

## Week One - Introduction to Colossians

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Preview

The Apostle Paul wrote this New Testament letter to encourage the followers of Jesus Christ who lived in Colosse, a small town in the Roman Province of Asia (located in the area of modern Turkey). The Christians in Colosse and the surrounding towns needed to grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding. Those who received Paul's letter had learned the basics about Jesus Christ. But Paul wanted these young Christians to grow to spiritual maturity. Those who received Paul's letter needed protection from popular false teaching. This Bible book is filled with God's truth about Jesus Christ, and how you can grow spiritually.



#### Background

This letter to the Colossians has a special meaning for international scholars who first learn about Christ while away from home nations.

Sometime in the early first century, a man named Epaphras traveled from his home in Colosse. He went to the major city of Ephesus. We are not sure why he traveled to the city of Ephesus. Epaphras may have gone for business, or education, or to enjoy a good time in the biggest city in the area. But God had plans that were bigger than Epaphras' own plans. While Epaphras was in Ephesus, his life was changed by the message of Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Paul never traveled to the small towns where Epaphras grew up. Paul had a wise plan. Paul's goal was to first take the message of Jesus Christ to the major cities of the Roman empire. After the message of Christ was believed in major cities, the Christian message would spread to smaller towns and provinces (as people traveled a big network of Roman highways). During two years at Ephesus (probably AD 52-55), Paul rented an academic lecture hall and taught the message of Christ to many people. As a result, the message of Christ spread. We read in Acts 19:10: "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."

Epaphras may have first heard the good news about Christ in that lecture hall. After Epaphras decided to follow Christ, he wanted his friends and family in his home town to also trust and follow Jesus Christ. So, Epaphras returned to the area around his home to spread the Christian message. As a result, three new Christian churches were established in Epaphras' home province.

Some time later (probably AD 60-61), the Apostle Paul was in prison at Rome because of his faith in Jesus Christ. Epaphras comes to visit Paul in prison. Paul had never gone to Colosse, or visited the churches Epaphras started. Paul was glad that the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ was spreading. Paul prays for these Christians, even though he has not met them personally. But Epaphras and Paul are worried about false teaching that is spreading. So Paul writes this letter - to teach Epaphras' friends more about Jesus Christ.

**Notes:**

**Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians**

**From the Bible: Colossians 1:1-6**



Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.

**English -  
New International Version**

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: 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, 4 because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints - 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

**New Chinese Version**

1 奉 神旨意作基督耶稣使徒的保罗, 和提摩太弟兄, 2 写信给在歌罗西的圣徒, 和在基督里忠心的弟兄。愿恩惠平安从我们的父 神临到你们。  
3 我们为你们祈祷的时候, 常常感谢 神我们主耶稣基督的父, 4 因为听见你们在基督耶稣里的信心, 和对众圣徒的爱心。5 这都是由于那给你们存在天上的盼望, 这盼望是你们从前在福音真理的道上听过的。6 这福音传到你们那里, 也传到全世界; 你们听了福音, 因着真理确实认识了神的恩典之后, 这福音就在你们中间不断地结果和增长, 在全世界也是一样。

**Spanish**

1 Pablo, apóstol de Jesucristo por la voluntad de Dios, y el hermano Timoteo, 2 A los santos y hermanos fieles en Cristo que están en Colosas: Gracia y paz á vosotros de Dios Padre nuestro, y del Señor Jesucristo.  
3 Damos gracias al Dios y Padre del Señor nuestro Jesucristo, siempre orando por vosotros: 4 Habiendo oído vuestra fe en Cristo Jesús, y el amor que tenéis á todos los santos, 5 A causa de la esperanza que os está guardada en los cielos, de la cual habéis oído ya por la palabra verdadera del evangelio: 6 El cual ha llegado hasta vosotros, como por todo el mundo; y fructifica y crece, como también en vosotros, desde el día que oísteis y conocisteis la gracia de Dios en verdad ...

**Discuss**

1. verse 1: Who writes the letter? How are they described?
2. verse 2: Who receives this letter? How are they described?
3. verse 3: What is Paul's attitude about the Colossians?
4. verse 4: What has Paul heard about?
5. verse 5: What produces faith and love?
6. verses 5-6: What "has come" to the Colossians?
7. verse 6: What is happening "all over the world"?
8. verse 6: What do you need to hear and understand?

## Week Two - Balanced Spiritual Growth

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Review

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to encourage Christians living in Colosse, in the Roman Province of Asia (today, in modern Turkey).

These Colossian Christians needed to mature in spiritual wisdom. They also needed protection from false teaching. Paul writes to instruct them.



#### Growing in Love and Knowledge

As we learned last week, the Apostle Paul never visited Colosse.

The gospel was brought to Colosse by his friend, named Epaphras. The gospel (or “good news”) of Jesus Christ is like a seed. When God opens a person’s heart, the gospel is planted in good soil. When the gospel seed receives God’s light (truth) and water (the Holy Spirit) growth will happen!

Sadly, some Christians are not balanced. A seed does not grow into a plant without both light and water. You can focus on your experience of God’s love but neglect learning more about God’s truth. You may spend more time in prayer than learning your Bible. The result will be a Christian who constantly seeks spiritual experiences, but who is not wise or discerning.

But the opposite can also happen. You can focus all your efforts on learning about God’s truth. You constantly go to Bible studies and classes. The result will be a Christian who is too academic about faith. You can even become proud of all that you know about God and Jesus Christ. As the Apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 8:1: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

There is no such person as a perfectly balanced Christian. For new believers, there is great joy and excitement about a new relationship with Jesus Christ. But to grow spiritually mature, you must learn how to apply God’s Word to your life. Sometimes, there are times when Jesus seems to be more in your head than in your heart. At those times, you need spiritual renewal. The Bible reminds us that only Jesus Christ has lived a perfect human life on earth. As we read in Luke 2:52: “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” Only Jesus was perfectly balanced. As John 1:14 observes: “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

If you live by *truth without grace*, you will become cold, hard, and rule-based in your spiritual life. Your Christian life will become all “knowing and doing.” But, if you live by *grace without truth*, you will become emotional, soft, and sentimental. You will not care about your beliefs, as long as you feel good. When your faith is based on feelings, not facts, you may lack wisdom.

As we continue our study in Colossians 1, notice the *grace-and-truth balance* that the Apostle Paul teaches about growing a full, fruitful, and maturing life in Jesus Christ. In these verses, what are the most important reminders for you?

Notes:

**Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians**

**From the Bible: Colossians 1:6-10**



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**English -  
New International Version**

6 All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. 7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, 8 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 and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God ...

**New Chinese Version**

6 这福音传到你们那里，也传到全世界；你们听了福音，因着真理确实认识了神的恩典之后，这福音就在你们中间不断地结果和增长，在全世界也是一样。 7 这福音也就是你们从我们亲爱的、一同作仆人的以巴弗那里学到的。他为了你们作了基督忠心的仆役， 8 也把你们在圣灵里的爱心告诉了我们。 保罗的祈祷

9 因此，我们从听见的那日起，就不停地为你们祷告祈求，愿你们借着一切属灵的智慧 and 悟性，可以充分明白神的旨意， 10 使你们行事为人对得起主，凡事蒙他喜悦；在一切善事上多结果子，更加认识神；

**Spanish**

6 que ha llegado hasta vosotros, así como a todo el mundo, y lleva fruto y crece también en vosotros, desde el día que oísteis y conocisteis la gracia de Dios en verdad. 7 Así lo aprendisteis de Epafras, nuestro consiervo amado, que es un fiel ministro de Cristo para vosotros, 8 quien también nos ha declarado vuestro amor en el Espíritu.

9 Por lo cual también nosotros, desde el día que lo oímos, no cesamos de orar por vosotros y de pedir que seáis llenos del conocimiento de su voluntad en toda sabiduría e inteligencia espiritual.

10 Así podréis andar como es digno del Señor, agradándolo en todo, llevando fruto en toda buena obra y creciendo en el conocimiento de Dios.

**Discuss**

1. verse 6: Where does the gospel "seed" grow?
2. verse 6: When did the gospel start to grow in the Colossians' lives?
3. verse 7: How did the Colossians learn the gospel?
4. verse 8: What fruit resulted when they understood the gospel?
5. verse 9: Who is Paul praying for? How often does Paul pray?
6. verse 9: What specific things does Paul pray for in their lives?
7. verse 10: What results from spiritual wisdom and understanding?
8. What are the most important things that you should pray for?

## Week Three - Understand what Jesus Christ did for you

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Review

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Christians in Colosse and other towns in the Roman Province of Asia. Paul wanted to help Christians grow in spiritual knowledge and wisdom. Paul prays these Christians will understand who Jesus is, and what Jesus has done for them.



#### Praying → Learning → Living

As we begin our Bible discussion today, we review some verses from last week. We are reminded how Paul prayed regularly and continually for these Christians. The gospel, “the good news” of Christ, had been planted in their hearts. Like a seed in good soil, the gospel will produce fruit in a Christian’s life. Paul did not stop praying for the gospel seed to be watered, cultivated, nourished, and fed - so that these Christians will grow more fruitful.

The ultimate goal is for Christians to glorify, honor, and enjoy God in their lives. But this will only happen when Christians think about and appreciate all that Jesus Christ did for them and continues to do in them. The road to growth is:

1. Accept Christ by faith → 2. Understand Christ → 3. Honor Christ in your life.

Today’s Bible passage contains many important Bible words and concepts:

- You must understand what Christ did for you, in history, and what Christ is doing in you, today. There is a difference between salvation accomplished and applied. What Jesus has accomplished gives you certain legal benefits. You receive a new legal standing with God. What Jesus continues to do in you, by the Holy Spirit, gives life-changing benefits: strength, hope, and joy.
- Redemption - the Redeemer’s work. There are two key ideas: kinship and cost. Your Redeemer must be someone who is your family member. Jesus Christ is God’s eternal Son. But as Hebrews 2:11 says, Jesus Christ was “not ashamed to call us brothers (and sisters).” Jesus remitted, paid-in-full, and forgave all of your moral debts, failures, and obligations.
- Which of the following describe legal benefits (change your legal status with God)? Which are life-changing (change your heart and daily life)?
  - \* Inheritance
  - \* Endurance
  - \* Joy
  - \* Redemption
  - \* Spiritual wisdom
  - \* Forgiveness

As we continue our study in Colossians 1, ask the LORD to give you a better understanding, and a greater appreciation, for everything that Jesus Christ has done for you in history, and all that Jesus Christ is doing in your life today!

