

Studies in the Epistles

Unit C - Colossians

Study 1. Christ's Pre-eminence Declared

READ: Colossians 1: 1-29



KEY VERSE:
Colossians 1: 27

“... God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”

BACKGROUND:-

Colosse was about 100 miles from Ephesus. It appears that, as a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus, new Christians moved to Colosse and commenced a church there. One of these new Christians was Epaphras. It was he who brought to Paul in prison the news of all that was happening in Colosse. (**Colossians 1: 7 and 4: 12 & 13**) Paul had a great care for the Christians there, especially when he heard that various learned people were influencing them and teaching error.

I. PAUL'S PRAISE AND PRAYER

(vs. 1-14)

Paul was delighted with the report which Epaphras brought, and he thanked God (v. 3) for what he heard about the Christians in Colosse:-

- 'Their faith in Christ Jesus'
- 'Their love for all the saints'
- 'Their hope of Heaven'

All of us, who have trusted the Lord Jesus, should not only show these qualities but we should continue to develop them in our lives. (v. 6)

Paul now enlarges upon his constant prayer for them. He prays that they may be able to know God's will for their lives, and that they **“may lead a life worthy of the Lord”** in accordance with His will. His main desire is that they may be **“fruitful in every good work”** and increase **“in the knowledge of God”**. (vs. 9 & 10)

2. PAUL'S 'PORTRAIT' OF CHRIST

(vs. 15-23)

It would appear that in Colosse there were some very legalistic Jews who were teaching that Jewish Christians should continue the ceremonies of the Old Testament. Also there were philosophers, who suggested that faith in Christ and His work on the cross were not sufficient. They taught that additional doctrines and experiences were needed. However, Paul completely rejects such false ideas by showing the complete supremacy and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus. He gives a wonderful description of who He is and what He has done!

a) The SON OF GOD -

“He is the image of the invisible God ...”

(v. 15)

b) The LORD OF CREATION -

“For by Him all things were created ...”

(v. 16)

c) The LORD IN CONTROL -

“He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.” (v. 17)

d) The LORD OF THE CHURCH -

“He is the head of the body, the Church.”

(v. 18)

e) The LORD SUPREME -

“In all things He may have the pre-eminence.” (v. 18)

f) The LORD OF THE CROSS -

“... having made peace through the blood of His cross.” (v. 20)

g) The LORD OF SALVATION -

“... we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” (v. 14)

These seven remarkable statements about Christ will help us to increase **“in the knowledge of God”**. Our best defence against false teachings is a clear understanding of who Christ is!

3. PAUL'S PASSION TO PREACH CHRIST

(vs. 24-29)

Paul's special service for God was to make Christ known to non-Jews, (or Gentiles). See **Key Verse**. Because of who Christ is and what He has done, even Gentiles can come into the blessing of **“Christ in you, the hope of glory”**. No wonder Paul did all he could to bring this message to everyone, as he explains in **verses 28 & 29**.

Study 1. Christ's Pre-eminence Declared

1 WRITE THREE THINGS THAT PAUL TELLS US ABOUT EPAPHRAS, IN THIS LETTER.

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2 WHAT HAD PAUL HEARD ABOUT THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE?

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3 READ VERSES 10-12 AGAIN AND ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:-

a) What does it mean to **“lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him”**?

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b) What is the source of strength to live such a life?

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c) What reasons have we, according to these verses, for giving thanks?

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4 LOOK UP THESE VERSES, AND DECIDE WHICH OF THE SEVEN DESCRIPTIONS OF CHRIST IN THE STUDY FITS IT BEST. WRITE IN THE TITLE YOU CHOOSE.

- i) **Ephesians 1: 22** iii) **Philippians 2: 9**
 ii) **John 1: 3** iv) **Acts 4: 12**

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5 **“And you ... now He has reconciled.” (1: 21)**

i) What does this mean?

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ii) According to **verse 21** what was their condition before being reconciled?

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iii) What happened to make reconciliation possible?

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iv) What are the results of being reconciled to God?

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6 WHAT A STAGGERING THOUGHT! **“CHRIST IN YOU THE HOPE OF GLORY.” (1: 37)** WHAT IMPACT SHOULD THIS HAVE UPON BOTH OUR LIVING AND OUR DYING?

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Study 2. Christ's Pre-eminence Defended

This study sheet belongs to:



KEY VERSES:

Colossians 2: 6

“As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.”

