

Colossians

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Notes

In preparing these studies I've used the following sources: the Bible Speaks Today Commentary The Message of Colossians & Philemon by R.C. Lucas, Paul for Everyone the Prison Letters by Tom Wright, the Bible Brief on Colossians by Luther Symons from The Briefing magazine # 284, the Matthias Media Interactive Bible Study booklet The Complete Christian (Colossians) by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne, the Aquila Press booklet Colossians New Life New Lifestyle by Stephen Hale, The Lion Handbook to the Bible, One Forever the Transforming Power of being in Christ by Rory Shiner, talks on the Trinity 2012/13 by Tony Golsby-Smith (www.gospelconversations.com) and "An Unpublished Essay on the Trinity" by Jonathan Edwards.

Study 1, Col 1:1-14, Letters

Getting started

1. (Around the room.) Can you remember the last letter you wrote (not an email or twitter or a short comment in a birthday or get well card)?
Who did you write it to and what was it about?

Paul wrote at least 9 letters to churches and 4 letters to individuals and Colossians is one of those letters. Paul's letters all have a similar structural pattern. He usually begins by praising the church for what they are good at then he teaches them some things they need to know and answers their questions they have asked of him. Often Paul warns them about false teaching and he finishes his letters with some cheerios. All his letters are centred around Jesus and his life, death and resurrection.

Introduction

Imagine, if you can, a fertile valley with a river meandering through it, in what we would now call Turkey. On the shores of the river, at the junction of two important roads, is a town like many 1st Century towns. This is Colossae, just down the road from Laodicea and Hierapolis.

As you stroll through the streets and into the market-place, you encounter a mix of races and religious beliefs – there are Jews there, and Greek mystery religions, and a variety of other cults and religious philosophies. And among the various sub-cultures is a group calling itself ‘Christian’.

From The Complete Christian (Colossians) p 9 by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne.

Although Paul had never visited the group at Colossae, he had heard all about it from Epaphras. There was much to be thankful for, but some of the news was worrying. So he wrote to them from prison – probably in Rome, about AD 61. He had a ready-made opportunity to send the letter with Tychicus (who may well have carried the letter to the Ephesians at the same time) and Philemon’s runaway slave, Onesimus, whom he was sending home.

From The Lion Handbook to the Bible p 611.

Bible

2. Read Col 1:1-8.
What are two things that Paul thanks God for?
3. What does Paul mean by “the word of truth” = “the gospel” (vv 5-6)?

4. What is it in vv 6-8 that is the first sign, for Paul, that they have grown?

5. Read Col 1:9-14.
What does it mean to know God's will (v9)?

Many 21st Century Christians use the phrase '**knowing God's will**' to mean knowing God's direction for particular decisions. "I sense that it's God's will for me to become a Christian " in which the blank space is filled by words like 'musician', 'doctor', 'film-maker' or 'businessman', but rarely by words like 'street sweeper' or 'factory hand'. It seems that God's will often runs along middle-class lines and tends upwards.

Alternatively, the phrase is used to describe a knowledge or sense of God's presence in our lives. To be filled with a knowledge of God's will seems, for many people, to imply being in touch with God's power; discerning his presence in our daily lives and walking according to his directions.

But note Paul's use of the phrase in this passage. 'Knowing God's will' means knowing how to please God, and to live a life worthy of all that he is and all that he has done for us. It means bearing fruit by doing good works; it means knowing God better; it means being strengthened to endure when things aren't going so well, and patiently and joyously thanking God for his saving grace.

From The Complete Christian (Colossians) pp 31-32 by Phillip D. Jensen and Tony Payne.

6. What does it mean to bear fruit (v10)?

7. Non-Christians sometimes reject Christianity because they feel they have to give up so much rather than looking at the benefits of faith in Jesus.
 - (a) (i) What might they feel they have to give up?

 - (ii) Would they really need to give up each of these (sometimes non-Christians think they have to give up more than they really have to)?

 - (b) From vv 12-14 what do they get out of becoming Christian?

