our hearts and minds can be set on earthly things, or they can be set on things above. Of course, there is no real choice to be made here. Since we have been raised with Christ, the only logical place to set our hearts and minds is on things above.

Did you know that you have been raised with Christ? Not only that, did you know that you've been seated *with him* in the heavenly realms? This is not something that will happen to you. It is something that has happened to you.

And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6

What does it mean to be seated on the throne? It would seem to mean that you have some level of authority, wouldn't it?

“I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.” Luke 10:19

It would seem to mean that you have some access to the riches of the kingdom, wouldn't it?

“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” John 15:7

It would seem to mean that you could do something with your life, something productive, something that makes a real difference in this world, something that lasts for eternity.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” John 15:5

It would seem to mean that you would know some things that the rest of this world would not know.

WEEK SEVEN

Colossians 3:1-17

¹ See also Ezekiel 36:25-27.

WEEK SEVEN

Colossians 3:1-17

But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2:16

All of these things, and many more, are a result of being seated with Christ. This is where our hearts and minds must be set. “How do I do this?” you might ask. The first step is simple. Just start thinking about Jesus and his kingdom and your place in it. Treat him as a real person and his kingdom as reality, and, note this, yourself as a current member of that kingdom.

Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. Hebrews 12:2-3

To do this, of course, means you will have to take your mind off of your old kingdom. The heroes of our faith have been marked by a focus they had on the kingdom of God and a distinct lack of lack of love for this world.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 11:13-16²

In his first epistle, Peter called the saints “strangers in the world” (1 Peter 1:1). This is true of all Christians, whether they know it or not. Our citizenship is in heaven, and that is where our love and focus needs to be.

Randy Alcorn, in a very important and beneficial book entitled *Heaven*, describes what it means for believers to recognize this truth.

Notice that the following description, written to believers alive on Earth, is in the present perfect (not future) tense, which expresses a completed action: “You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect” (Hebrews 12:22-23).

In a metaphysical sense, we’ve already entered Heaven’s community. By seeing ourselves as part of the heavenly society, we can learn to rejoice now in what Heaven’s residents rejoice in. They rejoice in God, his glory, his grace, and his beauty. They rejoice in repentant sinners, the saints’ faithfulness and Christlikeness, and the beauty of God’s creation. They rejoice in the ultimate triumph of God’s Kingdom and the coming judgment of sin.

Heaven, then, isn’t only our future home. It’s our home already, waiting over the next hill. If we really grasp this truth, it will have a profound effect on our holiness. A man who sees himself seated with Christ in Heaven, in the very presence of a God to whom the angels cry out, “Holy, holy, holy,” won’t spend his evening viewing Internet pornography.

No wonder the devil is so intent on keeping us from grasping our standing in Christ – for if we see ourselves in Heaven with Christ, we’ll be drawn to worship and serve him here and now, creating ripples in Heaven’s waters that will extend outward for all eternity.³

We must not show the world’s kingdom more love and affection and attention than we show our own.

² See also Hebrews 11:26-27.

³ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), p. 185.

“The man who loves other countries as much as his own stands on a level with the man who loves other women as much as he loves his own wife.”

– Theodore Roosevelt⁴

To fully set our hearts and minds on things above, we need to be freed from everything that would hold us back. All that is earthly in us – not our physical body parts, mind you, but those “evil passions, desires and practices that root themselves in our body, make use of them, and attack us through them”⁵ – must be killed ... and, according to Paul, we are the executioners who must do the killing.

Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.
Colossians 3:5-11

The list of sins here is by no means exclusive. Paul lists several examples here, but he is referring to “whatever belongs to your earthly nature”, that is, everything that is not of Christ. Usually, the problem with the Christian isn’t in determining what is and is not sin. The problem is the seriousness with which the Christian regards sin. Too often, certain sins are regarded as abhorrent while others are viewed as acceptable. Paul will not accept this view of sin. The Christian is to put to death anything and everything that belongs to the earthly nature.

This “putting to death” is not something which is to be done only by those Christians who are “extra serious” about the Lord. Nor is it something which can be done at a leisurely pace. Paul’s words here are quite forceful and leave no ambiguity about how the Christian is to respond to sin.

