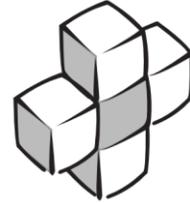




SMACC

Making Disciples of Jesus Christ



Bible Study Series:

Colossians



Our Mission:

*To glorify God together in response to his grace
by making disciples of Jesus Christ*

About These Studies

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Study 1: “Continue Where You Started” (Colossians 1:1–14)

Big Idea: Gospel growth seen in its proclamation, love for each other and continual trust in Christ’s complete work.

Getting Started

1. What stereotypes do people have of Christians?

This question is meant to help people see how the world views Christians and by extension, Christianity. From the get-go, we want people to have an idea of what Christians today look like and what they are supposed to look like according to Colossians. Key question to work through is, “what is a real Christian?”

Digging In

2. Read Colossians 1:1-14 and divide the passage into smaller sections.

Verses	Key Ideas
V1-5a	How they are doing at present Paul gives thanks because they trust in Jesus and this is shown by their love for God's people
V5b-7a	How they started with the Gospel Gospel growth among the Colossians which started with the receiving it via the proclamation of it.
V7b-14	How they will/ can continue in Jesus Paul's prayer that they will grow in the gospel to truly know God and how to please Him in their deeds as they have been made His people.

How they are doing at present

3. Who are the Colossians? (Col 2:1, 5)

V2 Paul considers them faithful brothers. It is important to note that back in the 1st century, a Jew associating himself with Gentiles was considered quite scandalous to society. They shared very opposing worldviews and as such, very different lifestyles. For Paul to acknowledge them as saints and then call them faithful brothers is not a half-baked thought. Knowing that Paul writes so carefully, we can know from here that they are indeed part of God’s family; Paul was writing to Gentiles who have put their trust in Jesus especially since he has never met them.

4. Why does Paul thank God?

V4-6 Their faith in Jesus is made public/ made known (heard of) as well as their love for other Christians. In other words, they're the real deal – they were Christians. They know that Earth is not their final destination and that a more glorious reality awaits them.

How they started with the Gospel

5. How can we be assured that the Colossians really are Christians?

V5b-7a They heard of this hope in heaven through the gospel preached to them just like everyone else. Epaphras was responsible for bringing the gospel to Colossae. It is the same gospel that they have (which we also have) but that's not all. There is evidence of gospel growth as seen earlier and also all over the world as it is being preached.

6. What do we know about the nature of the gospel of Jesus Christ according to what Paul said?

The gospel has come to them (V6a), can be heard (v6d), learnt from someone (V7a), it is the word of truth (V6) and it bears fruit and increasing (V6b). Simply put, the gospel message that saves and grows people is delivered to them by other people. It is amazing because it is being preached to non-Jewish people (which is what Jesus commanded in Matt 28). Those who preach the gospel are ministers/ servant of it. Get people to think back to how they became Christians. Who read the Bible with them? Who was their Epaphras?

7. What does it mean that the gospel is bearing fruit and increasing (V6)? Is the gospel multiplying into more gospels?

Wherever the gospel goes in the world, its effects go along with it. When do we see these effects? V6d "since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth" shows that the gospel bears fruit at when people hear it, when the truth finally makes sense. The gospel causes us to know God and calls us to respond to Him in true repentance. There is only one gospel but anyone who hears and trusts in it will be saved.

How they will/ can continue in Jesus

8. If the Colossians are already Christians and they also show evidence for it, why does Paul pray V9-10? (cf. Col. 2:4, 16-23)

The presupposition that Paul is attacking in this letter is that spirituality is progressive and that trusting in Christ is just one level of spirituality. According to Col 2:4, there were people who deceived the Christians (some of them who would have been Christians) with arguments that seemed reasonable and sound. Knowing who they belong to was crucial for their faithfulness. Later on in Col 2:16-23, he addresses practices like asceticism that they believe helped them attain

higher spirituality. Paul debunks that from the very beginning. It is precisely because they started with the gospel with actions as signs for their faith that they need to continue this way. Paul's prayer is meant to encourage the Colossians to truly know and discern God and to desire what God desires (His will). If you're trusting in someone, you're in a special relationship (covenantal relationship), you would want to know the person more within the relationship to continue serving and loving that person. Same logic here: If the Christian knows God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, he/she will know how to live in a way that pleases God. As the Christian learns how to love God and loves God more, he will grow to love God more. And the evidence for that is the fruit that he bears i.e. the godliness of his works that resembles that of the person He is in special relationship with. Spirituality is not about becoming more spiritual but responding rightly consistently to God by His Spirit.

9. Why would the Colossians need such great strength? Are they going to fight something/ someone? (cf. Col. 3:5,7-8)

Paul understands the difficulty of being Christian. He prays for great, glorious strength because they need it to endure patiently with joy or as the old English renders it as longsuffering. Before we jump the gun and point to persecution being the number one challenge of Christianity, it's not! It is faithlessness toward a faithful God. Remaining faithful to God means turning away from the world. Col 3:5 and 7 calls them to put to death the worldly-ness within them. It is so hard to break old habits. And when we are in the midst of resisting temptation to commit sin, it hurts us physically, mentally and emotionally. Our conscience is also hurt when we feel nothing but guilt. That is the weight of sin. It's like running a marathon and your hamstrings are sore and you're out of breath. However, as you continue at it, your stamina builds up and your resistance toward pain improves. Paul prays that Christians would suffer this world patiently with thanksgiving because the motivation is the new identity that Christians are given (V12). The painful process of sanctification continues after being sanctified through relationship with God in Jesus. Being "qualified" is the result of being made holy. When Jesus puts us back into relationship with God, we are made holy via the relationship and can enjoy citizenship in His Kingdom. V13 expands on the event of being made "qualified". Christ's sacrifice took away our sin and His righteousness became ours - that's how we were able to be transferred into the Kingdom.

