



Studies in Colossians
Midweek – Summer 2018

Name:

Euston
CHURCH

Getting into Colossians – Prep Questions

Starter question:

- Do you ever wonder if there is more to the Christian life? Do you ever wish you had 'more' of God? Do you think much about your growth as a Christian?

What?

Read through the letter to the Colossians and think about the following:

- What is the tone & feel of the letter?
- Are there any repeated themes and ideas?
- What do we learn about the Colossians?
- Do we get any hints about the challenges the Colossians face?
- Try to split the letter into distinct sections. What is the theme of each?
- What are the big instructions that Paul gives the Colossians?

Why?

- Why might Paul have written this letter to the Colossians? What is his aim?

Introduction to Colossians

DISCUSS:

- *Introduce yourself to one another and spend some time catching up.*
- *Have you ever read Colossians? What are your impressions of the book?*

(1) INTRODUCTION

DISCUSS:

- *Do you ever suffer from Christian FOMO? Do you ever wonder if there is more to the Christian life? Do you ever wish you had 'more' of God?*
- *Do you think much about your growth as a Christian?*
- *What is growth? How do you think Christians can grow and have 'more' of God?*

(2) WELCOME TO COLOSSAE

(a) A bit of background

- church in Colossae founded by Epaphras in 52-54 AD (1:7)
- letter to the Colossians written by Paul in 62 AD upon hearing news from Epaphras (1:4, 1:8, 4:12).



(b) What's going on in Colossae?

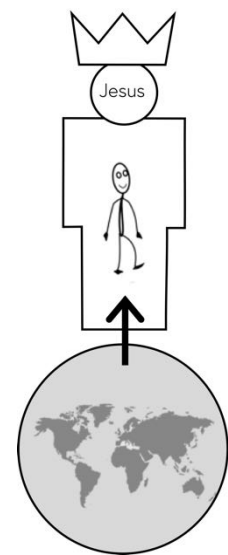
- keen Christians who want to grow...
(1:3-8)

- ...but are therefore vulnerable to listening to false teachers offering false ways of growing
(2:4, 16, 18, 20)

(3) PAUL'S AIM IN WRITING

(a) Assurance

(b) Real growth



→ • Book purpose:
Grow mature in Christ, assured that you are complete Christians in Him.

→ • Key verses:
2:6-7 "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted, and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

(4) OVERVIEW OF THE LETTER

DISCUSS:
 • Read through the letter together. For each section try to decide if this is mainly about 'Assurance' or 'Real growth' and see if you can match up each passage with one of the purpose statements on the right (currently jumbled up).

Passage	Assurance or Real Growth?
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Purpose

1:1-8	
1:9-14	

...keep seeking full growth
Full growth comes from knowing the apostolic Christ more fully, so grow rooted in him without shifting.

1:13-23	
1:24-2:7	

Live out your new identity corporately by replacing earthly living for heavenly.
In Christ you left this sinful world for new life, so don't be undermined by this-world religion.

2:8-19	
2:20-3:4	
3:5-17	
3:18-4:6	
4:7-18	

Serve your new King in all your relationships.
Don't move on from Christ, who has authoritatively brought you into his supreme kingdom!
As full members of the global Christian community, care for others as they care for you.
Fully fledged Christians...
Grow holy not by this-world religion, but by setting your mind on your heavenly life.

DISCUSS:
 • How do you feel about studying a letter that aims to help you grow as a Christian?

Study 1 – Colossians 1:1-14

Starter question:

- How do you know that you are a genuine Christian?

- What are your ambitions for your Christian life?

What?

v1-8 – Paul's first prayer

- Draw a flow diagram for how the Colossians have come to have faith.

- How are the Colossians doing as Christians? What evidence is there that their faith is genuine?

v9-14 – Paul's second prayer

- Look out for the 'fullness' language in Paul's prayer in v9-14. What is Paul praying for the Colossians in v9-10a? Can you try to sum up the prayer in your own words?

- Does this prayer mean Paul is saying the Colossians are not complete Christians?

- What would the outcome of Paul's prayer look like in the detail (v10b-12)?

Why?

- Why does Paul give the Colossians such insight into his Quiet times prayers for them?

- How does this fit with the context of false teachers offering them something other than Jesus to grow as Christians / have 'more' of God?

- How should the Colossians feel about what Paul prays for them here?

Apply!

- How does Paul's first prayer reassure you that you are a genuine Christian?

- How does Paul's second prayer challenge your own ambitions as a Christian?
Why might we not think about/care about our growth much? How might this challenge the complacent Christian who is assured about their standing with God and has no ambition to grow?

