



## ***Notes for Life Group use & personal reflection***

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**Paul wrote to people he'd never met to help them overcome struggles about how they thought and lived for Jesus. Paul helps us understand the beauty and priority of Jesus. *The book of Colossians is for us all.***

In the book of Colossians, Paul lets us know that because of what Christ did, we are made pure. We are free from judgment. Only through Him can this happen!

**Paul wants us to depend on Christ's transforming power,  
not on self-help or human tradition**

*We're invited to 'wear love everywhere we go!' Colossians 3v14* **"And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts!"**

**Good works are the fruit, not the root of a right relationship with God.**

"Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful!" Colossians 4:2



**St PETER'S  
& St PAUL'S**  
HEXTABLE & SWANLEY VILLAGE



Colossae was a town of faded glory, and the majority of those living there would have been ordinary men and women who farmed crops, looked after sheep, dyed wool and sold wool and textiles. Some would have been slaves, essentially scraping a living. Colossae was a very ordinary place with a desperate need of the reality of

hope in Jesus. What we know as the book of Colossians is actually a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the church at Colossae, probably around AD 62. We know Paul is in chains probably in Rome. Surprisingly, Paul had never been to their city but had heard of them through Epaphras, a member of the church there. While Paul commends them early in the letter, he also addresses the fact that they have been infiltrated by false teachers and Jesus related heresy! As you travel through this study, you will see Paul asserting the deity of Jesus, His sufficiency in all things, and the freedom we experience through the gospel.

The book of Colossians is the twelfth book of the New Testament. This epistle to the Colossians was like the letters to the Ephesians and Philippians and was written in Rome during Paul's first imprisonment. The church at Colossae, about one hundred miles East of Ephesus, may have been founded by Epaphras; who with many others, had probably been converted during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus. This pastoral letter can be divided into four parts:

- The Apostle's prayer for the Colossian Christians.
- The pre-eminent glory of Christ.
- The Apostle's concern for those at Colossae
- Characteristics of the abundant life of the Christian.

Paul never directly argues with the Colossians about their false thinking but powerfully paints a picture of Christian truth by describing **the beauty and priority of Jesus in everything! It's persuasive stuff in the power of the Holy Spirit!**

Ultimately, all of these things should change us personally in our faith, hope and actions, and impact how we interact corporately. God's word spoken into that place two thousand years ago still speaks to us all these years later through the power of the Holy Spirit.



## Study 1 - Grace and love in Christ

Colossians 1v1-14

Many commentators point out that the language of 'bearing fruit and growing' 1:6 alludes to God's command to the first humans to 'be fruitful and increase in number' Genesis 1:28. Here, that original mandate to be fruitful is finally being fulfilled in the growth of the gospel and in people who have been created anew in Christ - Colossians 1:15-16; 3:10. Our 'ministering grace and love' in everyday life flows out of the grace and love we have first received from God, and is rooted in the gospel. He is all our supply, confidence & life! Paul prays for the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will so they can live lives worthy of the Lord, seen in bearing fruit, growing, being empowered, and giving thanks!

The reference to the gospel 'bearing fruit' throughout the world and among the Colossians is a zingly opener in this passage, around people growth 1:3-6 and gospel growth 1:6-8. Paul is grateful to God for signs of the Colossians' faithful acceptance of the gospel, and the evidence of the gospel being worked out in their lives – in faith, love, and hope, just as we cheer that on in each others lives in church family. Before the gospel can grow and bear fruit in our lives, it must be heard and understood 1:6. Both hearing and understanding are important! Lean in... stop, listen & obey!

1. How many cards and letters did you receive at Christmas? What were some of the best ones, and what did they message?
2. Spend a moment discussing times where you may have received an encouraging letter from someone that had a big impact on you.
3. What strikes you from these verses, the opening notes & Sundays talk?
4. What do these opening verses from Paul to the church in Colossae suggest about the nature and tone of this letter? v1-2
5. Why was Paul offering prayers of praise and thanksgiving for the Colossian Church? And how might we seek to give prayers and gestures of thanksgiving for those within our church family? V3-5
6. Is there a difference between hearing and truly knowing the grace of God? How do we move from hearing to knowing God's grace in our lives? v9
7. From knowledge, Paul then moves into action. How can we live a life worthy of the calling we have received? What does this look like? V10
8. Verses 11-12 talk of a new identity, a new way of living. What might be obstacles to living like this?
9. Verses 13-14 give the reason for this changed life - grace and love in Jesus Christ. How might this lead us to obedience and this new way of living?