Application

10. Do your friends/ colleagues/ relatives think you are Christian? Why or why not?

Good to reflect on what we're known for as Christians like the opening question. Are we goody-two-shoes? Moral citizens? Bible technicians? Perhaps we're no different from the world around us.

11. Are you filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him? Really, why is that?
- How can you improve your Bible reading?
 - How can you apply what you learn in church?
 - How are you struggling to apply God's word in your life?

12. How can you be more like Epaphras or Paul?

- Are we preaching the gospel that saves people?
- Are we content with just “living the Christian life” so that people may or may not see?

13. So, what is a Christian?

Study 2: “Jesus is Everything” (Colossians 1:15–23)

Big Idea: Jesus is both the Lord of creation and redemption that reconciled his people to God by his cross

Getting Started

1. How would you explain who Jesus is? What is so significant about the person Jesus?

Get them to think about how would they explain who Jesus is to someone else.

Is Jesus a good man? A wise teacher? Or perhaps a magician full of miracles? What’s so special about him? Note that Jesus is more than what is stated above.

Context

In our previous study, we have seen how the Colossians started living when they became Christians after hearing the gospel. Their faith in Jesus Christ and love for all the saints is the result of their understanding of the gospel. Today, we will look at who the person Jesus is and his authority over all things.

Digging In

2. Read Colossians 1:15-23 and divide the passage into smaller sections.

Verses	Key Ideas
15 - 17	Jesus the Lord of Creation.
18 - 20	Jesus the Lord of Redemption.
21 - 23	Reconciliation and hope of Colossians to God.

3. Who does the “he” in this passage refer to?

Jesus. V15 and v19 shows that Jesus is distinct from God the Father. V13 and v22 shows that Jesus is the Son.

4. The table below summarizes verses 15-19. Split into pairs and discuss what each verse means.

Verse	Who is Jesus?	What does it mean?
v15a	The image of the invisible God.	Jesus is distinct from God the Father as “the image of the invisible God” and yet in him God is revealed.

v15b	The firstborn of all creation.	Jesus is a unique and distinguished from all creation. He is the supreme ruler over all creation. Jesus is the image of the transcendent God (v15a) but he is also over creation.
v16	All things were created by Jesus and for him.	The 'For' in this verse explains what is meant by v15b. Jesus created everything and it is all for him.
v17a	The one who is before all things.	Jesus was there from the beginning of creation. He was always Lord before creation.
v17b	In him all things hold together.	Jesus is the sustainer of all things. Nothing happens apart from him. Everything is established and dependent on Jesus.
v18a	The head of the body, church.	He has authority over the church which belongs to him.
v18b	The beginning and the firstborn from the dead.	Jesus is the first to rise from the dead and by rising from the dead, he has begun the new creation that is to come.
v19	All God's fullness dwells in him.	This verse is like v15a and completes this section where is started – Jesus is the fullness/image of God. Therefore, this summarises what came before.

5. What does it mean to be the firstborn of all creation? Is Jesus created first before Adam?

The firstborn in the passage refers to an heir or ruler, as in the 'firstborn son' who inherited all the father's property in the ancient world. It is about pre-eminence/supremacy. To be supreme means to be in a position of superiority or authority over all others. In this sense, Jesus is the heir or ruler of all creation (v. 15), as well as the supreme and pre-eminent one in the age of resurrection (v. 18). He is the 'heir' of the age to come.

6. Notice the word "all things" and "he/him" are repeated in the passage from v15-23. If you can, count them out. How do these words relate to Jesus?

All things refers to the things in heaven and on earth according to v16. Both visible and invisible together with all thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities. The purpose of these are all created through and for Jesus (v16). Jesus reigns over all things and that he is the Lord over all. In him, Jesus sustains the universe and hold everything together (v17b), Jesus rules over his people (v18a), Jesus reconciles all things whether on earth or heaven (v20).

7. a) What does it mean that everything is reconciled to him?

Jesus brings peace and reconciliation to the Father. This includes all things which are both good and evil whether on earth or in heaven. Reconciliation in this sense means to bring things back to their proper order (relationship) under the Lordship of Jesus. This is only done through Jesus's blood on the cross where peace can be achieved between God and his people. We as rebels against God are restored through the cross and by faith. Which is the beginning of the new creation that God has in store where rebellion will no longer be present. Those who don't trust in Christ will not enter this new creation.

b) Does this mean all people will be saved?

No, it doesn't! Salvation has been made available for all people but not everyone will be saved. In v16, all things includes the things in heaven and on earth which are both good and bad. Only those who choose to believe and trust in Jesus's death and resurrection will be saved and gain everlasting life with God. Those who ignore and reject the gospel will come under judgment and everlasting destruction away from God.

8. a) What were the Colossians once like? What was their attitude to God?

They were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. In other words, they were sinning against God and rejecting him as their Lord. Their actions are a result of their sinful hearts that led them to do evil deeds. Emphasize that sin is the root cause of the problem and to solve this problem, it needs reconciliation between the 2 parties. Someone has to pay the price to be redeemed.

b) How are the Colossians now after they accept the gospel?

They are now presented holy and blameless and above reproach before God. What does it mean? It means that they are now accepted by God. More importantly, how did this happen? By his death, Jesus paid the price for our reconciliation to God.

c) What should the Colossians continue doing in v23?

To continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that they have heard which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. (v23). Being accepted by God comes through faith in hope of the gospel and remaining in this state involves continuing the way we started – trusting in the gospel.