To finish

8. What are our most important tasks as Christians: to be good
to pray
to read the Bible
to go to church
to serve others
to evangelise
to not swear
to vote Liberal
to know God
to love God
to obey God
to be creative
to think different?

Pick one or two and say why you picked it/them?

Study 2, Col 1:21-2:8, Growth

Getting started

1. What factors are involved in promoting Christian growth?
2. What is the goal of Christian growth?

Bible

We've jumped over Col 1:15-20, for now, because I wanted to look at that passage in Study 3 under the theme of the Trinity and then look at how Christian growth fits in with the Trinity. But first we need to look at Christian growth. Col 1:6-11 introduces us to the idea of growth and this is followed up in Col 2:6-8.

3. Read Col 1:3-8.
(a) What causes the Colossians growth?
- (b) In answer to question 4 in Study 1 the first sign, for Paul, that the Colossians had grown was their “love in the Spirit” (v8). What do you think Paul means by their “love in the Spirit”?

Love in the Spirit

This love doesn't simply mean that they all (as we might say) have good feelings about each other. They may or they may not. What matters is that the behaviour which marks out so much of the world – lust, anger, lies and so on, which split up families and communities – is being replaced by kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, and an acceptance of one another as members of the same family, even where there were major differences of race, background and culture. This, as far as Paul is concerned, is the true sign of God at work, and he is thrilled and grateful to hear about it.

From Paul for Everyone the Prison Letters p 143 by Tom Wright.

4. Read Col 1:9-14.
 - (a) What do the Colossians need in order to grow/bear fruit?
 - (b) What are the results of their growth?
5. Read Col 1:21-23.

How have the Colossians changed?

6. Read Col 1:24-2:1.
(a) How does Paul describe his ministry?

(b) What is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions (1:24)?

Before his return in glory, the risen Lord will continue to share **the afflictions of his people** until the full measure of the church's sufferings (which are Christ's afflictions) is made up. Paul's sufferings helped to complete that full toll and hasten the end. But we cannot doubt that Paul sees his own ministry as being 'completed' by this sharing in Christ's sufferings.

From The Message of Colossians & Philemon p 79 by R.C. Lucas.

(c) What is the mystery (1: 26-27, 2:2)?

Paul uses it [the word '**mystery**'] to emphasize, not that the gospel truths are 'mysterious', but that they are undiscoverable by man, and have been disclosed by God. . . . This 'mystery' is nothing more nor less than the gospel of Christ: and it is brought to people not by semi-secret rites but by public proclamation.

From The Message of Colossians & Philemon p 69 by R.C. Lucas.

What does it actually mean to be **in Christ**? Let me try an analogy. Imagine yourself at the airport, about to board a plane. The plane is on its way to, let's say, beautiful Perth. You're at the airport. There's you. There's the plane. It's going to Perth. And my question is: What relationship do you need to have with that plane? . . . Of course, the key relationship you need with the plane is not to be under it, behind it or inspired by it. You need to be *in* it. . . . At its heart, the New Testament idea of being in Christ is something like that. What the New Testament is saying is that through faith in Jesus Christ, we become united to him. And we are in him, so that whatever is true of Jesus is also true of us.

From One Forever the Transforming Power of being in Christ pp 34-35 by Rory Shiner.

7. Read Col 2:2-8.

Note on 2:5 and the use of the word "**orderly**".

Though absent in body (the fetters saw to that, 4:18) he [Paul] wants the Colossians to know that he is 'with them' in spirit, especially as their faith comes under fire. We may allow ourselves this military metaphor since Paul makes use of similar army terminology when he describes the 'order' and 'firmness' of the church at Colossae. It is a natural use of language, perhaps used almost unconsciously, and suggests that despite the enticements of the false teachers, the Christians were standing firm with unbroken ranks. Their faith was still fixed, as we might say, foursquare on Christ alone.

From The Message of Colossians & Philemon p 85 by R.C. Lucas.