Notes:

Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

From the Bible: Colossians 1:9-14



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English -

New International Version

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. 10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom (Christ) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

New Chinese Version

9 因此，我们从听见的那天起，就不停地为你们祷告祈求，愿你们借着一切属灵的智慧 and 悟性，可以充分明白神的旨意， 10 使你们行事为人对得起主，凡事蒙他喜悦；在一切善事上多结果子，更加认识 神； 11 依照他荣耀的大能得着一切能力，带着喜乐的心，凡事忍耐宽容； 12 并且感谢父，他使你们有资格分享圣徒在光明中的基业。 13 他救我们脱离了黑暗的权势，把我们迁入他爱子的国里。 14 我们在爱子里蒙了救赎，罪得赦免。

Spanish

9 Por lo cual también nosotros, desde el día que lo oímos, no cesamos de orar por vosotros y de pedir que seáis llenos del conocimiento de su voluntad en toda sabiduría e inteligencia espiritual. 10 Así podréis andar como es digno del Señor, agradándolo en todo, llevando fruto en toda buena obra y creciendo en el conocimiento de Dios. 11 Fortalecidos con todo poder, conforme a la potencia de su gloria, obtendréis fortaleza y paciencia, 12 y, con gozo, daréis gracias al Padre que nos hizo aptos para participar de la herencia de los santos en luz. 13 Él nos ha librado del poder de las tinieblas y nos ha trasladado al reino de su amado Hijo, 14 en quien tenemos redención[h] por su sangre, el perdón de pecados.

Discuss

- 1. verse 9: Review: What does Paul pray for these Christians to have?
2. verse 10: Review: For what goal does Paul pray for these things?
3. verse 11: What is the source for spiritual power and strength? How do these benefits from God help you in your everyday life?
4. verse 12: How is God described? For what should we thank God?
5. verse 12: What "qualifies" you to have a share in God's inheritance?
6. verse 13: From what (bad) and to what (good) did God rescue us?
7. verse 14: What benefits are given to believers in Jesus Christ?

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



### Review

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to Christians in Colosse and towns in the Roman Province of Asia. The Christians in this region had only received basic spiritual teaching. So, these young Christians were open to attack from false teachers, especially concerning Jesus Christ.



### Errors about the Person of Christ

Paul does not begin by criticizing local false teachers. Instead, he gives good teaching about who Jesus is, and what Jesus did for us. False teachers always twist these Bible doctrines: what the Bible teaches about the Trinity (God in three Persons), what the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ (God and man in one Person), and what the Bible teaches about how to be saved. All cults and false religions will teach errors on these topics.

Here are some errors about Jesus Christ that are both ancient and modern:

- **Arianism.** Named for Arius of Alexandria, Egypt. Taught that Christ was not completely God. Claimed that Christ was God's highest creature, or the first-created angel. Today, **Jehovah's Witnesses** teach the same thing.
- **Apollinarianism.** Named for Apollinarius of Laodicea (died c. 390 AD). Taught that humans are composed of three parts: the body-soul-spirit. God's eternal Word took the place of the human spirit in Jesus.
- **Cerinthianism.** Named for Cerinthius (late 1st - early 2nd century AD). Taught that the "Christ-Spirit" came down on Jesus at his baptism, but left Jesus before he was crucified. This error is corrected by the letter of 1 John.
- **Nestorianism.** Named for Nestorius. Taught that Jesus was truly God and truly human. But these were not unified in one Person. The two natures = two persons. The Persian Christians who first reached China (Xi'an) may have been influenced by this teaching.
- **Eutychianism.** Named for Eutychus, 5th century Constantinople. Taught that Jesus' human nature was absorbed into his divine nature, or the two natures were "fused" into one. Jesus is not two natures, not like us or God.
- **Monophysites** (one nature) or **Monothelites** (one will). Christ did not have two natures, or Jesus only had one will - not a human will that did God's will.
- **Adoptionism.** Jesus Christ had God's eternal nature, but his human nature was "adopted" by God the Father as his Son on earth.

In the 4th - 6th centuries AD, the church met to write summaries of the truth of the Bible's teaching. These are called **creeds** (for example, Apostles, Nicene). The best protection from harmful teaching is healthy, positive teaching! In the Bible passage today, the Apostle Paul gives a complete summary about who Jesus is, and what Jesus has done. Compare John 1:1-14, Hebrews 1:2-4.

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

firstborn: in the original Greek New Testament, this word is πρωτότοκος - [prototokos] In Bible times, the firstborn had privileges and responsibilities that gave more prestige and status. A firstborn son received twice the amount of a family's inheritance as other offspring. This verse means that Christ existed before creation, is superior to the creation, and is the Heir of all God's creation.



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English - New International Version	New Chinese Version	Spanish
<p>15 He is the image of the invisible God, the <u>firstborn</u> over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by 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.</p>	<p>15 这爱子是那看不见的 神的形象，是首先的，在一切被造的之上。 16 因为天上地上的万有：看得见的和看不见的，无论是坐王位的，或是作主的，或是执政的，或是掌权的，都是本着他造的；万有都是借着祂，又是为着祂而造的。 17 祂在万有之先；万有也一同靠着祂而存在。 18 祂是身体的头，这身体就是教会。祂是元始，是死人中首先复生的，好让祂在凡事上居首位； 19 因为 神乐意使所有的丰盛都住在爱子里面， 20 并且借着祂在十字架上所流的血成就了和平，使万有，无论是地上天上的，都借着祂与 神和好了。</p>	<p>15 Cristo es la imagen del Dios invisible, el primogénito de toda creación, 16 porque en él fueron creadas todas las cosas, las que hay en los cielos y las que hayen la tierra, visibles e invisibles; sean tronos, sean dominios, sean principados, sean potestades; todo fue creado por medio de él para él. 17 Y él es antes que todas las cosas, y todas las cosas en él subsisten. 18 Él es también la cabeza del cuerpo que es la iglesia, y es el principio, el primogénito de entre los muertos, para que en todo tenga la preeminencia, 19 porque al Padre agradó que en él habitara toda la plenitud, 20 y por medio de él reconciliar consigo todas las cosas, así las que están en la tierra como las que están en los cielos, haciendo la paz mediante la sangre de su cruz.</p>

### Discuss

1. verse 15: Which of Jesus' natures is described? Does "firstborn" mean "first-created" (as Jehovah's Witnesses teach)?
2. verse 16: Which of Jesus' natures is described? What is his work?
3. verse 17: How does Jesus relate to God's creation?
4. verse 18: How does Jesus relate to the new creation, the church?
5. verse 19: What makes Jesus Christ a unique person?
6. verse 20: What work did Jesus Christ come to do for God - and us?

## Week Five - Good News! Jesus Christ Reconciles us to God

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians



#### Review

The Apostle Paul is writing to Christians in Colosse and nearby towns in the Roman Province of Asia. Because these Christians had received only basic spiritual teaching, they were open to false teaching, especially false teaching about Jesus Christ.



#### Confessing the Person and Work of Jesus Christ

The ancient Christian church prayerfully studied the Bible and wrote summaries of Bible teaching (doctrine) on the Person and the Work of Jesus Christ. These summaries are called "Creeds." The earliest creeds are called the ecumenical creeds, because they summarize the beliefs that are shared by all Christian churches - but not believed by cults or false religions.

Here are two early ecumenical creeds. Notice that these statements try to summarize what the Bible teaches, in precise terms that are clear to those both inside and outside the churches. Creeds have often been memorized as a teaching tool for new or young Christians.

- **Apostles Creed** (date unknown). God = one God in three Persons (Trinity)  
I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.  
He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary.  
He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.  
He descended into hell. On the third day he rose again.  
He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.
- **Creed of Chalcedon** (AD 451) Jesus Christ = one Person with two natures.  
We, then, following the holy fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary \*... according to the manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly (without confusion), unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the creed of the holy fathers has handed down to us.

#### Notes:

Creeds: from the Latin word "credo" for "I believe." So, creeds summarize Christian beliefs, based on the Bible.

Ecumenical: having worldwide scope or application. Related to the world-wide or universal ("catholic") Christian church.

\* At this place, the original Creed inserts the words *the mother of God* - which misinterprets Luke 1:43, where Mary's cousin Elizabeth asks, "Why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" This is a good example of how creeds do not have the authority of God's Word, the Bible. How have the words *mother of God* been misused over the centuries?

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

From last week:  
firstborn: in the original Greek New Testament, this word is πρωτότοκος - [prototokos]  
 In Bible times, the firstborn had privileges and responsibilities that gave more prestige and status. A firstborn son received twice the amount of a family's inheritance as other offspring. This verse means that Christ existed before creation, is superior to the creation, and is the Heir of all God's creation.

alienated: to be a stranger, an alien, or a foreigner to citizenship in God's kingdom. To have no legal relationship or legal standing with God.

reconciled: when hostility is removed and a previously broken relationship is restored to true friendship.

without blemish: no imperfection, spotless. (with no shame)

free from accusation: without blame, blameless. (with no guilt).

### From the Bible: Colossians 1:21-23

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#### English - New International Version

21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he [God] 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, not moved 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.

