

Paul's letter to

the Colossians

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



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

You live in the Roman city of Colossae! It's a bit like Dubbo - on the shores of a river and at the junction of two highways. Laodicea¹ is just 15km down the beautiful Lycus valley and Ephesus - the most important City in the Roman province of Asia - is about 150 km away, on the coast.

(In 60 AD your great city will be hit by an earthquake, and a while later it will decline as the City of Laodicea prospers, but you know nothing of this yet.)

You like living in Colossae. As a shepherd you know the hills between Colossae and Laodicea well. You enjoy the fertile pastures and abundant water supplied by the Lycus River. In fact, your sheep produce some of the distinctive purple wool that Colossae is famous for. And because Colossae is on the main trade route from Sardis to Ephesus - there's always a good market. Colossae is a pretty busy city.

Colossae is also a very religious place – you just have to look at the various gods inscribed on the local coins – Ephesian Artemis, Laodicean Zeus, Selene, Demeter, Hygeia, Helios, Athena, Tyche and Boule. Not to mention the few thousand Jews, and various others. But you don't worship any of these local Gods. You belong to a new group calling themselves, 'Christians.' You follow someone called Jesus Christ.

You became a Christian after Epaphras told you the gospel² You can still remember the time Epaphras came back so excited after his trip to Ephesus, where he heard about Jesus from someone called the Apostle Paulos. Paulos spent a while on the coast at Ephesus³. And started a church there. The apostle Paulos has never come to Colossae personally⁴, but you've heard he wants to visit soon⁵.

Onesimus, the slave who ran away from Philemon not too long ago, has just returned – what a surprise! And that's not all - rumor has it that a letter from Paul has arrived with him! As is your custom, you meet at Philemon's house⁶ for communion, prayer and the reading of scripture. Today, you are particularly excited because you are meeting together to read the letter that the great apostle Paul has written to you.

You hope that he will be able to clarify some things for your young church - things have been a little difficult of late. Some new teachers have arrived and unsettled you with the suggestion that you are "missing out" on something. With all the different teachings at Colossae, sometimes you're unsure about which you should listen to now that you're a Christian.⁷.

Epaphras has just been to visit Paul in Jail⁸ No doubt he told Paul about the things that were happening in your Church in Colossae. You're keen to see what things Paul has to say in response.

How is your new church going?

What things will Paul have to say to you?

Will they be words of encouragement or rebuke?

You eagerly sit down in Philemon's courtyard as the letter from Paul is read to you and your Church family..

¹ Col 4:16

² Col 1:7,4:12-13

³ Acts 19

⁴ Col 2:1

⁵ Philemon v22

⁶ Philemon 2

⁷ Col 2:8, Col 2:16-18

⁸ Col 1:7, 4:10

Overview of Colossians

Get someone to read the introduction to Colossians in the previous page, and then take a good amount of time to read through the entire letter to the Colossians in the message translation. Then have a discussion about the letter. You might like to think about some of the following questions...

1. What is the overall feel of Paul's letter to the Colossian Church?
2. Would the Colossians have been encouraged or discouraged? Why?
3. What is the difference between the first half and the second half of the letter?
4. Summarise the first half of Colossians in 10 words or so. What does Paul want the Colossians to know?
5. Summarise the second half of the letter in 10 words or less. What does Paul want the Colossians to do?

Notice that the first 2 chapters are describing what God has done for us in Jesus – the new life that we have - this is a fact. The second 2 Chapters are describing how we are to live that life out everyday.

Spend some time praying –

Thank God for what he has done for you in Jesus – for the new life that you have.

Ask that he would help you and the other people at DPC live in a manner worthy of this.

Paul's Prayer - Colossians 1v3-8

Last week we read the whole letter to the Colossians... What can you remember about it?

Go round the group, what is one thing you are thankful for that happened in the last week.
The Christian life is one full of thanksgiving – read quickly Colossians 1:11-12, 2:6-7, 3:17, 4v2.

Paul begins his letter to the Colossians with a prayer, and it's not a bad place to see what's on Paul's heart for the Colossian Church. He gives thanks for these people who he has never met.