- What does Christian growth look like? Have you considered the various aspects that Paul mentions in v10b-12 as being part of growth?

- Re-read v13-14. Can you begin to see how a fuller knowledge of Jesus' reign and rescue would lead to:
 - bearing fruit
 - knowing God better
 - being strengthened for endurance
 - and increasing thankfulness?

- How do Paul's prayers help us know what to pray for ourselves/other Christians?

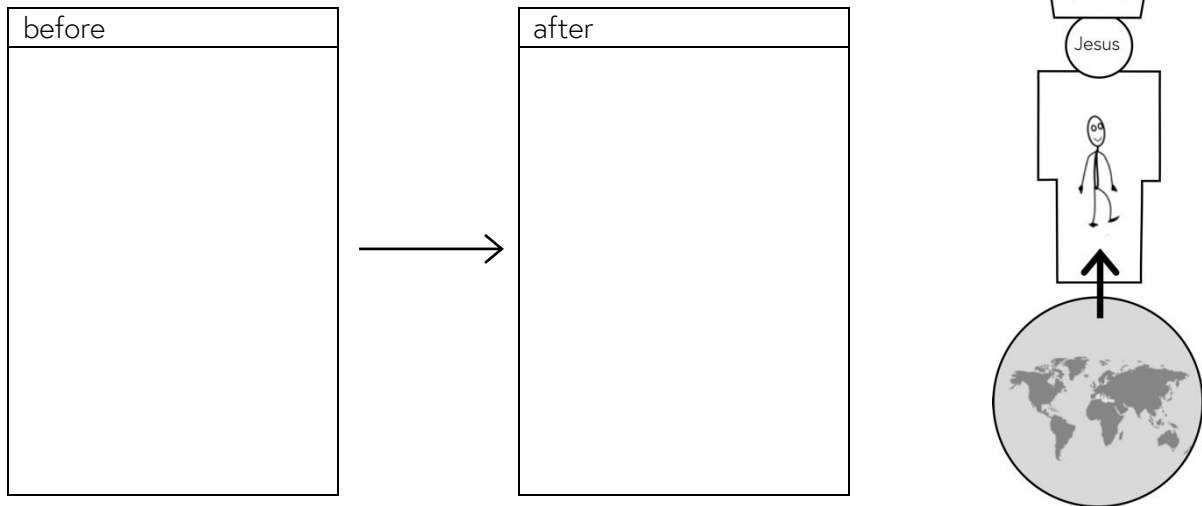
Study 2 – Colossians 1:13-23

Starter question:

- What one word would you use to sum Jesus up? Take a few seconds to think about this and then share around your table...

What?

- Look at v13-14 and v21-22. How has the Colossians' relationship with God changed thanks to Jesus when they became Christians? Complete the before/after table.



- Look at v15-20. What are the repeated words and ideas in these verses? What different aspects about Jesus are brought out in v15-17 and v18-20?

- So, what qualifies Jesus to bring about the before/after change in the Colossians' relationship with God?

Why?

- Against the backdrop of the false teachers why does Paul spell out the extent of Jesus' authority and supremacy in creation and salvation in so much detail? How does this assure the Colossians?

- How should they respond (v23)? Why would it be foolish/dangerous to 'not continue in the faith'?

Apply!

- How have these verses increased your understanding and view of Jesus? Which aspects about him do you tend to forget or downplay? Why might we forget or downplay how great Jesus is?

- How does this passage assure you that you are a fully qualified Christian?

- How does this passage help you not to move on from Jesus, when you are tempted to look elsewhere for 'more' of God?

Study 3 – Colossians 1:24-2:7

Starter question:

- When we (Rob and Anja) were teenagers we used all sorts of Christian things like WWJD bracelets or Taizé songs to grow as Christians. How can you know whether a new method for growth is good or bad?

What?

- We have just seen that Jesus is supreme in creation and salvation. In light of this what is shocking about what Paul is saying in v24?

- How does Paul fill up what is lacking (v25)?

- Looking at the whole passage. What is Paul's aim in his ministry?

- How does Paul work to achieve this aim?

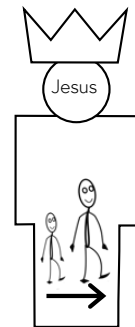
- What's so special about Paul that the Colossians should listen to him and not to 'the plausible arguments' of others (2:4)?

Why?

- From what we see here and in the previous study, why is knowing Jesus more fully through Paul's apostolic teaching the key to growth?

- Why is it so important that the Colossians understand that in the gospel of Jesus they have everything they need for growth?