#### New Chinese Version

21 虽然你们从前也是和 神隔绝，心思上与他为敌，行为邪恶， 22 但现今 神在爱子的肉身上，借着他的死，使你们与 神和好了，为了要把你们这些圣洁、无瑕疵、无可指摘的人，呈献在他面前。 23 只是你们要常存信心，根基稳固，不受动摇偏离福音的盼望。这福音你们听过了，也传给了天下万民；我保罗也作了这福音的仆役。

#### Spanish

21 También a vosotros, que erais en otro tiempo extraños y enemigos por vuestros pensamientos y por vuestras malas obras, ahora os ha reconciliado 22 en su cuerpo de carne, por medio de la muerte, para presentaros santos y sin mancha e irreprochables delante de él. 23 Pero es necesario que permanezcáis fundados y firmes en la fe, sin moveros de la esperanza del evangelio que habéis oído, el cual se predica en toda la creación que está debajo del cielo y del cual yo, Pablo, fui hecho ministro.

### Discuss

1. verse 21: How does this describe our previous ("once you were") relationship to God?
2. verse 21: Notice this verse never uses the word "sin." What words are used to describe our prior broken relationship with God?
3. verse 21: Based on this verse, do you think that sin is a bad attitude or bad actions?
4. verse 22: What did God do to solve our broken relationship?
5. verse 22: Why did God's Son, Jesus Christ, become a man?
6. verse 22: What words describe the new and restored relationship with God that Jesus Christ offers to us?
7. verse 23: What is required for you to have a holy and blameless relationship with God?
8. verse 23: What is the relationship between the gospel (the good news of Christ) and your life? ... and the world? ... and Paul's life?

## Week Six - Labors with Love - Struggles with Joy

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians



#### Review

The Apostle Paul is writing to Christians in Colosse and nearby towns in the Roman Province of Asia. Paul wants these Christians to be correctly taught about Jesus Christ. Paul wants to do two things: protect them from dangerous false teaching, and help them grow to maturity.



#### Christ suffered for us. We may suffer with Him

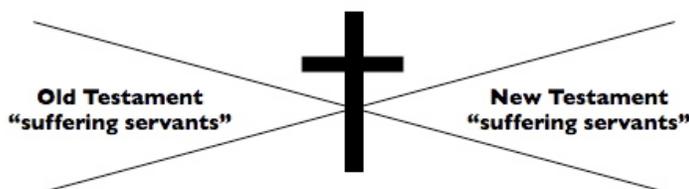
In the past two studies, we have discussed the **Person** and the **Work** of Christ. We have seen that the Bible teaches that Jesus is God's eternal Son who came to earth as a man. The church confesses that Christ is "**One Person - two natures**," the only Mediator between God and us.

We have also discussed the **Work** of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God the Father in heaven. As a man, Jesus Christ succeeded - but we always fail. Jesus always honored God the Father in all that he did. Jesus also reconciles us to God by his blood, shed on the cross for our sins. Jesus lived the life that we should live. Jesus died the death that we deserve. Because Jesus is **man**, his life and death can substitute for our disobedience and punishment. And, because Jesus is **God**, the value of Christ's work can save a great multitude from every nation on the earth, through all history.

The Bible clearly says that **Christ's work was complete and perfect**. Jesus "sacrificed for their sins **once for all** when he offered himself." (Hebrews 7:27). "He has appeared **once for all** at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself." (Hebrews 9:26) "Christ died for sins **once for all**, the righteous (man) for the unrighteous (men), to bring you to God." (1 Peter 3:18) But, in the verses we will discuss today, the Apostle Paul says, "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions..." (Colossians 1:24) Can anything be lacking in Christ's sufferings? There is no contradiction, if we understand what the Bible teaches about our being **united to Jesus Christ**.

We are united to, in relationship with Jesus Christ in two ways - a **legal** way, and an **experiential** way. Christ gives us the legal benefits of being **justified** and **adopted**. **Once for all**, our guilt was atoned or paid for by Jesus Christ. **Once for all**, we were legally adopted into God's family. But, in our lives, in daily experience, we continue to be **sanctified**. We must grow in holiness, and become more like Christ. But this is a process, only completed in heaven.

The Apostle Paul seeks to be Christ-like as he serves Christ's church, by his hard labors, his joyful struggles, and his sacrificial love for these Christians.



#### Notes:

Mediator: someone who goes-between, to reconcile or make peace between enemies.

lacking: missing, deficient, something has been left out.

atone: to pay for or cover someone's wrongs. Christ atoned for us when he offered his life as a sacrifice for our sinfulness.

For the truth that Christians must sometimes suffer before entering God's kingdom, see Acts 14:22.

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

servant: a slave or minister. The word “deacon” comes from this word.

Gentiles: the “nations” - who were not God’s Old Testament people, the Jews.

admonish: to challenge or warn someone.

perfect: no one can become perfect in this life. Paul means spiritually “mature.”

struggle: we get the word “agony” from this word. Paul “strives” or exercises himself to serve Christ’s Body, the church.



### From the Bible: Colossians 1:24-29

Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.

#### English -

##### New International Version

24 Now I rejoice in what was suffered 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 [the church’s] 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 saints. 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 We proclaim him, [Christ] admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

#### New Chinese Version

24 现在我为你们受苦，我觉得喜乐；为了基督的身体，就是为了教会，我要在自己的肉身上，补满基督苦难的不足。 25 我照着 神为你们而赐给我的管家职分，作了教会的仆役，要把 神的道，就是历代隐藏的奥秘，传得完备。现在这奥秘已经向他的众圣徒显明了。 27 神愿意使他们知道这奥秘在外族人中有多么荣耀的丰盛，这奥秘就是基督在你们里面成了荣耀的盼望。 28 我们传扬他，是用各样的智慧，劝戒各人，教导各人，为了要使各人在基督里得到完全。 29 我也为了这事劳苦，按着他用大能在我心中运行的动力，竭力奋斗。

#### Spanish

24 Ahora me gozo en lo que padezco por vosotros y cumplo en mi carne lo que falta de las aflicciones de Cristo por su cuerpo, que es la iglesia. 25 De ella fui hecho ministro, según la administración de Dios que me fue dada para con vosotros, para que anuncie cumplidamente la palabra de Dios, 26 el misterio que había estado oculto desde los siglos y edades, pero que ahora ha sido manifestado a sus santos. 27 A ellos, Dios quiso dar a conocer las riquezas de la gloria de este misterio entre los gentiles, que es Cristo en vosotros, esperanza de gloria. 28 Nosotros anunciamos a Cristo, amonestando a todo hombre y enseñando a todo hombre en toda sabiduría, a fin de presentar perfecto en Cristo Jesús a todo hombre. 29 Para esto también trabajo, luchando según la fuerza de él, la cual actúa poderosamente en mí.

### Discuss

1. verse 24: What brings Paul joy? How can suffering be joyful?
2. verse 25: How does Paul describe his relationship to the church?
3. verses 25-27: Describe the work and word that God gave to Paul.
4. verse 28: What or who is the message that Paul proclaims?
5. verse 29: How does Paul carry on his ministry of God’s Word?

## Week Seven - Growing Together in Love and Understanding

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians



#### Review

The Apostle Paul is writing to Christians who live in Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis - three towns in the Roman Province of Asia.

The Apostle struggles to help these churches be more spiritually mature. Churches are healthy when Christians learn to grow in both truth and love. But what is more important - to know Christ better, or love each other more?



#### Balanced Christian Community

In our Week Two study (p. 3), we discussed the relationship between love and understanding. We discussed how a “balanced” Christian life requires both truth and love. Knowledge without love is hard and arrogant. But love without understanding can be soft and too trusting - easily deceived.

Balance is not only needed for your personal spiritual growth in Jesus Christ. Churches must also be “balanced.” Churches should be filled with faith, love, and hope. Churches must be communities for **learning**, **loving**, and **servng**.

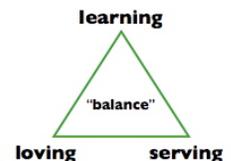
- Churches that only **learn** become more like **classrooms** than communities.
- Churches that only **serve** become more like **committees** than communities.
- Churches that only **love** become more like **clubs** than welcoming communities.

Paul reminds these Christians that they have never *met him face to face*. Paul was *absent in body* from them. But Paul thanked God when he heard about their *faith in Christ* and *love* for each other. Epaphras had brought the *gospel* to them ... the *word of truth*. They had started to grow in faith, love, and hope.

But these churches had problems. The churches were not balanced. So, Paul struggled and worked hard to restore these churches to health and stability. This is a summary of what Bible scholars think was happening:

- The pastor of these small churches was Epaphras. He probably became a Christian in Ephesus, and then went home to start three small churches.
- Epaphras was still a young Christian. He needed Paul’s leadership and teaching to help these new Christians learn and grow in Jesus Christ.
- The region around Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea was filled with some “mystery religions.” Today, we would call them “cults” or “false religions.” They taught that there are “many paths” to God - not only Jesus Christ.
- These “cults” claimed that young and immature Christians who want to be “full” or “complete” in knowing and experiencing God must leave churches. The cults claimed you could learn deeper “mysteries” in the secret societies.
- So, the new Christian churches at Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were in great danger. This is why Paul and Epaphras struggled because of them. The cults threatened both the **belief** and the **life** of the Christian churches.
- The mystery religions were attacking both **Christ** and Christian **community**. True Christian knowledge and loving Christian fellowship were both at risk. Christians could be deceived, and churches could be destroyed by the cults.

#### Notes:



## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

admonish: to challenge or warn someone. Like getting a "yellow card" in a soccer (football) game.

perfect: no one can become perfect in this life. Paul means spiritually "mature."

struggle: we get the word "agony" from this word. Paul "strives" or exercises himself to serve Christ's Body, the church.

Laodicea was a town that was near to Colosse. It seems that Epaphras started three churches after he became a Christian at Ephesus.

God's mystery: the cults taught that God's deeper things were learned in secret societies. But Paul says that all God's wisdom and knowledge are found in Jesus Christ - shared inside Christian communities (churches). Christ is God's "open secret" - for all to know and share.

### From the Bible: Colossians 1:28-2:5



Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.