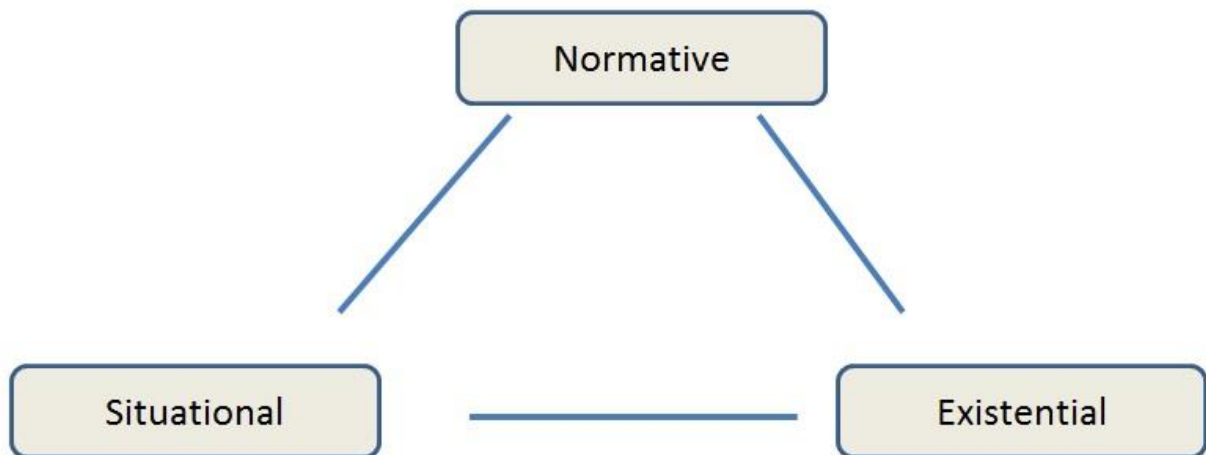
From Col 2:2-8

(a) What is the purpose of Christian growth?

(b) What helps Christians grow?

(c) What results from Christian growth?

8. Let's look at a model for Christian growth:



The normative perspective means we look to an ideal standard or norm. This is what we use to determine right and wrong. The norm is transcendentally true and doesn't change. In this perspective we try to understand God's will and the Bible. Paul describes it as "growing in the knowledge of God" Col 1:10.

The situational perspective means we look at our circumstances or situation. We respond to the changing contexts that we find ourselves in. If you respond to different situations in different times then it involves change. The normative perspective never changes.

The existential perspective means we look at our own existence; our emotional, personal and individual feelings; our "gut instinct"; what is authentic to our inner selves.

9. Which factors for growth that we noted from the Colossians passages can be put under
(a) the normative perspective?

(b) the situational perspective?

(c) the existential perspective?

To finish

10. Can you guess which perspective is given most emphasis by:

(a) Sydney Anglican churches?

(b) charismatic churches?

(c) Uniting and Salvation Army churches?

Study 3, Col 1:15-20, Trinity and Growth

Getting started

1. (a) Can you remember the last good idea you had about something?

(b) What was this good idea?

(c) How long did you think about this idea?

(d) How did you feel about this idea?

(e) Did you put this idea into practise?

Bible

2. Read Col 1:15-20.
What are the bits here that you would normally attribute to God, the Father?

3. How is it that Paul can write these things about Jesus but they are also applicable to the Father?

4. We haven't mentioned anything about the 3rd person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. What are some things the Spirit does?

5. One way to understand the Trinity is to compare it to the good idea of question 1.

We begin with an idea. The idea itself is one aspect.

We can think about this idea in any of a number of ways, one of which might be imagining how we might put it into practise. This thinking about our original idea we will call "the idea of the idea". This is the second aspect.

We might have felt some emotion about the idea e.g. sad if it was a bad idea, frustrated if it was an idea that was good but impossible to implement, or we might have felt joy if it was a really good idea that would lead to something ground breaking. So now we have the emotion of the idea as the third aspect.

All three aspects are different yet closely related and personal.

This is something like the close relationship between Father, Son and Spirit. All three different yet closely related and personal. The idea begins the process so we could line up the idea with the Father. Doing something about the idea – the idea of the idea - could be lined up with the Son. The emotion of the idea could be lined up with the Spirit.