- Why does Paul use the particular imagery of 2:6-7 to sum up what he's said so far? What role does thankfulness play in all this?



Apply!

- How can we be deceived into thinking that the gospel of Jesus is not enough for our Christian growth?

- Does 'simply continuing with what you already have' feel a bit disappointing as a method for growth? If so, what does this show about our view of Jesus? What we need to take on board from Paul's teaching about him?

- Why is it so countercultural to think that growth and progress simply require continuing with what you already have?

- What difference should knowing that the teaching about Jesus is all we need for growth make to how we approach our daily Bible readings/Bible studies/Sunday sermons? What would it look like practically to stay rooted in Christ and be built up in him? How can we help each other with this?

- What is our concern and aim for ourselves and other Christians? How can we learn from Paul's ministry aim?

Study 4 – Colossians 2:8-15

Starter question:

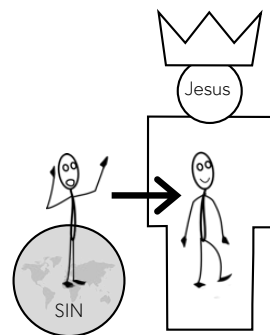
- How relevant do you think the doctrine of your union with Christ is? Is this just something for full-time bible scholars to spend their time thinking about?

What?

- Paul has already told the Colossians they must stay rooted in Christ. Now in 2:8 what do we learn is tempting the Colossians to shift from Christ?

- Compare and contrast what the false teachers and Paul offer the Colossians to be full Christians in 2:8-10.

- What is the big repeated idea in v11-13?
How has union with Christ changed a Christian's relationship with sin?



- In v14-15 what's the big achievement of Jesus' cross? How does this defend us against the Satanic rulers' accusations?

Why?

- How do you think Paul wanted the Colossians to feel about their standing with God after reading this passage?

- Paul uses circumcision as an illustration of the Colossians' break with sin. Why is the image of circumcision such a good one to use?

- Clearly in 2:8 Paul doesn't want the Colossians to return to this-world religion. But how does this passage protect them against that danger?

Apply!

- Union with Christ is amongst the most important, but most poorly understood, truths for Christians. Can you see why it matters so much? What do we lose if we don't fully grasp our union with Christ?

- How does Paul's teaching reassure you that you have full access to God? How can sin undermine your assurance and how does Paul's teaching deal with that too?

- Why is it so tempting to turn to philosophies and traditions that are just human inventions? Spell out for everyone how our union with Christ protects us from shifting from the gospel to this-world religion.

Study 5 – Colossians 2:8-19

Starter question:

- Michael Van Vlymen, author of *Angelic Visitations and Supernatural Encounters*, writes:
"I am an "ordinary" (sic.) guy who discovered how real God is. Once I realized that all of the things that the Bible talks about are still available for believers today, my relationship with God took on a vibrancy that I never had known before. Miracles and angelic visitations became the new standard for my Christian experience and I began to journal everything that God was (and is) doing. My books are born out of my new living relationship with God. I am impassioned to share with everyone who ever heard the old Bible stories and wished that God still did those things, that He still does and He will do them with and through YOU! Life with God is meant to be an adventure! Sitting in church once a week and trying to be a good person is a poor trade-off for what being a child of God is really all about! I pray you will be curious enough to find out!"

How does Van Vlymen's bio make you feel about your own Christian growth?

What?

- Paul warned us in 2:8 about false teachers who might deceive us. In 2:16-19, how were different teachers undermining the Colossians' assurance of their standing before God?

- How does Paul undermine the false teachers in return?

- How does Paul's attack on these false teachers flow from our union with Christ in 2:8-15?

Why?

- What is Paul really worried about here, just that they might choose an ineffective way to grow as Christians?

- What specific application of Christian assurance does 2:8-19 focus on (pay particular attention to the commands in 2:8 and 2:16+18)?

- How does Paul's teaching in all of 2:8-15 help the Colossians not to have their confidence in Christ undermined?

Apply!

- How might the desire for growth cause us, like the Colossians, to be vulnerable to false teaching?

- How can assurance in Christ's salvation protect us from the authority false teachers claim for themselves?

- What kind of false teaching would you be most vulnerable to, and why?
 - teachers mishandling Old Testament law?
 - teachers offering particular religious practices and traditions?
 - teachers who insist on the necessity of impressive spiritual experiences?
 - teachers of some kind of ascetic/monastic lifestyle?
 - something else entirely?

- How does knowing the true Christian way to grow (v19) protect you from false teaching?