#### English -

#### New International Version

28 We proclaim him, [Christ] admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

2:1 I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My purpose 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 orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

#### New Chinese Version

28 我们传扬他，是用各样的智慧，劝戒各人，教导各人，为了要使各人在基督里得到完全。 29 我也为了这事劳苦，按着他用大能在我心中运行的动力，竭力奋斗。

2:1 我愿意你们知道，我为你们和在老底嘉的人，以及所有没有跟我见过面的人，是怎样竭力奋斗， 2 为的是要他们的心得着勉励，在爱中彼此联系，可以得着凭悟性、因确信而来的一切丰盛，也可以充分认识神的奥秘，这奥秘就是基督； 3 一切智慧和知识的宝库都蕴藏在基督里面。 4 我说这些话，免得有人用花言巧语欺骗你们。 5 我虽然不在你们那里，心却与你们同在。我看见你们循规蹈矩，并且对基督有坚定的信心，就欢喜了。

#### Spanish

28 Nosotros anunciamos a Cristo, amonestando a todo hombre y enseñando a todo hombre en toda sabiduría, a fin de presentar perfecto en Cristo Jesús a todo hombre. 29 Para esto también trabajo, luchando según la fuerza de él, la cual actúa poderosamente en mí.

2:1 Quiero pues, que sepáis cuán grande lucha sostengo por vosotros, por los que están en Laodicea y por todos los que nunca han visto mi rostro. 2 Luchó para que sean consolados sus corazones y para que, unidos en amor, alcancen todas las riquezas de pleno entendimiento, a fin de conocer el misterio de Dios el Padre y de Cristo, 3 en quien están escondidos todos los tesoros de la sabiduría y del conocimiento. 4 Esto lo digo para que nadie os engañe con palabras persuasivas, 5 porque aunque estoy ausente en cuerpo, no obstante, en espíritu estoy con vosotros, gozándome y mirando vuestro buen orden y la firmeza de vuestra fe en Cristo.

### Discuss

1. verse 28-29: [Review from last week] Who does Paul proclaim? For what purpose does Paul preach Christ? Where did Paul find strength in his "struggle to serve" these churches?
2. verse 2:1: Paul says he struggles "for you." Who is the "you"?
3. verse 2: For what purpose does Paul struggle? What comes first: Christian love or understanding? Read carefully - think about this!
4. verses 2-3: How is Jesus Christ described?
5. verses 4-5: What are the cults attempting to do with the Christians?
6. How does Paul describe a healthy and balanced church?

## Week Eight - Filled to Overflowing in Christ

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Review

The Apostle Paul writes to Christians in Colosse and nearby towns in the Roman Province of Asia. Paul wants to correctly teach these Christians about Jesus Christ. That will protect Christians from false teaching. Paul also wants these believers to receive the fullness of spiritual life in Christ. Then, they will grow in both spiritual maturity and thankfulness.



#### Do you need more than Jesus Christ?

In our everyday lives, we sometimes want to “add-on” to get more than the “basics.” For example, you can purchase an automobile to give you “basic transportation.” But you may say, “I also want the optional CD player.” That is an “add-on.” You may want to add extra memory to your computer, or purchase a larger hard drive. That will enhance your “standard equipment.” Does the Christian life work this same way? Does every Christian believer get only the “basic configuration.” If that is true, then you will need to “add-on” other things to fully experience God’s power in your personal life. That is what many religious cults and false teachers have claimed throughout history. Since life in this world offers “basics + options,” it may seem that these same principles apply to spiritual life and your relationship with God.

Almost all false religions, and every distortion of the Bible’s teaching can be summarized as “**Jesus plus**” something else. False teachers may claim that you need faith in “**Jesus + good works.**” Is Jesus Christ, his Person and Work, all that you need in life? Do you need **Jesus +** water baptism, or **Jesus +** the gift of tongues, if you want to experience the fullness of your life with God? Do really “spiritual Christians” obey special rules, or eat only certain foods?

The Bible’s good news is this: **Jesus Christ plus nothing is enough** for you! All you need for a full and complete life with God comes through the person and work of Jesus Christ. *Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His [Christ’s] divine power has **given us everything we need** for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.* (2 Peter 1:2-3)

The Christians and the churches of Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea were troubled by false teachers who claimed that Jesus + nothing is not enough. These cults, religions, and secret religious societies said that the world’s basic principles teach that you must have “add-on’s” to enjoy a full life with God. The false teachers called God “the fullness.” And to reach God’s fullness, you must keep certain traditions, or go through mediators, **in addition to** Jesus.

Paul says, “No! You must continue to live in the same way that you began, **with faith in Jesus plus nothing.**” All of God’s fullness is found in Jesus Christ, and in Jesus alone. There are no add-on’s. You only need Jesus!

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

**received:** to learn, to receive instruction or to be taught in a certain tradition. (For example, *I received from the Lord what I passed on to you.* 1 Corinthians 11:23)

**live:** the literal meaning is walk. Your walk is your life in Christ.

**rooted, built up:** the Apostle Paul often used these word pictures to describe growing Christians or a healthy church. Rooted is an *agricultural* word picture: we grow like branches joined to Christ, who is the true Vine (compare John 15:1-8). Built up is an *architectural* word picture: we grow on the solid foundation of Christ (compare 1 Corinthians 3:10-12).

**captive:** to be taken prisoner.

**fullness:** the false teachers liked to use this term to describe the eternal God. They claimed you could only reach that God (the fullness) by many mediators.

**Deity:** the divine nature, essence, or being of God.

### From the Bible: Colossians 2:6-10

Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.



#### English -

#### New International Version

<sup>6</sup> So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, <sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

<sup>8</sup> See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than [depending] on Christ.

<sup>9</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

#### New Chinese Version

<sup>6</sup> 你们怎样接受了基督耶稣为主, 就当照样在他里面行事为人, <sup>7</sup> 按着你们所学到的, 在他里面扎根、建造, 信心坚定, 满有感谢的心。

<sup>8</sup> 你们要谨慎, 免得有人不照着基督, 而照着人的传统, 和世俗的言论, 借着哲学和骗人的空谈, 把你们掳去。

<sup>9</sup> 因为 神本性的一切丰盛, 都有形有体地住在基督里面, <sup>10</sup> 你们也是在他里面得了丰盛。他是一切执政掌权者的元首。

#### Spanish

<sup>6</sup> Por tanto, de la manera que habéis recibido al Señor Jesucristo, andad en él, <sup>7</sup> arraigados y sobreedificados en él y confirmados en la fe, así como habéis sido enseñados, abundando en acciones de gracias.

<sup>8</sup> Mirad que nadie os engañe por medio de filosofías y huecas sutilezas basadas en las tradiciones de los hombres, conforme a los elementos del mundo, y no según Cristo.

<sup>9</sup> Porque en él habita corporalmente toda la plenitud de la divinidad, <sup>10</sup> y vosotros estáis completos en él, que es la cabeza de todo principado y potestad.

### Discuss

1. verse 6: How did the Colossians first receive Christ? What were the Colossian Christians first taught about Jesus Christ?
2. verse 6: How should you connect your daily Christian life (walk) with what you were taught about Jesus?
3. verse 7: How do the word pictures rooted and built up (see notes) describe the way to mature in your daily Christian walk and life?
4. verse 7: How do strengthened and overflowing relate to the ideas of rooted and built up? How can you become strong and grateful?
5. verse 8: What do you learn about false teachers from verse 8?
6. verse 8: What is the source of false teaching? What is it based on?
7. verse 9: How is Christ connected to the fullness of God? The cults claimed that you need mediators (or many “go-between’s”) to get to God’s fullness. How does verse 9 correct that false teaching?
8. verse 10: What are we offered and given in Jesus Christ?

## Week Nine - United to Jesus Christ in New Life

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians



#### Review

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse and nearby towns in the Roman Province of Asia. Paul wants to correctly teach these Christians about fullness of life in Jesus Christ. This will protect them from popular false teachers who are confusing the churches. This week, we look at how Christians - united to Jesus Christ - receive new life from God.



#### Real Circumcision and Baptism

In today's Bible study, we first review what Paul taught about Christ. God's fullness dwelled in the God-Man, the Son of God, Jesus Christ. This is the Biblical teaching of the incarnation. God has made Christ supreme head over all powers and authorities. Fullness of life is only found in Jesus Christ. Christ is the one and only go-between: the only Mediator between God and humanity. There are not many ways to God, only one way - Christ. But how do you connect to Jesus Christ in your own life? How do the life and death of Christ become real in your own experience? What is the connection between what Christ did for you in history, and what Christ does in your life today? Christ came to give you freedom from sin, and a new life from God. How do you receive this new fullness, new freedom, and new life from Christ?

The false teachers confused Christians about the practices of baptism and circumcision. In the Old Testament, you had to be circumcised to become part of God's people. In the New Testament, baptism is the sign that you are a member of God's people, the church of Jesus Christ.

Both (Old Testament) circumcision and (New Testament) baptism are symbols of cleansing from sin, receiving a new life, and becoming part of God's family. No uncircumcised person could be part of Israel. And no unbaptized person is considered a member of the Christian church. Question: Why did baptism replace circumcision? Hint: circumcision required the shedding of blood.

But do physical signs connect you with spiritual realities? Can circumcision or baptism save you? No! God told the Israelites that circumcision symbolized a deeper reality. "Circumcise your *hearts*, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer." (Deuteronomy 10:16) Only God can do this for you. Salvation is Christ's work for you, God's gift to you. "The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live." (Deuteronomy 30:6).

The New Testament teaches the same about baptism. Water baptism is an outward, physical sign that points to God's deeper, spiritual work in your life. "(God) saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. (God) saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior..." (Titus 3:5-6) Christ must spiritually circumcise and baptize you!

#### Notes:

incarnation: the teaching of the Bible that Jesus Christ is one Person with two natures: God and man, or divine and human. God was embodied in the person of Jesus Christ.

circumcision: God commanded his Old Testament people (the Jews) to cut off the foreskin of every eight-day old male. This was a double sign: that your sinful nature is inherited and passed down from one generation to the next. Also, that your sin nature must be "cut off" for you to become a member of God's people.

baptism: The LORD commands his New Testament people to be baptized. The washing with water is a sign of God's cleansing of our sin.