1. THE REASON for the EPISTLE (vs. 1-4)

Verse 4 suggests that there were some argumentative people with persuasive words who may have caused some Christians to be discouraged. Others were being confused about the truth. (v. 8) To counteract these things, Paul again emphasises that he is writing in order that:-

- “their hearts may be encouraged.”** (v. 2)
- they may be **“knit together in love”**. (v. 2)
- they may attain **“to all riches of the full assurance of understanding ...”**. (v. 2)

2. THEIR RELATIONSHIP in CHRIST (vs. 5-15)

It is quite clear that the Lord Jesus is the centre of this chapter. He is mentioned up to 10 times.

- ◆ **Confidence in Christ - Verse 5** refers to their **“faith in Christ”**. This is both the beginning and the basis of true Christian life.
- ◆ **Conduct in Christ - Verse 6** calls upon them to **“walk in Him”**. This means changed behaviour because He is their Lord.
- ◆ **Continuing in Christ - Verse 7** encourages them to be **“rooted and built up in Him”**. This emphasises the unseen stability that they have in their relationship with Christ.
- ◆ **Complete in Christ - Verse 10** teaches them that they **“are complete in Him”**. This assures them that they need no one else, and nothing more, for their salvation!

READ: Colossians 2: 1-23

In summing it up, we can say that what Christ did was:-

- for us -**
He has **“forgiven you all trespasses”**. (v. 13)
- for the whole universe -**
He has **“disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it”**. (v. 15) What more could we possibly want? The Lord Jesus is the Victor and we are on the victory side!

3. THE REALITY of the NEW LIFE (vs. 16-23)

Paul is now giving answers to some of the wrong theories and practices which were being taught to the Christians in Colosse.

- Some were saying they should still keep the Jewish ceremonies of the past, like festivals and Sabbaths. Paul says NO! These celebrations were just a picture, or shadow, of all that the Lord Jesus would do and are no longer necessary. (vs. 16 & 17)
- Others were suggesting that angels should be given a prominent place in worship. Again he says NO! Christ is the Head of the Church and all our worship should be focused on Him. (vs. 18 & 19)
- Others were following regulations which men had made up and which were linked with dead religions. Even though some of these commandments may have been good, they should not have any part in a Christian's life. We are dead to all that, from the moment we trusted in the Lord Jesus and His work on the cross for us. (v. 20)

We need to constantly remind ourselves that we could never earn our salvation by trying to live a good life, however hard we try. It is not what we try to DO! It is what He has DONE for us that is important!

Study 2. Christ's Pre-eminence Defended

1 WHAT DOES PAUL SAY ARE "HIDDEN" IN CHRIST?

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2 A. ACCORDING TO VERSE 4, AGAINST WHAT DANGER WAS PAUL WARNING THE COLOSSIAN BELIEVERS?

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B. WHAT ADDITIONAL DANGERS ARE REFERRED TO IN VERSE 8?

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3 "ROOTED AND BUILT UP IN HIM" THIS SUGGESTS THE IDEAS OF A TREE AND A BUILDING, BOTH OF WHICH STAND FIRM. HOW CAN A CHRISTIAN TODAY WITHSTAND THE 'STORMS' OF FALSE TEACHINGS AND EVIL PRACTICES?

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4 "IN HIM DWELLS ALL THE FULNESS OF THE GODHEAD BODILY." (2: 9) ANSWER TRUE OR FALSE

- i. This means that in the Lord Jesus there is an incomplete revelation of God.
- ii. This means that every feature of the person of God abides perfectly in Christ.
- iii. This means that Jesus was truly human but not divine.

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5 A. WHICH VERSE TEACHES-

- i. that Christians "died with Christ"? Verse
- ii. that Christians are "buried with Him"? Verse
- iii. that Christians are "raised with Him"? Verse

B. IN WHAT WAY IS CHRISTIAN BAPTISM, BY IMMERSION, AN EXPRESSION OF THESE TRUTHS?

(SEE ALSO ROMANS 6: 4)

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6 IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, CHRIST IS "THE HEAD" AND HIS CHURCH IS "THE BODY".

READ VERSE 19 AND EXPLAIN WHAT IT MEANS.

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7 "I HAVE CHRIST; WHAT WANT I MORE?" THIS LINE FROM A HYMN SUMS UP THE TEACHING OF COLOSSIANS. IN CHAPTER TWO, FIND THREE PHRASES WHERE "ALL" IS USED WITH REFERENCE TO CHRIST. WRITE THEM OUT AND GIVE THE VERSE NUMBERS.

..... verse

..... verse

..... verse

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This study sheet belongs to:

Study 3. Christ's Pre-eminence Demonstrated

READ: Colossians 3: 1-17



KEY VERSE:
Colossians 3: 17

“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

Paul continues to steer the Christians at Colosse away from philosophies and legalism. As far as he is concerned, it is the Lord Jesus who should have the first place. This chapter is very practical. It is a challenge to us to give Christ priority in our lives.

