



In Christ Alone

Studies in Colossians

In Christ Alone

In Christ alone, who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

Introduction

Colossians is a book centred on Christ, on his supremacy and sufficiency. It is a book that is about the fullness of the Christian life, based on the fullness of Christ, about the freedoms that are ours in Christ and how we should live as Christians in our families, work settings and in the church.

There are 10 studies, however we have deliberately made 4 of the studies much shorter so that either studies 5 and 6 can be combined, or studies 8 and 9 can be combined, hence freeing up an evening for prayer, or a community project or a social. Each study has a main teaching point to act as a focus for the study.

Background to Colossians

Colossae is one of group of three cities (Laodicea and Hierapolis are the other two), based in the central part of what is now Turkey (see map below). A heresy was obviously developing in Colossae, which is known as the “Colossian Heresy”. There is much debate as to exactly what the nature of the heresy was, but whatever was going on in Colossae, Paul’s letter to them to point them back to Christ is as relevant for us today as it was for them then.



1. Hallmarks of the Gospel at work

Colossians 1:1-8

Main Teaching Point: Faith in Christ, hope of heaven and love for the saints are hallmarks of true Christians, transformed by receiving and accepting the gospel of Christ.

Paul is writing to people he hasn't met about Jesus. If you were doing the same, what four things would you say about Jesus Christ which are particularly important for understanding, believing and living the Christian life. (Do a brain storm – doesn't have to be exhaustive) (5mins)

Read the introduction at the front of the studies

Read the book of Colossians together as a group, in a version you are not familiar with (should only take 20mins). Get one member of the group to keep a tally of every time there is a reference to Christ, and also anytime there is a reference to 'fill', or 'full', or 'fullness'. The rest of the group can take it in turns to read.

1. Having read the epistle, why do you think Paul refers to the Christians at the beginning as the "Holy and faithful brothers in Christ"?
2. Although the letter may have been a corrective letter, what are the reasons for giving thanks? (**see also 1 Thessalonians 1:3**). What do these hallmarks show about the Christians in Colosse?
3. How would you describe in your own words what Paul means by faith, hope and love? How are the 3 connected?
4. These are hallmarks of being a Christian. Are all 3 evident in your life?

5. Which tends to be least evident? Do you know why?
6. The gospel is what brings this transformation. What does Paul say here about the gospel?
7. Why is it important for the Colossians to know that they have already been given the true gospel?
8. Epaphras was the missionary who took the gospel to the Colossians. What do we learn about him from these verses and verses 4:13,14?
9. Where does this simple biography of Epaphras challenge you most about your life?
10. **Verse 8** ends with a reference to their "love in the Spirit". How can your group become known for your love in the Spirit?

Pray as a group for the gospel to be at work in you and those around you, bearing fruit and growing. Pray specifically for faith, hope and love to be evident in your life – individually and as a group.

Memory verse:

"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

2. How to continue, and why

Colossians 1:9-14

Main Teaching Point: Let God's word influence our prayers and our securities.

Read the whole passage. Rather than skimming through the lists in **verses 10-14** (which are rich in meaning) you could start by writing down and discussing what you think the words mean. These written lists could be useful for reflection later.

Paul began with a reminder of how his readers became Christians. Most of the letter now is about *continuing* as Christians. Paul has “not stopped praying” for them: he is eager that they grow (**verses 9-12a**). This growth is to be inspired by complete assurance of their spiritual origins and present standing in Christ (**verses 12b-14**).

Section 1: verses 9-12a: Paul's prayer

1. Paul asks God for two things: knowledge of God's will (**verse 9**) and power (**verse 11**). Then he prays about what these will accomplish.
2. What are the motives that should inspire their lives? What are the long-term results he wants to see?
3. How does Paul's prayer compare with the prayers *you* pray for people?
4. Are there any goals you are pursuing that are challenged by this prayer?

Section 2: verses 12b-14: Their security

Paul hopes they'll be inspired to grow by what God has already done so he begins to use the past tense as he describes a “finished work”. There is a completeness about it: we do not need to add secret knowledge or mystical experiences. There is more to learn, but nothing hidden to us.