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

**fullness:** the false teachers liked to use this term to describe the eternal God. They claimed you could only reach that God (the fullness) by many mediators.

**Deity:** the divine nature, essence, or being of God.

**circumcision:** God commanded the people of Israel to cut off the foreskin of every eight-day old male. This symbolized the removing of the sinful nature, so you could become a member of God's people.

**baptism:** The washing with water is the New Testament sign of Christ's cleansing us from our sin.

### From the Bible: Colossians 2:9-12



Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.

#### English -

##### New International Version

<sup>9</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

<sup>11</sup> In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, <sup>12</sup> having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

#### New Chinese Version

9 因为 神本性的一切丰盛，都有形有体地住在基督里面，  
10 你们也是在他里面得了丰盛。他是一切执政掌权者的元首。

11 你们也在他里面受了不是由人手所行的割礼，而是受了基督的割礼，就是除掉你们的罪身。 12 你们在洗礼中已经与他一同埋葬，也在洗礼中，因信那使基督从死人中复活的神所运行的动力，与他一同复活了。

#### Spanish

9 Porque en él habita corporalmente toda la plenitud de la divinidad,<sup>10</sup> y vosotros estáis completos en él, que es la cabeza de todo principado y potestad.

11 En él también fuisteis circuncidados con circuncisión no hecha por mano de hombre, sino por la circuncisión de Cristo, en la cual sois despojados de vuestra naturaleza pecaminosa. 12 Con él fuisteis sepultados en el bautismo, y en él fuisteis también resucitados por la fe en el poder de Dios que lo levantó de los muertos.

### Discuss

1. Verse 9: What does this verse teach us about Jesus Christ?
2. Verse 10: What does this verse teach us about Jesus Christ?
3. Verse 10: What does God give to us through Jesus Christ?
4. Verse 10: Why is the verb tense significant - "you *have* been given fullness" (NIV) or "you *have* been filled in him" (ESV)?
5. Verses 9, 10: Notice the connection between Christ and Christians. What does it mean that our fullness comes from Christ's fullness? Compare John 1:16: "From (Christ's) fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."
6. Verse 11: What kind of circumcision does this verse describe? Does this mean a physical act to remove your sinful nature?
7. Verse 12: Does this verse describe water baptism?
8. Verse 12: What is significant about the words "*with him*" (Christ)?
9. What do "*buried with him*" and "*raised with him*" describe?
10. Why should you not trust signs like circumcision or water baptism to become full and complete in Christ?

## Week Ten - God Made You Free in Christ!

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Review

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse and nearby towns to teach them about fullness of life in Jesus Christ. Popular false teachers are confusing the churches. This week, we learn how God sets Christians free from sin, death, and all evil accusers.



#### Salvation is by God's Grace

According to the Gospel, we get a relationship with God entirely by God's Grace, through faith. Faith means believing, trusting, and putting your confidence in Christ. Salvation comes to us completely from God's love, God's unearned and undeserved favor. "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

In most religions, a person tries to "build a record" of personal virtue or merit to give God, hoping that God will reward your good efforts and bless your life. One writer says, "religion is to do right." But that is not the Christian message! The Gospel says that only Jesus Christ has a perfect record. Jesus lived the righteous life that we cannot live, and then Jesus died in our place, to receive the just punishment that our sins deserve. "Now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known." (Romans 3:21)

Jesus offers to each of us his personal record of perfect righteousness and total forgiveness as a free and unearned gift. Faith has no value in itself to bring us to God. Faith reaches out with empty hands to accept Christ's love.

#### Legal and Life-Giving Benefits

In the Gospel, God offers both legal and life-changing benefits in Jesus Christ. All of the gifts are from God's grace. They are distinct but comprehensive – all that we need! The legal benefits secure our new legal standing with God, and is Christ's work FOR US. The life-giving benefits change our character. Those are Christ's work IN US. The legal benefits are God's once-for-all acts **for** us. The life-giving benefits are God's continued work **in** us.

In Justification, your sinfully flawed life-record is charged against Jesus Christ. In exchange, Christ's perfect record of obedience is credited to your account. Jesus Christ receives all that you deserve (Jesus experienced death and hell when he went to the cross), and you are given all that an entirely holy person (Jesus Christ) deserves (God's favor now and heaven still to come).

**Legal benefits** include **justification** and **adoption**: when you trust in Christ, God declares you, once and for all, to be 1) not guilty, 2) righteous in God's sight (with no outstanding debts or obligations) and 3) God's adopted child.

**Life-giving benefits** include **new birth**, **sanctification**, and **glorification**. God gives you a new nature. You begin to grow Christ-like (throughout life). You die to selfishness and sin, and live for God's honor and for other people.

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

uncircumcision: you were not part of God's people, because your old nature was unclean and sinful.

canceled: like a canceled note of indebtedness.

written code: God's laws, rules, and moral standards.

nailing: when a person was crucified, the charges against them were nailed on the cross.

disarmed: take away the power. For example, "nuclear disarmament." But here, it is the power of sin, death, and the devil that have been removed.

powers and authorities: the devil and evil spirits had the power to enslave us - because we rebelled against God and broke God's laws and commands.

public spectacle: to put on display in shame or to show public contempt. The Roman generals marched their defeated enemies through the streets.

triumphing: to win the victory.

### From the Bible: Colossians 2:13-15

Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.



#### English - New International Version

<sup>13</sup> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

#### New Chinese Version

13 你们因着过犯和肉体未受割礼，原是死的，然而神赦免了我们的一切过犯，使你们与基督一同活过来，<sup>14</sup> 涂抹了那写在规条上反对我们、与我们为敌的字句，并且把这字句从我们中间拿去，钉在十字架上。<sup>15</sup> 他既然靠着十字架胜过了一切执政掌权的，废除了他们的权势，就在凯旋的行列中，把他们公开示众。

#### Spanish

13 Y a vosotros, estando muertos en pecados y en la incircuncisión de vuestra carne, os dio vida juntamente con él, perdonándoos todos los pecados. <sup>14</sup> Él anuló el acta de los decretos que había contra nosotros, que nos era contraria, y la quitó de en medio clavándola en la cruz. <sup>15</sup> Y despojó a los principados y a las autoridades y los exhibió públicamente, triunfando sobre ellos en la cruz.

### Discuss

1. Verse 13: How are you described before you were in Christ?
2. Is a person really "dead" apart from Christ? Why not "disabled"?
3. Verse 13: How are "your sins" connected to "your sinful nature"?
4. Verse 13: What legal and life-giving benefits are described?
5. Verse 14: Before you were a Christian, what was your relationship to God's laws? In what way was God's written code "against us" and "opposed to us"?
6. Verse 14: This verse says that God's code of laws was "cancelled". How did God take it away?
7. Were God's moral laws really cancelled? Is God's Law still useful or relevant for a Christian? Should you still obey the laws of God? Should your life be "regulated" by rules, do's and don'ts?
8. Verse 15: How did the cross disarm the powers and authorities? How did God overthrow sin and evil's power in an unexpected way?
9. How do sin and Satan still attempt to accuse us?
10. How are we "more than conquerors through [Christ] who loved us"? Do you have the ability to disarm or win the victory over sin?

## Week Eleven - Spiritual Reality is in a Relationship

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians



#### Review

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse and nearby towns to teach them how to grow to full maturity in Jesus Christ.

Popular false teachers are confusing the churches. Bad beliefs will always lead to bad practices and to destructive spiritual pride.



#### Legalism - a false path to spiritual growth

Legalism is an attempt to reach your spiritual goals by keeping rules, practicing certain rituals, keeping religious customs, obeying God's laws, and avoiding all bad influences. Legalism attempts to build your own record of righteousness and then give that to God, so God will bless you.

Legalism was the problem of the Pharisees. Jesus always challenged the Pharisees for their self-righteousness. These people were committed to their religious beliefs and practices. But, they thought that, by obeying God's laws, or even adding rules and regulations, they could become better people. The Pharisees thought they could either win or keep God's approval through their rule-keeping and their religious practices.

But this is the wrong path to God. You can never earn or keep God's love. So, legalism is against God's grace. We come to know God, and we continue to grow in God's love, through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is the work of Jesus Christ. It is God's provision and gift, not our own achievement.

#### Legalism - the path that leads to spiritual pride

Another problem with legalism is this: You can develop bad attitudes toward other people. If you think of yourself as a religious or spiritual achiever, you may think you are better than other people. If other people do not carefully obey God's laws like you do, you think they are not as good a person as you!

You may begin to judge or disqualify other people - if they do not keep your rules or practice your customs. This can lead to the "cancer of criticism" in local churches. That is what happened in the churches near Colosse.

When you focus on God's grace in Christ, you can "speak the truth in love" and help other Christians grow. But if you focus on "me, my righteousness, and my religious practices, you begin to judge and disqualify other people.

Legalism can be based on comparing what you do. But legalism can also be based on what you don't do. Today's Bible passage describes asceticism.

Some people refused to enjoy food, sleep, or sex, to become more spiritual. This leads to a loss of spiritual freedom and fullness that God gives in Christ.

Some people compare their experiences. If you have a certain experience, do you think everyone should experience God in the exact same way?

Spiritual growth is not through rules, rituals, or experiences - but through a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. So, stay connected with Christ!

#### Notes:

asceticism: denying yourself in physical ways, in order to achieve spiritual goals.

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

**judge:** to decide that your opinion or your practice is better than someone else - so you overrule or disqualify the other person.

**Sabbath:** God commanded his Old Testament people to keep one day of every week as a day of rest and worship. The word means "rest" or "cease."

**reality:** the word is literally "body." In other words, when Jesus Christ came into the world, he "embodied" the fullness of God. The "substance" of spiritual life is found in Christ, and in his body, the church which is the fellowship of Christians.

**false humility:** the practice of self-denial to achieve spiritual goals. Examples: denying yourself food, sex, or sleep to become "more spiritual."

### From the Bible: Colossians 2:16-19

Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.