## Study 2 - Reconciled in Christ

Colossians 1:15-23

'The false teachers in Colossae, like the false teachers of our own day, would not deny the importance of Jesus Christ. They would simply dethrone Him, giving Him prominence but not preeminence.' so wrote Warren Wiersbe. This text is one of the clearest of Paul's doctrine of Jesus in the Bible. Paul was responding to reports that the church was mixed up with teachings that Jesus was not God. Through this text, Paul asserts that Jesus is fully divine, and that He was not only involved in creation but also sustaining all things! And as if that were not powerful enough, Paul states that these things are not only BY Christ but FOR Him. He is not only a tool of creation but the reason for it! Paul then gives a meditation on the hope of the Gospel for reconciling us to God, through our faith. It is for this hope that Paul declares himself a "servant", or minister in some translations.

The comfort that comes from knowing Christ – that the Christian faith is not a particular way of being religious, or a particular system of morals, but about Jesus, the firstborn over all creation, the head of the church, and the reconciler of the universe. Again, this amazing picture of Jesus was given to people in a city of fading glory, to people in ordinary manual work contexts, which may be significant for Christians today who struggle to see that their lives are significant. The challenge that comes with serving Christ – seeing ourselves as part of the bigger story of creation and reconciliation, and the whole-life implications of that!

1. What are some of the silly ideas that sometimes distract your way?! Share a recent funny moment where something has become disproportionate?
2. Read the passage again. What strikes you from these few verses?
3. Do you feel we often underplay any part of the character and Lordship of Jesus in our worship and thinking about him? If so what and why? v15-20
4. Try to summarise Paul's main point in this passage in one sentence. v15-20
5. How does the supremacy of Jesus give encouragement for our daily lives?
6. What is redemption? Why is this such a fitting word to describe our salvation from past sins?
7. Now consider the same question with the word 'reconciled'. How does God 'reconcile all things to himself' through Christ? v22
8. According to 1:22 why were we reconciled to God?
9. How might we be changed and relate to others as redeemed and reconciled people?
10. Paul calls for the church to 'continue in your faith established and firm'. How can we be sure that we are established and firm in the midst of trials and doubts? v23



### Study 3 - Hope in Christ

Colossians 1v24-2:5

The word “mystery” is interesting here. Mysteries were something common in the ancient world, and those groups professed to be the only ones with the secret to the mystery. Paul is not professing to have this kind of secret. Rather, it is more of a plot twist is revealed to all viewers, or the punch line of a joke, or pulling the drape away from door number two! It is the sort of mystery that is hidden, and is then revealed to all who would receive it - not just a select few. Paul closes by encouraging the church to not be led away from Christ by fine-sounding arguments. Rather, to be firm in the faith!

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you struggled to do something for an extended period of time? What kept you going, if you did?
2. What strikes you from these few verses?
3. Paul doesn't appear to boast or emphasise his own merits and stories, of which we find many in the book of Acts, but rather his scars and sufferings. Why does he do this? v24
4. How can we be a servant of the Gospel? And why would we want to be?
5. How is Christ in us? Does he dwell within us personally? v27
6. Verses 28-29 Where can we see this lived out in Paul's story throughout Acts? How might we follow his example if we are not full-time travelling evangelists?
7. Paul is contending for a church and people he has never met. Why and how? 2:1
8. How can we be 'encouraged in heart and united in love' 2:2. What might this look like played out in a normal week?
9. How and why are some people deceived with 'fine-sounding arguments'? How might we be protected against this? v4 How does verse 3 help in the fight against temptations given in such arguments?
10. Read verse 5 again. How can we best love and support brothers and sisters in Christ who live both near and far from us?



## Study 4 - Alive in Christ

Colossians 2v6-15

Having received Christ as Lord, we are told to continue to follow him, to grow and make roots so that we are not lead astray by worldly philosophies. It is very easy to stray into false teaching and any study of the history of the church will show a multitude of differing opinions which have lead to groups setting up independent churches which claim that they have a monopoly of the truth. It is not entirely clear what the false teaching in Colossae was but Paul goes on to assert various Christian basics from which the Christians there had strayed.

