



***RAISED
TOGETHER***

A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

GLORIA FURMAN

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ISBN: 978-1-4627-7520-0

Item: 005798099

Dewey Decimal Classification: 227.7

Subject Headings: BIBLE. N.T. COLOSSIANS--STUDY AND TEACHING \ WOMEN \ CHRISTIAN LIFE \ JESUS CHRIST

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Printed in the United States of America

Adult Ministry Publishing
LifeWay Resources
One LifeWay Plaza
Nashville, TN 37234

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gloria Furman is a wife, mother of four, and writer. In 2008, her family moved to the Middle East to plant Redeemer Church of Dubai where her husband, Dave, serves as the pastor. She is the author of several books including *Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*, *Missional Motherhood*, *Alive in Him*, and the *Missional Motherhood Bible Study*.

A NOTE FROM GLORIA

Hello!

Greetings from the sandy Arabian Peninsula. The sun is setting over this desert city tonight, and I'm reminded of friends and family who are just waking up on the other side of the world. As this terrestrial ball rolls around the sun, I often think of these lines from the hymn "The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended," by John Ellerton, about the melody of unceasing praise the Lord receives from His church across the globe:

We thank Thee that Thy church, unsleeping,
While earth rolls onward into light,
Through all the world her watch is keeping,
And rests not now by day or night.
As o'er each continent and island
The dawn leads on another day,
The voice of prayer is never silent,
Nor dies the strain of praise away.

"From the rising of the sun to its setting, let the name of the LORD be praised" (Ps. 113:3, CSB). Jesus is worthy of unceasing praise! I'm excited to walk with you through Paul's letter to the church at Colossae and learn more about Jesus and how He reigns supreme over the cosmos. What a glorious vocation we have been given—to praise Jesus together—because we have been raised together with Christ.

In Christ,

Gloria

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Welcome to *Raised Together*! This eight-session Bible study can be used in a number of settings. It's primarily designed to be used in a weekly small group with a leader and a small gathering of women. However, the study can also be used as an individual study, in a one-on-one discipling relationship, or with a large group of women.

STUDY ELEMENTS

GROUP SESSION

During the Group Session you will discuss and process together what you are learning through the video teaching and the Personal Study time. Each Group Session will consist of four parts:

REVIEW: A list of questions will help you assess and discuss what you've studied in your Personal Study.

WATCH: Following the review, you'll watch the video teaching for the session. Space is provided for you to take notes on the teaching.

DISCUSS: Review and process the video teaching as a group, using the questions provided.

CLOSE: A suggested final prayer prompt or activity closes the Group Session.

PERSONAL STUDY

There are five Personal Study sections each week. This material will give you an opportunity to dig deeper into Paul's Letter to the Colossians as well as preview the teaching video in the coming session. You can complete these Personal Study sections at your own pace. However, it would probably be best to space them out through the week to give you time to ponder God's Word and how to apply it.

ABOUT THE GOSPEL COALITION

The Gospel Coalition is a fellowship of evangelical churches deeply committed to renewing our faith in the gospel of Christ and to reforming our ministry practices to conform fully to the Scriptures. We have become deeply concerned about some movements within traditional evangelicalism that seem to be diminishing the church's life and leading us away from our historic beliefs and practices. On the one hand, we are troubled by the idolatry of personal consumerism and the politicization of faith; on the other hand, we are distressed by the unchallenged acceptance of theological and moral relativism. These movements have led to the easy abandonment of both biblical truth and the transformed living mandated by our historic faith. We not only hear of these influences—we see their effects. We have committed ourselves to invigorating churches with new hope and compelling joy based on the promises received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We believe that in many evangelical churches a deep and broad consensus exists regarding the truths of the gospel. Yet we often see the celebration of our union with Christ replaced by the age-old attractions of power and affluence, or by monastic retreats into ritual, liturgy, and sacrament. What replaces the gospel will never promote a mission-hearted faith anchored in enduring truth working itself out in unashamed discipleship eager to stand the tests of kingdom-calling and sacrifice. We desire to advance along the King's highway, always aiming to provide gospel advocacy, encouragement, and education so that

current and next-generation church leaders are better equipped to fuel their ministries with principles and practices that glorify the Savior and do good to those for whom He shed His life's blood.