Think it through

9. Who is Jesus Christ to you? Are you trusting in him as your Lord and Savior?

Get them to think about their relationship with Jesus.

Is there anything that they are holding back from acknowledging Jesus as their Lord?

10. How do we know that we are trusting in him as Lord? Knowing that Jesus is our Lord and Savior, how then should we treat him in our life?

We should honour, respect, praise and obey him as he is the supreme ruler over all things. We are to acknowledge that there is nothing in this world that can satisfy our human desires. To live a life that

is in awe of what God has done in v20 through Jesus Christ. He must have the preeminence in all aspects of our lives.

11. Can you think of anyone to share the gospel with in your college/university/workplace/family?
Reflect on who and how they can share the gospel with.

Study 3: “Rejoice in suffering for Proclaiming Christ”

(Colossians 1:24–2:5)

Big Idea: Christians can rejoice in their sufferings to make God’s mystery known to all.

Getting Started

1. What are some steps/plans you make to achieve a goal you have?

Context

Previously, we read about who Jesus is – he is the Lord of Creation, the Lord of Redemption and he brings us peace and reconciliation to God our Father. The Colossians were once sinful and rejected God but now are presented holy and blameless and above reproach before God by Jesus’ death/work at the cross.

Digging In

2. Read Colossians 1:24-2:5 and divide the passage into smaller sections.

Verses	Key Ideas
1:24-26	Paul’s ministry in revealing the mystery of God to the saints
1:27	The revelation of the riches of the glory of the mystery
1:28-29	Paul’s goal to present everyone mature in Christ
2:1-5	Paul’s encouragement to stand firm in Christ in his absence

Colossians 1:24-29

3. How does Paul describe his ministry?

He rejoices in his sufferings. He is suffering for the sake of the body of Christ. It should come as a surprise to many as we rarely connect the words ‘rejoice’ and ‘suffering’ together. If we are suffering, we are unlikely to be rejoicing, and it seems strange to us to speak of rejoicing in suffering. (Note: We will be able to see what motivates Paul’s ministry in Q6).

4. What could be still lacking with regards to Christ’s afflictions? (v24). Wasn’t his work finished at the cross? (See also Rom 8:16-17; 1 Thess. 3:1-4.)

After reading verses 1:15-23, it is difficult to understand verse 24 to mean that Christ is lacking in any way in terms of who he is or the sufficiency of his work on the cross. In this verse, and in the New Testament more generally, Jesus is so closely connected to his people that the church is described as “his body” (cf. 1:18; 1:24). Therefore, as the head of the body, Christ suffers when the church suffers. As Romans 8:16-17 and 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4 make clear, the church will experience

and endure suffering until Christ returns. Paul's personal testimony here is that as he ministers on behalf of the Colossians, and therefore struggles and suffers, he is himself "filling up" some of what still remains of Christ's "afflictions"—afflictions that can be spoken of as "lacking" in the sense that they are not filled or completed until Christ returns. This is exactly what the Lord had indicated to Ananias upon Paul's conversion, regarding the future role that Paul would play (Acts 9:15-16).

5. What is the mystery that is now revealed to the saints (v26; see also Eph. 3:6)?

Paul was commissioned by God to be a minister/servant with the job of making God's word or message fully known. That word was a mystery for many generations but has now been revealed to God's saints (holy ones, set apart ones, as in v1:2). The mystery is that Christ is in "you", addressing to the Gentiles, that they may have Christ in them, sharing in the riches and hope of glory (heaven). It is no longer a mystery, because Paul's job is to publicly proclaim it.

6. Why does Paul continue to proclaim Christ despite his toil and struggle?

Paul's goal is to present everyone mature in Christ (v1:28). Note the repeated all and everyone which stresses that none, Jew or Gentile, slave or free (v3:11) should be missed out). Maturity, perfection, being what we were designed to be in Christ is the goal of Paul's ministry, achieved by presenting Jesus to people. This is not an easy task – he struggles with it. But he struggles with the aid of God's energy powerfully enabling him to carry out this ministry

Verse 2:1-5

7. What does Paul want for the Colossians (and those in Laodicea)?

Having mentioned the struggle in v1:29 he continues with that theme here. He does not want to pretend that his ministry (or any Christian ministry) is easy, but is open about the difficulties and struggles. Here he particularly draws attention to the fact that he is working for those he has never met personally – those at nearby Laodicea. His hope is that they will be encouraged when they understand the mystery of the gospel and why he is suffering (rather than discouraged by Paul's imprisonment cf. Eph 3:13). He also wants them to "knit together in love" as Christians and as churches, which should be the unifying result of properly appreciating his teaching. Paul also want them to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, Christ, who is the source of all wisdom and knowledge.

Paul wants the Colossians to know Christ and this is what drives him in his ministry despite his sufferings.

8. What is Paul warning the Colossians against?

He is concerned that they would be led astray by plausible arguments (e.g false teaching or may potentially refer to human philosophies which are mentioned in 2:8) instead of being rooted in Christ. But in the face of such a threat he rejoices in their firm faith and good order – which implies that they have not yet completely fallen for the delusions of false teaching which may be around

Application

9. In light of the study, how will this affect your attitude towards people who have not known this mystery of Christ?

This question is to highlight that all people are in desperate need of coming to know Christ. We have been blessed in having this mystery revealed to us and are now called to proclaim Christ just like Paul.

10. Paul's experience and testimony in this passage would suggest that serving the church won't necessarily be easy. What then will motivate us to live in this way?