The verb nekrōsate, meaning literally “to make dead,” is very strong. It suggests that we are not simply to suppress or control evil acts and attitudes. We are to wipe them out, completely exterminate the old way of life. “Slay utterly” may express its force. The form of the verb (aorist imperative) makes clear that the action is to be undertaken decisively, with a sense of urgency. Both the meaning of the verb and the force of the tense suggest a vigorous, painful act of personal determination. Maclaren likens it to a man who while working at a machine gets his fingers drawn between rollers or caught in the belting. “Another minute and he will be flattened to a shapeless bloody mass. He catches up an axe lying by and with his own arm hacks off his own hand at the wrist. ... It is not easy nor pleasant, but it is the only alternative to a horrible death” (p. 275).⁶

A gruesome example? Yes. But it is no more gruesome than the examples Jesus gave when he explained what we are to do if we find sin in our lives.

“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”
Matthew 5:29-30

Some Christians would say that this killing off of sin is impossible in practice. They would say that the best we can do with sin in our lives is to “manage” it – to keep it under control. I would disagree with them. God does not want us to manage sin. It is unmanageable. He wants it killed. These sins are not to remain in our lives as caged animals which we are struggling to keep contained. They are to be killed outright. The Holy Spirit himself helps the one who will commit to this task.

4 Quotations of Theodore Roosevelt (Bedford, MA: Applewood Books, 2004), p. 24.

5 Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 11, Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 212.

6 Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Volume 11, Colossians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p. 211.

WEEK SEVEN

Colossians 3:1-17

For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live ... Romans 8:13

Notice, “by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body”. You cannot take the Spirit out of this killing, for he empowers it. And you cannot take yourself out of this killing, for you do it.⁷

Do you have anything in your life that needs killing? Read over verses five through 11 again. Is your life marked by any of these things? If so, don’t wait a minute longer. Take out your axe and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, start hacking.

*... every Christian has the responsibility, before God, to investigate the lifelines of whatever sins are defeating him personally, and to cut them off without pity. Better that than have them eventually destroy him.*⁸

Of course, our lives as Christians will not be dominated by eliminating those things that belong to the earthly nature. As we rid ourselves of the old, we are to clothe ourselves with the new.

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:12-14

Like a person putting on clothing, we are to put on the new clothing of Christ. This, like the decision to kill off what remains of the earthly nature, is a deliberate action. And, as he helped with the killing of the earthly nature, the Holy Spirit will help with the putting on of this heavenly wardrobe.

The verses here do not say that we need to develop compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. They merely say that we need to put these things on. The thought is simple: we don’t manufacture this clothing; that is the Holy Spirit’s job. Our job is to put the clothing on.

The thoughts here are remarkably similar to those found in Galatians.⁹

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-25

The Spirit is beckoning you into the changing room. He is holding up the finest jacket anywhere, patiently waiting for you to try it on. The fabric’s weave is made up of individual threads of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Over these individual threads, a protective layer of love is sewn into the jacket. Try it on. The Holy Spirit will help you.

Now that we’ve chopped off the sin in our lives and have put on the Spirit’s new wardrobe (and if you haven’t, don’t move on until you do), we’re ready to begin living the Christian life as it is meant to be lived. These next verses outline what the normal Christian life looks like.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:15-17

The first admonition is to let Christ’s peace rule in our hearts. From the context, which refers to Christians as “members of one body”, it would appear that the peace being referred to here is peace between believers. We are called to live peaceably with our brothers and sisters. In fact, peace is to rule our attitudes and actions. We are to, as Hebrews 12:14 says, “Make every effort to

⁷ See also Galatians 5:24-25.

⁸ N.T. Wright, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 135

⁹ I would encourage you to study Galatians 5:16-26 alongside the passage we are considering. It will be well worth your time.

live in peace with all men”. Like an umpire in baseball, the peace in our hearts determines what is “safe” and what is “out” in terms of our relationships.

