

# **COLOSSIANS**

**5 & 7pm**

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# 1 PRAYING WITH PAUL

## COLOSSIANS 1:1 - 14

*This study aims to provide a simple introduction to the thrust of the whole letter through a careful look at what Paul prays in the opening paragraphs of the letter. The intent is to spend time **praying!** Paul provides a great model for prayer here, but even more than that, this prayer provides a really helpful lens for our reading of the rest of the letter as we see how much of the letter is an outworking of this prayer. It is no accident then, that we spend the first half in thanks for the gospel and its outworking, before coming before God requesting him to continue to apply the gospel to our lives.*

### Getting the cogs turning...

1. How does hope contribute to our lives?
2. What hopes and fears contribute to our planning for the future?

### Read Colossians 1:1-8

3. What does Paul give thanks for?
  - Does this strike you as an odd sequence (hope leading to faith and love)?

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4. Paul expands on the significance of the gospel in verses 5-8.

- How did the gospel 'take root' (my metaphor, not Paul's) in them?
- What does the gospel give rise to?

5. How do you see this gospel dynamic at work in yourself and those around you?

- How did you learn it?
- How is it growing and bearing fruit?
- Where do you see it springing forth in hope, faith and love?

*Pause and take 5-10 minutes to pray in thankfulness for this outworking of the gospel.*

### **Read Colossians 1:9-14**

Paul now turns from thanksgiving to supplication – recounting what it is that he asks God for.

6. Look at the structure of his prayer and break it down into its key components.
- What is the main request that Paul makes (v9)
  - What is the goal, or purpose, of this request (v10a)
  - What are the four secondary ideas that expand on this request (v10b-12) – *this is most clear in the NIV which shows each of the four clauses as participles – the ‘ing’ words that hang off the main idea.*

Use this prayer of Paul’s for the Colossians to shape your prayers for each other now. Think of creative ways you might be able to do this. One suggestion would be to split into groups of 2 or 3 and share one point for each of the four sub-clauses that people would like prayer for. There are many other ways you might want to pray in light of this prayer of Paul’s.

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*In many ways the letter to the Colossians serves to contribute to the fulfillment of each of these points of supplication. Paul is contributing to their growing knowledge of God’s will and he shows this to be at the wide angle ‘cosmic’ perspective of the Kingdom of God (see sections such as 1:13-20, 26-28) and the zoomed in perspective of personal godliness (e.g. much of chapters 2 to 4). Both aspects contribute to living a life worthy of the Lord as we acknowledge*

**2** *the Lordship of Christ expressed in God's eternal plans and purposes, and live our daily lives in light of this truth. So you might like to read the whole letter a couple of times through in the coming week, with this prayer in mind, to see how it frames the teaching of the letter.*

## LABOURING LIKE PAUL COLOSSIANS 1 & 2

*This study aims to highlight an important aspect of Paul's example of servant-hearted ministry that weaves through the first two chapters but is hard to draw out in a sermon or a study of a discrete passage. Colossians 1:29 captures it most concisely – Paul struggles/contends/labours, but he does so 'with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me'. He is at work and God is at work. This might seem a bit abstract, but it has remarkable implications for how we understand his teaching on personal godliness, and helps connect the dots of God's completed work for us in Christ and his ongoing work by his Spirit.*

### Getting the cogs turning...

1. Imagine you're on a long bushwalk (or other prolonged physical exertion!) and you've taken a break to refresh. What is more helpful in pushing on: a kind and sincere word of encouragement from a fellow walker, or a high energy snack?
2. To what degree is 'living a life worthy of the Lord' an exercise in gritting our teeth and striving forward?

**Read Colossians 1:9-12**

3. Remembering that this is Paul recounting what he asks God for on behalf of the Colossians, how does this prayer reflect God's work in enabling us to live a life worthy of the Lord?

**Read Colossians 1:21-23**

4. Is this passage a portrayal of our effort in living a life worthy of the Lord?

- What does Paul present as a certain assurance?

- Who has accomplished this?

5. What is conditional?

- What is it conditional on? What effort are we required to maintain? What does it mean to continue in the faith, to stand firm, to hold onto the hope we have in the gospel?

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### Read Colossians 1:28-2:5

6. What is Paul struggling (ESV)/contending (NIV) for?

- How does he do this?
- Bearing in mind that Paul is in prison as he writes this (see 4:3, 10, 18), how can he be contending for the Colossians, and others who is not able to be with in person? How does this help broaden our understanding of what struggle and labour in the Christian life might look like?

### Read Colossians 2:6-7

7. These two verses are a bit like a summary statement of the letter.

- What evidence is there that we need to work hard at the Christian life?
- What evidence is there that we depend on God in the Christian life?

### Drawing it together

8. When do we feel like 'living a life worthy of the Lord' is a hard slog?

9. Have there been times when you have been aware of 'the energy Christ so powerfully works in me'?



## 3

10. How can we shape our attitude to Christian living in light of the parallel realities that we struggle and work even while God is powerfully at work in us?