V 9 declares the full deity of Christ ...no half measures. Jesus was God , all the fullness of God was in the human person Jesus. This is the mystery of the incarnation , God made man . Jesus was fully God and fully man. He was present at the beginning of time and is now seated at the right hand of God. He goes on to explain the work of Jesus and how water baptism parallels circumcision as a sign of entry into the covenant community of God. He concludes in v 13-15 with a summary of what happens when we become Christians , how our sins are forgiven by the work of Jesus on the Cross and our lives are no longer governed by obeying a written code.

1. Have you ever seen someone you know come to faith in Jesus? What happened? What changed?
2. What strikes you from these verses?
3. How can we be 'rooted and built up' in Christ? What does this look like? v7kk
4. What might you describe as 'hollow and deceptive' philosophy today? v8
5. How can being rooted and built up in Christ help protect us from such beliefs? v8
6. How might the fullness of God in Jesus be linked to the fullness of life for us when we put our faith and trust in Him? v9-10
7. Why is baptism in Christ so much better than the circumcision of the Old Testament? v11-15
8. Verses 13 to 15 are a wonderful summary of the Gospel. Spend a moment reading this section out loud twice slowly, pausing briefly after each sentence. Then discuss what words or phrases spoke to you afresh from the good news of Jesus Christ presented here. v13-15
9. What examples can you give of someone or an action of someone that demonstrates a life alive in Christ? What could you take away as a way to live as one that is alive in Christ this week?





## Study 5 - Freedom in Christ

Colossians 2:16-23

V.20 begins 'since you died with Christ' and this is the point, everything changes when you belong to Christ and are born again. The trappings of religion are unimportant and we certainly should not judge others by them, likewise we should not attempt to live by religious rules or regulations. Paul emphasises that we are not alone and we should not feel superior because of our spirituality but should remain connected in the body of believers and with Jesus as the Head, the whole body grows.

Paul corrects false teaching which was present in the Church in Colossae .

These false teachers were proud of their humility and taught that God could be reached by worshiping angels. They had a self-made religion and denied the deity of Christ.

1. In what ways would you characterise yourself as permissive, and in what ways would you characterise yourself as strict?
2. What is your working definition of freedom?
3. What are the main ideas in this passage?
4. Some preachers talk of Christianity as a religion of 'done' rather than 'do'. Again, others go as far as to say Christianity is a relationship rather than 'religion'. What do you make of these two thoughts?
5. In what way is freedom found in Christ as stated in verse 17?
6. What were the characteristics of the false teachers? V19 How might we be wary of such people and the temptation to fall into similar traps?
7. What is 'self-imposed worship' and 'false humility' v23 and how do we avoid them?
8. How might one stay connected with the head? v19
9. Does v20-23 mean that we need not obey laws in society today? If not, why not?
10. What is Paul talking about with regard to rules and regulations then? How does it apply to us today?
11. As we have explored in today's reading, and as we have sung and spoken about countless times at Church, what is the nature of the freedom that we have in Christ? Make it practical!



## Study 6 - Clothed in Christ

Colossians 3v1-17

Paul has already called the Colossians to 'put off' certain qualities 3:9, and now he calls them to 'put on' certain characteristics 3:10, 12, which – like the fruit of the Spirit – show us what modelling godly character looks like. The 'clothing' analogy lends itself to quips about poor dress sense, bad fashion choices, or stories about wearing wrong clothes in particular situations. There is an intentionality about 'clothing' ourselves, which requires conscious daily decisions about what to wear – clothes which are to be appropriate for our new life in Christ.

1. Do you spend much time thinking about what you wear each day? What is your thought pattern for such a decision?
2. What strikes you from these few verses?
3. What does it mean to set our hearts and minds on things above? Why is this a clear result of being 'raised with Christ' for Paul? v1-2
4. When Paul talks about death and life in verses 3-4 what do you think he is getting at? What does this look like in practice? Answers in the verses that follow!
5. Using the list given in verses 5-9, what should followers of Jesus 'take off' before putting on their new clothes in Christ? How would this apply to your world?
6. What do verses 12-14 suggest believers should put on. What are your initial thoughts of this list? Anything you would expand on? Anything you find particularly difficult?
7. Adapt verse 11 to fit today's culture. What might happen if such a mantra were lived out by the church today?
8. Read v15-17 slowly and imagine your life, your home group, your church looking like the picture Paul is describing. Share your thoughts with each other. How might this look today?
9. Which of the items of clothing mentioned by Paul do you want to see yourself grow in over the next few weeks?

