



## Introduction

The epistle (letter) of Colossians was written by Paul the Apostle. Even though Paul had likely never visited this church, it was believed to be planted as the direct result of his ministry. Among other things it was written to address a concern that had arisen due to a merging of the beliefs from the local folk religions with Christian truths, which had an oppressive effect upon the believers. Paul was intent on pointing out that Jesus is all they truly need, and to encourage them to live in light of Him. To submit our minds, wills, and hearts in an ultimate sense to any alternative philosophy, teaching or religion actually oppresses us, keeping us from the fullness of life and freedom Jesus provides through the gospel.

In spite of Paul's concerns, the first eight verses are filled w/ praise to God and gratitude for this community of saints because of their faith in God, love for others and their hope of heaven which was being revealed within the world.

## Observation/Interpretation

- Read Col. 1:3-8. Why was Paul so thankful for the Colossian believers?
- Paul wrote that the Colossians had learned about Jesus through a man named Epaphras (Col 1:7). Whom did God use to share Jesus with you? Who are the people in your life which God may want to use you to be like Epaphras, and share Jesus with them?

## Application

- In Col 1:6, Paul uses the phrase, "heard...and understood the grace of God...". What was it like for you when this first heard and understood the grace of God? Explain how the grace of God impacted you.
- Paul describes the, "the word of truth, the gospel" as "bearing fruit and increasing" (Col 1:6) within the Colossian believers. What are some of the ways in which the gospel is "bearing fruit" in your life?

## Prayer

- Ask God to help you (and your Community Group) to increase in your impact of the gospel through your life, by "bearing fruit".

### COMMUNITY GROUP DISCUSSION

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## Introduction

Though it's unlikely that the apostle Paul never visited the church in Colosse, he prayed often for them that they would grow in their understanding of the gospel so that by increasing in their fruitfulness they would more clearly demonstrate God's love. Paul appears to be so overwhelmed with the benefits of the gospel he hopes to inspire the Colossians with that he doesn't even take a break in his ongoing description of what God has done.

## Observation/Interpretation

- Read Col. 1:9-11 What specifically does Paul pray for, for the church in Colosse?
- Why is knowing the will of God important to our spiritual growth and fruitfulness? (Col. 1:9)
- What does it mean to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord"? (Col. 1:10)

## Application

- Read Col. 1:11-14 Paul bursts out in "thanksgiving" to God for the many ways He's demonstrated his love and kindness. Within this passage what are some of the areas that you can be thankful to God for?

## Prayer

- What has God done for you in your life? Finish by praying prayers of thanksgiving.

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There can be no doubt in reading Colossians 1:15-20 that Paul had a very large view of Jesus. To him, Jesus was not just a good teacher, or a moral guide. Verses 15-20 read like a list highlighting the lofty pedigree of King Jesus. What we learn of Jesus (revelation) in this passage ought to have a major impact upon our souls...perhaps not too dissimilar from the effect of standing at the foot of El Capitan in Yosemite Park.

## Observation/Interpretation

Below is a list of descriptions all focussed on portraying the reality of who Jesus *really* is. Attempt to make your way through each of them (time permitting) and as a group discuss ways in which your view/understanding/opinion of Jesus may (previously) had been to small or limited:

1. Jesus **is** the **visible image** of the invisible God (He perfectly reflects God - 1:15a)
2. Jesus **is** the **firstborn of all creation** (He is preeminent before all things 1:15b)
3. Jesus **is** the **creator of all things** (He existed before everything and he designed/created all things 1:16)
4. Jesus **is** the **sustainer of all things** (He holds/supports all things and are in his control - 1:17b)
5. Jesus **is** the **head of the Church** (He lovingly rules over his redeemed/cherished people - 1:18a)
6. Jesus **is** the **first prototype (GR: archē prōtotokos)** of a new race of people who will live after death because of resurrection (He is the ultimate preview of how life can be lived and will one day be lived - 1:18b)
7. Jesus **is** the **living God in a body** (He added to his divinity, humanity 1:19)
8. Jesus **is** the **initiator of reconciliation** with his rebellious creation (He lovingly/sacrificially made peace, by the blood of the cross - 1:20)

## Application

- From the above list, which reveals the true greatness of Jesus, what type of comfort do you find in learning these?

## Prayer

- Ask God forgiveness (repent) for allowing lesser ideas/opinions of Jesus to discolor the way you've viewed & responded to Him.
- Thank God for revealing himself through the scripture the way He has and thank Him for the ways that revelation has made you free.

