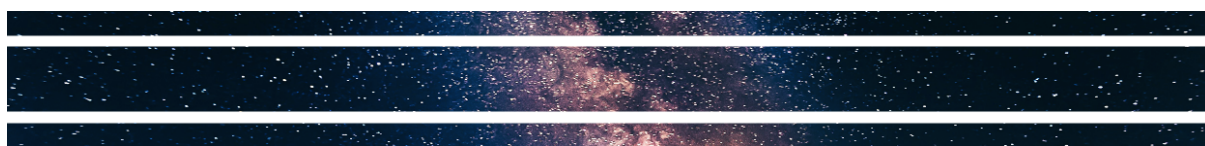




Colossians



A 7-day study

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS



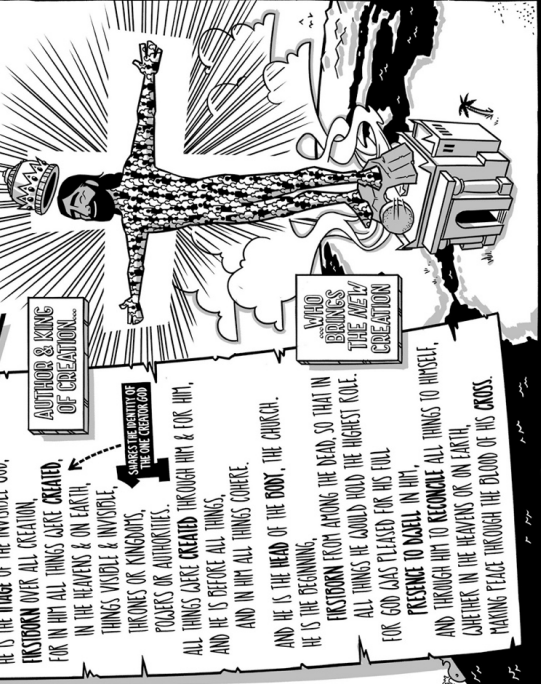
WRITTEN FROM PRISON (4:10)

CHURCH OF COLOSSAE
STARTED BY EPAPHRAS (4:12-13)

1:1-2:3 THE EXALTED MESSIAH

WE THANK GOD FOR YOUR **Faith** and **HOPE** and **LOVE** and **WISDOM** and **Understanding**.
(1:3-5)

1:5-20 THE MESSIAH POEM
HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD,
FIRSTBORN OVER ALL CREATION,
FOR IN HIM ALL THINGS WERE CREATED,
IN THE HEAVENS & ON EARTH,
THINGS VISIBLE & INVISIBLE,
THrones OR KINGDOMS,
POWERS OR AUTHORITIES.
ALL THINGS WERE CREATED THROUGH HIM & FOR HIM,
AND HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS,
AND IN HIM ALL THINGS COHERE.
AND HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH.
HE IS THE BEGINNING,
FIRSTBORN FROM AMONG THE DEAD, SO THAT IN
ALL THINGS HE COULD HOLD THE HIGHEST ROLE.
FOR GOD WAS PLEASED FOR HIS FULL
PRESENCE TO DWELL IN HIM,
AND THROUGH HIM TO RECONCILE ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF,
WHETHER IN THE HEAVENS OR ON EARTH,
MAKING PEACE THROUGH THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS.



1:24-2:5 THE SUFFERING APOSTLE

FOR THE MESSIAH'S NEW MULTI-ETHNIC FAMILY
PARTICIPATION IN THE SUFFERING OF THE MESSIAH
AND GROWING
JESUS IS LORD!
THE MESSIAH IN YOU ALL THE MORE OF GLORY (1:27)

2:6-2:3 THE PRESSURE TO TURN AWAY

DO NOT INFLUENCES TO RESIST
GIVING INTO THESE IS COMPROMISE!
OBSERVANCE OF THE LAWS OF THE TORAH
JESUS TRIUMPHED OVER ALL SPIRITUAL POWERS (1:15)
JESUS FULFILLED THE LAWS WHICH LACKED TOGETHER TO CHANGE THE HEART.
JESUS IS THE REALITY TO WHICH THE LAWS POINTED.