#### English -

##### New International Version

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the **reality**, however, is found in Christ. <sup>18</sup> Do not let anyone who delights in **false humility** and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. <sup>19</sup> He has 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.

#### New Chinese Version

<sup>16</sup> 所以不要让人因着饮食、节期、月朔、安息日批评你们，<sup>17</sup> 这些不过是将来的事的影子，那真体却是属于基督的。<sup>18</sup> 不要让人夺去你们的奖赏，他们以故意谦卑，敬拜天使为乐；迷于自己所见过的；凭着肉体的意念，无故地自高自大；<sup>19</sup> 不与头紧密相连。其实全身都是借着关节和筋络从头得着供应和联系，就照着 神所要求的，生长起来。

#### Spanish

<sup>16</sup> Por tanto, nadie os critique en asuntos de comida o de bebida, o en cuanto a días de fiesta, luna nueva o sábados. <sup>17</sup> Todo esto es sombra de lo que ha de venir; pero el cuerpo es de Cristo. <sup>18</sup> Que nadie os prive de vuestro premio haciendo alarde de humildad y de dar culto a los ángeles (metiéndose en lo que no ha visto), hinchado de vanidad por su propia mente carnal, <sup>19</sup> pero no unido a la Cabeza, en virtud de quien todo el cuerpo, nutriéndose y uniéndose por las coyunturas y ligamentos, crece con el crecimiento que da Dios.

### Discuss

1. Verse 16: By what standards did some people "judge" (qualify or disqualify, approve or condemn) these Christians?
2. Verse 17: How does Paul describe these practices, rules, rituals, and ceremonies?
3. What is the relationship between spiritual "shadows" and "reality"? What coming light created religious "shadows" in the past?
4. Verse 18: How does Paul describe these spiritual critics? What caused these people to be "puffed up"? What caused these people to inflate the value of their spiritual experiences?
5. In what forms have you observed spiritual pride in other people?
6. Verse 19: Who is the "Head"? What does "the whole body" refer to?
7. What do you risk when you claim personal spiritual experiences as your authority or standard of spiritual growth?
8. What is the only way for you to grow as a Christian?

## Week Twelve - New Life in Jesus Christ

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Review

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse and nearby towns to teach them how to grow to full maturity in Jesus Christ.

Popular false teachers are confusing the churches. If a person has received a new life in Christ, why then live by “rules and regulations”?



#### Since the Gospel is true, what should you do?

The Christians at Colosse have submitted to rules and regulations: what to eat, what they should practice, and even what they can touch. The false teachers are turning these Christians into slaves. Although they were set free by Christ, false teachers have put them back into bondage.

These rules, regulations, and taboos appear to be good for you. They involve self-discipline. They seem to promote good health. Rules forbid immorality. But you cannot “regulate” your way to a holy life. Rules never give new life. The gospel offers us the gift of salvation in Christ, not “self-help” formulas.

Through God’s grace, all believers in Christ receive a new life from the dead. And God’s gift of new life in Christ is more than a change of habits or behaviors. Rules are about perishable things, and regulations are about life in this world. This world is broken, sinful, and decaying. This life is passing away. New life in Christ lasts forever. You were raised to a new life that will not pass away.

#### Living in Union “with Christ”

If you have died with Christ, and if you have been raised to new life in Christ, how should you live? You should not focus on rules and rituals for this life. Because you received the resurrection life of Jesus Christ, your life and focus should be different. Your goals and ambitions, your viewpoints and passions, must all focus on Christ. Like a compass that points to the north, your life should now point to heaven, where Jesus Christ rules as your Lord.

Objective spiritual reality should motivate your daily personal experience. Paul teaches that “you have been raised with Christ.” This is the gospel truth. What should you do? Each day, you must “set your heart on things above.” You must seek every day to set your heart and your mind on Jesus Christ. You have received a new life in Christ, so seek to live a Christian lifestyle.

People who focus on self-help principles in this world may seem to be wise. Those who work hard to be self-disciplined, to regulate their lives, seem good. But you have received the power of resurrection life. In fact, the “real you” is hidden from public observation. Your life is “hidden with Christ in God.”

So live today as a person who has become a citizen of God’s kingdom. Stay focused on Christ. Remember: your everlasting home is heaven, with Christ. One great Day, when Jesus Christ comes again in glory, your true life will be revealed when Jesus Christ is revealed from heaven.

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

### From the Bible: Colossians 2:20-3:4



Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.

#### English - New International Version

2:20 Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules: 21 "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? 22 These are all destined to perish with use, because they are based on human commands and teachings. 23 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.

3:1 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.

false humility: the practice of self-denial to achieve spiritual goals. Examples: denying yourself food, sex, or sleep to become "more spiritual."

#### New Chinese Version

2:20 你们若与基督一同死了，脱离了世俗的言论，为什么仍然好像活在世俗中一样，21 拘守那“不可摸、不可尝、不可触”的规条呢？22（这一切东西，一经使用，就都朽坏了。）这些规条是照着人的命令和教训而定的，23 在随着己意敬拜，故作谦卑，和苦待己身等事上，似乎是智慧之言，其实只能叫人放纵肉体，再没有任何价值。

3:1 所以，你们既然与基督一同复活，就应当寻求天上的事，那里有基督坐在神的右边。2 你们要思念的，是地上的事，不是地上的事。

3 因为你们已经死了，你们的生命与基督一同隐藏在神里面。4 基督就是你们的生命，他显现的时候，你们也要和他一同在荣耀里显现。

#### Spanish

2:20 Si habéis muerto con Cristo en cuanto a los rudimentos del mundo, ¿por qué, como si vivierais en el mundo, os sometéis a preceptos 21 tales como: «No uses», «No comas», «No toques»? 22 Todos estos preceptos son solo mandamientos y doctrinas de hombres, los cuales se destruyen con el uso.

23 Tales cosas tienen a la verdad cierta reputación de sabiduría, pues exigen cierta religiosidad, humildad y duro trato del cuerpo; pero no tienen valor alguno contra los apetitos de la carne.

3:1 Si, pues, habéis resucitado con Cristo, buscad las cosas de arriba, donde está Cristo sentado a la diestra de Dios. 2 Poned la mira en las cosas de arriba, no en las de la tierra, 3 porque habéis muerto y vuestra vida está escondida con Cristo en Dios. 4 Cuando Cristo, vuestra vida, se manifieste, entonces vosotros también seréis manifestados con él en gloria.

### Discuss

1. Verse 2:20: What has happened to you?
2. Verse 2:21-23: What is wrong about rules and regulations?
3. Verse 3:1: How is your union with Christ described?
4. Verse 3:1: If this is true, what should you then do?
5. Verses 3:3-4: What are in the past and in the future for a Christian? What does this mean for the present, every day?

## Week Thirteen - New Life / A New Way to Live

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Review

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse to teach them how to grow in Jesus Christ. But how does God change our lives?

False teachers claim that we should live by “rules and regulations.”

But Paul teaches we should live by spiritual transformation - united to Christ.



#### A New Life in Christ

Last week, we discussed Colossians 3:2-4: “Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” Every believer in Christ dies and rises with Christ.

God gives all who believe in Jesus Christ a new life from the dead. New life is not God’s reward for the way you have changed your habits or behaviors.

New life is God’s free gift in Jesus Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, you are raised from moral decay and spiritual death. And you are united to Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead. You receive a new life now, and the hope of life forever - with Christ in heaven.

If God brings this great spiritual change into your life, how must you respond? Can anyone who receives a new life from God keep living the old way of life?

#### A New Way to Live - to Reflect Jesus Christ

In many cultures, people sometimes say, “Clothes make the man (or woman).” In western cultures, this means that you attempt to “dress for success.”

In India, there is the story of a Brahmin (an upper class man). He impressed other people by the way he dressed. Then he went home, took off his clothes, put them in a dirty clothes basket, and then bowed down to them. He said, “O source of wealth! It is clothes that are honored in this world and nothing else.”

In China, an old saying illustrates that it is possible to “look good” (gain face) with other people while you cover up your corrupt character. “Gold and jade on the outside, rot and decay on the inside.” Another Chinese proverb correctly notes, “If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person.”

A Christian person does not “dress for success” - to impress other people. Your life doesn’t change through rules, regulations, or changes in appearance. Because of the grace of Jesus Christ, God changes your life. God transforms your inner person, your heart, and your character. If the light of God’s truth and the power of the Holy Spirit enter your soul, you become a new person. The “real you” is “hidden with Christ in God.”

God changes our lives from the inside -> out. The gift of new life on the inside should result in practical changes that can be observed in your outward life. Paul describes this as taking off the practices of your old life - like disposing a dirty set of clothes. Then you put on new clothes - to reflect the “real you.”

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

**Put to death:** to take extreme measures to kill wrong things.

**Lust:** evil, wrong passions or bad desires.

**greed:** a strong desire to get more material possessions or have more things than other people.

**idolatry:** to put something finite in God's place. To worship things or people instead of God.

**wrath of God:** God's holy, pure justice against all wrong doing.

**anger:** human wrath, which is not pure justice.

**malice:** a strong dislike, a desire to do harm, to hate someone.

**slander:** to speak against another person in a way that harms or injures their reputation.

**circumcised, uncircumcised:** sign of belonging or not belonging to God's people.

**barbarian:** someone who is uncultured or uncivilized.

**Scythian:** from an area north of the Black Sea, considered cruel and uncivilized.

### From the Bible: Colossians 3:5-11



Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.