- Where are we in danger of judging each other/other Christian churches and falsely undermining their assurance?

Study 6 – Colossians 2:20-3:4

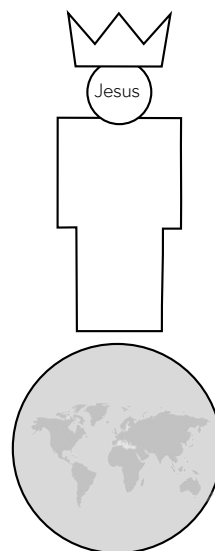
Starter question:

- Europe has seen a dramatic rise in immigration in recent years. But all through history people have often sought a new life for themselves and their loved ones. What difference do you think it makes to people when they have their hearts and minds set on a new life in a new home?

What?

- Try to spot all the contrasts between 2:20-23 and 3:1-4. What big teaching from chapter 2 is Paul applying in this passage and how does it structure the passage? Where are the Colossians on this diagram, even if they don't feel like it?

2:20-23	3:1-4



- How have the Colossians apparently failed to grasp the implications of their death with Christ? (Note 'elemental spirits of this world' here and in 2:8 means something like 'basic principles of this world'.)

- What does Paul command the Colossians to do in light of their union with Christ's resurrection? (Is Paul commanding merely an intellectual exercise?)

Why?

- What does v23 suggest the Colossians were hoping to gain from this-world religion?

- What do you think Paul wants to achieve as he sets human teaching and Christ side by side?

Apply!

- What kind of Christians are in danger of the Colossian mistake?

- We're not likely to turn to rules-based religion just because it's more tangible, are we?

- In the battle against the flesh why would 'seeking things above' be the only effective way to grow? Why then are we so quick to turn to rules?

- What difference will it make if we believe that our real life is in Christ's heavenly throne room already now? How can we help each other do that more?


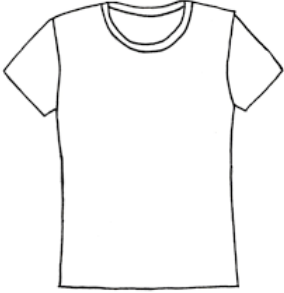
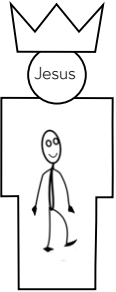

Study 7 – Colossians 3:5-17

Starter question:

- Why do people never turn up to a meeting with the Queen in their pyjamas?

What?

- Paul shows us a before and after for people who have become Christians.
 - Fill in the new/old person with new/old identity.
 - Fill in the T-shirts with the old behaviour they should put off and the new behaviour they should put on.

old sinful self	<p>old identity</p> 	<p>put off</p> 
new self in Christ	<p>new identity</p> 	<p>put on</p> 

- Try to summarise the old way and new way of living described by Paul.

- What do you think is more important in the new way Christians live, our relationship with God, or our relationship with other Christians?

Why?

- Does Paul just want the Colossians to follow rules after all? What makes this different from rules?

- Paul makes much of thankfulness here. How does thankfulness keep Christian growth motivated by the right things?

- How does this passage flow out of 3:1-4?

Apply!

- In your own heads do a quick audit of your own life (it would be good to use this as the basis for some proper self-evaluation after the study!) considering which behaviours you most need to put off and put on.

- Now pick an old-self behaviour at random, and as a group discuss what practical steps a Christian could take if they were struggling to put this behaviour off?

- What practical steps can you take to remind yourself of your new identity and set your mind on your new life;

- as a daily habit?
- in times of temptation?
- in times of apathy?

- What would Euston Church be like if we lived this passage out perfectly? How might that motivate you to keep changing your behavioural 'clothes'?

Study 8 – Colossians 3:18-4:6

Starter question:

- During the Trooping of the Colours to celebrate the Queen's birthday, some of the guardsmen had to stand in the same spot without moving for several hours. How would you feel about this job and why?

What?

- Look at 3:18-4:1. What do all the different relationships Paul describes in these verses have in common? What difference should being a Christian make in these relationships? What is the motivation for living like this in each case (even when it's hard and means suffering injustice)?

- Look at 4:2-6. How should the Christian's new identity shape their prayer life and the way they relate to non-Christians? (Note: these verses are full of 'Colossian' buzz words. How does this help understand what Paul means here?)

Why?

- This section could feel a bit random... Why do you think Paul thinks it's worth spending time talking about these relationships in such a short letter?

- How does Paul's teaching about relationships here relate to everything he's said so far in the letter? How does the Colossians new identity and status (united with Christ the Lord, transferred into Christ's kingdom, lives hidden with Christ in the heavenly throne room) make sense of living like this?