*The pax Christiana is to prevail in the church, as the pax Romana did in the world of Paul’s day, allowing its inhabitants to pursue their respective callings without the constant threat of war.*¹⁰

The second admonition is tied to the first. Paul reminds us to be thankful. Grumbling and complaining breed dissension, as the Israelites’ 40-year trek through the wilderness would attest to. Thankfulness breeds peacefulness. Thankfulness is also a sign of faith. It shows that we understand that God is in control and that he is looking out for our best. Not only that, it sets the stage for a fresh outpouring of God’s grace in our lives.

“He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation of God.” Psalm 50:23

It is easy to be thankful when you are wearing the Spirit’s wardrobe.

The third admonition is to let Christ’s word “dwell in you richly”. The idea behind the use of the word “richly” is one of abundance. Like a very rich dessert, which doesn’t mask its flavor in subtleness but shouts its flavor with every bite, Christ’s word is to flavor everything within the church. This is not talking, primarily, about Christ’s word dwelling richly in each of us individually (although that must happen). It is saying, rather, that his word must dwell richly in us corporately. Every time we come together, not just at our weekly services, but all the time, the word of Christ should spill out from us in some way: in a song, a teaching, an admonishment (yes, even rebukes are welcome in the body of Christ), or a hymn. As we spill out what we are full of (Christ), we build up and encourage one another. I have a great friend (he is a great man and a great friend) who has a habit of shouting “glory” when he is having a good time. This is an example of the word of Christ dwelling richly in the church and spilling out for all to see. His shouts encourage me and bring a shout to my own heart (in fact, I’ve found myself doing the same thing!).

This fourth admonition doesn’t just refer to the word of Christ. It refers to everything. Everything is to be flavored with him. Whatever we do – working, playing, studying, eating, drinking, talking, singing, cleaning, teaching, training, sleeping, living, dying, etc., etc., etc. – we are to do in his character and as unto him.

That’s what I want people to see in me. I want them to say that when they see me, they see Jesus. Is this what they always see in me? No. But that’s what I want, and that’s what he wants. We’re working together to see this accomplished moment by moment. That’s the message of this book, isn’t it? Christ is in us. We are in him. His richness is in us. Our richness as his creation is in him. It all makes me want to shout. In fact, I think I will ...

“GLORY!”

DAY SIX (CONTINUED)

This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me....

WEEK SEVEN

Colossians 3:1-17

10 N.T. Wright, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), p. 143.

Week Eight

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:18

DAY ONE

Read *Colossians 3:18-4:18* through twice. The first time through these verses, simply read the text. Do not write any notes regarding the verses at this time. The second time through the verses, circle or underline key words or phrases and write down any questions or thoughts the verses leave you with in the margin. If the verses bring any related Scriptures to mind, please write them in the margin.

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:18

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 favor, 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, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.*

Colossians 4

¹*Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.*

²*Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. ³And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. ⁴Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. ⁵Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. ⁶Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

⁷*Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.*

¹⁰*My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) ¹¹Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me.*

¹²*Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. ¹⁵Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.*

¹⁶*After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.*

¹⁷*Tell Archippus: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."*

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

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

DAY TWO

Read *Colossians 3:18-21*

These verses provide instructions for families. Paul starts with the wife. What is she commanded to do, and why is she commanded to do it? *Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 5:22-24*

What additional command does Paul give to wives in Ephesians 5:33?

What did Peter say to wives in 1 Peter 3:1-6?

What is the husband commanded to do? *Colossians 3:19; Ephesians 5:25-33*

What did Peter say to husbands in 1 Peter 3:7?

If you are married, would your spouse say that you are doing what Paul has commanded in these verses?

What happens in a marriage when the wife and the husband do not obey these commands?

What happens in a family when the wife and the husband do not obey these commands?

What is the child command to do and why? *Colossians 3:20; Ephesians 6:1-3*

What warning is given to fathers and why? *Colossians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4*

If you're a parent, have you seen this ever happen with your own children?

DAY THREE

Read *Colossians 3:22-4:1*

In these verses, Paul addresses slaves and masters. Slaves made up a relatively high percentage of the population in the Roman Empire and in the early church, so these words would have been listened to by many with great interest. What are Paul's commands to slaves in this passage and in Ephesians 6:5-8 and in 1 Timothy 6:1-2?

What is the Lord's response to the slave who serves well?

What is the Lord's response to the slave who does not serve well?

How do these words apply in cultures where there is no slavery?