3-4 THE RESURRECTION LIFE

3:1-17 THE NEW HUMANITY
"SET YOUR MIND ON THINGS ABOVE, WHERE THE MESSIAH RULES" (3:1)
"HERE NO ONE'S GREEN OR JEWISH, CIRCUMCISED OR UNCIRCUMCISED, SLAVE OR FREE: THE MESSIAH IS ALL & IN ALL PEOPLE." (3:11)
3:10-11 THE NEW ROMAN HOUSEHOLD
"HEED THE RICH OF LIFE & DEATH"
JESUS IS LORD OF THE HOUSE
PAUL RESHAPES THE ROMAN HOUSEHOLD AROUND JESUS, WHO RULES WITH SELF-GIVING LOVE.
1:2-10 CONCLUSION
"GREET ONE ANOTHER AS A BELOVED BROTHER IN THE LORD." (4:9)
"ESCAPED SLAVE OF PHILETION"



created by the Bible Project

Background on the Book of Colossians

Taken from the Bible Project

Who Wrote the Book of Colossians?

Christian tradition holds that the Apostle Paul wrote the book of Colossians.

Context

The events described in Colossians take place in the city of Colossae. Colossians was likely composed while Paul was in custody in Rome between 60 and 64 C.E.

Literary Styles

The book of Colossians is a letter written in prose discourse to the churches in Colossae.

Key Themes

- Jesus as King over all creation
- Liberation through Jesus
- Freedom in the Messiah

Structure

Colossians can be divided into four parts. Chapters 1:1-23 begin with Jesus as head of the new humanity. 1:24-2:5 focuses on Paul's suffering. 2:6-23 addresses cultural pressures in Colossae. And chapters 3-4 describe examples of Jesus' self-giving love.

Taken from the Bible Project

Day 1

Colossians 1:1-14

1. Background

Watch this summary video of Colossians done by the Bible Project.



2. Gratitude

Trace your finger across your knuckles. As you come to each high part, thank God for a high point in your life. As you come to each valley, thank God for a way he showed up for you in a low point in your life.

3. Imagination

Take a moment to think about the state of the world today. What are your own thoughts and feelings as you think about this?

Now, by using your imagination try to get a more heavenly view on what is going on. Try to imagine yourself seeing the world as God is looking down on it.

Can you imagine his concern for the world?

Can you imagine his own thoughts and feelings on what is happening?

Can you imagine how God is intervening?

How might God's perspective be towards the state of the world?

In what ways did this exercise help you grow into God's qualities of love, compassion, justice, understanding, etc.?

4. Preparation for the Word

Pray this prayer in preparation of reading the Word:

Father,
Anoint me with Your Holy Spirit
So that as I read Your living word,
What I read would change and transform me
And would draw me closer and closer to You.
Amen.

5. Word

Read through the passage slowly and carefully, as many times as you need.

Note what stands out to you.

You can use this word cloud to visualize the passage in a different way as well.



6. Consider

What is the passage saying?

What are the things that are “heard” in this passage (it’s mentioned 4 times)?

What aspects of this prayer do you want for yourself and your own life?

Is there a command, an example, or a principle to follow?

How do the truths in this text change me?

What does the passage mean?

7. Response

Reflect on what it means to live a life worthy of the Lord.

Talk to God about the passage and the insight you gained.

Take the idea of the passage and pray it over someone you know.

1 ¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,
²To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters^[1] in
Christ:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father.^[2]

Thanksgiving and Prayer

³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,
⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all
God's people — ⁵the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in
heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel
⁶that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing
throughout the whole world — just as it has been doing among you since the day you
heard it and truly understood God's grace. ⁷You learned it from Epaphras, our dear
fellow servant,^[3] who is a faithful minister of Christ on our^[4] behalf, ⁸and who also
told us of your love in the Spirit.

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for
you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all
the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,^[5] ¹⁰so that you may live a life
worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work,
growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to
his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹²and giving
joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^[6] to share in the inheritance of his
holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³For he has rescued us from the dominion of
darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have
redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

¹ 1:2 The Greek word for *brothers and sisters* (*adelphoi*) refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God's family; also in 4:15.