5. Which words describe our condition before conversion? What is it like to live under that dominion? What are the effects of darkness and of sin?
6. How many acts of God can you identify here? For example:
 - **“Qualified”**: What are some of the ways we might try to qualify ourselves?
 - **“The kingdom”** (i.e. rule) is described in two ways: what do they tell us about what it is like to live in that kingdom? How does it contrast with the “dominion”?
 - **“Redemption”** means a ransom price was paid to set us free. What should be the attitude of a freed slave?

Section 3: God's will

Read the whole passage again

7. As always in the Bible, knowledge is not for personal gain or glory, but for practical use in godly living.
8. Throughout the passage, how many clues can you find that indicate the kinds of things God wants?

9. How can your prayers, and your choices, aim at pleasing him? (You may find ways of applying these principles now as your group prays together.)

Review memory verse :

“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

3. An accurate picture of Christ

Colossians 1:15-23

Main Teaching Point: To see Christ for who he really is.

The work of Christ for our redemption was introduced in **verse 14**. Now Paul claims that Christ is supreme over all, fully God, and absolutely sufficient to secure our salvation and our eternal destiny. Then he sets out the implications of this for our present lives.

Read verses 15-20

1. What can you find out here about Jesus' relationship with (a) the Father, (b) creation, (c) history past, present and future, (d) the Church?
2. What does this tell you about his origin, status, and power?

“Firstborn” is a rich word. It expresses sonship: Jesus is “begotten, not made”. It implies pre-eminence over all who follow, and is principle heir. In **verse 18**, it is deliberately in parallel with **verse 15**. Jesus is firstborn of the new creation: the first to go on to the life beyond death, “heir” of the age to come, and he reigns supreme there too, being the conqueror of death so that others may follow. “Fullness”: Paul means the totality of God, with all his powers and attributes. The very essence of God dwells in Christ.

3. How does a body function in relation to its head, and how does this help us understand the life and work of the Church?

4. Jesus is Maker, Master and Life-giver of all there is. Which statements point to his being also the goal and destiny of all?

Verse 20: a shocking contrast ends this paragraph of glories. The means of achieving them is a blood sacrifice, a violent death, and one that was a legal punishment for wrongdoing.

5. How would you use what Paul says here to argue with the following statements?
- “God hides himself completely and human beings are not able to find him, so it’s not worth trying.”
 - “The universe has no purpose and life is meaningless.”
 - “There are some powers at work in this world that are beyond God’s control.”
 - “God the Father wanted to destroy everyone for their sin, but Jesus died so as to make the Father change his mind.”

Read verses 21-23. Appreciating who Jesus is, what he has done, and what he will yet do, inspires us to faithfulness.

6. Once we have come into his kingdom, how do our new attitudes, actions and thought patterns contrast with the ones we had outside it? (**verses 21-22**)
7. The two descriptions are so incompatible that we cannot be in both at the same time. How does **verse 23** tell us to live now in our new condition, and reject the old?

8. Looking back on the whole passage, is there anything about Jesus that you have realised afresh or for the first time? How does it expand your faith and hope? How might it inspire your worship?

Memory verse:

“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

4. The nature of ministry

Colossians 1:24-2:5

Main Teaching Point: The nature of Ministry is both to make the word of God fully known and the people of God fully mature and Christ is integral to both.

1. What keeps you going when you are struggling on working hard at something? What keeps you going in your ministry and your walk with God when you are struggling?

Read Colossians 1:24 –2:5

2. How does Paul describe himself in **verse 25**? (note that **verse 25** refers back to the end of **verse 24**). Look also at the end of **verse 23** – what similar phrase is used there?
3. What 2 areas of service are key to ministry?

The phrase “still lacking” in **verse 24** does not mean that Christ death lack anything to save us, but it does remind us that for people to see the love of Christ they sometimes need to see it in us and in our willingness to serve them and suffer for them.

4. In the New Testament the term mystery refers not to something mysterious, but to something previously hidden which God now wishes to make clear. What is the mystery that represents the ‘word of God in its fullness’, **verse 25**? (see also **verses 1:26-27 and 2:2-3**).