- How do v2-6 fit with Paul's purpose for the Colossians and his ministry more generally (1:28)?

Apply!

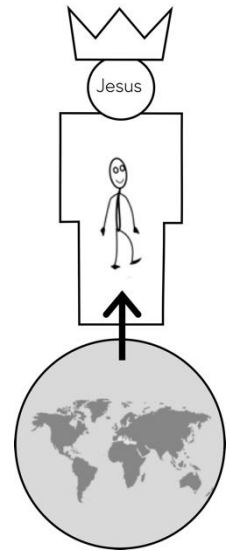
- Do you consider these types of relationship as an important part of your growth and maturity as a Christian? Why/why not? How does our thinking fall short of Paul's teaching?
- How does Paul's teaching on relationships in this and the last passage challenge our individualism?
- Pick one of the sets of relationships from 3:18-4:1 and mull over what living like this would mean/not mean in practice.
- What makes living like this hard? Why is it so countercultural? But what's so great about living like this?
- How does setting your mind and your new identity and Jesus' lordship help you live like this practically?
- How can we prevent drifting into legalism when trying to live like this?
- In what ways do 4:2-3 challenge and energise your prayer life?
- In what ways do 4:5-6 challenge and energise your evangelism?

Study 9 – Review and Colossians 4:7-18

PART 1 – Review of Colossians

(1) Be assured you are Christ's!

(2) Grow in knowing Christ!



Apply!

- What did you most need to hear?

- How has this assured you/motivated to know Jesus more fully and seek growth in Jesus?

PART 2 – Colossians 4:7-18

Starter question:

- How would you feel if the Apostle Paul had personally written a letter to our church, with greetings from lots of other Christian big shots, even though we had never met him or them?

What?

- Read through the one sentence biogs (jumbled up) and try to match them up with the names Paul mentions. How would the mention of these people encourage the Colossians?

Tychicus (v7)	a Colossian run-away slave belonging to Philemon, heard the gospel from Paul, now returning (Phil 10-18)
Onesimus (v9)	gospel minister from Thessalonica trained by Paul, one of Paul's travel companions (Acts 19:29,20:4, 27:2)
Aristarchus (v10)	one of the gospel writers and companion of Paul (2 Tim 4:11)
Mark (v10)	heard the gospel from Paul and told it to his fellow Colossian citizens (Col 1:6-7)
Epaphras (v12)	one of the gospel writers, abandoned Paul on first missionary trip leading to disagreements between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 12:12+25, 13:13, 15:26-41)
Luke (v14)	gospel minister trained by Paul, accompanied Paul on many missionary trips (Acts 20:4, Eph 6:21-22, 2 Tim 4:12, Ti 3:12)

- How were the Colossians benefitting from being members of this global Christian community?

- What did Paul expect the Colossians to contribute as members of this global Christian community?

Why?

- Why do you think Paul ends his letter (as he started it in 1:6) with the Colossians' membership of a global Christian community?

- How is this community an out-working of Paul's teaching about Christ in Colossians?

Apply!

- How is fellowship with the global Christian community good for us at Euston? What do we lose if we stand alone as a single church?

- What would it look like for us to take our standing as members of Christ's global kingdom more seriously?

Colossians – Summary Notes

Purpose and structure of the letter

Book purpose:

Grow mature in Christ, assured that you are complete Christians in Him.

Key verses:

2:6-7 "Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted, and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving."

Structure:

Cycle 1		
1:1-8	Assurance	Fully fledged Christians...
1:9-14	Real Growth	...keep seeking full growth
Cycle 2		
1:13-23	Assurance	Don't move on from Christ, who has authoritatively brought you into his supreme kingdom!
1:24-2:7	Real Growth	Full growth comes from knowing the apostolic Christ more fully, so grow rooted in him without shifting.
Cycle 3		
2:8-19	Assurance	In Christ you left this sinful world for new life, so don't be undermined by this-world religion.
2:20-3:4	Real Growth	Grow holy not by this-world religion, but by setting your mind on your heavenly life.
3:5-17	Real Growth	Live out your new identity corporately by replacing earthly living for heavenly.
3:18-4:6	Real Growth	Serve your new King in all your relationships.
4:7-18	Real Growth	As full members of the global Christian community, care for others as they care for you.