We want to generate a unified effort among all peoples—an effort that is zealous to honor Christ and multiply His disciples, joining in a true coalition for Jesus. Such a biblically grounded and united mission is the only enduring future for the church. This reality compels us to stand with others who are stirred by the conviction that the mercy of God in Jesus Christ is our only hope of eternal salvation. We desire to champion this gospel with clarity, compassion, courage, and joy—gladly linking hearts with fellow believers across denominational, ethnic, and class lines.

Our desire is to serve the church we love by inviting all our brothers and sisters to join us in an effort to renew the contemporary church in the ancient gospel of Christ so we truly speak and live for Him in a way that clearly communicates to our age. As pastors, we intend to do this in our churches through the ordinary means of His grace: prayer, ministry of the Word, baptism and the Lord's Supper, and the fellowship of the saints. We yearn to work with all who seek the lordship of Christ over the whole of life with unabashed hope in the power of the Holy Spirit to transform individuals, communities, and cultures.



SESSION 2:
COLOSSIANS
1:1-14



PERSONAL STUDY

ONE

Welcome to your Personal Study time. In the group session we talked about the need to understand the nature of Paul's Letter to the Colossians and how we should approach it. How is the letter organized? Why is it here? What is the message of the letter? How should we live in light of what we learn? These questions and their answers are critical for us to understand, because our primary goal in this study of Colossians is to know God.

In our study of Colossians we are interacting with the very Word of God, so let's pray together for His help.

Father in heaven, we are Your humble creatures. You've created us to be dependent on Your Word. We know You have made us to live by "every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3). We confess to You, Lord, that we forget this truth so often and we attempt to live apart from Your Word. Forgive us. Would Your Holy Spirit cause our hearts to burn with zeal for Your Word? Only with Your help can we understand Your Word in Colossians. Help us to read, understand, and apply Colossians to the glory of Your Son Jesus. It is in His name we pray, Amen.

This week we are going to cover the introduction of Paul's Letter to the Colossians. You will notice that these fourteen verses really pack a lot in there!

In this initial Personal Study this week, please read through the whole letter of Colossians. If you are able, read through all four chapters in one sitting. If you are reading the translation of Scripture you are most comfortable with, this should only take about fifteen minutes. Once you are finished reading, if you have more time for another read through (whether right now or later), read through the whole letter in one sitting again. In the course of our study we will examine Colossians in different proportions—from chapters to paragraphs to verses to words. All of this will be done in light of the whole, which is a single letter.



TWO

For the rest of the week we will go in-depth into Colossians 1:1-14. We will also be looking up some cross-references in the Old Testament and the other parts of the New Testament, though, to help us better understand the context. But before we do, let's recall what we've already read. Since we've already read the whole letter, let's review some general questions.

What impressed you about this letter during your read through(s)?

What is the main message Paul is conveying in this letter?

How has Paul organized his letter? Which particular parts can you identify (greetings, prayers, instructions, etc.)?

SLOWLY READ THROUGH COLOSSIANS 1:1-14, PAUL'S INTRODUCTORY GREETING AND PRAYER. There are several key words and themes in these first fourteen verses that are expounded upon throughout the rest of the letter.



What are the key words/themes you notice in this passage?

This letter is from Paul and was likely written by the hand of "Timothy our brother," who was acting as Paul's secretary (Col. 1:1). Paul identifies himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God."

Whom does Paul identify as the recipients of this letter?

Colossae is a geographic location one can point to on a map. What is the meaning of the location "in Christ"?

Do you understand yourself to be "in Christ"? Explain.

SLOWLY READ VERSE 3 A FEW TIMES, MEDITATING ON EACH WORD.

At first glance, these initial comments from Paul may not seem at all contentious, especially if one is accustomed to hearing Jesus referred to as the Son of God.