5. In your own life and the life of others why is it important to bear in mind both the sufficiency in Christ of what we have now, but also recognise there is more yet to come? Discuss this, then read the quote below:

“For this life grace is sufficient. Glory belongs to the age to come... Full salvation belongs to the last day, but a real salvation belongs to the Christian here and now. If a believer cannot yet say that he is free from the presence of sin, he certainly should be able to say that he is free from the penalty of sin. And by God’s grace, it is his daily privilege to find Christ at work in hi saving him from the downward pull of sin.”

Dick Lucas (page 77 Bible Speaks today on Colossians).

4. In **verse 28** what is the message and what is the purpose? How does Paul’s emphatic use of ‘everyone’ (twice in the NIV, three times in the Greek) challenge cliques, elitism and favouritism?
5. Paul describes in **verses 24, 29 and 2:1** his struggles and sufferings. What things from these verses keep him going in difficult work? What is comforting and what is challenging about what these verses say about Paul’s struggles?
6. Paul gives a warning in **verse 2:4**. What ‘fine-sounding arguments’ today lure us away from Christ and hinder our spiritual maturity?
7. What can you do in the week ahead to keep Christ at the centre of your life so you can know him better?

Look as you finish at Paul’s purpose in his work for the Colossians (see 2:2-3).

Review memory verse:

“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

5. Alive with Christ

Colossians 2:6-15

Main Teaching Point: We have died with Christ and been raised to new life in Christ, so just as you began in Him, grow in Him.

1. Can you think of any examples where the focus or the key to the “way in”, is the same as the focus or the key for the “way on”?
2. In **verses 6,7** we read “just as you receivedcontinue”. How is our growth similar to our beginning as a Christian? How do you “continue to live in Christ”?
3. What could be the hollow and deceptive philosophies which depend on the basic principles of this world? Why would they stop a Christian growing?
4. If being in Christ is the key - what is so great about Christ? (list as much as you can from these verses)
5. What does Paul mean by the circumcision done by Christ? (see also **Romans 1:28,29**)
6. How would you describe the meaning of Baptism to someone using this verse and **Romans 6:1-4**?

7. The cross and the resurrection are referenced a number of times in **verses 12-15**; look for each time they are referred to? What is the significance of these great events for the Christian life?

Memory verse:

“For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority .”

Colossians 2:9,10

6. Free in Christ

Colossians 2:16-23

Main Teaching Point: In Christ we find freedom, so don't be enslaved again.

Have you had any experience of something that pretended to be Christianity but in reality was more about rules and restrictions than about Christ? How did that affect your relationship with God?

1. This passage begins with "Therefore" - how does the cross and resurrection of Jesus mean we shouldn't let others judge us? **Verse 16**
2. What do you think people were saying about each other in regard to eating, drinking, festivals and special days? Is this verse a license for getting drunk and ignoring Sundays? What is the main point of **verses 16,17**?
3. What "reality" is found in Christ? **Verse 17**
4. How might the warning of **verses 18,19** be relevant for us today?
5. Basic principles are referred to in **verse 20 and verse 8** - think back to what you thought they were. If we have died to these then why do we not need to submit to the rules mentioned in **verse 21**?

6. Do rules have any part in the Christian life? What are the potential dangers of rules? How effective are they and what is the most effective way of restraining sensual indulgence? (**see verse 3:1**)

Review memory verse:

"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority."

Colossians 2:9,10

7. Hidden with Christ

Colossians 3:1-11

Main Teaching Point: Set your affections on Christ and put to death all corrupt affections.

1. What have you heard people around you say is their “greatest desire”? Think of people both inside and outside the church. How could this affect their character and behaviour?
2. How can we know the things that are above? Why does Paul encourage the Colossians to seek things that are above? (**verse 1-2**)
3. Paul encourages those who ‘have been raised with Christ’ to put to death earthly desires. What does it mean to be raised with Christ?
4. What do the lists in **verse 5** have in common?
5. What does it mean in practice to put these things to death? See also **Galatians 5:16-21**
6. What are we meant to understand by the wrath of God? (**verse 6 and John 3:7,8, Luke 3:7,8**)
7. What do the lists in **verse 5 and verse 8** have in common? Can you think

of a time when you’ve successfully rid yourselves of one of these things? How did you do it? (**read James 1:19-21**)

8. Why is it important for believers to be renewed in knowledge? In verse 10, how does it happen and how does it impact your “new self”?
9. Why do you think Paul picks out lying in **verse 9** as he talks about putting off the old self and putting on the new?
10. Look at **Galatians 3:26-28** and then at **Colossians 3:10 –11**. What do they reveal about Christ and the creator? Why are they so important?
11. What do we understand by the phrase ‘Christ is all and in all’ (**verse 11**). What difference does this make to your view of others in the church?