What are Paul's commands to slave owners? *Colossians 4:1; Ephesians 6:9*

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

How do these words apply in cultures where there are no slave masters?

Why do you think Paul addressed how slaves and masters ought to behave, rather than addressing the evils of slavery and encouraging its abolition?

DAY FOUR

Read *Colossians 4:2-6*

How is the Christian to pray? *Colossians 4:2*

What do the following verses teach about prayer?

Luke 18:1-8

Ephesians 6:18

1 Thessalonians 5:17-18

All Christians know that prayer is important. Why is it, then, that so many seem to rarely do it?

Do you think Christians in the first century found it as difficult as believers today often find it to devote themselves to prayer? Why or why not?

After reminding the church to be devoted to prayer, Paul tells them to be watchful and thankful. What do you think they are to be watchful for, and what are they to be thankful for?

How, specifically, was the church to pray for Paul and his companions? *Colossians 4:3-4; Ephesians 6:19-20*

How are Christians to relate with “outsiders”? *Colossians 4:5*

Could your typical conversations be generally characterized as “full of grace” and “seasoned with salt”? *Colossians 4:6*

What, specifically, do you think constitutes “grace” and “salt” in a conversation?

If your conversations are not full of grace and seasoned with salt, what are they full of?

DAY FIVE

Read *Colossians 4:7-18*

Paul refers to a number of different people in this last section. We have already discussed Tychicus (the letter carrier), Onesimus (the returning slave) and Epaphras (the man who first preached the gospel in Colosse). Of the remaining names, a few are unknown, but several are referred to in other Scriptures. Using the verses appearing after the name, write a brief biographical sketch for these men.

Aristarchus – *Colossians 4:10; Acts 20:4; Philemon 24*

Mark – *Colossians 4:10; Acts 13:13 (Mark is referred to as John in this verse); Acts 15:36-41; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24*

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

Luke – Colossians 4:14; 2 Timothy 4:11; Philemon 24

Demas – Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24; 2 Timothy 4:9-10

Archippus – Colossians 4:17; Philemon 2

Why do you think Paul includes greetings and personal information in his letters?

What do Paul's words about Epaphras in Colossians 4:12-13 teach us about the true nature of prayer?

Paul did not write this letter; a secretary recorded his words. But he did write by hand a final greeting to the church (Colossians 4:18). What practical value would this handwritten section have had to the church? *See also 2 Thessalonians 3:17*

Why does Paul tell the church to remember his chains? What does this really mean?
Colossians 4:18 (See also Ephesians 6:19-20)

DAY SIX

Read the study notes.

COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:18

What does it look like when a man, woman, boy, girl, slave or master does everything in the name of our Lord Jesus? It looks different for different people in different settings. In a family setting, this is what it looks like:

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

Colossians 3:18-21

Paul's words to individual family members here precisely correlate with his words found in Ephesians 5:22-6:4.¹ In both passages, Paul begins by addressing wives, and then addresses husbands, children, and finally fathers.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR WIVES

Wives, we are told in both passages, are to submit to their husbands. In Colossians, Paul says that this is "fitting". This word fitting means "what is due to a person, one's duty, what is befitting."²

Why is it fitting for the wife to submit to the husband? It is not because the wife is of less worth than the husband. It is because, as Paul explains in Ephesians 5, the husband is the head of the wife.

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Ephesians 5:22-24

It is important to note two things about these passages:

One, the phrase "submit to your husbands" tells how this submitting is to occur: wives are to submit themselves. The passage does not tell husbands to force their wives to submit. Coercion is not what Paul has in mind here. He is describing a voluntary submission based on the wife's own free will.

Two, husbands are not called to *be* the head of the wife. They are not called to *act like* the head of the wife. Instead, Paul simply says that husbands *are* the head of the wife. This is not a position the husband takes from the wife. Nor is it a position the wife gives to the husband. It is a position given to the husband by the Lord. The husband is ultimately responsible for whatever happens within the family. That is why it is fitting for wives to submit to their husbands.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR HUSBANDS

Husbands are given a different charge:

Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. Colossians 3:19

The husband is not to treat his wife as he would treat a friend or an employee. And he is certainly not to treat her as he would treat an enemy. He is to love her and avoid all harshness in his relations with her. In Ephesians 5, Paul greatly expands on the love the husband is to give the wife.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

1 Remember, Ephesians was probably written at the same time as Colossians and delivered by the same men who delivered the letter to the church in Colosse. Based on its more "generic" nature, Ephesians was probably written for the entire church in Asia, while Colossians was for one specific church (or two if you count the Laodicean church) in the province.