Read Colossians v3-8

List all the things that Paul is thankful for.

We give thanks for all kinds of things – we say thankyou for our meals, we give thanks for good weather, for a near miss on the highway, a recovery from illness. And so Paul's prayers can be surprising because they may not focus on the things we value.

Let's have a look at the kinds of things Paul prayed for in his other letters.

(You can skip down below now and spend the night praying with thanksgiving, or you can turn the page and look a bit more at the bible, or you can do over the page as preparation.)

PRAYING WITH THANKFULNESS

Make a list below of things we can be thankful for (in the light of what we have read)
Split up and spend some time thanking God for these things.

Passage	What Paul is thankful for (in your own words)
Romans 1:8	
1 Cor 1:4-9	
2 Cor 1:3-5	
Eph 1:3-4...	
Eph 1:15-16	
Phil 1:3-6	
1 Thes 1:2-5	
2 Thes 1:3-5	
1 Tim 1:12-14	
2 Tim 1:3-5	
Philemon v4-7	

Look back over the table above. What sort of things was Paul thankful for?

Why do you think Paul was so thankful about these kinds of things?

What kinds of things in people's lives should call for our deepest gratitude to God?

Often instead of being thankful we can be bitter, critical, resentful. Why does this happen? Do you think Paul had disappointments or occasion for bitterness? (cf 2 tim4:10-11)

Consider whether there people at Church for whom you are not thankful? (Keep this question to yourself!) If so, why do you think this is the case?

(PTO)

Who we are in Christ.

In the Movie "Who am I" Jackie Chan is knocked unconscious as he jumps from a helicopter into the South African jungle below. He is then rescued by the local tribesman and restored to adequate health. He is however left with total amnesia. So Jackie Chan tries to find an answer to the question 'Who am I?'

As Christians we can have a similar state of amnesia. Or maybe it's just that we haven't worked out who we are in the first place! It's an interesting question "Who am I? How would you answer that question?"

Who am I?

Wayne Connor? - No that's just my name.

An electrical engineer? No, that's just what I do.

An Australian? No that's just where I was born.

A Presbyterian?— certainly not — that's just a denominational preference.

A Christian? A follower of Jesus? A human being? A sinner?

How would you answer that question?

It is a very important question because what we believe about who we are will impact what we do. In the letter to the Colossians, Paul spends the first half of the letter reminding the Colossians about who they are in Christ, and the second half of the letter telling them how they are to live.

We won't understand how we are to live before we understand who we are. The first 2 chapters are describing who we are in Christ. The second 2 Chapters are describing how we are to live that life out everyday.

What aspects of life are affected by our identity?

Make a list on a whiteboard together or butchers paper...

eg. How we handle criticism, how we relate to others...

In this study we will look at who we are, from God's point of view. We will think about who we are in terms of our past, present and future.

Look up the passages below and write down what they say in your own words in the table below. (Some passages may have more than one thing, and may go in more than one column).

Colossians 1:4 Colossians 1:13-14 Colossians 1:21-23 Colossians 1v28
 Colossians 2:6-7 Colossians 2:10 Colossians 2:11-14 Colossians 3:1-4
 Colossians 3:10 Colossians 3:12.

What has happened in the Past?	Who are we in the Present?	What will happen in the Future?

Summarise in your own words what you have learned from the above passages about who you are?

Think again about what aspects of life are affected by our identity?(What we wrote on the whiteboard) How does who we are in Christ impact these areas?

Optional: Take a week to do the following:

Keep the list of aspects of our lives that are affected by our identity on the whiteboard. Next week, get each person to pick the 3 that most apply to them in a negative way. (eg. *I don't handle criticism well because I view myself poorly, OR, I don't listen to others well because I view myself as knowing everything.*)

Go down the list and write for each item how many people had that item in their top 3.

Which 1 or 2 or 3 items rated the most highly for your group?

Discuss these together. Why did we pick these? How does our identity in Christ from Colossians changes how we might react in these circumstances. (eg *relating to others, freedom from needing their approval, seeing others as God sees them, etc*)

Leaders: you may need to work through this yourself to understand where it is going!!

