

Term 4 *Serve*

Serving The Lord



Studies in Colossians
PART II



The book of Colossians

The Big Idea of Colossians is simple. Jesus is enough. There is nothing more you ultimately need than to be 'in Christ'. Paul says as much in the topic verses of the book – 'So then, *just as* you received Christ Jesus as Lord, *continue to live in him*, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.' (Col 2:6-7)

This message about Jesus was relevant for the group of Christian in Colossae (hence the name!) as it is for followers of Jesus today, as we find many of the same struggles and challenges they did in the way many voices call us to go 'further' and 'deeper' than Jesus. These might be super-spiritual experiences or super-spiritual practices, but Paul says, in the end, those who push these things on us have lost touch with what is truly Spiritual – being 'in Christ'.

Paul says that it's this kind of muddleheaded thinking that is of no use in restraining sin, but distracts followers of Jesus from being effective in serving God and others. So to get into our term of serving, Colossians is an ideal book to establish a foundation for understanding what serving and worshipping in Christ really looks like.

Since this term is about serving, I've included one last question in each study that asks 'how are you serving Jesus and his people'. This isn't meant as a hint or a guilt trip, but is rather an opportunity to shape your thinking around how a life of service should be informed by Colossians and expressed in our church community.

I trust that you'll find these studies helpful in exploring the book of Colossians and reflecting on how to really live a spiritual life 'in Christ'.

Weber

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Digging Deeper

For Growth Group leaders and others who want to dig deeper, our very own Mike Bird's commentary on Colossians is a fantastic guide. It's available at Koorong and other Christian bookstores

Colossae in the Lycus Valley



Colossians 1:1-14

STUDY ONE



Key verse: Col 1:9



Big Idea: The way Christians **start** following Jesus by hearing the gospel is the way they should **continue** following Jesus, being filled with the knowledge of God

KICK OFF

Share with each other a story (not necessarily personal experience!) of failure as a result of not persevering with what you began to do.

STUDY

Read Col 1:1-14.

1. If you had to break the passage (vv.3-14) up into two sections, where would you break it up? Why?
2. Fill in the table below:

What does Paul give thanks to God for?	What does Paul pray for the Colossians?

Is there something that connects across the two columns?

3. Re-write Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer in your own words, and address it to a Christian you know. Discuss any questions that might come up as you do this.
4. Look ahead and read Col 1:21-23. How important is it for them to persevere in the things Paul prays for them about?

THINK AND APPLY

How does your prayer similar or different to Paul's prayers? If it's different, how is it different and why?

- How are you going with:
 - 1) trust in Christ Jesus and love for Christians locally and farther away?
 - 2) being motivated by the 'hope stored up for you in heaven'?
 - 3) seeking to be filled with the knowledge of God's in the Bible?
 - 4) Enduring with patience?
 - 5) Being joyfully thankful to God for Jesus?
- How are you serving Jesus and His people?

PRAYER

Who can you pray for and what can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Col 1:1-23**

Colossians 1:15-23



Key verse: Col 1:22-23

STUDY TWO



Big Idea: Jesus is the Creator and the Redeemer of all humanity and his supremacy is seen in his work of reconciling all people through his death.

KICK OFF

A Mormon or Jehovah's Witness knocks on your door and engages you in conversation. You tactfully turn the conversation around to talk about Jesus and who He is. You discover that they think Jesus is a 'son of God' in the sense that he is one of the mighty angels of God, but not truly God himself... What do you think and why does it matter?

STUDY

Read Col 1:15-20.

1. List the description of Jesus and jot down what you think it means:

Description of Jesus	What does that mean?
Description of Jesus' actions	What does that mean?

2. How does who He is relate to what He has done?

Read Col 1:21-23

3. How does who Jesus is and what He has done apply to the Colossian Christians?
4. Does v.23 mean that it's up to us in the end to be saved? (see Phil 1:6)
5. What does it mean for Paul to be a servant of the gospel (as opposed to, say, the servant of the Colossian church?)

THINK AND APPLY

- How is your life a reflection of who Jesus is and what he's done? What can you give thanks for and what can you ask Him to change?
- Are you continuing in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the gospel? What challenges this ideal in your life?
- How are you serving Jesus and His people?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Colossians 1:1-2:7**

Colossians 1:24-2:7



Key verse: Col 2:6-7



STUDY THREE

Big Idea: The revelation of the gospel is the greatest 'good news' for humanity and must be the mission, method and motivation of our life of service together.

Kick Off

What piece of news has really changed the course of your life? How did you feel when you received it?

STUDY

Read Col 1:24-29.