## NEW LIFE WITH CHRIST

### COLOSSIANS 2:6 - 3:17

*The first half of this passage is hard work! Trying to nut out what Paul means can be a bit of a challenge, but it is worth the effort as it helps us understand the second half, and indeed the rest of the letter, much better.*

#### Getting the cogs turning...

1. List as many examples as you can that relate to being 'with' someone in the sense of being closely aligned to them. Some suggestions might include – being on the same sporting team; being business partners; marriage... there may be others.

In each of these examples, what changes when you enter into that alignment – what changes from before you were 'with' them?

#### Read Colossians 2:6-23

2. Begin with these questions as simple comprehension questions – don't expect to expand on them or link them all together at this stage, we'll come to that shortly.
  - How does Paul describe us dying with Christ?

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- What stands in contrast to being with Christ?

In all this Paul seems pretty keen to emphasize that Christ rules over all other powers and authorities – he mentions it in v9-10 and 15, which might seem a bit out of place. However, this is picking up his emphasis on changing from one dominion to another in 1:12-14, and this helps us make sense of his use of the concept of circumcision. Because circumcision was an external sign indicating which kingdom the Israelites belonged to – God’s kingdom. Yet it was always intended as an external symbol of an internal reality. To understand his logic, let’s do some background reading.

**Read Romans 4:7-12.** Right from the start, the physical act of circumcision was not what defined God’s people, it was a sign pointing to a heart-reality. As such, a number of passages could speak of ‘circumcision of the heart’ that called for a genuine change of heart that leads to changed lives rather than just an external religious action. **Read Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, and Jeremiah 4:4.** So the circumcision Paul has on view is the circumcision of the heart – the genuine inward change of allegiance to God’s kingdom as his people. In contrast to some external religious activity this is genuine heart-change.

Furthermore, whenever the New Testament uses the phrase ‘made with hands’ or ‘not made with hands’ it is contrasting the work of people with the work of God. **Read Mark 14:58, Acts 7:48, Ephesians 2:11 and Hebrews 9:11.** So this is a heart change achieved by God – it is ‘not done with human hands’ – which is not to imply it is done by human-determination or human-positive-psychology. It is not done by human hands but by God’s hands.

Finally, while there are a few different ways that ‘putting off the body of the flesh’ (ESV) could be understood, the NIV has been helpful in making it a little clearer when it describes this circumcision as ‘the putting off of the sinful nature’.



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### Read Colossians 3:1-17

Paul has told the Colossians they have died with Christ and been raised with him. Now he shifts from that teaching to giving instructions on how to live.

6. How does a work/team uniform contribute to or result from being aligned with someone/something?
  
7. How does verse 9-10 help us understand the link between the first half of our passage and these instructions on how to live? How is our behavior like a uniform?
  
8. Why does new life in Christ mean we need to live differently to before?
  
9. What stands out to you about things that we should 'rid ourselves of' or 'take off' or 'put to death'?
  - Is there something that you can see that God has enabled you to get rid of from your life?
  
  - Is there something in particular you'd like him to help you put to death still?
  
10. What is one aspect of the new uniform that you would like to get better at wearing?

# 4 LIVING WITH CHRIST

## COLOSSIANS 3:18 - 4:6

### Getting the cogs turning...

1. What significant relationships shaped how you behaved as a child?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What relationships shape how you behave now?

### Read Colossians 3:15-4:6

3. Identify as many points as you can where Paul refers to the relationship with God in Christ shapes how the Colossians are to behave.

- How does each instance contribute to the instruction that accompanies it?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How does this apply this in the household relationships discussed?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- This implies that the Christian's relationship with Christ takes precedent over all their other relationships. What do you think of this and what might be some practical implications?

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4:2-6 can feel a bit like a tack-on as at first glance it doesn't seem to connect with the flow of thought. However, if we recognize the central importance of our relationship with Christ as guiding our behavior this starts to make some sense of the link. Paul has shown again and again through this letter that he longs for people to know the real Jesus – the Supreme Son of God. This comes through loud and clear in this section.

4. How does this connect the way the Colossians behave towards non-believers and their conversation 'so that you may know how to answer everyone'? What question is Paul anticipating they might be asked?

*This passage is intensely practical – it would be a great irony if we were to simply consider it at a theoretical level when it should have all sorts of implications for how we live day to day. Knowing your circumstances, give thought to how you might want to engage with its practical implications – at home, at work, in church, with their non-Christian friends, in conversation, in behavior, in prayer...*

5. What does this look at work? What does it look like to work 'with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord' (3:22)?

- How does it change our perspective when we know our heavenly master?

- And how does this shape us as good managers, bosses and employers of others?

6. What might it look like live with the peace of Christ ruling our hearts – with housemates or family?

7. How might be a practical way we let the message of Christ dwell in us richly?