Worthy Lives. Colossians 1:9-14

Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to please God – to bring Joy to his heart! Well we can! Paul wants the Colossians to "live in a manner worthy of the Lord and please him in every way" Living in a manner worthy of the Lord is really what the rest of the letter is about, but here we find the secret of how to do that. Paul here prays a prayer that, when God answers it, will allow the Colossians to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. In Colossians 1:9-29 Paul prays a prayer in which we find out the secret of how to please God.

Read Colossians 1:9-12.

In this prayer there is one thing that Paul asks God to give the Colossian Christians. What is it?

Paul prays this with some particular long-term goals in mind. What are they?

Why will each of these things flow out of a knowledge of God's will?

"Filled with the knowledge of God's will" – it's an interesting term. We often think of God's will to mean 'what job I should get', or 'which house I should buy'. But it's unlikely that that 'narrow' view of God's will is on view here. If the result of knowing God's will is in bearing fruit, growing in knowledge, being strengthened, having endurance and giving thanks, it seems that Paul is talking about Knowing what pleases God in the wider sense – knowing the kind of things that God enjoys, knowing God's overall plan for his creation, knowing his plan for the gospel and for his church. It is a big theme of the New Testament –Let's take a look at it elsewhere...

What do we learn in the following passages about pleasing God or knowing what pleases God (knowing God's will)?
Philippians 1:9-11 (where the results are similar) Romans 12:2

Eph 1:17-19, 5:8-17 (especially v10 and v17)

2 Peter 1:3-4

So, in summary – how will we be able to live a life that pleases God?

How will knowing God better change us?

(Optional Question if you have time) What do we specifically learn of God's will for us in the letter to the Colossians?
(1:19-20, 1:27-28, :5-6, Col 3:20, 3:22-23 (Think in broad principles for these 2))

What role does our mind play in pleasing God? (cf Rom 12:1-2 above)

How is this similar to what we saw a few weeks ago in 1 Tim 4:16 "Watch your life and doctrine closely."

But finally, a warning. What is scary about Romans 2:17-22?

What is the obvious thing to be praying for each other from Colossians 1:9-12? Spend some time praying!

For next Week: What does it mean that Jesus is 'the image of the invisible God' (Ch1v15) and how does this fit in with verses 16-20 ?
(See: Gen1:26-28,5:1-3,9:6,Col3:10,1Cor11:7,2Cor4:4,Heb1:1-4,2:5-10...)

In the light of who Jesus is, read Colossians 2:6-7 again and feel it's force!

"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.

What does it mean to receive Jesus as Lord?

Have you done this? Have you taken the action of submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

What does it mean "just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him,?"

Are you continuing to live with Jesus as Lord?

Are there areas in which you are consistently failing to submit to Jesus?

Why do you think you keep failing in these areas?

Where do we get the strength to obey Jesus, according to Col 2:6-7?

"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.

Where do we get the strength to obey Jesus according to Col 1:9-10?

"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. 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," Colossians 1:9, 10.

Pick one of the two above passages and as a group try and learn it for next week.

Pray: Spend some time praying that God would strengthen you help you to know him better, so that you will be able to continue to live with Jesus as Lord.

Homework: Work on getting to know God better this week!

A tricky passage: suffering for the Mystery of Christ- Col 1:24-29

This is a tricky passage, but it gives us great insights into the importance of the gospel. It specifically has in mind Paul's role.

Read Colossians 1:21-29.
What is Paul's specific task?

What is the 'mystery' he talks about?

"Christ in you, the hope of Glory' What do you think this phrase means? Cf Eph 3:16-17 & Eph 1:13-14)

How is Christ in us, and how is this the hope of Glory? (cf Col 3:3-4)

'Sufferings of Christ' Read verse 24. What does it appear to be saying at face value? Can this be right? Are you sure? Have some verses to back up your answer.

How do the following verses help us?
About Paul and/or Apostles

Isaiah 49:6, then Acts 13:47. Who is the suffering servant?	Phil 3:10
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And Christians in general...

