

Colossians

Changed By Christ

The study of Colossians will be a marked contrast to one of our studies of Ecclesiastes. The difference is in perspective. Ecclesiastes is a man's eye view and concludes that *"under the sun all is meaningless and a chasing after the wind,"* while in Colossians we have a God's eye view, which concludes that everything, for those who share life, is meaningful and eternally rewarding. The contrast is illustrated in the comparison between Ecclesiastes 9:10 and Colossians 3:23&24. In Ecclesiastes 9:10 we read; *"whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning, nor knowledge nor wisdom."* In Colossians 3:23&24 we are told, *"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."* Colossians lifts up the Lord Jesus Christ as the central figure in creation and the example and hope of believers.

The eleven studies in this course will consider the text of Colossians, but will also encourage us to review comparative passages in other New Testament letters. In this way we will be able to see the consistency of the New Testament in its approach to the person and work of Christ, the doctrines of the church and the growth and development of believers. Colossians also considers error and its potential for damage in the church, this we will see is also a consistent New Testament theme.

Colosse was a city in Asia that had been evangelized by Epaphras, not Paul. Yet Paul had the same interest in instructing these believers and encouraging their faith as he showed toward the Ephesian church or other churches that he had planted. The letter was written about 61-62 A.D. from Rome while Paul was imprisoned there.

STUDY #1 - STRONG AND GROWING FAITH

READ COLOSSIANS 1:1-12

1. Compare the address of each of the letters, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians, and write down the descriptive terms used for the believers. Which of the addresses would be the most appropriate for a letter to your church?
2. The Colossians are addressed as "*holy and faithful*" in Christ. What is the significance of this description to God, to us, and to people outside the church?
3. What would be the result for a group of Christians if they were not "*holy and faithful*?"
4. Compare Colossians 1:3-5, Philippians 1:3-6 & Ephesians 1:15&16. How is "*faith and love*" shown in individual Christians and in the churches? How were the Philippians "*partners*" with Paul in the gospel? How should we "*partner*" with the spread of the gospel?
5. List some things you are thankful for in your church fellowship.
6. Read Colossians 1:9-14, Philippians 1:9-11 & Ephesians 1:15-23.
 - A) What is Paul's prayer emphasis?
 - B) Make a list of the specific requests made for each church.
 - C) What specific things does Paul want to happen as a result of his prayers?
7. Explain how the request of Colossians 1:9 would accomplish the result expected in verse 10.
8. Which of Paul's requests for the three churches is most relevant to your personal need?
9. Write out a prayer that would be relevant for and appropriate to the needs of your church fellowship.

STUDY #2 - THE LORD JESUS AND HIS WORK

READ COLOSSIANS 1:13-23

1. Write out Colossians 1:13 in your own words. What part does "*redemption*" and "*the forgiveness of sins*" play in God's rescue plan?
2. Compare Colossians 1:15-20, John 1:1-5,14 & Hebrews 1:1-4
 - A) What did you learn about the identity of the Son?
 - B) What did you learn about the work of the Son?
 - C) What did you learn about the future prospects of the Son?
3. What specific fact about the Son is of major importance to you right now? Why?
4. Stop and ask the Holy Spirit to impress the significance of the Lord Jesus on your heart.
5. Define "*reconcile*" as used in Colossians 1:20. How does it relate to the phrase "*Making peace through His blood shed on the cross*"?
6. The "*peace*" referred to in Colossians is "*peace with God*" ending alienation for sinners. How do we experience the "*Peace of God*" in our daily lives? In what ways is this peace most needed in your life today?
7. In Colossians 1:22, Paul moves from the general results of reconciliation to the specific results. How does reconciliation affect the individual Christian? Explain "free from accusation". Who are the potential accusers?
8. Does Colossians 1:23 imply uncertainty in our position in Christ? If not, what does the verse mean?
9. Explain the phrase "*servant of the Gospel*". What does it mean to be one?

