Conversations
Bible Study Resource

COLOSSIANS
THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

www.scottishbiblesociety.org
The book of Colossians was written by Paul and Timothy (1:1, 4:18) to Christians in Colossae (1:2) and was intended to be shared with their neighbouring church in Laodicea (2:1; 4:13,15-16). Paul makes clear his concern and efforts for these two churches, even though he does not know them personally (2:1). These churches were founded by Epaphras (1:7-8; 4:12), who was in prison with Paul (1:7; 4:12; Philemon 1:23). It appears that Epaphras has been speaking to Paul about these churches, and in the discussion it becomes clear that they are struggling with some of the same issues Paul has encountered elsewhere. Of particular concern to Paul are those false teachers who suggest that there is some hidden knowledge or “mystery” that must be discovered in addition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul launches a robust defence of the Gospel, and forcefully argues that God has revealed everything in Jesus Christ, and that Christ and Christ alone is the heart of the gospel message. Refuting the false teaching that we need Jesus “plus something else” is a recurring theme in many of Paul’s letters. Colossians contains incredible truths about who Jesus is and what God has done for us through Christ. Like most of Paul’s letters, Colossians has a great list of folk who supported and worked alongside Paul in gospel ministry and the letter has much to say about how we conduct our relationships inside and outside of the church.

It takes less than ten minutes to read the whole of Colossians. If possible, reading the whole letter again before each study would allow the text to really sink in.

There are seven individual studies in this series. Together, they cover the entire text of the book:

2. Colossians 1:15-23  Jesus, the Image of the Invisible God
3. Colossians 1:24-2:5  Jesus, the Mystery of God revealed
4. Colossians 2:6-23  Depending on Christ alone
5. Colossians 3:1-17  Living and dying with Christ
6. Colossians 3:18-4:1  Living for Jesus in our relationships
7. Colossians 4:2-18  Living as a Christian community
Each of the individual studies uses the Conversations style.

Conversations is a method of Bible study developed by the Scottish Bible Society and the Contextual Bible Study Group. Conversations seeks to encourage people to actively engage with the Bible and apply it to life. The questions are designed to stimulate conversation within groups where people may have varying backgrounds and knowledge of the Bible.

You will notice a similar pattern of questions used throughout the studies. All of the questions are ‘open’ questions which don’t presume an answer but instead invite people to reflect personally on the text. The first question is always, “What jumps off the page at you?” – an opportunity for people to begin to share their thoughts on a passage. Then there are ‘listing’ questions that encourage a closer reading of the text, ‘theological’ questions that seek to understand the meaning, and finally ‘contextual’ questions that begin to apply the text to life. We hope you find this a refreshing and stimulating way to study the Bible.

More Bible study resources that utilise the Conversations method can be found on the Scottish Bible Society website: www.scottishbiblesociety.org

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Colossians 1:1-14

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
2 To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ:
   Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for
   you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for
   all God’s people – the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in
   heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel
   that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout
   the whole world – just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and
   truly understood God’s grace. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant,
   who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in
   the Spirit.

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for
   you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the
   wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy
   of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in
   the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious
   might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks
   to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in
   the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and
   brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the
   forgiveness of sins.

1. What jumps off the page at you?
2. List the things that Paul has heard about the Colossians (v1-8), and the
   things that Paul and his companions are praying for the Colossians (v9-12).
3. List the things Paul says God and the gospel is achieving in the life of
   the Colossians.
4. Paul says the Colossians heard and learned “the true message of the gospel”,
   from Epaphras (1:5, 7). Who taught us the gospel? How does knowing those
   from whom we learned the gospel help us have confidence in the gospel?
5. Of all the things Paul and his companions prayed for the Colossian church, what do
   you think we need most and why?
Colossians 1:15-23

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation – 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

1. What jumps off the page at you?
2. List the things this passage tell us about Christ and the things it tell us about humanity.
3. Why does reconciliation (v20, 22) and making peace with humanity (v20) matter to God and why should it matter to us?
4. Paul argues that Christ is "supreme". That is, Christ is superior and has the highest authority in all things. What things do we give first place in our lives ahead of Jesus and what effect does that have on our lives?
5. In what ways are we tempted to “move from the hope held out in the gospel” (v23) and what do we find hardest about the “gospel that you [have] heard” (v23)?
Colossians 1:24-2:5

24 Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. 25 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness – 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord’s people. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. 29 To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.

2 I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. 5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

QUESTIONS

1. What jumps off the page at you?

2. List the words and phrases in this passage that speak of Paul’s suffering and effort for the gospel.

3. What do you think Paul means by the “mystery of God” (1:26, 27; 2:2) and how is this mystery discovered?

4. How would our faith be affected if it was suggested that the gospel wasn’t the full message of God (1:25; 2:2) and that there was some other “mystery” or knowledge we needed to discover for ourselves?

5. How do we remain firm in our faith in Christ (1:23; 2:5) when the gospel we believe is challenged by those outside and inside the Christian faith?
Colossians 2:6-23

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

13 When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

20 Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.
1. What jumps off the page at you?

2. List the words and phrases in the passage that speak of what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.

3. List the words and phrases in the passage that speak of depending upon “human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world” rather than depending on Christ (2:8,20).

4. What is at risk if we depend upon what we can achieve rather than on what God has done for us through Jesus Christ?

5. What areas of our lives need to change as a result of this passage: where do we think we are depending upon other things rather than fully depending on Jesus?
Colossians 3:1-17

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 10 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

11 Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 12 Bear with each other, and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 13 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

14 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 15 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 16 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

1. What jumps off the page at you?
2. List the things that Paul says we must “put to death” (v5) and “rid [ourselves] of” (v8) and the things that Paul says we must “clothe” ourselves with (v12). List the reasons Paul gives that we must do these things.
3. Why do you think Paul says we need to set our hearts and minds on things above (v1, 2)?
4. What difference would it make to our lives and our churches if we did the things that Paul commands in this passage?
5. What needs to change in our lives as a result of what God has said to us through this passage?
**Colossians 3:18-4:1**

18 Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.
19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.

21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favouritism.

4 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

**QUESTIONS**

1. What jumps off the page at you?
2. List the instructions that Paul gives to different people in the passage.
3. How is it possible to do things for others as “working for the Lord”? (v17, 23)
4. How would our relationships with God and with others be transformed if they were marked by submission (v18), love (v19), obedience (v20, 21), a desire to encourage rather than embitter (v21), and justice (3:25, 4:1)?
5. What needs to change in our relationships so that we live as those serving the Lord Christ? (v24)
Colossians 4:2-18

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

7 Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord. 8 I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. 9 He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

10 My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) 11 Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews among my fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. 13 I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

16 After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.

17 Tell Archippus: ‘See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.’

18 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.
1. What jumps off the page at you?

2. List the things Paul asks prayer for in v3-4 and the instructions he gives in v5-6.

3. What do you think is Paul's main concern in his prayer requests and instructions in v3-6?

4. List the descriptions Paul gives of the various people he mentions in v7-15. Who do you know who could be described in a similar way?

5. If the prayer of Epaphras (v12b) was prayed for you and your church, which areas do you think would give Paul and Epaphras most encouragement, and which areas would encourage Paul and Epaphras to pray more fervently for you!
The word of God is full of living power.
HEBREWS 4:12 (NLT)

7 PSALMS
CONVERSATIONS STUDY
Psalms are the outpouring of praise and worship but also include pain, suffering and often cries to God for release. Just pick one of these Psalms that will suit your group and the circumstances you find yourself or your group in.

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