1 Peter 4:12-19	Acts 9:4-5
Rev 6:9-11	2 Cor 1:3-7

What then does it mean for Christ's afflictions to be lacking? (Col 1:24)

How does what Paul is doing help fill up Christ's afflictions?

Reread Col 1:24-29. How does what we have looked at help us understand verse 29 more profoundly?

Why do you think Paul was prepared to suffer in such a way?

Why do you think Paul decides to tell the Colossian Church of his suffering?

How does this passage encourage you in your daily life and ministry?

Present everyone perfect in Christ – Colossians 1:28-2:7

Do you know our Church motto? The second half – ‘present everyone perfect in Christ’ comes from this passage.

Read Colossians 1:28-2:7

What are the aims of Paul's ministry? (What is he aiming for)

What are the reasons for Paul's ministry? (What motivates him, why does he do it?)

What are the methods of Paul's ministry? (How and What does he do)

How are the ideas of this passage related to Colossians 4:2-6? What good practical advice do we see there?

What words or phrases does Paul use to indicate how hard he is working for the Colossians?

What similar words are used of Paul in 1 Thes 2:8-9, or of Epaphras in Col 4:12-13?

What might all these things mean for our small group this year?

(Maybe think about our aim as a group, how we should go about achieving that aim, and what should motivate us!)

Fullness in Christ Colossians 2:6-23

After reminding the Colossians of who Jesus is (1v15-20) and of his own suffering and labour for the gospel (1v24-5) he now turns to warn them about some things that might sidetrack them. Various false teachings or 'religious' things appear in this chapter.

1. Make a list of all the things Paul warns the Colossians against in the left column.

Threat to the gospel for the Colossians	Paul's answer

2. Now go back and look at how Paul answers each particular problem. Fill in the right side. What does Paul keep referring back to in each case?

What is the key to staying Christian? (1:22, 2:6-7)

Now look back over Colossians 1:22-23. There Paul urged the Colossians to continue on their faith:
“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 1:22,

Now in Chapter 2 we have seen Paul point out some of the things that might stop them from continuing on in their faith – and the answer to them.

If Paul was writing Chapter 2 to DPC, what sort of things might he identify as threats to people’s continuing on in the gospel?

Make a list of things that might ‘move people from the gospel’ today and come up with an ‘answer’ to each one.

Threat to the gospel for Christians in Dubbo	Answer

Which of the above ‘threats’ do most need to be on your guard against?

Spend some time praying for each other and other people in DPC, focussing on Jesus, who he is, what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do.

Being Heavenly Minded Part 1 Colossians 3

When I read a letter like Colossians I get challenged by the last 1 or 2 chapters where all the 'practical' stuff is. Why do you think the practical stuff is at the end?

Put off this, put on this. Do this. Don't' do this. It can be a trap to skip over these bits and not obey them, but it can also be a trap to skip straight to them and try to obey them. In our enthusiasm to fix up the problems with our lives – the temptation, the sin, the problems in our families or at Church, they can look like a quick fix. And they would be a quick fix- if we could do them.

Now read Colossians 3:1-4

What has already happened to us in the past?

What will happen to us in the future?

How does this impact how we live now?

Try to draw a picture of this:

SPLIT UP INTO PAIRS AND DO THE FOLLOWING TOGETHER:

What does it mean to 'set your hearts on things above' and 'set your minds on things above' and what use will this be in every day real life? What is the opposite of this and what would that mean to every day life?

Glance over the list of things to put off (v5-11) Why don't these old clothes fit us any more?

Glance over the list of things to put on (v12-14) Why are these new things more fitting?

Do you think a Christian would 'choose' to live the first way rather than the second way? Why then do we do these things?

How does verse 5-14 fit with v1-4? The NIV heading for Ch3 is particularly bad. Why? What might be a better heading?

Why is an understanding of who we are in Christ essential to putting these things on and off?