2 W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), p. 55.

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body. “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” This is a profound mystery – but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.
Ephesians 5:25-33

Love is not portrayed as a romantic feeling in these verses. It is portrayed as a choice. The husband chooses to give up himself for his wife. He chooses to love his wife. The wife is to make the choice to respect her husband.

Feelings do not dictate what is right and appropriate. God’s word tells us what is right and appropriate. As we line up our actions with God’s commandments, we will find that feelings will follow.

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CHILDREN

Paul’s next words are directed to children.

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Colossians 3:20

It is very interesting to note that Paul speaks directly to children here.³ He is not telling parents to make their children obey (although that is certainly within their authority). He is telling children to personally make the choice to obey. When they choose obedience, they are pleasing God. It is, as Paul explains in Ephesians 6, “right” for children to obey their parents.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” – which is the first commandment with a promise – “that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.” Ephesians 6:1-3

By telling children to make the choice themselves, Paul is giving them a chance to put their faith into action. Sometimes, we don’t allow children to exercise their faith. We make all the choices for them because we know better than they do. But that is not always best. When people don’t exercise, they grow weak. Choosing obedience is a chance for kids to exercise their faith in God. And when they choose to obey, they are setting the stage for a good and long life for themselves here on earth.

Kids, do you want a long and good life? Obey your parents. This pleases God and unleashes his grace in your life. Do you want a short and bad life? Of course you don’t. Choose obedience. God will keep his promise to you.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FATHERS

Paul is not done with families. His next instructions are to fathers. (These instructions must also be heeded by mothers, grandparents and guardians.)

Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.
Colossians 3:21

There is, as Solomon said, “a time for everything” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). There is a time to correct, and there is a time not to correct. If correction is overdone, it produces embittered and discouraged children. They will think that pleasing you is impossible, and they will eventually stop trying.

Puppy training happens best in short sessions. They can’t handle much more than five minutes at a time. (I used this example because we’re currently training a puppy.) The same is true with children. If you spare the rod, you spoil the child. But if you never set the rod down, you discourage the child. Paul says that fathers need to choose balance.

³ Since children were directly addressed in this letter, we may assume that Paul believed children would be present when it was read. This is perhaps indicative of how church gatherings might have looked in the early church.

Just a few days ago, one of my daughters needed an attitude adjustment (don't we all at times?). However, I had a sense that I'd already talked with her about enough issues for the moment. We were at the "discouragement line." Instead of addressing her attitude, I told her, "I think I know what you need right now," and I gave her a big bear hug, pinned her to the ground and tickled her. Guess what? The attitude was taken care of. *I am not* advocating ignoring discipline. That is a problem with some parents. *I am* advocating knowing when something other than discipline is needed. Too much will discourage the child. It takes away their courage to try anything, for they believe, based on your reactions to their actions, that they will never get anything right, so they quit trying altogether.

I like how Paul addresses this in Ephesians.

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

Parents, pick your battles. If everything is a battle, you will exasperate your kids. Replace your battles with the Lord's training and instruction. He'll show you how to do it.

Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. Proverbs 22:6

Again, choices are the key to the family functioning well. Wives choose to submit; husbands choose to love; children choose to obey; fathers (mothers, grandparents, etc.) choose to exercise restraint in discipline.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SLAVES

Now that Paul has addressed the family, he moves on to address slaves. It is probable that a good number, even a majority in some places, of the early Christians were slaves. These words are casually glanced over by most people today, but they would have had great relevance to the church in the first century.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. Colossians 3:22-25

Paul was not writing this letter to politicians who would have had the power to abolish slavery. He was writing to slaves themselves. How are Christians who find themselves in this situation to live? They are to obey their masters as they would obey the Lord. They are to work for their masters as they would work for the Lord.