- This question is to highlight the things that motivate Paul should also motivate us,
- i.e. wanting to serve Christ's body (1:24) so as to see people mature in Christ (1:28) and encourage them to stand firm in him (2:2, 5); wanting to protect God's people from being deceived by plausible arguments (2:4); and of course simply caring about people and their state before God.

Study 4: “What more do you need?” (Colossians 2:6–23)

Big idea: Hold fast to Christ who is solely enough for Christian growth.

Getting started

1. What is the most important practice for us to grow as Christians?

You might get answers like praying or reading the bible. Maybe even some stranger ones. This trick question of sorts is meant to help them wonder if any practices can give us a boost in Christian growth. Today’s passage will show that the only thing we can do is hold fast to Jesus. This is what we are aiming for when we pray/read the bible.

Context

Paul started off the letter (Colossians 1:1-14) by thanking God for and commending the Colossian Christians for their genuine conversion seen in their faith and love. He prays that they will never cease growing in Christ and proceeds to remind them of how Christ is supreme over all things (Colossians 1:15-23). This motivates Paul to proclaim Christ even in chains, suffering for God (Colossians 1:24-2:5).

So why is he writing this letter? What does Paul need to remind the Colossians?

Digging In

2. Read Colossians 2:6-23. Divide the passage smaller sections and give each section a title.

Verses	Title
v6-8	Stay rooted in Christ, not captive to worldly (demonic) instruction.
v9-15	The primary aid – Christ and His resources for us.
v16-23	Details on the danger (false teachings).

Colossians 2:6-15

3. Paul begins with his classic ‘Therefore...’. What is he referring to, and what instructions does he give? (V6-8)

The linking word ‘Therefore’ shows us that Paul is continue from his previous point, that is the struggle Paul endures for the sake of the church. His goal is to make Christ known, to reveal the mystery of

God, that this mystery be revealed to the Colossians. We know from chapter 1 that they did indeed receive Christ. As such, we know (Paul directly points this out) that he is referring to how they are Christians who have ‘received Christ Jesus the Lord’. His instruction – walk in Christ, stay rooted and built up in him, established in the faith *just as they were taught*.

The imagery of the tree (rooted) and building (built up) remind us that Christ, the starting point of their conversion, the one who has already been taught, *is* the firm foundation on which they are to remain and grow. So why should they *now* give in to any rival arguments and instruction? Stand firm in the gospel.

What should the Colossians NOT do?

They should not allow themselves to be taken captive, like plundered treasures, by any philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition and the elemental spirits of the world. These are NOT in line with Christ and the gospel.

Leaders: This list could be rather vague or cryptic, so if you feel the need, it may be helpful to explore what these things are. You can supplement the discussion by asking, **“What do these terms refer to?”**

Philosophy was a much broader term in the time of this letter, and likely referred to a form of pagan religion principles that were around in Colossae. These are merely *empty deceits* that were inspired by the *elemental spirits of the world*. Paul here is likely referring to demonic spirits synonymous with the “rulers and authorities” found later in verses 10 and 15. These false teachings are handed down, becoming *human tradition*. Again, the issue at heart is that these philosophies are not in accord with Jesus Christ, who they should rightfully put their trust in. It’s mostly important that they understand these are false teachings – more details are given in verse 16-23.

Leaders: One supplementary question you can ask to facilitate discussion in a quiet group.

- Why is so wrong about philosophy and human tradition? Is Paul anti-culture?

- Paul points out the motivations for standing firm in Christ in verses 9-15. List them out and try to explain what they mean.

Verses	What they say	What they mean
9	“in him the fullness of deity dwells bodily”	Christ is “the image of the invisible God” From incarnation to suffering to glory, Jesus IS God is flesh.
10	“you have been filled in him who is the head of all rule and authority”	It is important we don’t confuse or just assume this to mean we are filled WITH him (which is true), but it says we are filled IN him. This is about our union with Christ, we share in Christ’s power and authority over ALL rule and authority. This is a very important central truth in this letter ; if the divine “fullness” is in Christ (v9) and we are “filled in Him”, what more do we need to grow as Christians? Our union

		with Christ means we need no other teaching to be glorified and share in authority over all, even demonic forces. This would be especially encouraging for the Colossians who seemed to fear demons (explored more in verses 16-23)
11	“in him you were also circumcised... without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ”	Circumcision here is a spiritual action, described as putting off the body of the flesh; we no longer live influenced by our sinful flesh desires, rather we are brought into the family of Christ, living under His influence. Paul’s use of the circumcision metaphor could also be due to the hints at the false teaching coming from the local Jewish and pagan folk belief (more in verses 16-23)
12-14	“buried with him in baptism... raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. You were dead in your trespasses... God made alive together with (Jesus), forgiving all our trespasses, cancelling the debt by nailing it to the cross”	A summary of the salvation we have in Christ. Baptism represents and identification with Christ in his death and resurrection. This is further explored in verse 13; we were dead in our sin, God made us alive together with Christ, forgiving our sins. How? He cancelled the debt that was against us; all the sins and charges against us that deemed us worth of death was nailed to the cross. A notice would be fastened to the cross by the Roman authorities to declare the crime for which someone was executed, much like how Jesus was being executed for being the King of the Jews. Our debt was nailed to that same cross, Jesus took our sin and so took our punishment, the wrath of God.
15	“He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to shame, by triumphing over them in him”	Death could not stop Jesus. The cross and Jesus resurrection was the final defeat of the demonic powers. These demons were stripped of their power to be accusers (“devil” means accuser). They cannot accuse us Christians of being unworthy for God. We together triumph over them in Christ.