Why is it important that Paul says he is thanking "God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"?

What does this mean for our friends, family, and neighbors who deny that God is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ?

READ PAUL'S REMARKS ON THOSE WHO DENY GOD IN ROMANS 1:21.

This dark and grave depiction of those who are outside of Christ is no longer true of the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. And it is no longer true for any and all who are in Christ. Praise God! The futility of our thinking has been replaced by the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16) and our darkened, foolish hearts have been replaced with hearts of flesh.

NOW READ EZEKIEL 36:26.

This is God's work in our lives. We did not do a single thing to merit such a gift! You could say that the only thing we contributed to our salvation is that we desperately needed it. If you are a believer in Christ Jesus, take some time right now to praise God specifically for your salvation in Christ.

Recall the time when you did not know the Lord—your thinking was futile and your heart was darkened. Remember when the light “turned on” for you. What’s your born again birth story? What were the circumstances? Who was the messenger God sent to you? What was that day like?

If you came to know Jesus at a very young age, praise the Lord for His miraculous grace in your life. No one who has been delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son could possibly have a “boring” born again birth story!

THREE

One of the brilliant by-products of globalization is the ease of communication. I believe that God has strategically designed all of the comings and goings of every people group under the sun. He has done this for the spread of His glorious gospel and in such a way as to bring glory to His Son. The residents of Colossae were beneficiaries of this ease of communication. Ancient Colossae was a small city near a meandering river in the Lycus Valley, but its proximity to the port city of Ephesus allowed opportunities for the exchange of information. Epaphras was a local man who went on a journey to Ephesus and came back with good news for his people—the good news of the gospel! This, of course, was no surprise to the sovereign God, who planned it all before the foundation of the world.

Paul's thanksgiving and prayer in this passage reveal so much to us about "the word of the truth, the gospel" (Col. 1:5). Indeed, the entire letter teaches us about the gospel. *But what is the gospel?* One of the things that potential members of our church are asked to do in their "membership chat" with an elder is to summarize the gospel briefly. The elders are not looking for a perfectly-memorized treatise, but a faithful explanation of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Can you summarize the gospel? Try to summarize the good news in less than one hundred words. It is helpful to keep in mind these four things as you write your summary: our holy God, man's rebellion, the sacrifice of Jesus, and the response that is required of us all.



READ COLOSSIANS 1:1-14, LOOKING CAREFULLY AT VERSES 3-8.

What do we learn about the gospel from this passage of Scripture?

There are certainly many aspects of the word of truth we could discuss at this point. I do want to point out verse 6 right now. It sounds rather astonishing, doesn't it? Paul specifically describes the gospel as that "which has come to you [the Colossians], as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing." The whole world! Bearing fruit and increasing! Now, when we read the newspaper or scroll through a newsreel on the news app in our phones, we are not likely to read such encouraging words. We are more likely to encounter horrific headlines that can tie one's stomach into knots, make the blood boil, or induce anxiety. This news, however, that the gospel is bearing fruit and increasing in the whole world, is exceptionally encouraging and increases our faith.

We ought not be surprised, though. This is what God had planned from before time. In Genesis 12 He reveals more specifically His promise to bless the whole world. We read about the covenant God made with Abram (who would become Abraham) in Genesis 17:7 that God would bless the nations of the earth through the "offspring" ("seed," KJV) of Abraham. Through Abraham's son, Isaac, came the nation of Israel. Isaac and Israel typologically fulfilled God's promise, and they pointed ahead to Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to bless every nation.

READ MATTHEW 1:1.

Matthew wants his Jewish readers to recognize Jesus. Who does Matthew intentionally identify Jesus with in this passage?

NOW SKIP AHEAD TO MATTHEW 28:18-20.

As the seed of Abraham, Jesus has been shown to be the heir of the covenant God made with Abraham. Which nations are included when Jesus tells His disciples to go make more disciples?

SLOWLY READ GALATIANS 3:7-22, AND THEN CIRCLE BACK TO GALATIANS 3:7-9.