Again, Paul's words in Ephesians mirror this passage.

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. Ephesians 6:5-8

The truths in these passages apply to all Christians, not just slaves. Whatever we do, we are to do with all our hearts. Christians should be the best employees anywhere, because we work as if we're serving Christ. The boss should not have to keep his or her eyes on the Christian. Motivation should not need to come from without. It should come from within. Christ should motivate us to excellence in everything we ever do.

WEEK EIGHT

Colossians 3:18-4:18

INSTRUCTIONS FOR MASTERS

Of course, slaves were not the only ones in Colosse who had become Christians. We know of at least one Christian master in the area. His name was Philemon. (I'm sure he listened to these words with great interest.) We may assume there were other masters within the church. What are Paul's words to these masters? They are few, but powerful.

Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven. Colossians 4:1

As he heard these words read to him, Philemon must have asked himself, "Am I doing this?" There's a chance he hadn't been, for one of his slaves, Onesimus, had run away from him. This same Onesimus was now back in town, having accompanied Tychicus as he brought Paul's letter to the church in Colosse. How did these two eye each other as they listened to the words being read? Did apologies need to be extended by both parties?

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul introduces what must have been a radical concept to the masters.

... you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no favoritism with him. Ephesians 6:8-9

The Lord, as Master, rewards his slaves for all the good they do. Earthly masters are to do the same – they are to notice the good their slaves do and reward them for it. They are not to treat the slaves as lower than themselves; instead, they are to honor and reward them for the labor they do.

Does any of this apply to employer/employee relations? I'm sure it does. If you're an employer, ask the Lord if you're treating and rewarding your employees in a manner that pleases him.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR ALL CHRISTIANS

Now that Paul has addressed different segments of the Christian population, he returns to the Christian population at large. He has two final topics to address. The first is prayer.

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Colossians 4:1-4

This is a strong statement about the Christian's relation to prayer. We are to be devoted to it. The English Standard Version translates this verse, "Continue steadfastly in prayer". The literal idea is that Christians are "to be strong towards" prayer.⁴ If there's one thing we rely on, lean on, continue in, run to, and never quit doing, it is to be praying. We are to be strong towards prayer. When people list our strengths, praying should be at the top of the list.

Two things are to mark our prayers: watchfulness and thankfulness. What are we to watch for? Things needing prayer! What are we to be thankful for? That, for the Christian, should be obvious.

After these general instructions about prayer, Paul asks for prayer for himself and those working with him. By his words, he indicates that he will have more open doors and clearer speech if the Christians help him by their prayers.

Paul is now in heaven. He no longer needs our prayers. But there are many that do. That is surely something we all can do, isn't it? We need to be "strong towards" prayer, for when we're strong towards our prayers, others become strong from our prayers.

4 W.E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), p. 127.

The last “general” topic Paul addresses is how Christians are to relate to non-Christians.

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. Colossians 4:5-6

Notice, Paul refers to making the most of every *opportunity*. Opportunities for what? The answer should be obvious. Opportunities for Jesus!

Every interaction with a non-Christian is more than an interaction – it’s an opportunity. Our responsibility isn’t to make the opportunities. It is to make the most of the opportunities, making sure our words are full of grace and “seasoned” with salt.

Gossip, by the way, has the opposite effect of grace and salt. The same may be said of complaining, sarcasm, criticism and coarse joking. These “seasonings” are poisonous, ruining present opportunities and leaving a foul aftertaste in future ones. Better to be silent than sprinkle the wrong seasoning on our conversations.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Paul has said all that he wants to say about the problems in Colosse and the solution. Like a good father who knows when enough is enough, Paul turns to some other matters. However, rather than work our way through the greetings and final instructions found here, we will take our leave of Colossians.

I wonder what happened when this letter arrived in Colosse. How long did it take for the church to be gathered and the letter to be read? How many times did the people hear it? Were the false teachers present when the letter was read? Were they given (I hope they weren’t) a chance to refute Paul’s arguments? Did Tychicus have any interaction with them? Above all, what changes happened in the people’s lives because of the truths found in the letter? How were the surrounding towns impacted?

