

I. OUTLINE OF THE LETTER¹

A. Letter Opening: “Just as You Have Received Christ Jesus as Lord . . .” (1:1-2:5)

1. Greeting (1:1-2)
2. The Powerful Gospel of God’s Son (1:3-23)
 - *The Evidence of the Gospel’s Power among the Colossians (Thanksgiving and Prayer)* (1:3-14)
 - *The Heart of the Gospel: The Supremacy of Christ in Creation and Redemption* (1:15-20)
 - *The Hope Held Out in the Gospel* (1:21-23)
3. The Mystery of Christ in Paul’s Ministry and Christian Experience (1:24-2:5)

B. Letter Body: “. . . Continue to Live Your Lives in Him” (2:6-4:6)

1. The Heart of the Matter: Remaining Centered on Christ (2:6-7)
2. The Threat to Christocentric Living: Warning about False Teachers (2:8-23)
 - *Spiritual Fullness in Christ* (2:8-15)
 - *The Empty Promise of False Teaching* (2:16-23)
3. Living a Christocentric Life (3:1-4:1)
 - *Heavenly Thinking* (3:1-4)
 - *Putting Off the Practices of the “Old Self”* (3:5-11)
 - *Putting On the Practices of the “New Self”* (3:12-17)
 - *The Lordship of Christ in Earthly Relationships* (3:18-4:1)
4. Exhortation to Prayer and Christian Witness (4:2-6)

C. Letter Closing, Greetings, Plans, and Instructions (4:7-18)

¹ Adapted from Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), vi.

II. Theological Emphases of Colossians

“In none of Paul’s letters can we find his “theology,” considered in the abstract. What we find, instead, is *contextualized theology* [emphasis mine], particular points and emphases from the “platform” of his theological convictions that he uses in debating with his opponents and correcting his flock. So in Colossians. The theology that comes to expression in this letter is intended to convince the Colossian Christians not to succumb to the false teaching that has arisen in their midst. The theological emphases are therefore largely polemical thrusts against a particular form of erroneous teaching.”

- A. “The key religious theme throughout Colossians is the centrality and supremacy of Jesus.”²

“Christology (i.e., the study of or teaching about Christ) is the theological heart of Colossians, and, like the spokes of a wheel, all the other themes of the letter radiate from it.”³

*1:15-20

- B. Cosmology and the Powers

- C. The Church (1:18, 24; 2:19). Only in Colossians is Christ called the “head” of the body.

- D. The Gospel or Message About Christ (1:5-8, 23, 25; 2:6-7; 3:16)

- E. Emphasis on “realized” over “future” eschatology (i.e., on what God has “already” done for believers in Christ over what God has “not yet” done for them) (cf. 1:13, 23; 2:13, 15; 3:1)

- F. The Christian Life (1:10ff; 2:16, 19-23; 3:1-4:1)

² Larry Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 505.

³ Moo, *Colossians*, 63.

III. One Week Study Guide to Colossians

Day 1: Read the entire book in ONE sitting

- Use the outline given in this handout to guide your reading
- Try and memorize the basic three-part division of the book given in the outline. (i.e., “Opening” [1:1-2:5]; Letter Body [2:6-4:6]; Closing [4:7-18]). Memorize a one sentence summary (created by you!) of the main point of each section. How would you summarize the message of the entire book . . . in one sentence?

Day 2: Read 1:1-12

- What specific ways should Paul’s prayers for the Colossians, mentioned in 1:3 and 1:9, inform our personal prayer life?
- How is Epaphras an example for us in the areas of evangelism and discipleship? (1:7; 4:12) How might *you* follow his example in your “sphere” of life (i.e., in the workplace, in your community group, in SGC as a whole)
- What important point do we learn about the relationship between doctrine and practice in our Christian lives from 1:9-13? That is, how does Paul conceive of the relationship between “the knowledge of his will” (i.e., doctrine/ knowledge of the scriptures) in 1:9 and “walking in a manner worthy of the Lord” in 1:10? What are the areas in which “knowing” needs result in “doing” in your life?
- According to verses 10-12, what does it mean to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him”? (hint: Paul lists *four* specific things). Do these things characterize your Christian walk? What are some specific steps you might take so that your Christian walk reflects Paul’s teaching here?

Day 3: Read 1:13-23

- Spend some time meditating on Colossians 1:15-20. Paul calls Jesus the “image of the invisible God” in 1:15. What does this statement teach us about Christ? About God the Father?
 - What does this passage teach about Christ’s supremacy?
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- How might you need to change your thinking about Christ based upon this passage? How might this change in thinking be reflected in your personal life and relationships?
- We often think of Christ's work on the cross in individualistic terms (i.e., Christ died for me) or corporate terms (i.e., Christ died for his church). How does the teaching in 1:20 expand our understanding of what God was doing through Christ on the cross? What does this teach us about the *power* of the cross? Does this text leave you in utter amazement of the cross?

Day 4: Read 1:24-2:5

- What do you think Paul means when he says that he is "filling up what is lacking" in the sufferings of Christ?
- What does Paul mean when he uses the term "mystery" in this passage? What is the mystery?
- According to 1:14-29, why was Paul willing to undergo so much suffering for the church? (hint: focus on the end of verse 25 and all of verse 28). According to verse 29, what provided the energy and endurance for Paul to do this? How might you apply this section to your relationships within the church and your small group specifically?

Day 5: Read 2:6-23

- Memorize 2:6-7: these verses summarize the theme of the entire book. What is their central teaching?
- In 2:8 (see also 2:4) Paul expresses his concern that the Colossians not be led away by false teaching. According to verses 9-15, what do the Colossians need to know in order to combat this false teaching? In what ways might you be looking for fulfillment in anything other than Christ (i.e., people, job, school, titles, things, reputation, degrees, etc.) What things or people might be leading you away from the gospel? How might you apply Paul's teaching here?

Day 6: Read 3:1-4:1

- What does this passage teach about the Christian life?
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- Meditate on 3:5-11? What does Paul mean by “putting to death what is earthly in you.” Why, according to verse 6, is it so urgent that we do so? What *specific* things to you need to put to death *now*?
- Meditate on 3:12-17. Why are Christians to “put on!” all of the things Paul mentions in these verses? (focus on the words immediately following Paul’s command to “put on!”). In what ways is God calling you personally to change based upon this passage?
- What is the most important thing, according to Paul, to “put on” in this passage? Why? Would you say that this is characteristic of your Christian life? Would others?

Day 7: Read 4:2-18

- How might 4:5 inform how you relate to unbelievers and your evangelism?
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