² 1:2 Some manuscripts *Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*

³ 1:7 Or *slave*

⁴ 1:7 Some manuscripts *your*

⁵ 1:9 Or *all spiritual wisdom and understanding*

⁶ 1:12 Some manuscripts *us*

Colossians 1:15-23

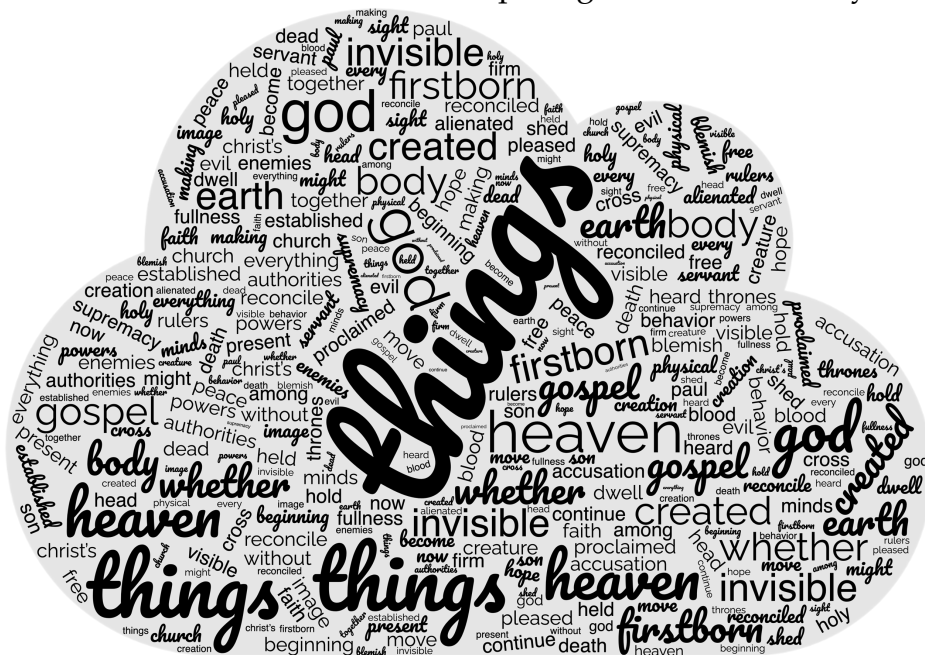
Think through these questions.
What have I done with/for Christ?
What am I doing with/for Christ?
What ought I do with/for Christ?

Sit in a relaxed position and close your eyes. Pay attention to your body. Where are you tense? Where are you carrying burdens, stress, anxiety, fear, etc.? After you have finished this scan, bring these burdens to God. Tell him where you need comfort or consolation. Sit in a relaxed position with your palms up and receive the comfort and consolation that he wants to give you.

Quiet your heart. Ask God to remove distractions and thoughts not of him.
Ask him to help you see yourself as he sees you.
How did his answer speak to your heart?
Thank him for what he said.

Hold the text up in your hands and thank God for the fact that you can now read it today in your language with such ease. Ask him to open your mind, heart, and ears to what he wants to say.

Read through the passage slowly and carefully, as many times as you need.
You can use this word cloud to visualize the passage in a different way as well.



6. Consider

What grabs your attention as you read?

What are the “things” mentioned in the passage? (It’s there 9 times.)

Meditate for a minute on the picture of Christ as portrayed in this passage.

How does this fit into the big storyline of the Bible? (creation, fall, redemption, restoration)

In what ways does this passage point to the hope of the gospel?

How could you summarize the main idea of this passage in 5 words or less?

7. Response

What steps can I take to honor God with what I’ve taken from this passage?

The Supremacy of the Son of God

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

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of^[7] your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation — ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

⁷ 1:21 Or *minds, as shown by*

Day 3

Colossians 1:24 – 2:8

1. Background

Watch this video done by the Bible Effect on Colossians' historical background – why it was written.