1. Think about the context for our passage – i.e. what's happened so far in Colossians – what is the gospel and what does Paul have to do with it?
2. What does 1:24 seem to be saying? What can't it be saying and why?
3. What is the Church? How is Paul and Jesus related to it?
4. What is the mystery¹ Paul is talking about?

Read Col 2:1-7

5. What is the goal of Paul's ministry? (See also 1:28-29)

THINK, SHARE AND APPLY

¹ Mystery (Greek *mysterion*) is not something that is puzzling and hard to understand, rather it's simply a secret that has to be revealed – e.g. where you were born. If you don't tell someone, they cannot know, it's a mystery in that sense.

- The Church seems to have an important role in God's plans, so much so that his Son died for it to be the head of it. How should this shape the way we think about the 'local' church? What should we prioritise in our life together?
- How might we as Christians look to share Paul's priorities in life?
- How are you serving Jesus and His people?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Col 2:1-23**

Colossians 2:6-23



Key verse: Col 2:6-7

STUDY FOUR



Big Idea: The gospel of Jesus saves us to serve in freedom. We need no longer be impressed by 'religiosity' since we have been marked out as God's people in Christ.

Kick Off

Share your experience of 'Super-Christian' fads which Christians have promoted or being a part of. How did you feel when the fad was over?

STUDY

Read Col 2:6-7.

1. What previous idea(s) in the letter so far do these verses connect to?
2. How does 'just as you received... so continue to live in him' happen in the rest of these verses?
3. What would it practically mean to continue in Jesus? What would it look like to stop?

Read Col 2:8-23

4. What are the Colossian Christians to beware of (v.8)? What are such things aiming to do (v.23)?
5. Consider the various practices in the passage. Do they come in a modern guise? Why might they be attractive to people?
6. In contrast to what Paul warns against, what is their status in Christ (v.9-15)? If it helps, write it down in the table on the next page:

What has God/Jesus done for us? (write down what YOU mean rather than just what the passage says verbatim)	How does that compare what other 'spiritual methods' offer?
e.g. v.13 while we were dead in our sins, God made us alive in Christ.	'don't handle, don't taste' (v.21) rely on our sinful hearts which is dead!

THINK AND APPLY

- "The message of Christianity is a person not an idea." Do you agree? Why or why not?
- What issues for you are becoming or have become a distraction to the message about Jesus? What issues for our church community?
- How can we help each other to continue to live out v.6-7 'So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him...'?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Acts 10:1-11:18**

Colossians 3:1-17



Key verse: Col 3:1-4

STUDY FIVE



Big Idea: The positive way to continue living with Jesus as Lord is through setting our hearts and minds on Jesus, and practically bearing fruit in a transformed life.

Kick Off

There's a saying '[so and so] is too heavenly minded to be of earthly use'. Does that ring true? Do you know of anyone that fits this description? Share.

STUDY

Read Col 3:1 - 4.

1. How is it that we've been raised with Christ? (v.1 cf. 2:9-12)

2. What does it mean to set our hearts and minds on things above? (v. 1-2) What would that look like?

3. What reasons to Paul give for that? (v. 3-4) What might it mean?

Note: the 'therefore in v.5 connects everything that is said there and after to v.1-4. In other words, how they are to dwell on Jesus/things above is by what is said in the following.

Read Col 3:5-17

4. What does it mean to 'put to death'? (v.5)

5. These verses are about as clear as it gets in the Bible about what it looks like to live as God's people following Jesus. Nevertheless, Paul slips in a number of motivations for why they should do this. Find the following phrases in the passage and explain why they help us understand and get motivated to live accordingly:
 - a) '...the wrath of God is coming'
 - b) '...being renewed in the image of its Creator'

- c) '...Christ is all, and is in all'
- d) '...as God's chosen people'
- e) '...as the Lord forgave you'

6. What is the greatest virtue and how does it hold all together?

7. What should peace look like? (Don't just think of v.15, wrestle with v.16 as well!)

THINK, SHARE AND APPLY

- What motivates you in following Jesus? What keeps you from setting your heart on things above? How can we help each other in this?
- Which of the virtues mentioned by Paul do you find the easiest? Which do you find hardest? Why?
- How is your life characterised by 'thankfulness' which appears throughout this passage (as well as the letter)?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Acts 11:19-30**

Colossians 3:18-21



Key verse: Col 3:1-4(!)

STUDY SIX



Big Idea: Living out the new identity we have in Christ means that our family relationships will be transformed also – to be the way God intended it in the beginning.

**** NOTE TO THE LEADER:** Because of the nature of the material covered in this study, you may like to consider meeting as sub-groups of men or women to consider this passage.

Kick Off

What is the hardest thing about family relationships as a husband, wife, parent or child?

