

REALITY CHECK **COLOSSIANS**

OVERVIEW: THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

Who wrote it? Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus (1v1)

When? In about 60AD while he was in prison in Rome (4v18).

Who were the recipients? Primarily the new Christian church in Colossae - an important city in what is now Turkey.

Why did he write? Paul had probably heard from Epaphras (who set up the church in Colossae) that they were facing pressure to move on from Christ. It seems that false teachers were influencing them with new human philosophies, impressive religious disciplines and talk of way-out spiritual experiences. The false teachers were saying that there was a 'fuller' form of Christianity to move on to.

In response Paul writes a letter that provides a **Reality Check** for these new Christian converts. The letter reaffirms the sole supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus Christ for a full and satisfying Christian life.

Key verse: Colossians 1:18 "And He is the head of the body, the church; he is the firstborn form among the dead, **so that in everything he might have the supremacy**"

Objective of this Bible Study Series: To provide a 'reality check' to remind us that authentic spiritual growth is centred on Christ alone, and to invite us to put him first in our lives so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Material adapted from 'Knowing God', by the www.SAEK.org, and 'Colossians' in the Read- Mark-Learn series. Used by permission

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STUDY 1

READ COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Focus on verse 1-2 **Paul's greetings**

Q1. How does Paul describe himself and Timothy and why? (v1)

Q2. In verse 2 Paul calls the Colossians 'holy and faithful brothers'. According to Paul what is the source of their holiness, faithfulness, and brotherly connection?

Focus on verse 3-8 **Paul reassures the Colossians that they are true Christians**

Q3. Why does Paul thank God? (v3-4)

Q4. What was the cause for their faith and love? (v5)

Q5. How did their hope come about? (v5)

Q6. Look at v5-6:

- i) How is the gospel described?
- ii) What does the gospel do?
- iii) What does the gospel show us about God?

Q7. How does Paul reassure the Colossians that they heard the true gospel?(v7-8)

Q8. In summary, v3-8, how did Paul reassure the Colossians that they are true Christians?

Think it through

- i) Do you ever doubt that you are a true Christian?
- ii) What evidence is there in your life that the gospel is bearing fruit and growing?
- iii) What can we learn about Christian service from Epaphras?

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STUDY 1

READ COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

Focus on verse 9-14

Paul reminds Colossians of a Christian's greatest need

Q9. In verse 9 Paul prays for the Colossians to be "filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding." What does that mean? Where does knowledge, spiritual wisdom and understanding come from?

Q10. If God grants his request, what will the result be? (v10)

Q11. What does a life 'worthy and pleasing' to the Lord' look like?(v10-12)

Q12. v12 says the Father has 'qualified' Christians to share in the inheritance of His kingdom, how has He qualified them? (v13)

Q13. In summary, why does Paul remind the Colossians of the Christians greatest need (v9-14)?

Think it through

- i) In verses 9 and 10 Paul says that the point of knowing God's will is to enable us to live lives worthy of the Lord. How does your understanding of knowing God's will differ from Paul's?
- ii) How does your life measure up to Paul's description of a life worthy and pleasing to the Lord?
- iii) When we compare ourselves to the list Paul gives us of a life worthy of the Lord (v10-11) we see our sin. And yet if you are a Christian Paul says that you have been qualified for heaven because of the work of Christ (verses 12-13). How does that truth help you 'endure' with 'patience' and 'joyful thanksgiving'?
- iv) When do you lose sight of the work of Christ as the motive for holiness?
- v) In what way are you under pressure to go beyond what Jesus has done for you on the cross?

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STUDY 2

READ COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Focus on verses 15-20

Christ is supreme over all things

Q1. List the various ways Jesus is described in verses 15-20. Which of these are most difficult to understand and why?

Q2. V15 makes it clear that Jesus is supreme over all creation, how does v16-17 confirm this?

Q3. V18 makes it clear that Jesus is supreme over God's new creation, how does v19-20 confirm this?

Think it through

- i) What does it tell us about Jesus that he was the one by whom all things were created?
- ii) How much would you say is the lordship of Christ over creation a feature of your relationship with him?
- iii) How would you respond if someone said: "I wish that God would reveal Himself to me"?

Focus on verses 21-23

Christ is sufficient to reconcile all things to God

Q4. What does v21 say the Colossians were like before they became Christians?