2. Examen

Where and how do I experience God being present in my life?

3. Humility

Our posture can have a great effect on our hearts. Try getting on your knees or your face before God. In this position of humility, acknowledge your great need for your Savior. Tell him what comes to mind while in this position. Spend as long as you need, then return to your normal position. Give God thanks for how he lifts us up.

4. Preparation for the Word

Pray this prayer before you read:

Holy Father,
I am grateful for your word today.
Open my eyes to your words.
Let your Holy Spirit guide me into truth.
Grant me unity with you through this time.
Let me be satisfied in your gospel
And be a doer of your word.
Amen.

5. Word

Read through the passage slowly and carefully, as many times as you need.
You can use this word cloud to visualize the passage in a different way as well.



Repeated words, phrases, or ideas

Types of sentences such as commands, questions, statements, if-then clauses, etc.

What encourages you in this passage?

What challenges you in this passage?

7. Examen

Pray for grace to be able to see God's acting in your life.

Review your day yesterday. Recall specific moments and how you felt at that time.

Reflect on what you did, said, or thought in those instances. Were you drawing closer to or further away from God?

Look toward your day today. Think about how you might more effectively collaborate with God's plan. Be specific.

Paul's Labor for the Church

²⁴ Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

²⁵ I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness — ²⁶ the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. ²⁷ To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

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

2 ¹ I want you to know how hard I am contending for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. ² My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴ I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. ⁵ For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how disciplined you are and how firm your faith in Christ is.

Spiritual Fullness in Christ

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

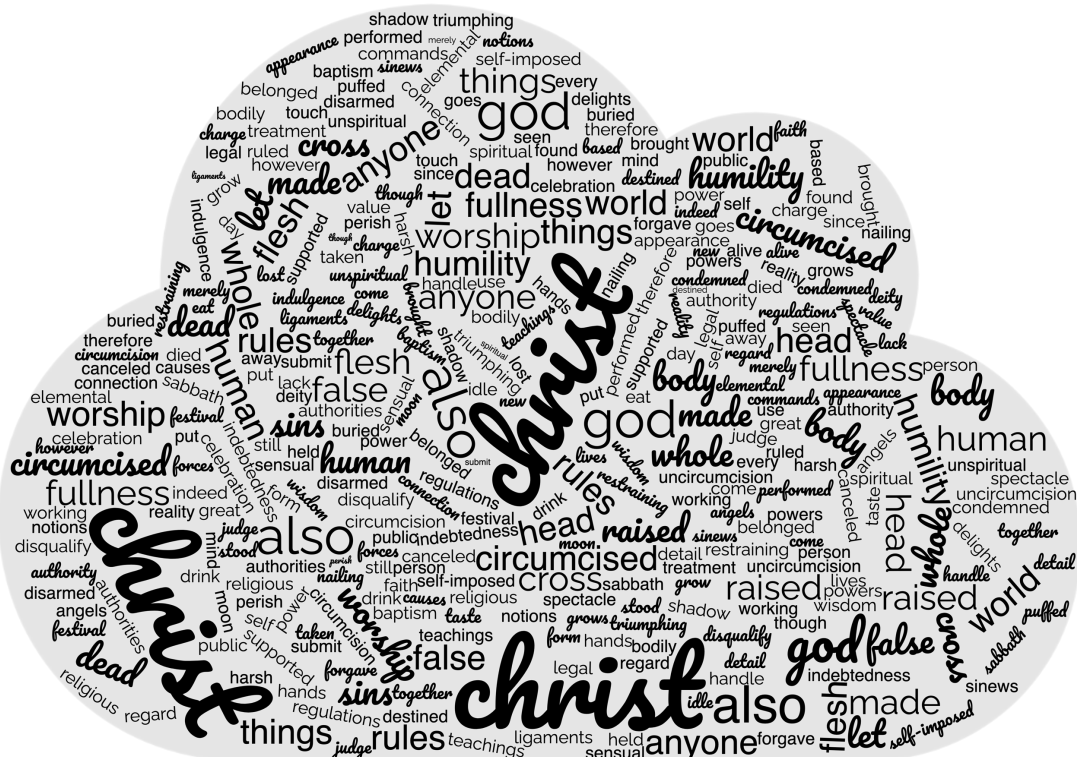
⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces^[8] of this world rather than on Christ.