12. What can we conclude from these verses?

The Colossians truly do have everything they need in Christ; from growing as gospel citizens to salvation to freedom from demonic powers, they are ALREADY living a new life in Christ. They should not and need not turn to anyone or anything else to “complete” their spiritual walk and growth. Nothing can or needs to supplement Christ, if Christ and His finished work if He is supreme over all.

Leaders: Some supplementary questions you can ask to facilitate discussion in a quiet group.

- *Considering all these characteristics of Christ, what would this mean for us Christians (or Christian growth)?*
- *How should the Colossians be living?*

Colossians 2:16-23

13. Ah, another “Therefore...”! What is Paul referring to and how does he encourage the Colossians? (v16-19)

Paul is referring to the fact that we have all we need in Christ for salvation and growth, so we should NOT let other pass judgment on us about food and drink or festivals and Sabbaths. This is of course not an extensive list; is we are fully enough in Christ we do not need to participate/abstain from certain things to attain some form of advanced Christian growth. The encouragement – these things are merely foreshadowing Christ. They have already been fulfilled in Christ; we need not strictly observe them for salvations sake. So, the Colossian Christians can rest assured their salvation is assured. They don’t need anything else.

Don’t let anyone **disqualify** you. To disqualify something means to call something ineligible – these false teachers were trying to claim that these genuine believers were NOT genuine. Paul lists two things that they used to try discredit the genuine believers – asceticism, that is the self-discipline from indulgence (think “Do not eat etc”) and worship of angels. This probably involved invoking angels for help and protection from evil spirits (remember Paul’s emphasis on how we share in Jesus’ authority over them!). This practice was quite common in Jewish and pagan folk belief. Paul’s describes this false teacher’s mind (‘him’ – singular) as sensuous, meaning relating to feeling rather than intellect, NOT holding fast to Jesus who is the Head. Christ nourishes and provides for the body (the church) so it grows and matures. The false teacher has not maintained contact, being taken captive by false teaching and maliciously spreads it (v8).

14. How does Paul then summarize this section of Colossians? (v20-23)

Well, if you are in union with Christ who died and rose triumphant, you should live and hold fast to Christ! Why do you need to submit to worldly (not gospel centred) laws and regulations?

The issue at heart for the Colossians was that they were in danger of falling prey to these false teaching. Verse 21 shows us that there were specific taboos (note the quotation marks) that were being spread around the church. These are not divine rules, they are human; food is not crucial to your spiritual health (cf. Mark 7:18-19). Sure, they may seem wise, they may appear to be good and desirable. But Paul points out that these are wise in promoting *self-made* religion and asceticism. In the end, they cannot save you (V23). The truly scary thing about these practices is that **they may appear spiritual but serve nothing more than confidence in ourselves rather than in Christ.**

Application

15. How has this study informed/changed your understanding of the sufficiency of Jesus and His finished, perfect work? How can we continually hold fast to Christ?

This question should give them time to reflect on what they’ve read about Jesus in the passage.

16. *“Do keep me in prayer, I’ve been jumping between music ministry, children’s ministry, UCF meetings, camp preparation, children church... my mentor says I must serve with maximum capacity in church, but I’m feeling the burnout and I’m worried about losing favour with God if I take a break.”*

How would you encourage your fellow brother/sister who says this to you?

While it is true that we all should aim to serve God in every way, we should be careful and try to find out the actual underlying belief of this friend. Has this person misunderstood their pastor’s intentions, or are they being taught that serving is a means to gain more from God/grow spiritually? Either way, today’s passage reminds us that nothing can be done to bring us closer to God, Jesus is sufficient.

17. *“Hey! I won’t be coming to church next week because I’m going to a seminar! You should come too! Prophet X will be preaching, and I think it’s really going to deepen my bond with God. I hope to be touched like never before!”*

How would you respond to your fellow brother/sister who says this to you?

We don’t want to assume the worst. But it would be good to inquire more into what they mean when they say, “deepen my bond with God/touched like never before”. Perhaps to them, this is an event that they must attend to reach a new level of Christianity. Again, we should never just assume everything is false or misleading, but we must never assume the gospel. Are they trusting in the Jesus who died on the cross and has given us all we need for Christian growth?

- Reflect on your own Christian walk. Are you rooted in Christ as your firm foundation?
- Think about someone who could benefit from today’s passage. Pray for them and find time to encourage them with this passage this week.

Study 5: “You Have Died and Raised with Christ”

(Colossians 3:1–17)

Big idea: Christians should have a drastic change in their lives as they were saved by Christ.

Getting Started

1. When was the last time you felt very determined to change yourself? What was it for and what triggered you to make the change?

Context

From the previous passage, we learned that Christ’s work on the cross is enough to make his believers complete and perfect before God. Paul made a point, that we had been dead with Christ in our trespasses, but we were raised with Christ through faith in the wonderful work of God. Hence, we should hold fast to him and not be taken captives by other philosophies and regulations.

Digging In

2. Read Colossians 3:1-17 and then divide the passage into smaller sections.

Verses	Title
1-4	As Christians being dead to the world and made alive with Christ, their hearts should focus on things in heaven rather than things on earth.
5-9	Christians being dead to the world implies that they should kill the earthly passions in them and stop living the old lifestyle.
10-17	Christians being made alive with Christ implies that they should all imitate, obey and be thankful to their Creator as they live their lives.

3. Paul asks the Colossians to seek and set their minds on things on things above, not the things on earth. What does Paul mean by that and why does he say that?
 - It means to not put their focus on:
 - o the flesh indulgence (earthly passion) [2:23]
 - o regulations and philosophies that have to do with earthly things that will all perish [2:20-22]
 - But put their focus on:
 - o Things in heaven (God’s kingdom), where Christ is ruling with all power and authority given by God.