Most of the qualities imply the significance of the relationship. We can't be a person like this in holy and glorious isolation. Christ's people will want to keep Christ central. He provides the strength and motivation for how we clothe ourselves: his characteristics become our characteristics, his forgiveness is the basis of our forgiveness, his peace rules our hearts, his word dwells in us richly. The passage provides a focus on character – not a set of rules or holiness by numbers – taking our cue from Jesus, with what he has done for us, and asking what sort of people we should be as a result, reminding us that every aspect of our life is transformed by Christ.





## Study 7 - Christ-Like Relationships

Colossians 3v18-4v1

Many find this passage difficult and Christians have viewed it in different ways, some taking a literal translation of the words and others understanding them in their wider cultural and historical context. We remember the old adage 'a text without a context is a pretext'.

Paul looks at three relationships 1) husbands and wives 2) parents and children 3) masters and slaves. Some who are happy to accept the teaching on husbands, wives and children find the teaching on slaves problematic, even when we understand that slaves in Paul's day were more like servants than slaves.

It is the word translated as submit which to many is the stumbling block. It is helpful to look at a parallel passage in Ephesians 5:21 which is longer with more explanation where husbands and wives are told to submit to each other out of reverence to Christ. The word obey is not used in relation to wives only to children and slaves. For those who still find the teaching difficult it is interesting to note that a husband has to love like Christ did, giving himself up to death for his wife, a more extreme expression of devotion than the wife is called to make! In every relationship there is a responsibility on both parties and in all things Christ must be honoured.

1. If there were a strapline to describe your family and your friendship what would it be? What two phrases?
2. What strikes you from these few verses?
3. In what ways are wives to submit to their husbands? v18
4. In what ways are husbands to love their wives? v19
5. Why do you think obedience to parents pleases the Lord? v20
6. In what way can the verses on slaves be relevant to us today in a nation without servants in the same way as there once were in Paul's era? v22
7. What do flourishing healthy relationships look like in theory and practice for you?
8. Pause, reflect and describe one of your favourite relationships, and offer a prayer of thanks for that person?
9. How can these instructions for our families help us to be better disciples of Christ and to grow in our walk with him?
10. How can we be more like Jesus in the way we relate to others around us whether they are close family or people we see once a week or less.
11. Spend some time praying as a group for members of your own family and pray for yourselves that you might grow to love them better as Jesus has loved us.



## **Study 8 - Proclaimers of Christ**

Colossians 4v2-6

Paul encourages the Colossians to look outwards, to pray for his evangelistic work, and to be alert to their own opportunities – in word and in deed – to proclaim the mystery of Christ.

Prayer was not a vague thing, Paul gave explicit instructions on who to pray for and what to pray about, and the Colossians were instructed to devote themselves to prayer. Also their lives should be lives of thankfulness and an example to all.

1. How courageous are you about talking with others about family, favourite things in your life and your faith?
2. Having read these verses carefully, what strikes you?
3. What has stuck with you and stood out from our study through the book of Colossians? Review and reflect on this.
4. Paul says we should be devoted, 'watchful and thankful' in our prayers. Do you struggle with any of these? How can we grow more in each of these in our daily prayer life? v2
5. Paul then asks for the church to pray for him that 'God may open a door...' Is this picture helpful to you? In what areas might we be praying for God to open doors in our lives for the good news of Jesus to come in? v3
6. Even the great Paul asked for prayers for God to help him proclaim the good news 'clearly'. Are there times where you have really needed to lean on God to give you the right words to say in a situation? v4
7. How should we be 'wise in the way we act towards outsiders'? v5
8. Paul says we should seek to 'make the most of every opportunity'. Do you have any experiences of where an opportunity arose to shine some of the light of Christ where you least expected it? v5
9. Read verse 6 again. Spend some time discussing what Paul means by this sentence and how it can best be lived out?