Q5. How did Jesus change what they were like? (v22)

Q6. How does God view those who trust in Christ? (v22)

Q7. What is the one condition to having this restored relationship with God? (v23)

Think it through

- i) How would you answer someone who said that people are fundamentally 'good at heart'? (Consider also Ephesians 2:1-3)
- ii) Is v22 true of you? How do you know?
- iii) Do you find it difficult to see yourself as holy in God's sight and free from accusation? Why? How can you overcome that?
- iii) In what way do you face pressure to not 'continue in faith'?

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STUDY 3

READ COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:5

Focus on verses 23b-29

Paul describes his apostolic ministry

Q1. Who does he serve in his ministry and who assigned him to it? (v23b-25)

Q2. What is day-to-day life like in his ministry? (v24,29,2:1)

Q3. What was he assigned to do in his ministry? (v25)

Q4. In v26-27 Paul describes this 'word of God' as a mystery.

What is the definition of a mystery according to verse 26?

I. What is this 'mystery of God' focussed upon? (2v2)

II. What are the 'riches of this mystery'? (v27)

III. Why is it important for the Colossians to know that Christ indwells them?

Q5. What does Paul do in order to present the 'word of God' in its fullness? (v28)

Q6. What is the ultimate aim of Paul's ministry? (v28-29a)

Q7. How is he able to persevere despite all the hardships? (v29b)

Think it through

- i) How important is faithful preaching in your Christian life? What value does Paul place on it?
- ii) Paul's aim was to present everyone perfect in Christ, in what ways would having this aim:
 - a. shape your own life?
 - b. affect the way you relate to others?

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STUDY 3

COLOSSIANS 1:24-2:5

Focus on verses 2:1-5

Paul explains the significance of his ministry

Q8. Why does Paul want the Colossians to know about his ministry labours? (v1-2)

Q9. Why does he want them to know Christ better? (v3-4)

Q10. What does Paul long to see in them? (v5)

Think it through

- i) In verses 2 and 3 Paul tells us that being encouraged in heart and united in love are essential if we are to enjoy the full riches of complete understanding, which is essential if we are to know the mystery of God (Christ) better. Why do you think unity in love and encouragement in heart is so important to knowing Jesus better?
- ii) What can you do to be encouraging of heart and promote unity in love?
- iii) In verse 4 Paul is anxious that no-one be deceived. Are there any areas where you are being led astray by fine sounding arguments? How would you know? How would you help someone else who was?
- iv) How do you measure the success of 'Christian work' and how does it differ from Paul's measurement of success?

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STUDY 4

READ COLOSSIANS 2:6-15

Focus on verses 6-7

Paul encourages them to continue in Christ

Q1. How does one 'receive Christ Jesus as Lord'?

Q2. How were the Colossians to continue their Christian lives (v6)? What does that mean?

Q3. What images are used in v7 to explain the Christian's relationship with Christ, and how do they help us to understand how to continue in Him? (v7)

Think it through

- i) Have you received Christ Jesus as Lord? When, how, how do you know?
- ii) Why is it wrong to claim to have Christ as saviour but not as Lord? (see also Acts 2:136, Romans 14:9, 2Cor.4:5, 1Peter 3:15) What dangers might there be in such a view?
- iii) Are you continuing with Christ Jesus as Lord?
- iv) What things compete with Jesus for lordship in your life? What things are tempting you to 'move on' from Jesus?

Focus on verses 8-15

Paul warns them not to be taken captive by worldly philosophies

Q4. In verse 8 Paul says the false teachers ministry is spiritually hollow, obsessed without outward traditions, and involved with occult power ('the basic principles of this world' is a reference to spiritual powers). In (v9-15) Paul gives the Colossians 3 reasons why they shouldn't allow the false teachers to take them captive. Compare Paul's description of the Christian life in verses 9-15 with the characteristics of the false teachers in verse 8 and answer the following questions.

- i) In (v9-10) what have the Colossians received because of Christ? Why would following the false teachers be foolish?
- ii) In (v11-12) what have the Colossians received because of Christ? How has this come about? And why would following the false teachers be foolish here?
- iii) In (v13-15) what have they received because of Christ? How has this come about? And why would following the false teachers be foolish?

Think it through

- i) Do you find it difficult to accept Paul's description of who you are in Christ? If so why?
- ii) Which worldly philosophies are trying to take you captive?
- iii) Are there any subtle rules or regulations in your life that threaten to become an addition to the gospel?
- iv) Why is it easier to turn to rules, traditions, new teachings, or worldly philosophy than to the gospel to satisfy our need for spiritual authenticity, life, and growth?