1. THE GOALS of the CHRISTIAN (vs. 1-11)

- a) **“Seek those things which are above . . .” (v. 1)**
From God’s viewpoint, we have been raised with Christ (2: 12) and since Christ is **“sitting at the right hand of God”**, we should set our hearts on things above.
- b) **“Set your mind on things above . . .” (vs. 2 & 3)**
We should endeavour to concentrate our minds on heavenly things, rather than be distracted by the things of the world.
- c) **Strengthen your hope in Christ’s future coming (v. 4)**
We should set our hearts and minds on heavenly things, because we shall one day be there with Christ and share His glory.
- d) **Separate yourselves from your past (vs. 5-9)**
Paul reminds them of many evil things which had been part of their lives in the past, sins which merited the wrath of God, and which should never have a place in the Christian’s life.

Note how he emphasises being finished with all these things - **“put to death” (v. 5), “put off all these” (v. 8), “put off the old man” (v. 9).**

- e) **Strive for Christ-likeness. (vs. 10 & 11)**
Gradually, as the Holy Spirit works in our lives, we become more and more like the One who created us!

2. THE CHRISTIAN and CHRIST (vs. 12-17)

- a) **Aim for the Character of Christ (v. 12)**
We have been challenged to **“put off . . .”**. Now we have a call to **“put on . . .”**. Here are five virtues of Christian character which are very similar to the **“fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5: 22)**. They are qualities that were so clearly displayed in the life of the Lord Jesus, and should be evident also in every believer.
- b) **Follow the Example of Christ (v. 13)**
The result of this will be that these qualities will be seen in our lives. Then, as Christ has forgiven us, we shall forgive others.
- c) **Consider the Love of Christ (v. 14)**
True love is always evident in actions. The greatest display of love ever, was in the life of the Lord Jesus, and in His willingness to go to the cross for us. It is His love that we should endeavour to **“put on”**.
- d) **Submit to the Peace of God (v. 15)**
It would appear that the oneness among the Christians at Colosse was being disturbed by ‘teachers’ with wrong doctrines, causing restlessness and division. Therefore, Paul says, **“Let the peace of God rule in your hearts”**.
- e) **Receive the Word of Christ (v. 16)**
All genuine teaching, admonishing, worship and thanksgiving are based upon the Word of God. Therefore it should **“dwell in you richly”**. Why should we listen to philosophies and theories when we have such a treasure in the Word of God!
- f) **Endeavour to serve Christ (v. 17)**
The **Key Verse** reminds us that everything we do, at home, school, college, work or wherever we are, should be done for Him, and in such a way that honours His Name.

What a different place our world, our countries, our towns and homes would be if Christians increasingly put into practice these ‘Rules for Holy Living’!

Study 3. Christ's Pre-eminence Demonstrated

1 A. ACCORDING TO VERSE 1, WHY SHOULD A CHRISTIAN "SEEK THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE ABOVE"?

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B. HOW DO YOU SUGGEST THIS CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED?

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2 A. LIST SIX OF THE SINS OF THE PAST LIVES OF PAUL'S READERS.

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B. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE WHAT PAUL INSTRUCTS THEM TO DO WITH THESE EVIL THINGS.

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3 A. LIST FOUR OF THE VIRTUES PAUL ENCOURAGES THEM TO "PUT ON".

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B. WHAT CHANGES SHOULD BE SEEN IN THE LIFE OF A PERSON WHO PUTS THIS INTO PRACTICE?

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4 PAUL REFERS IN VERSE 16 TO THE FACT THAT CHRISTIANS SHOULD SING.

A. SUGGEST SOME REASONS WHY CHRISTIAN SINGING WAS IMPORTANT THEN AND STILL IS.

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B. WHAT DO YOU THINK IS MEANT BY "SINGING WITH GRACE IN YOUR HEARTS TO THE LORD"?

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5 CHRISTIANS SHOULD ALSO BE "THANKFUL". SEE VERSES 3: 15 & 17 AND 2: 7

GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF TEACHING IN THIS LETTER WHICH MAKES YOU THANKFUL TO GOD.

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6 A. WRITE OUT THE KEY VERSE.

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B. WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "DO ALL THINGS IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS"?

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Total marks
for this study

This study sheet belongs to:

Study 4. Christ's Pre-eminence Displayed



KEY VERSES:

Colossians 3: 23 & 24

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”

1. PRINCIPLES MATTER (3: 18-25 and 4: 1)

Paul is continuing his teaching about 'Holy Living', but is now applying it to specific situations.