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## Introduction

One of the great realities that Paul rejoices in and points out, is that Jesus' death brought about our reconciliation (assuming you trust/love Jesus). Prior to our salvation we were by position, outsiders (alienated) from right relationship with God proving our opposition to Him by our thoughts and actions. Yet the good news is that God has not abandoned us in our brokenness/rebellion (which leads to death), but has lovingly done something about it which can be summarized by, Jesus "made peace (with us) by the blood of his cross." (Col 1:23)

## Observation/Interpretation

- Paul referred to his readers prior to their conversion as being "alienated and enemies" (Col 1:21). Why do you think he used terms like this?
- Paul uses the word "reconciled" to describe what Jesus did for us. Based on Col. 1:22 what does being "reconciled" to God look like?

## Application

- In Col. 1:23 Paul challenges his readers to continue on in the faith, trusting/loving Jesus so as to not be "shifting from the hope of the gospel" ("not moved away from the hope of the Gospel" KJV). While this verse is likely not indicating losing ones salvation, it does seem to imply that we can lose sight of the *hope* which brings *stability* and *peace* in our lives. What things have the potential of moving our hearts/minds away from the hope in the gospel?

## Prayer

- Ask God to keep you firmly grounded in your confidence in what Jesus has done, motivated by His unrelenting love for you.

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Paul writes this short letter to a group of people who he has never meet face to face. He's ecstatic about the fact that these people who were once outsiders/foreigners to the life changing beauty of God (glory) are now brought near and made recipients of this and are being changed into something beautiful (glorious). Paul points to the reality that all of this is made possible because Jesus died and rose again and now lives by His indwelling Holy Spirit in these people (and all believers). Or in others words, "Christ (the King) in us, is our hope of glory (true beauty)."

## Observation/Interpretation

- According to Colossians 1:24-25 what was the source of Paul's joy?
- On two different occasions Paul had referred to a "mystery" (vv. 26-27). According to your reading and discussion pertaining to this, where and how has this "mystery" been revealed.

## Application

- In Colossians 1:27 Paul describes the life that believers have been give as, "the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." The risen life of Jesus is the churches greatest hope. The reason for this is because Jesus the resurrected King lives by his Spirit within each of us. How have you experienced change, transformation and hope within you because of Jesus?
- How can understanding/seeing Jesus in any other way than, "rich in glory (true beauty)" have negative effects on how we live our lives?

## Prayer

- Offer prayers of thanksgiving and praise to Jesus, because he lives in you and is your true hope of glory.

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## Introduction

Like a treasure map that's been hidden and is now found which promises wealth beyond compare is the way Paul describes Jesus. Those who discover Jesus find in Him, "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). Paul's greatest desire for the Colossian church (and us) is that they (we) would be securely rooted and firmly built up in Jesus.

## Observation/Interpretation

- According to Colossians 2:1-2, why was Paul having such a "great struggle" for this church he'd never met?
- What do you think Paul means by saying, In King Jesus is, "hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"?
- Since a Christian is one who believes the above to be true about Jesus, how should that affect the way we live?

## Application

- What is the most valuable thing you've ever discovered? Upon discovery of this item of great value, what did you do next? When you discovered the value of Jesus was your response the same (similar) as the above?
- Paul desires his readers to be securely rooted and firmly built up in Jesus (Col 2:6-7). Throughout the remainder of his letter Paul explains some of the practical ways this takes place. Based upon your experience and/or other scripture in Colossians how do we practically go about being "rooted and built up"?

## Prayer

- Pray that you'd see the exceeding value and worth of Jesus and that you'd respond to him rightly.

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## Introduction

Every idea, action and lifestyle we choose or follow, costs us something, as nothing is for free. Paul's concern for the Colossian believers (and us) is that they/we would invest ourselves in a false/counterfeit version of what we already have been given by way of King Jesus. In doing so our lives become less free and joy-filled. Paul's hope is that we would see that In Jesus at great cost to himself (incarnation, death, betrayal, suffering, etc) we've been given everything we need to truly live in *this* life (as well as the next).

## Observation/Interpretation

- Read Colossians 2:9-10. What does Paul have to say about the identity of Jesus and how does it impact the believer?
- We live in a culture where there's an open-market of ideas all promising life/freedom, from Hollywood stars advocating Scientology or Spirituality to Atheists promoting Naturalism, etc. The acid test that Paul puts everything to is, is it: "in line with the King" (v. 2:8 - N.T. Wright's translation)? Is Jesus the center of it's focus? What are some of the practical steps believers can take in order live with their eyes wide open, being aware that they are not captured by false ideas?

## Application

- Why do religious people/institutions get so uncomfortable with "spiritual freedom" (like what Jesus offers) and feel the need to control others? Is this a trait you struggle with?
- How is the above behavior actually related to a failure to trust God's power to make us (and others) whole and holy?

## Prayer

- Pray for the eyes to see the great value/worth of Jesus.
- Pray for the wisdom to identify and turn away from (repent) counterfeit ideas, actions and lifestyles that may appear life-giving/freeing, but actually lead away from the freedom that Jesus provides.