(a) If we are made in the image of God (Gen 1:27) and God is Trinity does this mean there is a Trinitarian aspect built into us?

(b) Is there a connection between the Trinity and personal growth?

6. In the last study we looked at the normative, situational and existential perspectives for growth. Which of Father, Son and Spirit would you line up with the normative, situational and existential perspectives? Why would you make those connections?

To finish

7. Growth is not only about me but also about helping others grow and other people can help me grow more than I would if I did everything by myself.

Taking the good idea of question 1 as an example:

(a) We need to communicate the idea in order to help others grow. The idea starts in our heads and then what happens in us to communicate that idea?

(b) How does this 3 stage process correspond to the Trinity?

(c) Our role in this growth process has been described as "Trinitarian Agents".

(i) Where does this process start?

(ii) Where does this process end?

Study 4, Col 2:9-3:17, Old Self/New Self

Getting started

1. "Some people are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly use" Oliver Wendell Holmes. What does this statement mean? Is it true?

Bible

2. Read Col 2:9-10.
In what sense have Christians been given "fullness in Christ"?

With regard to the **fullness** of God's presence with us on earth, in Christ *we have all that can be ours* this side of heaven. With regard to heaven's victory over powers and principalities, *we share with Christ all that he has won*.

From The Message of Colossians & Philemon p 100 by R.C. Lucas. (See also paragraph **in Christ** p 6.)

I've arranged the following questions so that your answers can go in two columns: the left column describes the old self and the right column describes the new self.

old self

new self

3.

Read Col 2:11-12.
What have the Colossians "put off"?

What have the Colossians got instead?
4.

Read Col 2:13-15.
What has God done for the Colossians?
5.

Read Col 2:16-17.
What is the shadow?

What is the reality?
6.

Read Col 2:18-19.
What does this say about the false teachers?

What does this say about our growth?
7. Read Col 2:20-23.
What is Paul telling the Colossians to put behind them?

8. Read Col 3:1-4.
(a) Having put this stuff (Col 2:20-23) behind them, how are the Colossians to live instead?

(b) Compare Col 3:1-3 with your answer to Q1.

9. Read Col 3:5-11.
How does Paul describe the old self that needs to be put to death? How does Paul describe the new self (vv 10-11)?

10. Read Col 3:12-17.
How does Paul describe the new self here?

To finish

11. (a) Once you embrace the new self, have you “arrived” since you now have “fullness in Christ” (Col 2:10) or can you continue to grow?
12. Looking back over the right column, the new self column:
(a) mark any bits about growth?

(b) mark the bits that fit in with the normative (N), situational (S) or existential (E) model for growth?

Study 5, Col 3:18-4:18, Examples

Getting started

1. Consider a work situation where you have people working for you or a home situation where you have to look after children or young adults:

(a) What's the hardest thing about managing people?

(b) What's the best thing about managing people?

(c) How did you grow (if at all) in managing those people?

Bible

2. Read Col 3:18-19.

Remember the situational perspective for growth? Here we have the situation of a husband and a wife. In the NIV the editors' heading at the beginning of ch 3 is "Rules for Holy Living" so we have the normative perspective in Col 3:1-17 and we can apply that to the specific situations of husbands and wives, children, slaves etc. in Col 3:18-4:1. (In question 1 (c) we were looking at the situational perspective for growth in a management situation.)

(a) Which things in Col 3:1-17 can be applied to the situation of wives submitting to husbands and husbands loving their wives?

(b) Why do you think Paul might single out these particular aspects of husband/wife relationships?

3. Read Col 3:20-21.

How much of this is true when your children grow up?

4. Read Col 3:22-4:1.

Seeing as not many of us have slaves, this passage is often used to instruct us in our work relationships. So, whether we are “masters” or “slaves” should we think of work as working *with* people rather than working *for* someone? What difference would this make to our work situations?

5. Read Col 4:2-4.

(a) How does prayer fit into our normative, situational, existential growth model?

(b) How do we grow through prayer?