⁸ 2:8 Or *the basic principles*; also in verse 20

Colossians 2:9-23

Then hold these things out in your palm, offering them to God. Wait in silence and see how God accepts and responds to them.

What is God revealing to you through this passage?



5. Response

As this passage talks a lot about Christ, sit with Christ for a minute and talk with him about your thoughts about the passage.

6. Imagination

It is helpful at times to come to God in reverence, holy fear, and respect. It can also be helpful to come to him casually as a friend. In this moment, practice coming to God as a friend.

How would you like to spend time with him? Choose the way that feels most natural to you, for example imagining yourself sitting at a breakfast table with him, or go on a walk and imagine him walking next to you, or set a chair across from where you are sitting and imagine yourself talking to him in front of you.

Greet him like you'd greet a friend.

What would you like to say to him?

What would you like to ask him?

Listen for what he might be saying to you.

Linger for as long as you'd like with him; no need to rush to the next thing.

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh^[9] was put off when you were circumcised by^[10] Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you^[11] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.^[12]

Freedom From Human Rules

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. ¹⁸ Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. ¹⁹ They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. ²⁰ Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? ²² These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely 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.

⁹ 2:11 In contexts like this, the Greek word for *flesh* (*sarx*) refers to the sinful state of human beings, often presented as a power in opposition to the Spirit; also in verse 13.

¹⁰ 2:11 Or *put off in the circumcision of*

¹¹ 2:13 Some manuscripts *us*

¹² 2:15 Or *them in him*

Day 5

Colossians 3:1-17

1. Background

Watch this video done by Spoken Gospel on Colossians.



2. Notice

Look around you to find evidences of God's grandeur (i.e. the sky, stars, mountains, clouds, etc.). As you notice them, wonder and marvel.

3. Examen

Choose one of the fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control).

Close your eyes and hold the word in your mind.

Review the past day. What were moments when you exhibited that fruit? What were moments when you had a chance to exhibit it and chose not to?

4. Prayer Map

Start at the "shipwreck" in the upper right of the picture below, and take a tour around the island, following the path to pray for the things that catch your attention.



Pray this prayer in preparation for reading the Word:

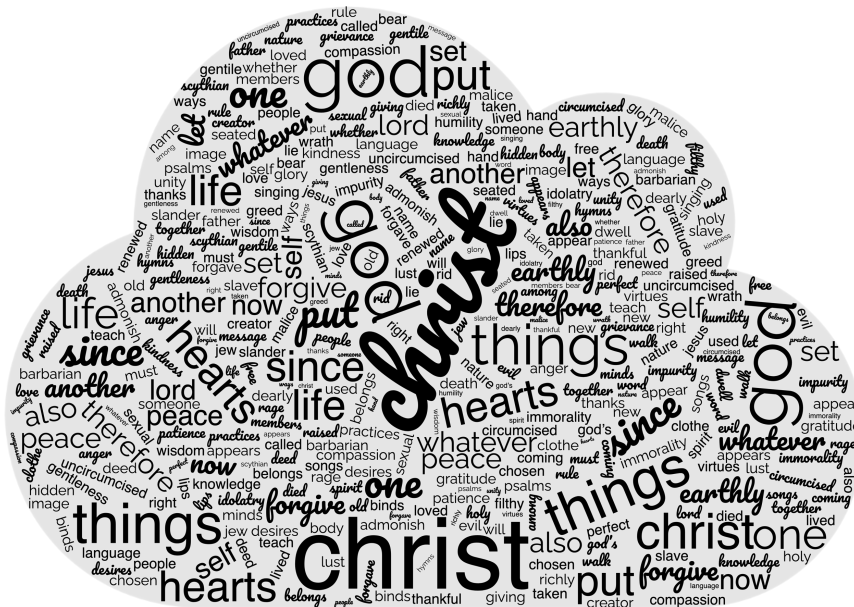
I want to sit with you in this time.