STUDY #3 - MOTIVATION FOR SERVICE

READ COLOSSIANS 1:24-29

1. Read Acts 9:10-16. What are the two responsibilities Paul was to have as a "*servant of the Gospel*"?
2. Suffering is something we like to avoid. Why does Paul say "*Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you*"?
3. Explain what is meant by the phrase "*what is still lacking in regard to the afflictions of Christ.*" Do you think there is still something lacking?
4. Read Acts 9:15&16, Ephesians 3:7-13, and 2 Corinthians 5:11-15. Paul speaks of his commission in Colossians 1:25, what was involved in this commission and what did it commit him to do?
5. Do you have a commission from God? How do you know? What does your commission commit you to do?
6. Read Colossians 1:26, Ephesians 3:1-12, and Romans 16:25-27:
 - A) Define "*mystery*" as used in these verses.
 - B) How did Paul come to know the "*mystery*" he refers to?
 - C) What was new about Paul's "*mystery*"?
7. What is the major difference between O.T. and New Testament saints?
8. How does the "revelation of the mystery" impact us? What does God expect of us as New Testament saints?
9. What is Paul's goal? What must be true in Paul's life and in ours before this goal can be fulfilled? Why does Paul call his service labour?

STUDY #4 - NOT PHILOSOPHY BUT CHRIST

READ COLOSSIANS 2:1-10

1. The word "*struggling*" in Colossians 2:1 could read "*agonized*," what reasons could Paul have for wanting the Colossians to know about his struggles?
 2. What or "*agonies*" do you experience for other believers? Be specific.
 3. Express Colossians 2:2&3 in your own words.
 4. Would it help you to know how others have struggled to help you spiritually? Explain.
 5. Read Colossians 2:4&5, 8 & 1 Timothy 4:1-8, 1 Timothy 6:3-5, 1 Timothy 4:1-8
 - A) What steps are required to become a false teacher?
 - B) List the spiritual characteristics of a false teacher?
 - C) Why does the question of marriage and food enter so often into religious controversy?
- Read 2 Timothy 6:3-5
- A) What is the standard by which doctrines are judged?
 - B) List the personal characteristics of a false teacher?
 - C) What are some of the results of false teaching?
6. Describe how philosophy could be "*hollow and deceptive*."
 7. Can you name a present day "*deceptive philosophy*" that depends on "*human tradition*" and the basic principles of this world.
 8. Why is the deity of Jesus Christ reaffirmed again in Colossians 2:9
 9. Colossians 2:9 says that the fullness of deity was in Christ, what does the fullness of Christ in us mean (see Verse 10)? How is it displayed by us?

STUDY #5 - NOT LEGALISM BUT CHRIST

READ COLOSSIANS 2:11-23

1. Read Colossians 2:11-20, Genesis 17:1-14, and Romans 4:4-12
 - A) According to Genesis 17, what was the purpose of circumcision?

 - B) What important truth is Paul making about circumcision in Romans 4?

 - C) Explain Paul's use of the concept of circumcision in Colossians 2:11-12.

 - D) What is liberating about being "*circumcised by Christ?*" How should this experience challenge us in our day to day life?

2. Compare Colossians 2:11-12 with Galatians 2:20. How does the truth presented make you feel about being a Christian? What should our daily response be to this truth?

3. In Colossians 2:13, we are told "*God made you alive with Christ*", explain what that means in practical terms.

4. How would you describe the persons referred to as "*anyone*" in verses 16 & and 18?

5. What does it mean in Colossians 2:19 to lose "*connection with the Head?*"

6. Read I Corinthians 8:1-13.
 - A) Define "*scruples*".

 - B) Explain the Corinthian problem in your own words.

 - C) What is Paul's solution?

 - D) What should dictate the choices of a Christian when it comes to our daily routine?

7. How does legalism express itself today? How should we react to it?

8. Paul is proclaiming Christian freedom in Colossians 2:20-23. What is the Christian free from and are there any limitations to this freedom?