STUDY PART I – Marriage Relationships

Read Col 3:18-19 and Ephesians 5.

The letter to the Colossians has a 'sister' letter, Ephesians, which Paul wrote later and sent to Ephesus. It has a lot of similarities to Colossians and spells out in more detail what Colossians leaves sketchy.

1. What is the husband's responsibility? What is the wife's?

2. What does it look like to carry out these responsibilities?

(Optional questions if the above questions are unclear or controversial – WARNING the study will be much longer and you may like to do it over 2 weeks!)

3. Read Genesis chapter 2. What does the ideal man-women/husband-wife relationship look like without sin?

4. Read Genesis chapter 3. If the order in Gen 2 was that God created man, helped by woman, to 'have dominion' over the earth and all its creatures, what is the order in Gen 3? (A hint: a creature other than man or woman takes the initiative).

5. What is humanity's sin? What are the consequences...

- a) for the serpent?
- b) for the woman?
- c) for the man?

We believe that men and women exist in *complementarity* – that is, God created man and woman in a specific order, man first, with the task of ruling the earth, then woman, to help him. They are equally made in the image of God, equally worthy but have differing responsibilities. It is the devastating effect of sin which destroys the intimate relationship man and woman should have enjoyed – such that the woman will have the sort of domineering desire (against God’s intentions) over her husband just the same way sin desires to master Cain (Gen 4:7), and similarly for the man to repeat the sin of Adam in neglecting his responsibilities to love and lead his wife. But the gospel breathes life back into the marriage relationship by showing us that Christ died for the church just the same way Husbands ought to love their wives in such a way as to die for her, and that wives may be dignified in their submission just the same way Jesus submitted to His Heavenly Father to die. It is in the power of the gospel that Christians may hope to negotiate the tricky path of marriage in a God honouring way.

STUDY PART II – Parent relationships

Read Col 3:20 – 21 and Eph 1:1-4

6. What are the responsibilities of parents, and what of the children?

7. What are the difficult issues surrounding parenting and what does the Bible say about it?²

THINK AND APPLY

What conversations might you need to have with members of your family?

How can we help each other honour God in our family relationships?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Acts 12:1-24**

² See the article by Al Stewart over the page for more discussion on blokes and fatherhood for further information and thought.



AL STEWART ON BLOKES³

There's lots of advice around for dads, some good, some not so good. Here's some advice that's gold. Writing to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul says,

"Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord."

There are three really important things in this verse.

First of all, when Paul speaks to the Ephesians he speaks to the fathers. Although it's not politically correct, God expects fathers to be the heads of their families. This is not the authority of some tin-pot dictator but the authority that comes with the responsibility of loving, leading and looking after your family. So if you have children, you cannot just hand over their raising to your wife. It's something you've got to do together.

Secondly, Paul says, "Don't exasperate your children". Literally, this means don't make them angry or frustrated by misusing your power. Where fathers and children are concerned the power moves from one side of the relationship to the other. When your children are toddlers you basically have all the power; you decide things like where they go, what they wear and what they eat. When your children are young adults, the power is shared so you negotiate together when you'll see each other. But remember that forty or fifty years down the track the power will be theirs; they'll be choosing your nursing home!

Here are a few ways that we might misuse our power:

We can put our children down and never praise them, or be inconsistent in discipline by laughing at something one day but punishing it the next.

We can frustrate or anger our children by disciplining them in front of others. Feel free to praise in public, but discipline should only take place in private. Whatever their age, you must always let them keep their dignity as the pain of embarrassment lasts a lot longer than any physical pain.

³ Al Stewart is a Christian minister from Sydney who currently spends his time promoting Church Planting and mentoring young church planters. You can find more of his articles on www.sydneyan Anglicans.net

It's also important to keep any promise you make to your children and to make sure that you are around for them. Someone will fill their heads with how to live, and the values worth holding. Wouldn't you like it to be you that does that?

Perhaps the greatest way to build anger into a child is to show favouritism. If you favour one child over the others, you will hardwire anger and frustration into them.

Thirdly, Paul says, "Instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord". In the original language, this means to nourish and feed them, and the way you feed their soul is through encouragement. Words of encouragement help them grow and give them confidence.

As you train and instruct you move them from having no responsibility, decisions or consequences, to where they are young adults who are making their own decisions and are aware of the consequences. Disciplining your children means gently letting them feel the consequences of what they do. If you don't discipline your children by letting them experience the consequences of their actions (in an age-appropriate way), it can be a disaster. The Old Testament reflects on both Eli the priest and King David as hopeless dads. Their central problem? They didn't discipline their sons. This resulted in tragedy for their children and their families.