And take joy in this time with you.

And speak to my heart.

Thank God for your time in prayer, and ask him to direct your attention as you study the passage for today.

You can use the word cloud below as another way to think about the words in the passage.



What are the most often-repeated words in the passage? What do we learn about them?

Divide your paper into two sides. On one side write the earthly nature

characteristics, and on the other side write the God's chosen people characteristics. Spend a few minutes reflecting on these lists.

Has this passage pricked your conscience in any way? Repent and confess, and enjoy God's forgiveness.

Use what you've learned or read to pray for situations, events, and people around you.

Living as Those Made Alive in Christ

3¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your^[13] life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.^[14] ⁷You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. ⁸But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. ⁹Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. ¹¹Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷And 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.

¹³ 3:4 Some manuscripts *our*

¹⁴ 3:6 Some early manuscripts *coming on those who are disobedient*

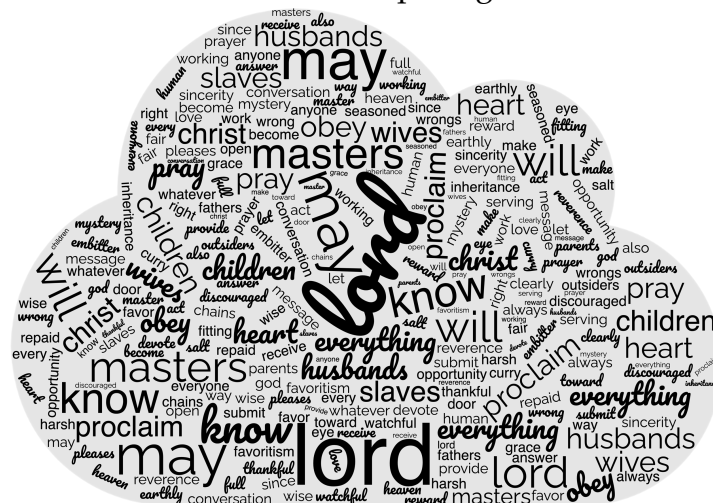
Colossians 3:18 – 4:6

Option 3: Out of darkness, into light.

Sit for a minute feeling his forgiveness and his love.

Express your appreciation to him for your friendship.

You can use this word cloud to visualize the passage in a different way as well.



6. Consider

Highlight each word for God in a different color.

What are the relationships mentioned in this passage?

Why might these specific commands be given in these relationships in particular?

How does this passage relate to the two greatest commandments?¹⁵

Looking at the highlighted words for God and the relationships mentioned, what can we learn about God? What can we learn about humankind?

What can we learn about prayer?

7. Response

Respond to God first by sitting in silence in his presence with what you have learned.

Then respond to God by expressing your thoughts to him.

Next, respond to God by telling him what you want to do as a result of reading this passage. Ask him for his strength to do this.

¹⁵ The two greatest commandments are from Matthew 22:36-40: “‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’” Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Instructions for Christian Households

¹⁸ Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹ Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them.

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

²¹ Fathers,^[16] do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

²² Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. ²⁵ Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

4 ¹Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Further Instructions

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

¹⁶ 3:21 Or *Parents*

Colossians 4:7-18

Thank God for those gifts.

Was there a chance to do good that you did not take? Or one that you did take? Give glory to God or express your regret to him.

Precious Holy Spirit,
I ask you to illuminate this passage for me.
To use it to shine light on my own heart and intentions.
I praise you for the gift of your Word.
May I have a soft and humble heart today.
Amen.

You can use this word cloud to visualize the passage in a different way as well.



5. Consider

Read again, pausing each time you come to a name and spending a moment thinking of this person and the little or much you may know about them.

What is each person remembered for?

Which names or descriptions stand out to you today? Take a moment with God to consider how that uniquely speaks to you today.

Who are people in your own life who encourage you or who remind you of those in this passage?

How does this passage point us to the gospel?

6. Response

How would you like to thank, encourage, or pray for those in your own life who are influential?

How else would you like to respond to today's passage?