- In the marriage bond (vs. 18 & 19)
- In the family setting (vs. 20 & 21)
- In the work place (vs. 22-25 & 4: 1)

He is no doubt conscious of the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament and the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Now, guided by the Holy Spirit, he applies these principles to the Christians to whom he is writing. Note that in each of the relationships which he covers, he emphasises the importance of the Lord - **“as is fitting in the Lord” (v. 18), “well pleasing to the Lord” (v. 20), “whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord” (v. 23).**

2. PRAYER MATTERS (vs. 2-4)

Paul is emphasising the importance of prayer as a key to the practical living about which he has been teaching. Note how he combines prayer with thanksgiving. We should always look for answers to our prayers and give Him thanks. Despite being in prison, Paul has, in each chapter, written of the importance of thankfulness, in every situation. He asks also for personal prayer that he might be used by God in the prison.

3. PRACTICALITIES MATTER (vs. 5 & 6)

Having mentioned his own efforts to proclaim his faith, Paul now gives his final challenge to the church, especially concerning their witnessing.

- Our Conduct** - **“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside.”** Our lives should be a witness.
- Our Availability** - **“Redeeming the time.”** We

READ: Colossians 3: 18-25 and 4: 1-18

should make use of every opportunity to tell of our faith.

- Our Speech** - **“Let your speech always be with grace ...”** What we say and how we say it is very important when we witness.
- Our Answers** - **“That you may know how you ought to answer each one.”** All Christians should be able to explain what the Lord Jesus has done for them in their lives.

Paul wants them to understand that unless their lives match their faith, their witness is useless!

4. PEOPLE MATTER (vs. 7-18)

There is a number of people who are now mentioned. All of them are different, but they are all part of the Christian family. Each one is loved by Paul and is involved with him.

- Tychicus**, who was to deliver the letter, would explain to the church all about Paul and his circumstances. (vs. 7 & 8)
- Onesimus** was his travelling companion. He was a converted slave - see **Philemon (v. 9)**
- Aristarchus, Mark and Jesus (Justus)** were three of Paul's fellow workers. They had been a great comfort and support to him. (vs. 10 & 11)
- Epaphras** had brought the news about Colosse to Paul. He was not returning to them but was **“always labouring fervently ... in prayers”**. Paul commends him for his great zeal and concern for the church. (vs. 12 & 13)

He concludes with greetings from several others. When he comes to the end of his life he is almost alone (**2 Timothy 4: 11 & 16**) but at this stage is supported and helped by so many. Paul wants to acknowledge their faithful service. Eventually all service for Christ will be evaluated by the Lord Himself. Are you living in such a way that He will say to you, **“Well done, good and faithful servant?” (Matthew 25: 21)**

The letter was also to be read at Laodicea. (v. 16) Now, two thousand years after, churches are still reading it, and finding it such a challenge! May we also give careful consideration to all that it says and do all we can to put it into practice.

Study 4. Christ's Pre-eminence Displayed

1 A. SUMMARISE IN YOUR OWN WORDS, PAUL'S TEACHING FOR HUSBANDS AND WIVES.

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B. THE INSTRUCTION FOR CHILDREN IN (3: 20) AGREES WITH EXODUS 20: 12.

WRITE OUT THIS COMMANDMENT.

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4

2 EXPLAIN FULLY WHAT THE KEY VERSES MEAN.

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3 A. EXPRESS AS CLEARLY AS POSSIBLE WHAT INSTRUCTIONS PAUL GIVES TO BOTH EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS. (3: 22 & 4: 1)

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B. DO THESE PRINCIPLES APPLY TODAY? GIVE REASONS FOR YOUR ANSWERS.

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4 READ 4: 3 & 4 AND THEN ANSWER:-

i. What does Paul mean when he asks the believers to pray **"that God would open to us a door ..."**?

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ii. What do you think he means by **"the mystery of Christ"**, bearing in mind that in the Bible a mystery is something previously hidden but now revealed? (See **Colossians 1: 24-26**)

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5 "REDEEMING THE TIME" (COLOSSIANS 4: 5) IN ANOTHER TRANSLATION READS "MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY OPPORTUNITY". HOW CAN WE IN OUR DAILY LIVING FULFIL THIS SCRIPTURE EFFECTIVELY?

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6 ANSWER TRUE OR FALSE TO THE FOLLOWING:-

i. Tychicus was Paul's fellow prisoner.

ii. Epaphras was going to take the letter to Colosse.

iii. Luke was a well-loved doctor.

iv. The church in Laodicea was to read the letter also.

v. If Mark came to Colosse, they were to reject him.

5

THINK BACK OVER THE ENTIRE LETTER AND WRITE A COMMENT ABOUT ANY POINT THAT HAS IMPRESSED YOU.

Return your study sheets to:

100

Total marks for this Unit

25

Total marks for this study