#### English -

#### New International Version

<sup>5</sup> **Put to death**, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, **lust**, evil desires and **greed**, which is **idolatry**.  
<sup>6</sup> Because of these, the **wrath of God** is coming. <sup>7</sup> You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. <sup>8</sup> But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: **anger**, rage, **malice**, **slander**, and filthy language from your lips. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. <sup>11</sup> Here there is no Greek or Jew, **circumcised** or **uncircumcised**, **barbarian**, **Scythian**, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

#### New Chinese Version

5 所以要治死你们在地上的肢体，就如淫乱、污秽、邪情、恶欲和贪心，贪心就是拜偶像。6 因着这些事，神的忿怒必要临到悖逆的人（有些抄本无“悖逆的人”）。7 你们从前在其中生活的时候，也曾经这样行过。8 但现在你们要除去忿怒、恼怒、恶毒、毁谤，以及粗言秽语这一切事。9 不要彼此说谎，因为你们已经脱去了旧人和旧人的行为，10 穿上了新人。这新人照着他的创造者的形象渐渐更新，能够充分认识主。11 在这一方面，并不分希腊人和犹太人，受割礼的和未受割礼的，未开化的人和西古提人，奴隶和自由人，唯有基督是一切，也在一切之内。

#### Spanish

5 Haced morir, pues, lo terrenal en vosotros: fornicación, impureza, pasiones desordenadas, malos deseos y avaricia, que es idolatría. 6 Por estas cosas la ira de Dios viene sobre los hijos de desobediencia, 7 en las cuales vosotros también anduvisteis en otro tiempo cuando vivíais en ellas. 8 Pero ahora dejad también vosotros todas estas cosas: ira, enojo, malicia, blasfemia, palabras deshonestas de vuestra boca. 9 No mintáis los unos a los otros, habiéndoos despojado del viejo hombre con sus hechos 10 y revestido del nuevo. Este, conforme a la imagen del que lo creó, se va renovando hasta el conocimiento pleno, 11 donde no hay griego ni judío, circuncisión ni incircuncisión, bárbaro ni extranjero, esclavo ni libre, sino que Cristo es el todo y en todos.

### Discuss

1. Verse 5: What should you do with your old habits?
2. Verse 6: How will God respond to those old patterns of living?
3. Verse 7: What is the relationship between your *walk* and your *life*?
4. Verse 8: What should you *get rid of* (put away, remove, take off)?
5. Verses 9-10: Why must you not lie? Why should you tell the truth?
6. Verse 10: How does spiritual renewal take place?
7. Verse 11: Does spiritual growth depend on your cultural background?

## Week Fourteen - The Christian's New Clothes

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Review

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse to teach them how to grow in Jesus Christ. But how does God change our lives?

Paul teaches about our spiritual transformation, as we are united to Christ's death and resurrection. As God changes our hearts, our lifestyle must also change. We "put off" the old lifestyle, and "put on" a new lifestyle.



#### A New Life - and a New Set of Clothes

We have discussed how spiritual transformation cannot come through outside rules and regulations. Christ gives us a new birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. But, after God changes our hearts, our lives must outwardly and observably change. Spiritual renewal is "from the inside to the outside."

We can never change our own hearts. Only God can do that, through Christ. We are united to Jesus in his death and resurrection. Our sins were nailed to the cross of Jesus Christ. Our new life is guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection.

What can we do? We must take responsibility to conform our lifestyle with our new life in Christ. The Apostle Paul compares this to taking off dirty clothes, and putting on new, clean clothes. We must "throw away" the old dirty rags of our sins. Then, we must then "put on" the new clothes of Christ-like qualities.

#### Personal Transformation and Social Harmony



Western cultures focus on individuals and personal liberties. Other cultures, especially in Asia, focus on groups and mutual responsibilities. Which is the best or correct approach? Which way of life does the Bible support? Both!

In the Bible, salvation is more than transforming individual personal lives.

Through Jesus Christ, God seeks to restore human societies, and the whole world, to harmonious and right relationships - between humans, and with God.

In fact, God's plan to save the world will not be fulfilled until people from every nation, language, culture, and people group have come together to worship Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

In today's study, look for the connection between spiritual renewal in both our personal and social life. Christians must be seen as God's "new society," the Body of Christ. If Christians will apply what the Bible teaches us, then this painful, sinful world will see a glimpse of God's "new creation" in Jesus Christ.

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

### From the Bible: Colossians 3:12-17

Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.



**grievances:** any offenses, grudges, or things that cause you harm - that you have some reason to complain about.

#### English -

#### New International Version

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever **grievances** you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

<sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

<sup>15</sup> Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. <sup>17</sup> 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.

#### New Chinese Version

<sup>12</sup> 所以，你们既然是神所拣选的，是圣洁、蒙爱的人，就要存怜悯的心肠、仁慈、谦卑、温柔和忍耐。

<sup>13</sup> 如果有人对别人有嫌隙，总要彼此宽容，互相饶恕；主怎样饶恕了你们，你们也要照样饶恕人。<sup>14</sup> 在这一切之上，还要有爱心，爱心是联系全德的。

<sup>15</sup> 又要让基督的平安在你们心里作主；你们蒙召归为一体，也是为了这个缘故。你们要有感谢的心。<sup>16</sup> 你们要让基督的道丰富地住在你们心里，以各样的智慧，彼此教导，互相劝戒，用诗章、圣诗、灵歌，怀着感恩的心歌颂神。<sup>17</sup> 凡你们所作的，无论是言语或行为，都要奉主耶稣的名，借着感谢父神。

#### Spanish

<sup>12</sup> Vestíos, pues, como escogidos de Dios, santos y amados, de entrañable misericordia, de bondad, de humildad, de mansedumbre, de paciencia. <sup>13</sup> Soportaos unos a otros y perdonaos unos a otros, si alguno tiene queja contra otro. De la manera que Cristo os perdonó, así también hacedlo vosotros. <sup>14</sup> Sobre todo, vestíos de amor, que es el vínculo perfecto. <sup>15</sup> Y la paz de Dios gobierne en vuestros corazones, a la que asimismo fuisteis llamados en un solo cuerpo. Y sed agradecidos. <sup>16</sup> La palabra de Cristo habite en abundancia en vosotros. Enseñaos y exhortaos unos a otros con toda sabiduría. Cantad con gracia en vuestros corazones al Señor, con salmos, himnos y cánticos espirituales. <sup>17</sup> Y todo lo que hacéis, sea de palabra o de hecho, hacedlo todo en el nombre del Señor Jesús, dando gracias a Dios Padre por medio de él.

### Discuss

1. Verse 12: How are Christians described in this verse? If this is true, how should Christians respond to God's love?
2. Verse 13: How should we live in a broken and sinful world?
3. Verse 14: What "glue" holds Christ's "new society" together?
4. Verse 15: Can laws or governments impose social harmony? What can bring peace between people?
5. Verse 16: What should Christians do for one another?
6. Verse 17: What should motivate the way Christians live?

## Week Fifteen - Christian Relationships

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians



#### Review

The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Colosse to teach them how to grow in Jesus Christ. Paul has taught about our spiritual transformation. When God renews our hearts, our lives will change. Our social relationships will also be transformed. In today's study, we learn how to reflect Christ in relationships with our family members and in society.



#### Renewed - not Regulated - Relationships

We have noted that spiritual transformation happens "from the inside to the outside." Christ must first change your heart. Then, your lifestyle begins to change. You cannot change persons or societies by imposing rules, laws, or regulations. Only the grace and power of Jesus Christ can transform our lives and bring God's peace into social relationships.

Both Asians and Westerners can misunderstand how lives are transformed. Legislators may try to pass laws to control people's behavior. And laws are important. Laws set the standard for what is good and right behavior. But laws do not motivate you to live up to right standards. Laws do not change lives. You cannot "legislate" a good society.

In Confucian teaching, a good and harmonious society depends on ethical social relationships, especially in the family, between parents and children, and also between superiors and inferiors at all levels of human society.

The gospel of Christ teaches that these relationships must reflect God's grace. And the Bible gives us God's standards for good, healthy family relationships. But the gospel gives us more. By the grace of Jesus Christ, we also receive the power and motivation for God-pleasing, Christ-reflecting relationships.

#### Does the Bible support social oppression?

When the message of Jesus Christ began to spread in the first century A. D., slavery was commonly practiced throughout the Roman Empire. Prisoners of war were often made slaves. Upper class Roman families were served by household slaves. Wealthy Romans might even adopt a slave into their family.

How were the early Christians to respond and react to the practice of slavery? If Christians tried to out-law slavery, Roman authorities would think Christians were a revolutionary social movement. The Apostle Paul knew that Christ's gospel would transform society, as God began to change lives, motivations, and relationships. The gospel would start a *spiritual revolution* in society.

Sadly, Christians often misunderstand the Bible. The Bible speaks of slavery, but does not approve it. Slavery is immoral. Christians must oppose slavery. Christians like British Member of Parliament William Wilberforce worked to outlaw the slave trade. Other Christians, motivated by their spiritual beliefs, have opposed slavery, served the poor, and worked for women's right to vote. Societies change when lives change. The gospel changes lives, not just laws.

#### Notes:

oppression: to put down or "oppress."  
To place a burden on someone or on some group; to take away their powers, their interests, or their opportunities.

Notes:

**Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians**

**From the Bible: Colossians 3:18 - 4:1**

Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.



<b>English - New International Version</b>	<b>New Chinese Version</b>	<b>Spanish</b>
3:18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.	18 你们作妻子的，要顺服丈夫，这在主里是合宜的。	18 Casadas, estad sujetas a vuestros maridos, como conviene en el Señor.
19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.	19 你们作丈夫的，要爱妻子，不可苦待她们。	19 Maridos, amad a vuestras mujeres y no seáis ásperos con ellas.
20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.	20 你们作儿女的，要凡事听从父母，因为这在主里是可喜悦的。	20 Hijos, obedeced a vuestros padres en todo, porque esto agrada al Señor.
21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.	21 你们作父亲的，不要激怒儿女，免得他们灰心丧志。	21 Padres, no exasperéis a vuestros hijos, para que no se desalienten.
22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.	22 你们作仆人的，要凡事听从世上的主人，作事不要只作给人看，像那些讨人欢心的一样，却要以真诚的心敬畏主。	22 Esclavos, obedeced en todo a vuestros amos terrenales, no sirviendo al ojo, como los que quieren agradar a los hombres, sino con corazón sincero, temiendo a Dios.
23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,	23 无论你们作什么，都要从心里去作，像是为主作的，不是为人作的，	23 Y todo lo que hagáis, hacedlo de corazón, como para el Señor y no para los hombres,
24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.	24 因为你们知道，你们一定会从主那里得到基业为赏赐。你们应当服事主基督，	24 sabiendo que del Señor recibiréis la recompensa de la herencia, porque a Cristo el Señor servís.
25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism.	25 但那些不义的人，必按他所行的不义受报应。主并不偏待人。	25 Pero el que actúa con injusticia recibirá la injusticia que haya cometido, porque no hay acepción de personas.
4:1 Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.	4:1 你们作主人的，要公平地对待仆人，因为知道你们也有一位主在天上。	4:1 Amos, haced lo que es justo y recto con vuestros esclavos, sabiendo que también vosotros tenéis un Amo en los cielos.