Final Greetings

⁷ Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. He is a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant^[17] in the Lord. ⁸ I am sending him to you for the express purpose that you may know about our^[18] circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts. ⁹ He is coming with Onesimus, our faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you everything that is happening here.

¹⁰ My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him.) ¹¹ Jesus, who is called Justus, also sends greetings. These are the only Jews^[19] among my co-workers for the kingdom of God, and they have proved a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. ¹³ I vouch for him that he is working hard for you and for those at Laodicea and Hierapolis. ¹⁴ Our dear friend Luke, the doctor, and Demas send greetings. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.

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

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

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

¹⁷ 4:7 Or *slave*; also in verse 12

¹⁸ 4:8 Some manuscripts *that he may know about your*

¹⁹ 4:11 Greek *only ones of the circumcision group*

Guide for the Book of Colossians

Taken from the Bible Project

This letter was written during one of Paul's many imprisonments for announcing Jesus as King. Unlike his other letters, this is addressed to a group of people that he had never met and a community that he didn't start. The church in Colossae was started by a coworker of Paul's named Epaphras, who was from Colossae (Col. 1:7-8; 4:12-13). Epaphras had recently visited Paul in prison and updated him on how well the Colossians were doing overall. However, Epaphras had also mentioned some of the cultural pressures that were tempting them to turn away from Jesus. Paul wrote this letter to encourage the Colossians, address the issues Epaphras had raised, and challenge them to a greater devotion to Jesus.

The letter's design and flow of thought are fairly easy to follow. The opening movement focuses on Jesus as the exalted Messiah, followed by Paul's description of his suffering in prison for the Messiah. Then, Paul addresses the pressures tempting them to turn away from Jesus. In chapters 3-4, Paul explores the new way of life that Jesus' resurrection has opened up for them.

Colossians 1:1-23: Jesus As King Over All Creation

The letter opens with two prayers. Paul first thanks God for what he learned from Epaphras, that the Colossians have been totally faithful to Jesus and showing love for God and their neighbors. He moves on to pray that they will grow in their wisdom and understanding about Jesus. Paul has placed a poem here to help the Colossians and us do exactly that (Col. 1:15-20). It's the centerpiece of chapter 1, and it's all about the crucified and exalted Messiah.

This poem has two parallel stanzas crammed with language and imagery from the books of Genesis, Exodus, the Psalms, and Proverbs. The first stanza explores how Jesus is the true image of God. In him, the full character and purpose of God is embodied in a human. Jesus is the firstborn, an Old Testament phrase about Jesus' royal status, over all creation. In this, he shares the very identity of the one true Creator God. Through him, all reality, all powers and authorities, both spiritual and human, were created.

It's in Jesus the Messiah that we discover the author and King of creation, as well as the one who will bring about the new creation. He's the head of a new body, which refers to Jesus' people, who are the new humanity of which his resurrection existence is a prototype. God's glorious temple presence dwells in Jesus. And God has reconciled himself to humanity, all spiritual powers, and all creation through Jesus' death and resurrection. It's a remarkable poem, and Paul will keep referring back to it as he continues with the letter.

Colossians 1:24-2:5: Paul's Suffering

Paul then shows how the truth of this poem transforms his own experience of suffering in prison (Col. 1:24-2:5). While he's being punished for announcing Jesus as the risen Lord and King to the Greek and Roman world, his suffering is not a defeat. It's actually Paul's way of participating in Jesus' own suffering, which was also done as an act of love. Paul's hardships are a cause for joy, as he has been imprisoned for spreading the surprising news about Israel's resurrected Messiah. Just as the divine glory dwells in Jesus, so Jesus dwells in and among his international family. In Paul's words, "the Messiah is in you all, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27).

Colossians 2:6-23: Cultural Pressures

Paul then addresses the cultural pressures that are tempting the Colossians to turn away from Jesus (Col. 2:6-23). They were being confronted by a combination of mystical polytheism and pressure to observe the laws of the Torah. All of these new Christians had grown up worshiping the various Greek and Roman gods who governed different arenas of everyday life. And some of the Colossian Christians considered Jesus as one more deity that they could worship alongside the others. From a different cultural group, the Jewish Christians were pressuring these non-Jews to "complete" their commitment to the Messiah by following all the laws found in the Torah. Paul specifically mentions the pressures of eating a kosher diet, observing sacred days, and circumcision (Galatians).