Take some time to slowly look over who we are in Jesus:

- We have been rescued from Satan's rule (Col 1:13)
- We have been Forgiven (Col 1:14)
- We have been made friends with God (Col 1:22)
- Christ lives in us (Col 1:27)
- We know Jesus, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3)
- We have been given fullness in Christ (Col 2:9)
- Our old sinful nature has been removed (Col 2:11)
- We have been given a new life in Jesus (Col 2:13)
- Our new life is hidden with Christ in heaven where we are seated (Col 3:1)
- We are being remade in God's image (Col 3:10)
- We are God's chosen people (Col 3:12)

If reading that list doesn't want to make you get rid of any old habits that are left over from your old life, I don't know what will! When we struggle with 'old' sins we need to go and remind ourselves of these things. Knowing these things will help us do these things. That is what Colossians has been saying (For in Christ... 2v9, Since you died... 2v20, Since then you have been raised with Christ... 3v1, Put to death, therefore... 3v5, Therefore, as God's chosen people... 3v12, etc.)

If we struggle to live out our new life, what might we do to help ourselves?

What might we do to help each other. (Col 4v12)

Pick something from 3v1-14 to work on this week, share it with someone else, and pray for each other.

TIP: Good memory verse Colossians 3:1-4.

Being Heavenly Minded Part II Colossians 3:15-4:6

List all the changes that you can remember described in Colossians that come as a result of trusting Jesus.

In the light of Chapter 3v1-4, what you say about the idea that someone can be— “so heavenly minded they are of no earthly value”?

True spirituality, true heavenly mindedness, true union with God has great implications for everyday life. Let's look at some of them. Very quickly fill in the following table from Colossians 3:15-4:6. Look at the big picture, don't get lost in the details.

How to live:	Reason given.
All Christians:	
Wives	
Husbands	
Kids	
Fathers	
Slaves	
Masters	

What do you notice that all the reasons have in common. (cf Colossians 1:15-20!).
What might be a general principle that applies to all your relationships?

Now lets have a look in more detail at one or two of these situations.

Pick one side of the table and work through it during the group. You might like to do the other at home, or next week. OR you may wish do both sides together!

MARRIAGE	WORK
What are the principles that Paul instructs the Colossians on regarding Marriage?	What are the principles that Paul applies to the Colossians as they work for their masters?
Compare with Ephesians 5:22-33. Why do you think Paul picks the particular things he does as a summary in Colossians 3:18-19?	Compare with Ephesians 6:5-9. What similarities do you notice?
How does this pattern of marriage fit with their new life in Christ?	How does this pattern for work fit with their new life in Christ?
With the fall, how has marriage and sexuality become corrupted? How is it different now from in Genesis 1-2?	With the fall, how has work become corrupted? How is it different now from in Genesis 1-2?
What will it mean for us in our marriages that we have been raised with Christ?	What will it mean for us in our workplaces that we have been raised with Christ?
Why do you think we can be comfortable with marriages that don't function this way?	Why are we often so comfortable with the division between private/public and sacred/secular in our lives? Why is the world comfortable with the division between private/public and sacred/secular in our lives?
Why is how we live in our marriage important?	Why is how we work important?
How could Christians witness to the world a healthy understanding of Marriage?	How could Christians witness to the world a healthy understanding of Work?

Pray about these things in the light of Colossians 2:6-7!

Colossians 1:21-23 — Before and after.
(Optional do this instead of 'tricky passage' for a simpler study)

- What did the Colossians used to be like? What was their attitude toward God?
(see also Ch2:13, 1:13)

What is the attitude of those around us who don't know Christ?

Can you remember a time when you were like this?

How do you think evil behaviour affects our attitudes and thoughts?

- How did God reconcile his enemies to himself?
- What does the future hold for those who are reconciled?
- What was Paul's part in the Colossian's appearing before God like this?
- What was Jesus' part?
- What was the Colossians part?
- How are we to continue on?

To think and pray about:

Do I still at times feel an enmity between myself and God?

Am I 'established' in the Gospel?

How am I:

- continuing on as a Christian?
- growing as a Christian?

What steps can I be taking to make sure that these two things happen ?

What things distract me from continuing on and standing firm?

How can I encourage others to stand firm in the Gospel? Who am I currently encouraging?