Study 1 – Colossians 1:1-14

Purpose: Fully-fledged Christians, keep seeking full growth!

v1-8

Paul is thanking God that the Colossians are genuine Christians. Hearing the gospel of God's grace and eternal hope has had a powerful effect on them: they have believed it and have started to be transformed by it as seen by them bearing fruit and loving their fellow Christians. They can be certain that they are fully-fledged Christians because it is the word of truth that they have believed – proclaimed to them by faithful Epaphras, who knows it from Paul, who is Christ's

apostle. It is the same word of truth that is not only changing them but is powerfully at work across the whole world.

v9-14

Even though the Colossians are fully-fledged Christians, there is room for growth. So, Paul now turns to pray for them to come to a fuller understanding of Jesus/the gospel, which is what will grow them as Christians, increasingly enabling them to 'walk in a manner worthy of the Lord' and 'fully please him'. Such growth includes bearing more fruit, knowing God better, being strengthened for joyful endurance and being thankful for the amazing transfer into Jesus' kingdom that God has worked.

Study 2 – Colossians 1:13-23

Purpose: Don't move on from Christ, who has authoritatively brought you into his supreme kingdom!

v13-14 and v21-22

In becoming Christians, a mind-blowing change has taken place for the Colossians. They previously belonged to the domain (authority/power) of darkness, were separated from God and hostile to him in mind and deeds, but now they have been transferred into Jesus' kingdom, receiving reconciliation and forgiveness and being seen as holy and blameless before God.

v15-20

But how can they be really sure they are fully qualified, that this transfer has given them full access to God? Paul goes on to explain that Jesus has the full authority to bring them into God's kingdom. He is supreme in everything, in creation and in salvation: Jesus is the creator God who has made everything, owns everything and sustains everything. Nothing and no-one is outside his rule, neither worldly powers (such as the false teachers) nor the powers of darkness. Secondly, Jesus is also supreme in salvation. He is the life-giving ruler of the new creation, his body, the church, being the first to conquer death and rise to new life. Being fully God and by shedding his own blood on the cross he is the only one who can bring about reconciliation with God. So, the Colossians can be certain that Jesus is uniquely authorised to transfer them from the domain of darkness into his kingdom with full access to God.

v23

However, the Colossians need to continue believing the gospel and holding on to Jesus. Because Jesus is supreme in everything, there is nothing to be gained by moving away from him, on the contrary: moving on from him means they would lose everything.

Study 3 – Colossians 1:24-2:7

Purpose: Full growth comes from knowing the apostolic Christ more fully, so grow rooted in him without shifting.

1:24-2:3

Paul moves on to talk about his own ministry in these verses. At first glance v24 seems a bit of a shock. Is Paul really saying that something is lacking in Jesus and his gospel? Not quite: we have already seen in the previous passage that Jesus is supreme in everything. But, what is lacking is

that this supreme Christ needs to be made fully known and this is what Paul is doing (v25-27). For this purpose, he was appointed by God, to make fully known the 'mystery', i.e. Christ in whom the Colossians are reconciled to God. Paul's aim in proclaiming Jesus is clear: he is labouring, struggling, even willing to suffer so that the Colossians (and indeed all the saints) would grow into mature, complete Christians (1:28) who are fully assured and fully know Christ (2:3). Christ alone holds 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' and is therefore everything the Colossians need to grow as Christians.

2:4-5

It is important that Paul convinces the Colossians that growth comes from fully knowing the Christ whom he is proclaiming, so that they are not tempted to listen to people who are offering them other plausible-sounding ways of growing. We get the first hint here of the existence of false teachers who are trying to delude the Colossians and take them away from Jesus.

2:6-7

Paul now concludes his argument so far with a big 'therefore'. Because the Colossians have been fully transferred into the kingdom of Christ, the supreme king, and because growth comes from knowing Him more fully through the apostolic teaching, Paul urges them to continue as they begun: by sticking with Christ and growing rooted in him without shifting, just as they were taught and overflowing with thanksgiving for all Christ is and has done for them.

Study 4 – Colossians 2:8-15

Purpose: In Christ you left this sinful world for new life, so...

2:8-10

The false teachers in Colossae threaten to take the Colossians captive with deceptive teaching. This teaching is the product of human tradition and the elemental spirits (i.e. the basic stuff) of the world. And it has nothing to do with Christ. This is the greatest indictment imaginable of any teaching, because Christ is none other than God in the flesh, ruler over all. The Colossians have all they could ever need in Christ: they are filled in him. If they turn to this-world teaching, then they will lose Christ, and so lose everything.