- Paul said this because:
 - o They have died in their sins and unholiness [2:13] but made alive with Christ through his work on the cross [2:12-14], hence getting a new life.
 - o v3: their new life (their citizenship in the coming Christ's kingdom) is now hidden with Christ v4: but when Christ (who is the source of their new life) appears, they will also be with him in glory.
 - Paul's point: Earthly citizens focus on things on earth; heavenly citizens focus on things in heaven. Since Colossians have died as earthly citizens (no longer having that citizenship) but made alive as heavenly citizens, so focus not on things on earth but things in heaven.
4. Paul has been saying that "the Colossians have died", how should the Colossians live in response to this truth? [v5-7]
- They should kill what is earthly in them: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.
 - All these are about satisfying their earthly passion (self-serving), and not seeing God as the lord of their lives. Because of these sins, God's judgement is coming.
 - The Colossians used to live in them, but now they should kill them.
5. From v8-14, there are two kinds of 'self' that the Colossians seem to be able to choose to put on as they live. What does each 'self' imply? Why should the Colossians choose to put on the new self and not the old self?
- Old self: a human who lives in a self-centered, sinful lifestyle, focusing on things on earth. What he does: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, lying to one another.
 - New self: a human who has a renewed knowledge of its creator, he imitates its creator, and he lives in an others-centered lifestyle. What he has and does: compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiving and love each other.
 - The Colossians are told to put on the new self because of their identity as God's chosen people. They should imitate Christ who is the image of the invisible God, loving and forgiving each other just like how Christ has done to them.
6. What point is Paul trying to make when he lists various groups of people in v11 as he talks about the new self?
- The new self comes from knowing the image of its creator (knowing Christ).
 - It's not about which ethnicity background or which social status background they are from.
 - But it's about Christ the source of new true life to all kind people and is in all kind people.
 - So, whoever receives Christ and his gospel is God's chosen holy and beloved people regardless of their background.

7. How does Paul command the Colossians to live as one body (church) who has died and raised with Christ?
- They should let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts – love and forgive one another, no anger, malice, slander, obscene talk, lies.
 - Be thankful (repeated 3 times from v15-17)
 - Let the word of Christ dwell in them richly, how it looks like:
 - o teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom
 - o singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs
 - o do them with thankfulness to God
 - Do everything in the name of Lord Jesus (acknowledge that whatever we do are not for perishable earthly things, but imperishable Christ's kingdom).

Application

8. *“Being a Christian is all about having faith that Jesus has saved us. It’s ok for me to continue watching pornography as long as I trust that Jesus has saved me.”*

How would you respond to your fellow brother/sister who says this to you?

9. *“I knew that I shouldn’t watch pornography anymore, but every time I just fail to resist the temptation when it comes. I feel so guilty that I can’t bear it anymore.”*

How would you encourage your fellow brother/sister who says this to you?

10. Are you struggling to resist any sin that you have been committing? How can we as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ help you to face the struggle together?

11. As a student, what can we do to help each other to know the word of Christ better and to encourage each other in our faith better?

12. We know that the gospel is for people from all kinds of backgrounds. Have there been any group of people whom you know you could have reached out to share the gospel, but you haven't? What can be your first step to start reaching out to them?

Study 6: “Living with Christ as Lord” (Colossians 3:18–4:1)

Big Idea: Do everything in the name of the Lord.

Getting Started

1. What do people mean when they say they are doing something in the name of the Lord?

Context

Paul has shown us that as Christians, we only need to hold fast to Jesus Christ for our growth. We saw how we have died and raised with Christ; hence we should put off our old self and put on the new self. What then does put on the new self look like?

Digging In

Read Colossians 3:18-4:1

Role	What they do?	Why?	Verses
Wives	Submit to husbands	Fitting to the Lord	V18; Eph 5:22
Husbands	Love your wives, Do not be harsh with them		V19; Eph 5:25
Children	Obey your parents	Pleases the Lord	V20; Eph 6:1-3
Fathers	Do not provoke the children	Lest they become discouraged	V21; Eph 6:4
Bondservants	Obey earthly masters	Fearing the Lord, Serving the Lord	V22-24; Eph 6:5-8
Masters	Treat servants justly and fairly	You also have a master in heaven	V25; Eph 6:9

2. Why do you think Paul gives these instructions at this juncture? (look back to 3:1-17)

3. How do you see “Putting on the new self-attitude” in the relationships above?

When a believer is saved, he is spiritually identified with Christ. He died with Christ, raised with Christ, seated at the right hand of God (3:1). However, this new status isn't just a mental note or a point where life is radically changed. It should change the way a person behaves, thinks; set your mind on things above (3:2). This new status should affect every thought, action and word uttered because whatever you do, in word or deed, you should do it in the name of the Lord. Note that in this passage, we see repetition of pleasing/serving/fearing the Lord/Master (3:18,20,22,23 and 4:1).

It should change the “clothing” we wear - putting off old self and putting on new self (3:5-17). V1-3 is the principle of what it means to be selfless and personal Godliness. Repentance (put off) and obedience (put on) come together. You can't put on something (v12-17) without putting off something (v5-11). Paul is trying to show that putting off and putting on is not something that is impossible but is possible because it is shown in v18-4:1 which are the basic relationships you can find in daily life.

4. What would relationships look like if the following people “put on a new self”?

a. Husbands and wives

Wives' responsibility is to submit to their husbands as it is appropriate for her position in Christ. She is to willingly submit which shows humility and in the context of love (v12). In the same way, husbands are called to love their wives and what this looks like is to be patient, meek and humble as well.

Cf Ephesians 5:25 - Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

Leaders to ask: What does Jesus as an example show?

