

Colossians Study # 1



Reading and Reflecting
on God's Word
Together

Colossians for Today

Welcome to a new study series that is designed to help you take a fresh look at the letters of the Apostle Paul.

To illustrate how effectively Paul's letters relate to our world today we will use the Contemporary English Version (CEV) as our recommended text.

For your convenience the CEV text of Colossians is being provided in a separate booklet. You will also need access to a complete Bible of whatever translation you ordinarily use.

Colossians is about the supremacy and the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

In the first chapter of Colossians Paul stresses that God provides what we need.

Paul says, "His glorious power will make you patient and strong enough to endure anything, and you will be truly happy." (Col. 1:11)

Choosing a Translation

Perhaps you already have a favourite translation. It may be one you were introduced to years ago or perhaps it is one you chose recently because of the familiarity of the language, the beauty of the English or the clarity of understanding that it seems to provide.

Some translations are quite literal (i.e. attempt to provide a word for word translation of the original Greek and Hebrew texts). Other translations focus more on attempting to represent the thoughts and ideas of the original text.

While we ought always to be concerned about the accuracy and faithfulness of any translation to the original texts, it is hard to choose a "best" translation. Our choice often depends on the context in which we are using it.

For these studies the recommended text is that of the Contemporary English Version. It is hoped that it will bring what Paul has written to you in a fresh form.

This translation was styled to be read aloud and that is the recommended approach. By reading the text of Paul's letter out loud it is hoped that there will be benefit for both the reader and the small group sharing in the study

"Christ Rules Supreme"

In the New Testament era people in the Roman world worshipped various gods. In fact, many people paid homage to more than one god and turned to different gods in different situations and for different concerns.

The people often pondered which of these various gods were most powerful. In a world where such thoughts about God existed it is not surprising that Paul stressed the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

People today sometimes regard such discussions about the power of the ancient gods as primitive and meaningless.

However, our contemporary culture is greatly impressed with power. We honour, and often almost worship, the rich and the famous and the influential within the human population.

It seems highly unlikely that people today would be impressed by a so called god who was portrayed as being weak or helpless.

The Christian faith today can learn much from what Paul has to say about the power and authority of Jesus Christ.

Colossians, Chapter One

First, read through the whole chapter.

Then, reread the text - pausing at intervals to make sure you understand it.

A Simple Outline of Colossians 1:

Vss. 1 & 2. Opening greetings.

Vss. 3-6. Paul's prayer for the Colossians.

Vss. 9-14 What God has done in Christ Vss. 15-20 Christ and what he achieved

Vss.21-23 The new relationship in Christ

Vss. 24-29. Paul's service to Christ.

Some notes that may be useful:

The exact details of the letter are uncertain. Probably written from Rome about 60 AD.

Colossae was an important trading city in the Province of Phrygia in Asia Minor. The Christian message was preached in Colossae by Epaphras (Col. 1:7 & 4:12).

vs. 1. Timothy is associated with this letter as he also was with Philippians.

Vs. 5. Hope is mentioned numerous times in this letter. This is the first of three references to hope in this first chapter. See also vss. 23 and 27.

vs. 27. At least some of the believers in Colossae had Gentile roots rather than Jewish ones.

Colossians, Chapter One

For Reflection and Discussion

Approach these topics on two levels. First, you are encouraged to make them a matter of some searching personal reflection. They are also intended to spark group discussion.

Paul acknowledges that the Christian faith is spreading all over the world. (Vs. 6)

In what ways does Paul link this growth to the work of God's Spirit?

Was there any resistance to what was happening and where does it come from?

Paul expresses his bonding with the Colossians by praying for them.

What does Paul ask for on their behalf?

What does Paul wish them to be able to accomplish?

What sort of response does Paul want the Colossians to have to their new faith in Christ?

Paul makes some bold declarations about Christ and his unique power and authority. (Vss. 15-20)

Do any of Paul's claims surprise you?

Do any of Paul's declarations cause you to reexamine what you believe about Jesus Christ?

Paul speaks about the transformation that knowing Christ has brought to the lives of the Colossians. (Vss. 21-23)

Do you think that Paul's bluntness about their former life is likely to offend the people in Colossae?

How does Paul describe how this transformation came about?

Paul speaks about his personal role in the work of evangelism. (Vss. 24-29)

Once again Paul associates suffering with the proclaiming of the good news. Do you think that he stresses this too much?

Do you think that Paul is boasting?

Paul associates the words "secret" and "mystery" with the Christian faith. (Vss. 26 & 27)

Do you think that this way of speaking about the faith is easily understood in our world today.

As time permits you may want to consider:

What impressions are you forming about the believers in Colossae from what is in this first chapter of Paul's letter to them?

Are there any questions that you would like to ask Paul about what he said in this opening chapter of his letter?