2:11-13

Paul now expands on union with Christ in more detail. Four times Paul explicitly states our union with Christ in these verses: in him, with him, with him, with him. Union with Christ has utterly transformed Christians' identity, particularly our relationship with sin. Firstly, in Christ we have had our sinful flesh circumcised (i.e. chopped off) through being buried with Christ. (Paul talks of circumcision perhaps to highlight how much better the new covenant is than the old.) The second aspect of our union with Christ is our resurrection out of the spiritual death of our old sinfulness. We have both died to sin and have been raised from it. And all of this was made possible through forgiveness.

2:14-15

Paul finishes his explanation of our union with Christ by explaining the legal basis of our forgiveness and our union: the cross. The record of our sins, a record that authorities (presumably satanic) want to use to condemn us before God, has been nailed to the cross. There is no authority left in the unseen realm that can stop Christ from taking us to be his body, members of his kingdom. Christ has definitively and authoritatively dealt with our sin at the cross.

Study 5 – Colossians 2:8-19

Purpose: In Christ you left this sinful world for new life, so don't be undermined by this-world religion.

2:16-19

False teachers are judging (v16) the Colossians, and even disqualifying them (v18). These teachers are offering something on top of Christ to help the Colossians grow. This might seem positive, but the false teachers imply (or perhaps even explicitly state) that the Colossians are second-rate Christians, or worse still, perhaps not even real Christians at all. However, in the last passage we saw that Christ triumphed over the unseen powers that want to condemn the Colossians for their sin and disqualify them from being members of Christ's kingdom. So what right do these false teachers have to disqualify the Colossians? None at all! Therefore the Colossians must stop letting the false teachers judge them.

It would be hard to not let these false teachers undermine them, because they are pretty impressive: they seem to have Old Testament laws and even angelic encounters on their side. Paul dismantles their authority by claiming that the Old Testament laws were only ever shadows of what Christians now have in Christ, and angelic encounters might give people a big head, but they also distract them from the Church's supreme head, Christ. Paul finishes with the right way to grow (v19): holding fast to Christ and to one another. Being part of a church that clings to Christ is the way to grow, and not private religious observance or experience. The false teachers are quite wrong.

Study 6 – Colossians 2:20-3:4

Purpose: Grow holy not by this-world religion, but by setting your mind on your heavenly life.

2:20-23

Paul now makes his one and only criticism of the Colossians. They seem to have forgotten that through their union with Christ, they don't belong to this world any more. If they had remembered this, then they wouldn't bother with this world's rules-based religion. Not touching certain things and not consuming certain things doesn't make people more or less holy at all. That may be what human religions have always taught, it may even have an appearance of wisdom, but it can't really help in the battle against sin. All it can do is make people seem more religious, but harsh religious regimes actually have no value at all in battling the sinful desires of our flesh.

3:1-4

Paul now moves on to his positive vision for growth. What will help the Colossians grow in holiness and fight their sinful flesh is seeking Christ's heavenly kingdom and setting their minds on their true life in Christ. Paul is simply echoing Jesus' own teaching to "seek God's Kingdom". But this side of the cross and resurrection, Paul can go further. This kingdom is Christ's *and it is ours*, who have believed upon and been united with the risen Christ. We can joyfully pursue, and long for, and live for Christ's heavenly kingdom because it, and not this earth, really is our true home now. So it is not the stuff of the world they have left behind that Christians should focus on to grow, but their new resurrection life in Christ. As their hearts are set more firmly on their true life in Christ, they will find the motivation and strength to fight sin. Not that it will be straightforward to pursue their true life in Christ: this life is hidden and has not yet appeared. However, it is worth persevering because one day Christ will appear and then our new life in Him will finally be revealed in glory, too.

Study 7 – Colossians 3:5-17

Purpose: Live out your new identity corporately by replacing earthly living for heavenly.

3:5-11

As people who have left this world by dying with Christ, the Colossians should kill off any remaining earthly behaviours, e.g. wrong desires that lead to idolatry and sexual immorality (which, as Scripture testifies, go hand in hand.) Evil desires provoke God's anger. But the Colossians are no longer people who belong to this earthly way of living, so must put it to death. The metaphor now moves from extermination to changing clothes. The desires to be put away are different aspects of hatred towards others (anger, wrath, malice) and the associated outward behaviours of how we then talk (slander, obscene talk, lying). This kind of hatred is no longer who we are. We have taken off the old self (a better translation than "old self", and perhaps a reference to Adam, whose name means "man", and whose sin has characterised all his descendants) and put on the new self, namely our creator, Jesus Christ. Through him we are restored to be his image-bearers, in such a way that our other cultural differences are transcended. We are not to hate other Christians, because Christ unites us all.