It shows how he willingly gave himself up for us which is selflessness. So, marriage should be selfless which is how husbands and wives are to relate with one another.

b. Father and children

Children are to obey their parents because it is pleasing to the Lord. Importance of obedience can be seen in the 10 Commandments. It says, honour your father and mother so that you may live long (Ex 20:12). As they obeyed their parents they would then obey and respect other authorities on the earth.

How do parents provoke the children? Parents embitter children by not disciplining them. A spoiled child is a child that is thankless and bitter. Because they get their way all the time, they are bitter whenever any authority does not give them their way or when life becomes difficult. Solomon said, “Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him” (Prov. 22:15).

Parents are to bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord, cf Eph 6:4. How?

Cf Deuteronomy 6:5-7, teach them to love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might.

c. Bondservants and masters

Here, we want them to think about what should a Christian worker look like? Does the work represent their Christian faith? Again, here we want them to remember that since we have died and raised with Christ, our relationship with Christ encompasses everything including the workplace.

Servants must obey their masters in everything. Obedience is important here because it serves the Lord. Even masters are to treat servants justly because they have a master in heaven too. Obedience is important as it honours God's authority. Cf Romans 13:1 - *Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.*

Therefore, when we disobey or dishonour, we are rebelling against God. Employers must see submission to the authority of God reflected in how their Christian employees submit to and obey them.

5. What is the similarity of these 3 sets of relationships?

Each of these three sets of relationships is hierarchical with one person in a position of power over the others. In each of the three circumstances, the one in power (do take note this is defined as roles given by God and not the value of the person) is meant to love the one under them and treat them well. Conversely, the one who is under authority should respect and submit to those above them.

6. How should our attitude be to our work? (v22-23) How does this look like?

Work with a sincere heart, fearing the Lord, and whatever we do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men. Let them spend some time to think how they can watch practically work as if they were working for the Lord even in their mundane tasks like preparing for a test, sweeping the floor, travelling on the road or train. All these mundane tasks should be viewed as holy work offered to God as these to bring glory to God.

Application

7. Is there a point at which your obligation to obey your parents ceased? How would that look like in your relationship?

(Refer to Ephesians 6:1-2)

8. Who are you trying to please with your work (assignments/ projects/ exams/ theses/presentations)?

9. How has this passage challenge what you might look for in marriage-bound relationships?

Note that UCFers may not be in a relationship but helpful to point out that it's our conviction too because we belong to a body and we are responsible to encourage one another to live the right way. Not just verbally but also spare time to be praying for couples in church.

10. What would your relationships look like if you say Christ is your Lord? What is hindering you from responding as people who have been raised with Christ?

Study 7: “Working for the Gospel” (Colossians 4:2–6)

Big Idea: We serve the gospel by supporting its ministers in prayer and being always ready to preach it faithfully and wisely.

Getting Started

1. Have you ever felt that you’ve made the gospel message confusing?
Get them thinking about how inadequate they are in presenting the gospel to build the assumption that perhaps being part of the gospel preaching ministry is not their talent and therefore not for them.....or is it?

Digging In

Read Colossians 4:2-6

2. Why does Paul instruct the Colossians to pray and to be watchful with thanksgiving? (cf. Col 2:20-23, 3:1-4)
Help the students see what are praying and thanksgiving a function of - humility and dependence. With reference to their status in Col 3:1-4, they should think like people who belong to Jesus because they belong to Jesus. What does that mean? Go back just a few verses in Col 2:20-23 and we see what the Colossians struggle with; we see their inconsistency in living for Christ by resorting to asceticism and other man-made rituals for the sake of achieving higher spirituality. For Paul, the highest spirituality is not achieving it by one’s own mortal efforts but understanding that true spirituality has been achieved by God for His people. Hence, His people should respond in true humility knowing that there is nothing that they can do for themselves. That is why they should also depend on Him and be thankful.
3. What does Paul understand about prayer and ministry that we don’t? (Eph 6:18-20)
Take time to go through what the prayer reveals about Paul’s desires for the gospel to be preached. Taking into account that he is in prison, Paul can do nothing but make use of his position in jail to preach to whoever comes by (Phil 1:13-14) and truly rely on God through prayer and the prayers of others. He demonstrates trust in God that He alone can create opportunities for the Gospel to go out unhindered. Paul understands that the ministry of gospel growth is not a matter of logistics but God’s sovereignty. Ultimately, he is only a servant and the ministry belongs to the one who assigned him to it (Col1:25). In other words, serving the gospel is his duty.
4. How does Paul serve the gospel? (cf Col 1:24-27).
Verse 3-4 He declares the mystery of Christ...that he may make it clear. Re-establish the context the book of Colossians where Paul is preaching to Gentiles and helping to plant Gentile churches too. Col 1:27 shows us that the mystery refers to God’s plan for people of all nations to be redeemed in Jesus including the Colossians. Since it was previously a mystery, previously hidden, Paul helps to reveal this mystery by clearing it. This mystery is that justification by faith is available to all who trust in Jesus; they can be saved. In other words, his job is to be a messenger to help people understand the truth.

5. Why does Paul want the Colossians to have salty speech?

Salt is used to enhance certain flavours in food as well as preserving food. Without it, it is difficult to pick out the taste of food, let alone enjoy it. Here, Paul instructs the Colossians to make their speech taste better in a sense; they are to be more influential in their speech as supposed to being influenced. To be more specific, the result of having salted speech shows graciousness to those around us, especially those who are considered outsiders. Just the verse before, Paul talks about exercising wisdom in the way we speak to non-believers. Here, we are to be wise as well. In showing grace to people in our conversations, they are less likely to feel overwhelmed with facts and theological arguments, annoyed by our disagreements and shy or scared of being judged for sharing opinions. The goal ultimately is to know how to answer each person.