Who are the sons of Abraham? What is the means by which the Christians at Colossae (Gentiles!) are included as sons of Abraham?

Paul had not carried the gospel to Colossae and delivered it in person, but Epaphras heard the good news in Ephesus and brought it back to his friends, family, and neighbors in Colossae. Paul isn't bragging about his ministry when he says the gospel is bearing fruit and increasing in the whole world. His words describe a hallmark of the gospel—its universality.

The word of truth is universally applicable to every man, woman, and child everywhere, and it is the power of God to save any and all who call on Him in faith. The gospel is never adjusted for any people group, as this adjusted news would actually become a totally different false gospel. False gospels (heresies) take on the nuances from the cultures in which they originate, but the true gospel belongs to God (Rom. 1:1-3) and is universal truth.

And so, the word of truth, the gospel, has also come to you. As the beautiful feet of messengers run throughout the world with the good news, God is keeping His covenant with Abraham to bless the world through his offspring—through Christ. Isaiah prophesied,

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shown.

ISAIAH 9:2

FOUR

No doubt, as you read through the entire Letter of Colossians earlier in the week you noticed some major themes rise to the forefront. One of those themes is the knowledge of God. What is the knowledge of God? How can we get it? How do we know we have it? Or have enough of it?

Possessing the knowledge of God is very different than possessing the knowledge of multiplication tables or how to drive a car. If you have ever tried to learn a foreign language, you've probably been puzzled by the verbs and their usage when it comes to "knowing" things. One time I asked one of my foreign language tutors to explain to me how I could know when to use one verb over the other when it comes to "knowing" something, and even she was puzzled! "I cannot explain it to you, I think you just have to know," she said, and then we both cracked up laughing.

SLOWLY READ THROUGH PAUL'S PRAYER IN COLOSSIANS 1:9-14.

(Sometimes it's tricky to follow along when you read Paul's prayers, so just read it through a few more times if you get stuck in any of the multiple commas in those phrases.)

What are Paul's specific prayer requests in these verses?

What do you think is the connection between the Colossians being "filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (v. 9) and the rest of the prayer requests?

According to verse 10, how does one "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord"?



Why does Paul ask that they be “strengthened with all power, according to [God’s] glorious might” (v. 11)?

Does any of this seem overwhelming to you? In what way?

Most of us are woefully aware of our own inadequacies. I could easily give you a list of all the ways I have mismanaged my time, stopped short of reaching a goal, misunderstood instructions that were given to me, or simply gone to bed early because I couldn’t envision myself having the energy to do one more thing. We are fragile, human creatures. Last I checked, transforming into a superhero was not on the list of spiritual gifts given to the church by the ascended Christ. We do not shed our creaturely humanness when we become Christians. Where does our sufficiency come from? It comes from Christ Himself. Paul prays for these things because we so desperately need them. Remember, remember, remember—don’t ever forget it—we are in Christ! These blessings are ours in Christ.

The knowledge of God’s will is ours in Christ. We can “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” and be “fully pleasing to him,” because we are in Christ (Col. 1:10). We can bear “fruit in every good work” and increase “in the knowledge of God,” because we are in Christ. Amen?

Wait. Have you read this somewhere before? Think way back to the beginning of the Bible. If you have read Genesis before, do you recall a story from around creation-time about mankind bearing fruit/increasing and the knowledge that belongs to God?

READ GENESIS 1:26-28.

In whose image did God create mankind (male and female)?

What did God say when He blessed the man and the woman He created?

NOW READ GENESIS 2:16-17.

What does God command the man not to do? What are the consequences of disobedience to God's command?

AND NOW READ GENESIS 3:2-3.

What is the difference between God's command (Gen. 2:16-17) and what the woman says to the serpent?