3:12-17

Given our new identity (God's chosen ones, holy and beloved) there are many new behaviours that we should long to put on. They can all be summed up in one word: love. As God has loved and forgiven us, so we are to love and forgive each other. Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience are all qualities that help us relate to one another with love and are the opposite of the hatred we saw in 3:5-11. Finally, evil desires leading to immorality and idolatry should now be replaced with joy in Christ leading to Christ-centred living. Notice how much Paul mentions thankfulness in 3:15-17. As we grow in Christ's word, through teaching and singing to one another, so our thanks and joy in his salvation should grow. The Christian who, together with his brothers and sisters, seeks to live more and more for Christ, not out of guilt, but out of a deep thankful joy, is truly growing mature.

Study 8 – Colossians 3:18-4:6

Purpose: Serve your new King in all your relationships.

Our new identity as people who have been transferred into Jesus' kingdom and have new life in Christ, should not only transform our behaviour within the body of Christ, but all of our lives at all times. 3:17 is the hinge-verse here: whatever we do, we are to do it in the name of the Lord Jesus and with thanksgiving, remembering the glorious new life that we have been given and the king we now serve.

3:18-4:1

In these verses Paul addresses how Christians are to live out their new identity in specific relationships: in marriage, in the family, in slave-master interactions (of which the closest analogy for us today would be the employee-employer relationship). Note, that all these relationships are to be governed by reciprocal obligations: submission/obedience by one party and love/care by the other. This is very countercultural. Paul is not condoning slavery here or saying that submission and obedience can ever mean going against God's word. But he is saying that such living is fitting in the Lord (v18), pleases God (v21) and that the motivation to live like this is found in our new identity: ultimately, we are serving the Lord (3:24, 4:1) whose glorious kingdom we have become

part of. Knowing that Jesus is our Lord and king will energise us to live for him even when this feels hard or might mean suffering injustice.

4:2-6

Such living is never easy and so Paul calls the Colossians to pray with thankfulness and being watchful (this could be a reference to the danger of the false teachers trying to lead them astray or a reference to the heavenly kingdom that is still to come in glory and which they should set their minds on). Paul's own prayer request might be surprising for us (he's not praying for freedom) but fits with his ministry purpose: to declare the mystery of Christ to bring people into Christ's glorious kingdom and fill them up with Christ so they would become fully mature. Likewise, the Colossians are to join in with Paul's mission. Having become part of Christ's kingdom, they should seek to live as his people and make the most of the opportunities to speak of Jesus.

Study 9 – Colossians 4:7-18

Purpose: As full members of the global Christian community, care for others as they care for you.

v7-14

The Colossians are part of a global Christian community. He now shows them in detail what he mentioned briefly in chapter 1:5-6, that the gospel they have believed is bearing fruit globally. And as it does, it unites people into one kingdom. So although the Colossians have never met Paul, he knows they will be encouraged to hear news of his gospel work. He also cares enough about them to send one of his most trusted colleagues, Tychicus, to make that news known. Tychicus and Paul seem to care for them just as much as Epaphras does in v12. In fact Paul's description of Epaphras' prayers matches Paul's description of his own ministry for the Colossians back in 2:1-2. Here is a community that considers the Colossians their very own, that greets them and cares for them.

The Colossians' place in this community is brought out in the structure: two sections of Gentile Christians (v7-9 and v12-14) sandwich a list of Jewish Christians (v10-11). The first section of Gentile Christians ends with the observation that Onesimus is 'one of you', i.e. a Colossian, and the second section begins with the same description of Epaphras. The point of sandwiching Jewish and Gentile (including Colossian) Christians together like must be to confirm the Colossians' standing to them in the community. They really are a part of the true Kingdom of God in Christ. This point is further driven home by the details we get about the Jewish Christians. Many Jewish people have been unsettling the faith of the Colossians (see 2:16-19), but these men comfort Paul, because they believe in and work for Christ, as all true members of Christ, whether Jewish or Gentile, do.

v15-18

After demonstrating the place of the Colossians in the Christian community, Paul ends his letter with a series of commands calling on the Colossians to play their own part in caring for that community. They are to pass on Paul's greetings to Laodicean Christians, including the church in Nympha's house. And they are to do a letter swap with the Laodiceans. They are to care for the Laodiceans' growth and to grow together with them *in the same truths* as the true global Christian community should. Paul drives home that they are not simply to be ministered to, but to take their part in gospel ministry. They are to hold Archippus, a minister, to account with Paul's charge that he fulfil his ministry. And they are to remember (i.e. pray for and care for) that arguably greatest of gospel ministers, Paul, as he sits in chains.