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STUDY 5

READ COLOSSIANS 2:16-23

Focus on verses 16-19

Paul warns them against being deceived by man made religion

- Q1.** What were the false teachers saying to the Colossians? (v16,18)
- Q2.** Why shouldn't they allow the false teachers to judge them? (v17)
- Q3.** Despite their appearances, what is the truth about these new teachers?(v18-19)
- Q4.** What would result for the Colossians if they had their way? (v18)
- Q5.** How is it possible for the false teachers to 'disqualify' the Colossians for the 'prize'? (v19)
- Q6.** What is Paul's recipe for Christian growth? (v19) (compare Ephesians 4: 14-16)

Think it through

- i) Why is it important to know the difference between false teaching and gospel truth?
- ii) What things are you doing, or trying to abstain from, as a means of earning God's favour?
- iii) Do you judge other Christians by man made rules?
- iv) What sort of false teaching might Christians today be tempted to follow?

Focus on verses 20-23

Paul warns them against submitting to man made rules

- Q6:** Why is submitting to man made rules a foolish thing according to v20-21?
- Q7:** Why do people find these man made rules so attractive? (v23)
- Q8:** What is the problem with these kinds of rules? (v23)

Think it through

- i) What do you think you need to do/think/experience to be a Christian?
- ii) If rules have "no value in restraining sensual indulgence" (v23) what does have power to make us godly?
- iii) Why is legalism so dangerous for Christians?
- iv) How do you measure spirituality and Christian maturity? How do you know if you or anyone else is really godly?

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STUDY 6

READ COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

Focus on verses 1-4

Paul reminds them of their spiritual reality

Q1. How does Paul describe the new-found status of those who have received Christ Jesus as Lord? (v1-4)

Q2. What is the source of the Christian's life? (v3-4)

Q3. Seeing that their life is now hidden with Christ in God, how should the Colossians live? (v1-2)

Q4. Why would living life like this be worthwhile to them? (v4)

Think it through

- i) Have you been raised with Christ?
- ii) How is Paul's prescription for holiness here different from the valueless rule-centred approach of 2:23?
- iii) What earthly things have taken your mind captive?
- iv) Does Christ's second coming shape your life? If so, how? If not, why not?

Focus on verses 5-17

Paul describes what true spirituality looks like

Q5. v9b-10 is a good summary of this section, how does it describe the life of a Christian?

Q6. What are the Colossians told to take off/put to death? (v5-11)

Q7. Why should they get rid of these earthly things? (v5-11)

Q8. What are the Colossians told to put on/clothe themselves with? (v12-17)

Q9. Why should they clothe themselves with these things? (v12-17)

Q10. Why does Paul emphasise thankfulness 3 times in (v15-17)?

Q11. How does v17 sum up Paul's understanding of what true spirituality is?

Think it through

- i) Which of the earthly things mentioned in (v5-11) do you need to put to death?
- ii) Which of the attributes mentioned in (v12-16) do you need to clothe yourself with?
- iii) Is thanksgiving something that marks your life as a Christian?
- iv) How does Paul's understanding of true spirituality differ from yours?

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STUDY 7

READ COLOSSIANS 3:18-4:18

Focus on verses 3:18-4:1

Paul instructs them how to act towards their household

Q1: What are the commands given to the Christians in the regards to his household? (v18-4v1)

Q2: What reasons does Paul give for following this teaching? (v18-4v1)

Q3: What is the connection between 3v17 and 3v18-4v1?

Think it through

- i) How does Paul's instruction regarding the household differ from the way that society views these relationships?
- ii) As Christians, why can't we allow relationships within the family to remain broken?
- iii) How does Paul's teaching on slaves/masters challenge your attitude regarding your work and your relationship with colleagues?

Q4: This section has an evangelistic focus. How does evangelism fit under the heading: "Set your hearts and minds on things above"? (3v1-2)

Q5: What should we be watchful and thankful for? (Look back at 3v1-4)

Q6: What does Paul want the Colossians to pray for (v3-4)? Put it in your own words.

Q7: Why is it important for the Colossians to be wise in the way they act and speak to outsiders? (v5-6)

Think it through

- i) How might this passage affect the content of your prayers?
- ii) What steps do you take to render your conversations more gracious and 'salty'?
- iii) Do you know how to explain the gospel to someone?

Focus on verses 4:7-18

Paul gives his final greetings

Q8: What does Paul say about the following people?

Tychicus:	
Omnesimus:	
Epaphras:	

Q9: How do these descriptions fit into the theme of the letter?

Q10: Why does Paul give the instruction in v17?