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## Introduction

In this world, there are always competing voices that offer alternatives or counterfeits to Jesus. Each promises a form of freedom but in the end leads to slavery. The problem with every form of, as Paul describes, “outright rebellion and misguided act of spirituality” is that it does not lead to holding on to Christ who is the source of life for the body (Col 2:19). The result of not holding on to Christ is malnourishment and disintegration. God intends for us to have freedom and find life by being united with Jesus who is the Head of the body.

## Observation/Interpretation

- The “record of debt that was against us” (Col. 2:14) referred to the law of Moses which both condemned Jews for breaking it’s commands and prevented Gentiles from entrance into the company of God’s people. How has God dealt with the condemnation that came through the law? (see Col 2:14)
- Why does Paul keep coming back to the cross of Jesus? (read Col 2:13-15, 1 Cor. 1:23, 2:8)

## Application

- Paul speaks about various religious rules and regulations which promise to add to someone’s spirituality but in the end lead to spiritual pride or self-loathing. Which legalistic man-made restrictions are prevalent in today’s Christian culture?
- Why are external rules and regulations incapable of bringing about internal reformation? How does the Gospel reorient our hearts and transform our actions? Or in other words, how does the Gospel change us from the inside-out?

## Prayer

- Thank God for the completeness and safety he provides for us in the fullness of Jesus.

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## Introduction

In a world where morals and restraint are out of control, there's a desire in many to create new rules, or rediscover ancient ones in order to make their lives and society, better. In the Colossian church this is what was happening. These believers were embracing outdated Jewish traditions as their hope of renewal. Paul in writing, wanted them to be aware that even though their actions may offer external change (abstaining from foods & keeping certain holy-days) they could do nothing to offer internal change. Or in other words, their actions can never make them holy, only Jesus can.

## Observation/Interpretation

- Read Col. 2:23. In a world with depleted values, where moral lines seem to be blurred, many people like to create their own lines that are firm, straight (at least from their skewed perspective) and rigid. According to this verse why does Paul say that, "these have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh"?
- Read Col. 1:1-4 In contrast to the above, what characterizes the life of a truly spiritual person (a Christian)?

## Application

- Have you ever set out to live according certain rules of discipline? (E.g. Jogging in the morning, Having a daily bible reading time, eating only healthy food, vegetarianism, avoiding all alcohol, etc). How well did you do with your disciplines? While these have helped you externally (E,g, you're healthier, you know more scripture, etc), how are these disciplines incapable of bringing about internal reformation?

## Prayer

- Thank God for the completeness and safety he provides for us in the fullness of Jesus.

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## Introduction

Someone once described God's action through the gospel as being similar to a wealthy person moving into the projects in the inner city with the intention of a massive restoration - changing everything. In many ways this is what Jesus has begun to do within our hearts and lives. Because he has taken residency in us, he is in the process of transforming us in a way that is reflective of what he considers beautiful. Old destructive ways and patterns are replaced with new ones that are life-giving and consistent with his peace (shalom).

## Observation/Interpretation

- Paul describes two main areas of broken behavior that are typical of the old life-style that is now to be abandoned, since Jesus has entered. They have to do with both sex and speech - both of which have the potential for great good (blessing), or evil. Many pretend that such things are purely for private matters, how does wrongdoing in these two areas lead to the potential of widespread problems throughout the community?
- Read Col. 3:9-10. What is the reason Paul gives for the profound transformation in our behavior?

## Application

- Of the old habits Paul describes in Col. 3:5-9, which ones do you struggle with most?
- Often times church leaders intent on cultivating holiness in the lives of their people often resort to guilt to get them into better behavior. Paul never did this. Rather, he reminded the people who they are in Christ (Col 3:1, 10-11). How does being reminded of our "new nature" given to us by grace become a better motivator than guilt to live holy lives.

## Prayer

- Ask God for the power needed to shed your old behaviors and walk in the new ones gifted to you in Christ.

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One metaphor found in the New Testament likens the Christian life to taking off an old, soiled pair of clothes that are unfit for a banquet and being gifted with a new, clean set to be worn in their place. Certain patterns of behavior listed in Colossians 3:5-9 are common in this decaying world. Yet, the hope of the gospel is that Jesus frees people from that cycle of decay and creates a new humanity that is renewed in God's image and reflects Him in every way. So, like a set of clothes that are inappropriate for an important occasion, these must be taken off and new patterns of behavior must be put in their place.

## Observation/Interpretation

- If you had the choice of choosing a group of people (or friends) whose behavior mirrored that which was described in Col. 3:5,8-9, or a group whose behavior mirrored that which was described in Col 3:12-17, which group would you choose? Why?
- Why do you suppose some people prefer to live in a relational environment characterized by the description in, verses 3:5,8-9?
- Paul described love as being what "binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3:14). How do actions that are consistent with love bring people together while actions that are consistent with selfishness, lust, coveting, etc tear people apart?