Finally, you need to bring your children up "in the training and instruction of the Lord". If you're a Christian dad who follows Jesus, it's your job to teach them about Jesus. You can't subcontract it out.

Your wife will be a partner in this and there will be Sunday School teachers and youth leaders who will help you, but, dad, it's your job and you've got to do it.

Moses passed on these instructions: "Talk about God when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:7) If Moses was writing that today he'd say, "Talk about it as you take them to sport and when you pick them up from music lessons and when you teach them to drive." Build teaching about the Lord into your family's routine.

You can teach your children and set an example but in the end they will have to make their own decisions. You might be filled with heartache about being a dad, and fathering might not work out the way you'd want. All you can do is be the best dad you can be; to set the best example and to pray for them. But, ultimately, they have to live out their own life because it's their story.

Colossians 3:22-4:1



Key verse: Col 3:1-4

STUDY SEVEN



Big Idea: Living out our new identities in Christ will also transform the way we serve our earthly masters and employees.

Kick Off

What's the best and the worst part about your job?

STUDY

Read Col 3:22-25 and 1Tim 6:1-2

1. How might your situation as a worker differ to that of a 1st century slave (the word 'servant' in the NIV translation is actually the Greek word 'slave')? What implications does that have on our reading of this passage before we go on to apply it to ourselves?

2. How is servant/slave to serve his master?

3. What is the ultimate motivation for serving earthly masters?

4. How might 'working at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men' look like in your work place? How might it be abused?⁴

Read Col 4:1 and Eph 6:9.

5. What is the Master's responsibility for slaves? How might that translate to modern day 'managers' of people?

⁴ Another question to consider is where does work fit into the web of tasks and relationships in our lives?

6. What are the temptations that face people who manage other people?

THINK AND APPLY

- How might we help each other think about 'work' from a godly perspective?
- What things need to change for you to be able to say you're 'working for the Lord'?

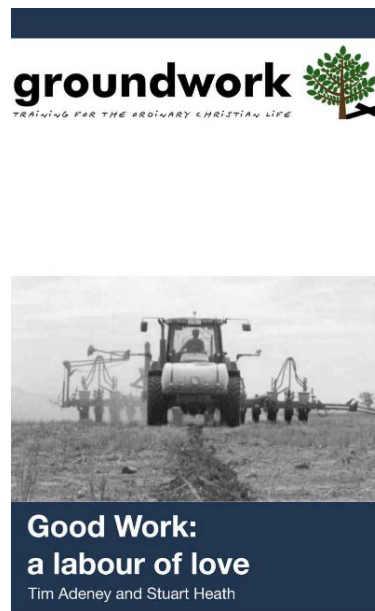
PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



For next week
Read
Acts 12:25-13:52

There is a wealth of information in 'Good Works: a labour of love' by Stuart Heath and Tim Adeney, who are Australian authors who aim to help Christian workers think through what it means to work 'as to the Lord'. You can find the electronic form of their book at <http://www.amazon.com/Good-Work-labour-Groundwork-ebook/dp/B007UFIZVY> or alternately you can join the next 'work seminar' at ARPC when we run it in 2013.



Colossians 4:2-18



Key verse: Col 4:2-6

STUDY EIGHT



Big Idea: The gospel motivates us towards the greatest form of service in the world: having an active or supporting role in proclaiming Jesus that others may hear and believe.

Kick Off

What do you think of first when the word 'Evangelism' is mentioned?

STUDY

Read Col:2-6.

1. How example might the Colossians have in prayer (1:3-14)? How might this be linked to v.3?
2. What does Paul ask specifically for in prayer? What doesn't he ask for (but could have)?
3. How should their prayerfulness for his proclaiming the gospel affect their own behaviour towards outsiders?

THINK, SHARE AND APPLY

(The following questions assume you don't feel great about how you're going sharing Jesus with others... if this isn't you – go straight to thanking God in prayer!)

- How do we usually feel about conversations with outsiders when it comes to sharing Jesus? Do we always 'make the most of every opportunity'?
- Taking out the guilt factor and don't worry about making excuses for a second, what needs to happen in order for us to have real evangelism happening?

Read Col:7-18.

4. What does Paul rely on in his missionary journeys?

5. How do these people fit into his mission?

THINK, SHARE AND APPLY

- How can you be a supporting partner for someone in proclaiming of Jesus ?
- How are you serving Jesus and his people in this way?

PRAYER

What can you pray about arising from this study?



**For next week
Read
Acts 14:1-28**

Prayer notes:

Acacia Ridge Presbyterian Church
Growth Groups Studies
Term 4 2012

Please direct any feedback on the material to weber@arpc.org.au