Take a moment to reflect on what has particularly struck you from this study that you need to put off and what do you need to put on? Pray as a group for the Holy Spirit to help you live as a new creation in Christ.

Memory verse:

“Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

Colossians 3:1

8. Living as the body for Christ

Colossians 3:12-17

Main Teaching Point: Live in mutual love, forbearance and forgiveness.

1. What do you understand by the term 'body of Christ'?
2. What could be the reason why the bible uses the term 'body' in reference to believers?
3. God describes his people as his "Chosen" people. (This is a phrase used in both the old and New Testament) Why do you think the phrase is used here and what bearing does being chosen have on the way we live?
4. Are all Christians holy? What is the basis for this statement by the writer to the Colossians? (**2 Corinthians 5:21**)
5. As Christians, why should we live in mutual love, forbearance and forgiveness (**verses 12 to 17**)?
6. It is always easy to give thanks when all is well. Can you think of a time in your life when giving thanks to God has been difficult?

Review memory verse:

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

9. Living for Christ at home and at work

Colossians 3:18-4:2

Main Teaching Point: Practice the duties of wives, husbands, children, parents and servants as those under the authority of the Lord Jesus.

1. Whose authority do you see yourself as under and who is under your authority?
2. How does Paul refer to Jesus in most of the letter? How does he refer to Jesus here in this passage?
3. What do you think is the significance of his choice of title for Jesus in these verses?
4. Wives are advised to be submissive to their husbands, and husbands are advised to love their wives with tender and faithful affection. In which ways can wives be submissive and husbands love their wives with tender affection?
5. Children must be obedient. Discuss how this can be applied when parents are either authoritarian or non-believers.
6. We are instructed to obey our masters. What advice would you give to a Christian who has got a difficult boss? How do you live out **Colossians 3:23** in your work setting?

7. How should we react as believers, when faced with ungodly options/instructions bearing in mind this study?

Pray for those in authority over you and for those you have authority over.

Memory verse:

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him.”
Colossians 3:17

10. Working together in Christ

Colossians 4:2-18

Main Teaching Point: The importance in mission of prayer, godly living, wise speech and working hard together in partnership.

Make two lists, one labelled ‘national’, the other ‘international’, and take five minutes to write down names of people known to you who are not at Holland Road but who are Christians working wherever they are for the spread of the gospel.

Take a moment to pray for these people.

Read Colossians 4:2-18

1. If you devoted yourself to cricket, what would that look like in practice? How would your life look if you devoted yourself to prayer? Why do you think Paul particularly emphasises being watchful and thankful?
2. Paul asks for prayer. What are some of his specific requests? How do they show what matters to Paul? How do your requests show what matters to you?
3. Prayer is part of our reaching out. How do **verses 5-6** spell out other key aspects? Which of Paul’s exhortations in **verses 2-6** is in need of most immediate work to be lived out in your life?

4. Look through **verses 7-18** and try to place each name mentioned under one of the following headings:

With Paul	With Colossians
On the way to the Colossians	At work elsewhere

5. There seems to be a partnership and sharing going on between some of the churches mentioned. How is that expressed and which churches are involved? See particularly verses 13-16.
6. Many in this passage are described as workers or doing some work. What does this passage teach us about our work in the Lord?
7. How does this passage inspire you about the importance of working in partnership with others in missions?
8. What do you know about our partnership in mission with other churches in our city? What do you know about our connections and relationships that we have with other churches in places such as India and Ethiopia?
9. What could you do to help your understanding and support of these specific partnerships?

Please pray for other churches in the city and for those who have gone out from Holland Road and are working abroad in mission.

Review memory verse:

“And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God through him.”
Colossians 3:17

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