For Paul, to give into these temptations is an unacceptable compromise and a failure to grasp who Jesus is and what he accomplished on their behalf. The Colossians used to live in fear of spiritual powers and “elemental spirits,” as Paul calls them (Col. 2:8, 20). But Jesus has triumphed over these powers through his death and resurrection, freeing the Colossians from any former obligation to these powers. In the same way, Jesus has fulfilled all the laws of the Torah, which never had the power to transform the selfish human heart. What Jesus did through his life, death, and resurrection lacks nothing and doesn’t need to be supplemented by following the old laws. After all, Jesus is the reality to which the Torah was pointing all along.

Colossians 3-4: Examples of Jesus’ Self-Giving Love

Rather than trying to live under the laws of the Torah, Christians have the power of Jesus’ resurrection to change their hearts, minds, and way of life. Following Jesus means joining the new humanity and joining their lives to the risen Jesus. This is why Paul challenges the Colossians to “set their minds on things above, where the Messiah is seated” and where he rules at God’s right hand (Col. 3:1). Paul doesn’t mean for them to think about leaving Earth to go to Heaven. Rather, the heavens are the transcendent place from which Jesus rules over creation. From there, he will one day return to Earth to transform all things. Or, as Paul says, “When the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, you too will be revealed with him in glory” (Col. 3:4).

Paul challenges them to live in the present as the new kinds of humans that they will one day become. Paul describes their old humanity, which was characterized by distorted sexuality and destructive speech. For Christians, that old humanity died along with Jesus and is replaced with his new humanity, characterized by mercy, generosity, forgiveness, and love. This new humanity transcends the ethnic and social boundary lines of the world in order to create, in Paul’s words, a people in which “no one is Greek or Jewish, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free. But the Messiah is all, and is in all people” (Col. 3:11).

Paul next offers a practical example of this concept, showing the Colossians what this new humanity might look like in a first-century Roman family. The Roman household was a highly authoritarian institution, in which the patriarch held the power of life and death over his wife, children, and slaves. This is not so in a Christian household because the risen Jesus is the true Lord, where the wife allows her husband to be responsible for her, and the husband

is subject to Jesus by loving his wife and placing her well-being above his own.

In a home where Jesus is Lord, children are not objects but called to maturity and respect. Parents are to raise their children with patient understanding. And Christians who are enslaved are also to honor their human masters precisely because they’re not the real master — Jesus is! Christians who have enslaved other people are to understand that these people are not their property but are fellow members of Jesus’ body. They are to be honored and embraced in love.

Paul is walking a fine line here. He takes the most basic Roman institution and reshapes it around Jesus, who rules with self-giving love. While he doesn’t abolish the household structure outright, the exalted Messiah demands that it be transformed almost beyond the point of recognition for any Roman living in Colossae.

You can see this most clearly in the letter’s conclusion (Col. 4:2-18). After a request for prayer, Paul applies these instructions about Christian enslaved people and masters to the church at Colossae. We discover that Tychicus is the one carrying and reading this letter to the Colossians and that he’s accompanied by Onesimus, a person formerly enslaved to a Colossian Christian named Philemon. We also discover, from another letter of Paul’s addressed to Philemon, that Onesimus had escaped from his master — a crime that was worthy of imprisonment. In the face of all this relational tension, Paul asks the church to greet Onesimus “as a faithful and beloved brother in the Lord” (Col. 4:9). In the letter to Philemon, Paul is even more clear. He says that Onesimus should be received “no longer as a slave, but as a brother” (Phil. v. 16).

In this letter, Paul invites us to see that no part of human existence remains untouched by the loving, liberating rule of the risen Jesus. Our suffering, temptation to compromise, and moral character, and the power dynamics inside our homes must be reexamined and transformed. We are invited to live in the present as if the new creation really arrived when Jesus rose from the dead.