9. What gives the "*principles of the world*" an "*appearance of wisdom*" and what do those principles lack?

STUDY #6 - NOT CARNALITY BUT CHRIST

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-11

1. In Colossians 3:1 (compare to Colossians 2:12) we are told to "*set our hearts*" and to set our minds "*on things above*" what does this mean and how is it accomplished?

2. What are some things that could be defined as "*things above*" and what are some things that could be described as "*earthly things*?"

3. Read Colossians 3:5 and Romans 6:6-14
 - A) We are "*children of God through faith*," however the commands: "*set your hearts*", "*set your minds*" & "*put to death*" seem to suggest some activity on our part, why?
 - B) What does Romans 6:6 say about being "*crucified with Christ*," what is the result?
 - C) Explain Romans 6:11 in your own words.
 - D) What encouragement do we have in our struggle against sin in Romans 6:12?
 - E) In Romans 6:13&14 we have some advice, what two steps can we take to experience victory?

4. Compare the two lists given in Colossians 3:5 and verses 8&9. How are they different?

5. From this section we discover that the Christian's past should be quite different from the Christian's present. What do you find the hardest things to overcome and why?

6. In Ephesians 5:1-8, we are encouraged to "*be imitators of God*", "*to live a life of love*", and to "*live as children of light*." How would obedience help us show our "*new self*?"

7. In Ephesians 5:10, we are told to "*find out what pleases the Lord*", how can this be done?

8. Note Ephesians 5:7 as well as 5:11, these verses are asking us to be separate from certain people and things, why? How can this be accomplished?

9. Explain Colossians 3:11 in your own words. What does it mean to us today?

STUDY #7 - CHRISTIANS IN RELATIONSHIPS

READ COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

1. Meditate on Colossians 3:1a (*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above*), what is the encouragement and challenge in this statement?
2. Read 1 Peter 2:4-10
 - A) Israel was also God's chosen people, see Deuteronomy 7:6-8. How is our position the same as Israel's and, also, how is it different?
 - B) According to verse 9, why are we chosen and how can we fulfil our role?
3. Compare Colossians 3:12 with Ephesians 4:22-24. What is necessary and what help is available to obey the request?
4. Define "*forgive*". What does it mean "*to forgive as the Lord forgave you*"? (Colossians 3:13)
5. How important is forgiving in our day to day relationships? What happens if we are not forgiving? What happens if we are not forgiven?
6. Reread Colossians 3:12-14. Why is love so important to other virtues and to unity?
7. Note the word "*let*" in Colossians 3:15-16. Why is it used and what practical outcome would follow as we obey?
8. What is the "*peace of Christ*" and what is the "*word of Christ*"; Colossians 3:15-16?
9. Compare Ephesians 5:18-20 and Colossians 3:16-17. Since "*be filled with the Spirit*" and "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*", produce similar results, what connection is involved?
10. In Colossians 3:17 we are told to act "*in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*". What often guides our actions? How would they be different if we remembered Colossians 3:17?

STUDY #8 - The Christian Home

READ COLOSSIANS 3:18-21

1. Read Genesis 2:20-25. What are the fundamentals of marriage as originally outlined here?
2. Read Matthew 19:4-6, what does the Lord Jesus reaffirm about the original marriage mandate?
3. Note the guidelines for the submission of wives in Colossians 3:18, explain "*as it is fitting in the Lord.*"
4. Note the guidelines for the husband's relationship with his wife, explain "*and do not be harsh with them.*"
5. Read Ephesians 5:22-23
 - A) What is the standard for a wife's submission given here?
 - B) What is the standard for a husband's love given here?
 - C) The standard given seems impossibly how can wives and husbands fulfil it.
6. Some women have objected to the idea of submission because they believe it is demeaning to women and an excuse for male domination. How would you respond to such an objection?
7. Read Exodus 20:12, Ephesians 6:1-3, and Colossians 3:20. How can parents help their children be obedient?
8. Read Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21, Deuteronomy 4:1&2, Joshua 4:19-24
 - A) What attitudes on the part of fathers would "*exasperate*" or embitter children and thus discourage them?
 - B) Why do you think this point is addressed to fathers and not parents?
 - C) Note Ephesians 6:4. "*Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord*". How can this directive be fulfilled?