6. How can we make the most of every opportunity (Col 4:5-6)?

7. Read Col 4:7-18.

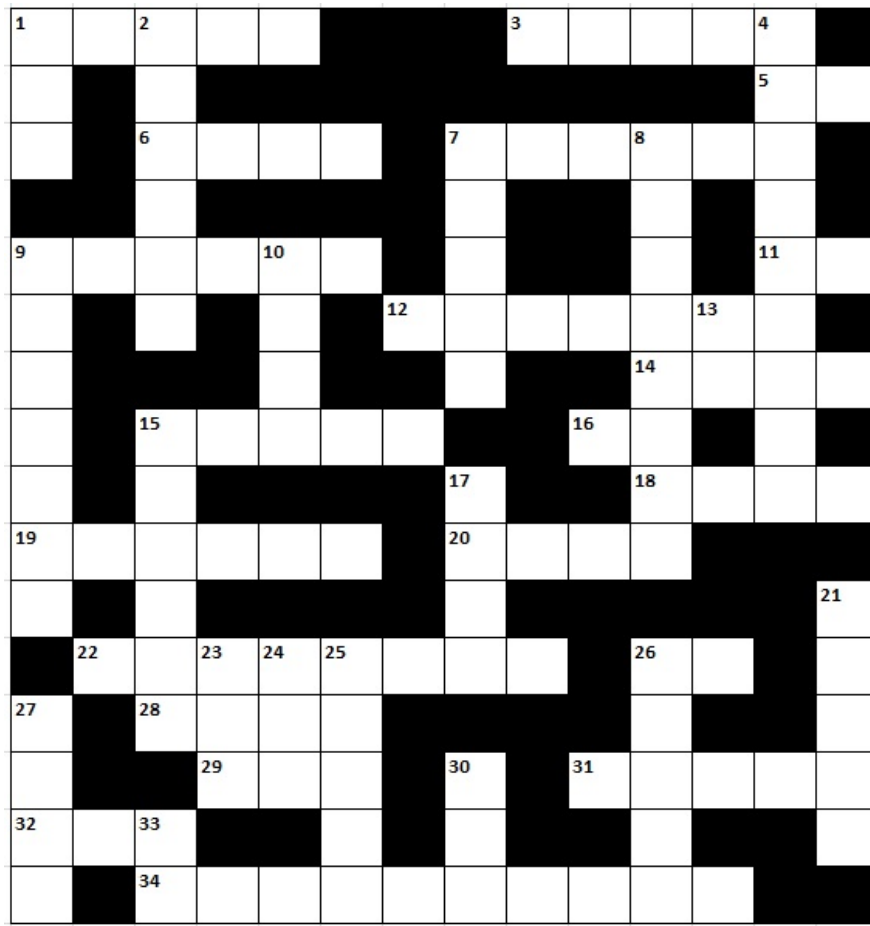
What does this tell us about the lives of the earliest Christians and their relationships with each other?

To finish

8. How do we grow in
(a) the normative perspective?

(b) the situational perspective?

(c) the existential perspective?

**Across**

1. Word of God
3. these need grace, salt & wisdom 4:6
5. condition
6. metaphor for church
7. turn back
9. third person
11. place
12. description of ministry 1:24-26
14. lumbus
15. getting what you don't deserve
16. ambushed city Josh ch 8
18. melody
19. needed to bear fruit 1:9-14
20. difficult for children 3:20
22. bought back
26. where Abraham came from
28. difficult for husbands 3:19
29. pronoun
31. pointers Matt ch 24
32. when you get there (abbrev.)
34. to grow in faith 2:6-7

Down

1. there is no Greek or ____ 3:11
2. difficult for wives 3:18
4. make the most of every 4:5
7. put these behind you 2:20-23
8. important for unity 3:11
9. religiosity 2:16-17
10. begins communication process
13. negative
15. good news
17. first sign of growth 1:6-8
21. "sinful nature"
23. expression of surprise
24. mother
25. weird
26. pull together
27. think
30. apocalyptic figure of Rev ch 20
33. equally