Application

6. How do you walk in wisdom toward outsiders you know? (1 Cor 9:19-23).

7. *“God said, ‘I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.’ Since he decides who to save, we don’t need to evangelize.”* How would you respond to someone who says this?

8. How do you make the best use of the time on campus/ at your workplace/ at home?

Study 8: “Fellowship with Saints in Christ” (Colossians 4:7–18)

Big Idea: The Church works together for the common good of Gospel growth

Getting Started

1. What is gospel growth and why is it not a one-man show? What is gospel growth and why is it not a one-man show? Why is gospel growth not a one-man show? Because in order to take the gospel to all nations (Matt 28:19), it will require all of us working together to reach the nations. Many of Paul’s partners in ministry came from different regions of the Roman Empire but he would often send messengers back to the lands that they came from in order to reach their own people.

Digging In

2. How are the following people named in the passage described?

Name	According to Paul	According to the rest of Scripture
Tychicus	beloved brother and faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord	Acts 20:4 Eph. 6:21–22 2 Tim 4:12 Titus 3:12
Onesimus	faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you	Philemon 1:10
Aristarchus	fellow prisoner	Acts 19:29 Acts 20:4 Acts 27:2 Philemon 1:24
Mark	cousin of Barnabas	Acts 13:13 Acts 15:39 2 Tim 4:11 Philemon 1:24
Justus/Jesus		2 Tim. 4:11 Philem. 24
Epaphras	one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, struggling on your behalf in his prayers	Philemon 1:23
Luke	beloved physician	2 Tim 4:11 Philemon 1:24
Demas	my brother at Laodicea	2 Tim. 4:10 Philemon 1:24
Nympha	church in her house	
Archippus	fulfill the ministry that you have received from the Lord	Philem. 1:2

3. What does Paul show when he distinguishes between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians?
It will be helpful to point out that this letter is written to a Gentile church and that Paul is himself a Jew. In mentioning the Jews and their roles in the ministry of preaching the gospel, he shows them that they are anything but alien to the Gentile Christians. They share in the same ministry and commission that the Lord Jesus left them (and us). V11 shows that these guys are very close to Paul and that he finds comfort in them. Likewise, in V12, Paul uses Epaphras as an example of a Gentile Christian who labours for the gospel. This shows that both Jews and Gentiles may be different in terms of ethnicity but are united in the gospel and in the mission of preaching it and seeing it grow.

4. What are Paul's and Epaphras' main concerns for the Colossians? (V12-13; 1:9-11)
Understanding what people pray for helps us understand what they are most concerned about. Paul and Epaphras pray concerning their maturity and assurance in Christ (V12-13) as well their holiness displayed in the way they live (1:9-11) that it might be pleasing to God. Their ministry is concerned with true gospel growth in people, not assuming that they are Christian just because they might say so but that they truly rely on Christ, repent of their old sinful ways and live their new lives for God (3:1-4). That's also why Paul bothered writing this letter.

5. Paul ends the letter by asking them to "remember my chains". Why do you think Paul says that?
Paul's ministry along with those whom he shares ministry with is one that is stained by suffering as it is inevitable. Looking at this passage, suffering is mentioned 3 times in Aristarchus's imprisonment (V10), Epaphras's prayers for the Colossians (V12) and Paul's imprisonment (V18). These mentions are not just cameos in a movie but Paul exhibits Christ-like selflessness by showing the Colossians that he is willing to suffer for the gospel that they might benefit from his ministry. The same can be said about Epaphras who brought the gospel to Colossae. Moreover, they are also modelling servant-heartedness to the Colossians, showing them that the gospel is worth suffering for and the holiness of fellow brothers and sisters is worth fighting for, simply because it matters to God.

Application

6. How can we better answer “how are you?”, after reading this text that may encourage or spur others on? This is to point out that we often respond to the question “How are you?” without thinking of sharing how God has worked in us or through us in the ministries we are involved in. Like Paul and the rest of those who share in the ministry of the gospel, we ought to see ministry as a privilege since we get to do God’s will by bringing the gospel to people who are hell-bound. It is amazing that God should allow us to be part of such an important ministry even if it tires us out physically, mentally and emotionally. Serving the King of all creation is what we are meant to do. So, as we change our attitudes to see that life is meant for ministry even if it involves suffering, then we would be able to encourage others to serve with us. If we aren’t suffering for ministry, what are we suffering for?
7. Are you on the team for the gospel or a benchwarmer? Why? Often times, we’re way too comfortable in church, letting other people do evangelism, the welcoming, ushering, lead in music, etc. Ministry isn’t just for those who are “called” to serve but for the whole church to work out together. Ministry is a fruit of the Christian life. Without this fruit, how would others find out that we are God’s workers?
8. How can we be serving with other congregation in our church? What is our mission? Our mission is to glorify God together in response to His grace by making disciples of Jesus Christ. How do we do that is by remaining gospel centered, bible based and disciple making. Get people to think of ways we can be sharing our resources to be more effective for ministry in the Klang Valley and beyond. Perhaps draw up a simple ministry plan for the coming week and for 2020 or take the opportunity to get to know international students. Invite them to ISF and invest in gospel growth to the nations.

Prayer

- Praise God for gospel partnership we have with people around the world for the growth of gospel.
- Ask God to grow our understanding of what it means to be part of the team for the gospel.
- Ask God to strengthen our unity in the gospel and reveal to us ways in which we can use our diversity for the common good of Gospel growth.