STUDY #9 - THE CHRISTIAN EMPLOYEE

READ COLOSSIANS 3:22-4:1

1. Read Ephesians 6:5-9, Colossians 3:22-4:1
 - A) What is the standard for work as set out in these passages?
 - B) Notice that both readings use the expression "*sincerity of heart*". Why? What is Paul trying to correct in the behaviour of slaves?
 - C) Both Ephesians 6:8 and Colossians 3:24 suggest an eternal incentive. Explain what this means. If we had this prospective how would it change our work life?
2. Paul is referring to real slaves and real slavery which was common in the first century. Why does the New Testament not condemn slavery as a social evil? Why didn't the apostles try to emancipate the slaves?
3. Workers are not slaves now (although they may disagree!), how should these passages be applied to workforce?
4. Many Christians are very involved now in social reform projects. These involve equality, rights, labor laws, fair trade, etc. Are they wrong in using their time in this way given the New Testament example?
5. What is the biggest problem you face as a Christian, in the workplace? How do you deal with it?
6. Read 1 Peter 2:18-20. What is being taught here about working conditions and the response of Christians to injustice? Is this relevant today?
7. How should Colossians 4:1 be applied by Christian employers?
8. Given the instructions of Colossians 4:1, is it realistic to think that a Christian employer could be successful in today's work climate?
9. Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10. Why would Paul consider the idle to be dangerous company? Is Paul's work ethic a good example?

STUDY #10 - THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS

READ COLOSSIANS 4:2-6

1. Why is prayer important to a Christian and to the Local Church? What attitude would help us to "*devote*" ourselves to it? What is the Lord Jesus emphasizing about prayer in this verse?
2. Read Luke 18:1. What is the Lord Jesus emphasizing about prayer in this verse?
3. Read Matthew 18:19. What is being promised in this verse? Some seem to believe that such prayer promises are "*blank cheques from God*", why should this opinion be viewed as incorrect? What are the limits to answered prayer?
4. Read 1 John 3:21&22. Explain the phrase "*if our hearts do not condemn us*". What is the result of that condition of heart?
5. Read 1 John 5:14-15. Put these verses in your own words and explain how they encourage ardent prayer.
6. What is meant by the words "*being watchful and thankful*" as they are used in Colossians 4:2?
7. In Colossians 4:3, Paul asks for prayer for himself. How should we react when someone asks us to pray for them? What two things must we possess to be a good prayer partner?
8. Sometimes we all feel that our prayers are not being answered. What steps should we take to discover what is wrong and to grow in our prayer life?
9. Colossians 4:5&6, seems to be referring to Christian witness. What would be a wise way to act toward outsiders? What makes conversation "*full of grace and seasoned with salt?*" Try to think of an illustration for verse 6 from the life of the Lord Jesus.

STUDY #11 - ENCOURAGED IN MINISTRY

READ COLOSSIANS 4:7-18

1. Read Colossians 4:7-18. These verses are similar to those found at the end of other letters Paul wrote. What purpose is served by these salutations?
2. Compare Colossians 3:7 and Ephesians 6:21, and try to write a description of Tychicus.
3. Paul seems to be accountable to the churches for his time and support, does God require such accountability? How are Christians today accountable to their local church?
4. Read Acts 15:36-41. In Colossians 4:10, Paul seems to have changed his mind about Mark, what might have happened to cause this change?
5. What two characteristics does Paul acknowledge in Epaphras?
6. Read 2 Timothy 4:10. How do you think Paul felt about this defection? How do you feel when someone disappoints you by drifting away from Christ?
7. Archippus appears to have been the son of Philemon and Apphia, try to explain Paul's fear for this young man.
8. What is our responsibility toward the Demas' and the Archippus' in our life? What actions could we take to restore them?
9. Paul's disagreement with Barnabas as seen in Acts 15:36-41, illustrates one way of handling differences. We can't judge whether it was right or wrong but you could try to suggest some other ways that their disagreement might have been handled.