Someday, I’ll meet Tychicus, and I think I’ll ask him what happened. And after he tells me how the letter was received in Colosse, maybe I’ll tell him how the letter was received in America. More specifically, I’ll tell him how it was received in me.

Care to join us?

DAY SIX (CONTINUED)

This week, the Holy Spirit has taught me....

FAREWELL

There is much more that could be said about the subject of Christ in you. Indeed, as he is limitless, this subject must also be limitless. Only so much of this can be taught. Much of it must be lived. You will discover these truths as you let him live through you. The “Christ-lived life” is an adventure. It involves risk; but Jesus takes all the risk on himself. As you move forward from here, I would encourage you to act upon this truth in your life. Take a new step ... something that you have been afraid, perhaps, to do. Christ is not afraid. One possible step would be to pass on your knowledge of this truth. I would encourage you to take another believer (or believers) through this book. It will bring strength to them.

As a final thought, I would encourage you to read a little book written by V. Raymond Edman entitled *They Found the Secret*. In this book (which was first published in 1960), Mr. Edman provides brief biographies of 20 different Christians who learned the secret of the Christ-lived life. On page after page you’ll encounter earnest, hard-working Christians who battled frustration and defeat until they “discovered” this truth. As you read of others who have taken the same journey you have taken, it will cement these truths in your heart.

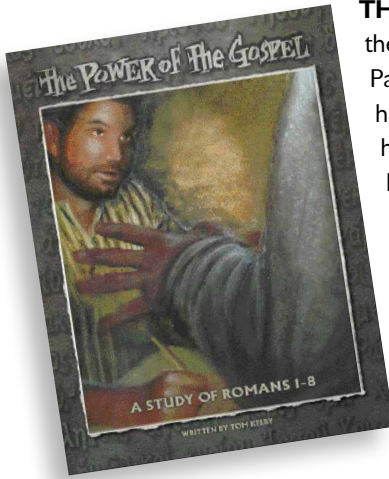
Grace and peace to you.

Tom Kelby

November 30, 2005

Additional Bible Study Resources

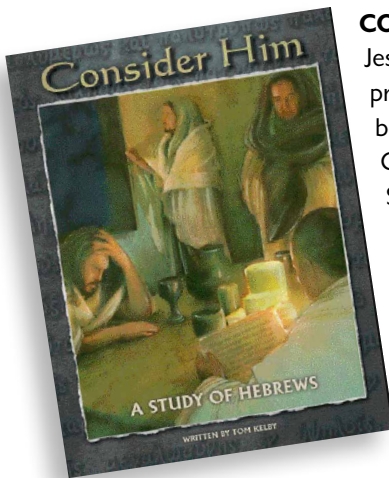
FROM HANDS TO THE PLOW MINISTRIES



THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL – A Study of Romans 1-8 – An understanding of these eight chapters is essential for every Christian and every church, for in them, Paul explains, in plain language, what salvation is and what it does. Entire continents have been impacted as people have recognized and embraced the truths revealed here. The changes wrought by this book have been so great, in fact, that John MacArthur, Jr., in his commentary on these chapters, said,

Most, if not all, of the great revivals and reformations in the history of the church have been directly related to the book of Romans.¹

Each lesson in this 128-page book includes Scripture reading, study questions and in-depth notes. This eight-week study is suitable for individual and group studies. In addition to the study book, Tom Kelby's teaching on this book is available on audio CD.



CONSIDER HIM – A Study of Hebrews – The letter to the Hebrews focuses on Jesus in a way not found in any other book in the Bible. Understanding his high priesthood and how it relates to day-to-day life is essential for the growth of the believer. Without this understanding, believers grow tired and, like the Hebrew Christians, drift away from the Lord. Each lesson in this 156-page book includes Scripture reading, study questions and in-depth notes. This 13-week study is suitable for individual and group studies. In addition to the study book, Tom Kelby's teaching on this book is available on audio CD.

To order additional copies of this book, the studies or CDs listed above, or for information about other teaching and evangelistic materials Hands to the Plow Ministries offers (including children's materials) please contact:

Hands to the Plow Ministries
P.O. Box 567
Webster, WI 54893

www.handstotheplow.org

715-349-7185

¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 1-8* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), p. ix.