## Application

- How forgiving are you? Do you tend to nurture grudges and feel the need to "get even"? Why? Search your heart in light of the Gospel (good news) that God has forgiven you. Why do you feel the need to enact a vengeance on those who have wronged you when God had every right to do this to you but showed mercy?

## Prayer

- Repent of any sin. In light of what God has done to free you, ask Him to help you to be free to love and forgive others the way he has done this for you.

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## Introduction

The Gospel changes everything about us. A Christian is one who has been changed from living primarily for one's self, into one who desires to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col 3:17). This doesn't mean one's life becomes perfect but it does mean that there are seeds growing that produce transformation and change. As the believer grows in this new life, all things eventually are affected. Paul knowing this, challenges us to carefully work the gospel into some of the most significant areas of our lives such as marriage, family and work. (see Col. 3:17-4:1)

## Observation/Interpretation

- Read Col. 3:12-4:1 out loud as a group. What are some of the gospel-motivated actions that are to be prevalent within the most significant areas of our lives? See verses 12-17.
- Seven times, between verses 3:18-4:1, Paul roots his instructions, "in the Lord". It's important to note Paul is not admonishing these believers to conform to the popular cultural patterns, but rather he intends for them to evaluate everything they do and every role they play to be done in light of the teaching about Jesus and the pattern he left for his people to emulate. The New Testament is clearly "Jesus centered". How and where do you need to come into alignment?

## Application

- The scope of God's restorative grace effects you personally by offering you forgiveness and transformation, yet extends beyond you into your relationship with others in the Church family, and further still into the various roles you play in society (e.g. husband/wife, parent/child, employee, etc). What are some of the roles *you* play within our culture that God would challenge you to live in light of the gospel there? What would that look like for you?

## Prayer

- Ask God for wisdom in applying the example of Christ's sacrificial love through out the various roles you play. Be specific. (E.g. If you're a business owner, ask God to help you to embody "gospel life" with a difficult employee. Etc.)

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## Observation/Interpretation

- Read Col. 3:12-4:1 out loud as a group. What are some of the gospel-motivated actions that are to be prevalent within the most significant areas of our lives? See verses 12-17.
- New Testament scholar, N.T. Wright, writes that, "Paul's command to wives has come in for particular criticism. While I think verse 18 is best translated as "treat your husbands with respect," in many translations the key word in verse 18 comes out as submit. This conjures up the image of a downtrodden woman, the victim of her husband's every whim, unable to be herself, to think her own thoughts, to make a grown-up contribution to the relationship. What indicators are there in this passage that this "downtrodden" image is not at all what Paul has in mind?"
- How do Paul's commands to both husbands and wives in Col. 3:18-19 compliment one another?

## Application

- Are there any areas in your thinking regarding marriage that have been corrupted by the decaying culture around us? How can the gospel help to correct these?

## Prayer

Pray for marriages, that they would reflect the beauty (glory) of Jesus. If there are married or engaged couples in your group, lay hands on them and pray for God's help to be given to them. If the group is mostly single, pray that God would help each individual bear the image of God in the important relationships in their lives.

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## Observation/Interpretation

- Read Colossians 3.20-21 and the companion passage, Ephesians 6.1-4. What are the underlying attitudes in how the family members are to treat one another?
- Assuming both children and fathers lived up to their responsibilities to each other (Col. 3.20-21) what would the relationship look like?

## Application

- What type of relationship did you have with your biological father?
- What ways can a father (or mother) provoke their children toward discouragement?
- God is described throughout Scripture as a Father (read: Matthew 6:9-13, Luke 12:32, 1 John 3:1, Hebrews 12:6-11). How does knowing the way God lovingly fathers us transform our hearts?

## Prayer

Pray that you would come to see and know God's fathering love in an experiential way.

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## Observation/Interpretation

- Read Col. 3.22-4:1 and Gal. 3:28. How did passages like these set the stage for the eventual abolition of slavery?
- The gospel teaches us to see *all* people equally. In the first century the slave/master relationship as you would imagine was abused and slaves were often treated as less than human. How does the gospel restore dignity to those who would otherwise be alienated, marginalized and abused?
- Read Genesis 2:15. The fact that work was something which was in place to display (image) God's worth even before the fall should cause us to rethink how we approach our work. In what ways can your work become an idol? In what ways can it become an instrument to make much of God and his gospel?

## Application

- What was the best job you ever had? Why?
- Do either of the below describe you?:
  - a) I find little value or joy in my work, only seeing it as a means to pay my bills.
  - b) I find too much value in my work (like an idol), as it's where I find my identity and worth.
- What would be some of the proper motivations that you can set in place in order to glorify God through your work?

## Prayer

Ask God to help you to see your work as an instrument to make much of God (and His gospel) by doing all that you do with excellence.

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