**Discuss**

1. Verse 3:18: What should wives do? Why (motivation)?
2. Verse 19: What should husbands do? Why (motivation)?
3. Verse 20: What should children do? Why (motivation)?
4. Verse 21: How should Christian fathers behave?
5. Verses 22-25: Apply these instructions to your relationship with your "boss". How should you relate to your employer? Why?
6. Verse 4:1: How should a Christian "boss" be different than others?

## Week Sixteen - Prayer and Witness

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

Notes:



#### Review

The Apostle writes to the Christians in Colosse to teach them how to grow in Christ. Paul teaches about spiritual transformation.

When God renews your heart, your life will change, and then your life will have a transforming impact on people around you. In today's discussion, we will learn the important connection between prayer and Christian witness.



#### Persist in your Prayers

There are some things that you cannot do. But that does not mean these things are impossible for God. Jesus taught, "What is impossible with men is possible with God" (Luke 18:27). How do you show your belief that God can do the impossible? You demonstrate your faith when you pray! When you pray, you ask God to do the things that you cannot do.

None of us can give salvation and new life in Jesus Christ to a friend, family member, or fellow worker. God is the Author of life. Only the LORD can give repentance and faith to someone (see Acts 11:18, Titus 3:5, Ephesians 2:8).

This is why prayer is a very important part of your witness to Jesus Christ. As someone has said, "Those who want to speak to a person about God, must first speak to God about that person." You cannot open the door to anyone's heart, so that they will believe. But God can. So, pray for the Lord to work!

We must also pray for our words and deeds to reflect the reality of Jesus Christ. Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) did not have formal theology training. But he was a powerful preacher. Sometimes, up to 6,000 came to hear him preach in London. He was asked why so many came to hear him, and why his ministry was so successful. Charles Spurgeon answered, "My people pray for me."

The Apostle asked for prayers so the gospel would be clearly communicated. "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power." (1 Corinthians 2:4-5)

#### Look for Doors of Opportunity

Jesus also taught his disciples to "watch and pray" (Matthew 26:41). When we fail to pray, we fail to be spiritually alert. If we do not pray, we become open or prone to temptation. "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak" (Mark 14:38). If I do not persist and continue in prayer, I may become blind to spiritual **dangers**.

Also, if I do not "watch and pray," I become blind to my spiritual **opportunities**. There is a connection between your praying to God and your witness to others. When you pray, you become spiritually alert to opportunities. You perceive when and how to serve people in times of need, with deeds that demonstrate Christ's love. Also, when you pray, you become spiritually wise about your "timing" - when you should speak about Jesus Christ to others.

## Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians

### Notes:

Devote yourself: persevere, don't give up, continue to do something, persist.

watchful: stay alert, don't fall asleep. Keep your "spiritual eyes" open to things that are happening.

make the most of every opportunity: this is an English translation of the original Greek for redeem the time. One idiom is to "seize the day." Literally, to "buy up the time." We can invest our time as witnesses to the reality of Christ in our lives.

seasoned with salt: Salt keeps things from rotting or going bad. So speak healthy words. Salt also creates thirst. Jesus said, "You are the salt of the earth." (Matthew 5:13). Christ wants believers to speak healthy words that give people a thirst to know more about God.

### From the Bible: Colossians 4:2-6

Plan to bring your Bible each week to our discussions. If you do not have a Bible, we can provide you with one. If English is not your first language, then try to bring a Bible in your own language. This week, we will provide three translations.



#### English - New International Version

<sup>2</sup> Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should.

<sup>5</sup> Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. <sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

#### New Chinese Version

<sup>2</sup> 你们要恒切祷告，在祷告的时候存着感恩的心警醒；<sup>3</sup> 也要为我们祷告，求神为我们开传道的门，宣讲基督的奥秘（我就是为了这个缘故被捆锁），<sup>4</sup> 使我照着我所应当说的，把这奥秘显明出来。

<sup>5</sup> 你们要把握时机，用智慧与外人来往。<sup>6</sup> 你们的话要常常温和，好像是用盐调和的，使你们知道应当怎样回答各人。

#### Spanish

<sup>2</sup> Perseverad en la oración, velando en ella con acción de gracias. <sup>3</sup> Orad también al mismo tiempo por nosotros, para que el Señor nos abra puerta para la palabra, a fin de dar a conocer el misterio de Cristo, por el cual también estoy preso, <sup>4</sup> para que lo dé a conocer anunciándolo como es debido.

<sup>5</sup> Andad sabiamente para con los de afuera, aprovechando bien el tiempo. <sup>6</sup> Sea vuestra palabra siempre con gracia, sazonada con sal, para que sepáis cómo debéis responder a cada uno.

### Discuss

1. Verse 2: How does Paul describe the **importance** of prayer?
2. Verse 2: What two words describe **the way** we should pray?
3. Why should you **watch** or **be alert** when you pray?
4. When we pray, we ask God to do what we cannot do for ourselves. Verse 3: Why does Paul ask for prayers?
5. Verse 3: What can only God do?
6. Verse 4: What must Paul do (and what must we do)?
7. Explain the relationship between **God's work** and **your work** when you communicate the gospel to other people?
8. Verse 5: In addition to prayer, what else do you need to become an effective witness for Jesus Christ?
9. Verses 5-6: What is the relationship between the way you **act** and the words you **speak** to outsiders?
10. Verse 6: What does it mean to communicate with words that are **seasoned with salt**?

## Week Seventeen - Christian Friends and Fellow Workers for God's Kingdom

### Growing to Fullness in Christ - the Letter to the Colossians



**Colossians 4:7-18** ends Paul's letter to the Colossians. Paul has taught them how to grow in Christ. Jesus Christ will transform your heart, your life, and your relationships. What do you learn about each person whose name Paul mentions? (see names in **bold**)

#### English -

##### New International Version

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

<sup>10</sup> 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.) <sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> **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. <sup>13</sup> I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis.

<sup>14</sup> Our dear friend **Luke**, the doctor, and **Demas** send greetings. <sup>15</sup> Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to **Nympha** and the church in her house.

<sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Tell **Archippus**: "See to it that you complete the work you have received in the Lord."

<sup>18</sup> I, **Paul**, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

#### New Chinese Version

7 我的一切景况，**推基古**会告诉你们。他是我所爱的弟兄，是忠心的仆役，也是在主里同作仆人的。8 我派他到你们那里去，使你们知道我们的景况，并且安慰你们的心。9 他是跟欧尼西慕一同去的。**欧尼西慕**是忠心的亲爱的弟兄，是你们那里的人。他们会把这里的一切告诉你们。

10 与我一同坐监的**亚里达古**，和**巴拿巴**的表弟**马可**，问候你们。（关于马可，你们已经受了吩咐：他若到你们那里，你们要接待他。）11 别号**犹士都**的**耶数**，也问候你们。在受过割礼的人中，只有这几位是为神的国与我同工的，他们也成了我的安慰。

12 **以巴弗**问候你们，他是你们那里的人，是基督耶稣的仆人；他祷告的时候，常常竭力为你们祈求，好使你们在神的一切旨意中完全站稳，满有坚定的信念。13 我可以为他作证，他为了你们和在老底嘉、希拉波立的人，多受劳苦。

14 亲爱的**路加**医生和**底马**问候你们。15 请问候在老底嘉的弟兄和**宁法**，以及在她家里的教会。

16 这封信你们宣读了以后，也要交给老底嘉的教会宣读；你们也要读老底嘉的那封信。

17 你们要对**亚基布**说：“你要留心在主里领受的职分，好把它完成。”

18 我**保罗**亲笔问候你们。你们要记念我的捆锁。愿恩惠与你们同在。

#### Spanish

7 Todo lo que a mí se refiere, os lo hará saber **Tíquico**, amado hermano y fiel ministro y consiervo en el Señor. 8 Os lo he enviado a vosotros para esto mismo, para que conozca lo que a vosotros se refiere y conforte vuestros corazones. 9 Lo acompaña **Onésimo**, amado y fiel hermano, que es uno de vosotros. Todo lo que acá pasa, os lo harán saber.

10 **Aristarco**, mi compañero de prisiones, os saluda; y también **Marcos**, el sobrino de **Bernabé**, acerca del cual habéis recibido instrucciones; si va a visitaros, recibidlo.

11 También os saluda Jesús, el que es llamado **Justo**. Estos son los únicos de la circuncisión que me ayudan en el reino de Dios, y han sido para mí un consuelo.

12 Os saluda **Epafras**, el cual es uno de vosotros, siervo de Cristo. Él siempre ruega encarecidamente por vosotros en sus oraciones, para que estéis firmes, perfectos y completos en todo lo que Dios quiere. 13 De él doy testimonio de que se preocupa mucho por vosotros, por los que están en Laodicea y los que están en Hierápolis.

14 Os saluda **Lucas**, el médico amado, y **Demas**. 15 Saludad a los hermanos que están en Laodicea, a **Ninfas** y a la iglesia que está en su casa.

16 Cuando esta carta haya sido leída entre vosotros, haced que también se lea en la iglesia de los laodicenses, y que la de Laodicea la leáis también vosotros. 17 Decid a **Arquipo**: «Mira que cumplas el ministerio que recibiste en el Señor».

18 Esta salutación es de mi propia mano, de **Pablo**. Acordaos de mis prisiones. La gracia sea con vosotros.