It cannot be overstated that being made in God's image is profoundly connected to knowing God and knowing His will. Adam and Eve were created in God's image and given the task of multiplying into more godly image bearers. But they sinfully desired to enjoy a particular insight apart from God (the knowledge of good and evil), and when tempted with an opportunity to take this knowledge for themselves, they sank their teeth into the forbidden fruit. The knowledge of God's will had already been made plain to them by God Himself, but the man and the woman disobeyed. In their quest for this special wisdom, they showed that they were fools. From that moment on, everyone born of Adam and Eve has been born spiritually dead—apart from God, their Creator. And every person born is in need of a Mediator to stand between them and the righteous wrath of God.

Paul prays that the Colossians (and us) would "be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col. 1:9). We don't need some new, better knowledge of God, but we need to be filled with all that is ours to have in Christ. We don't need some secret, exclusive knowledge of God, but we need to understand how to obey God's will. We need discernment to appropriate God's will for our lives. It is utterly ironic, isn't it? In their quest for God's knowledge, Adam and Eve failed to apply the knowledge of God to their lives. We do the same thing, too. Oh Father, forgive us!

But now we are in Christ! In Christ we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, and that's the only way Colossians 1:10 can happen in our lives.

Read the following passages where Jesus describes His mission. Make a note of what Jesus says He is concerned with doing.

John 4:34

John 6:38

Luke 22:42

NOW READ COLOSSIANS 1:9-10 ONCE MORE.

Recall how our first parents were given the charge to be fruitful and multiply into more godly image bearers who live by God's Word and obey God's will. How did Jesus perfectly live out verses 9-10?

How is Jesus "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45), through His church, doing what the first Adam failed to do?

Praise God for giving us His Son! What a thrill it is to be placed in Christ and to have all that is in Him. The knowledge of God's will, the ability to bear fruit in every good work, to be strengthened with all power, to endure patiently with joy—thank You, Father, for qualifying us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Pray through Paul's prayer to close your Personal Study time today, personalizing it for yourself and others in your life.

FIVE

Well, we are only about fourteen verses in to Paul's Letter to the Colossians, and we've been all the way back to God's plan of salvation from before time, up to the creation, and all the way forward to the spread of the ever-fruitful, ever-increasing gospel over the whole world. All of this is going somewhere. We are headed for the day when we will be delivered, once and for all, from all futility and pain and even from death itself. It is the "day of redemption" for which we have been sealed by the promised Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30).

Paul said that he has not ceased to pray for the church at Colossae, and he lists out what he is praying for. We've seen that being placed in Christ is the reason we can avail of these tremendous things—things like spiritual wisdom, fruitful ministry, and spiritual strength. We recall in Colossians 1:11 the strength Paul is praying for comes via the glorious might of God, and it is for all endurance and patience with joy. My kindergarten-aged son likes to imagine he has powers that can enable him to punch through cement walls. Some of us bigger kids like to pretend we have special powers that enable us to do things like consume everything we can (fiscally or otherwise), be exempt from things like sleep and fellowship, and ignore our needs to pray and meditate on God's Word. But as we are filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, we learn to discern what we really need and why.

According to verse 11, why do you need all endurance? Why do you need patience? What kind of patience do you need?

The One who is doing the work requested in this prayer is God, and we are the ones who need endurance and patience with joy. God is the One who fills us with knowledge, enables us to walk in a worthy manner, bears fruit through us,



strengthens us, and qualifies us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. There is something else that God has done for us that Paul wants us to recall.

READ VERSES 13-14.

What has God done for us?

In whom do we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins?

In the Old Testament, when God's people sinned greatly against God time and again, one of the most devastating consequences was the judgment of being exiled out of the promised land and into captivity in foreign nations. God spoke through His prophets time and again to remind His people of His faithfulness to keep His promises. He promised He would bring them out of exile—out of captivity. The promise of deliverance was initially fulfilled when God did bring the nation of Israel out of exile and back to the land He had given to them. But the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise of deliverance—often called the second exodus—is fulfilled when Christ, through His work on the cross, redeems His people from their exile in Satan's kingdom and their bondage to sin. In the Book of Isaiah, we read some truly captivating descriptions of God's redemption of His people from exile.

READ ISAIAH 44:22-24.

What do you notice about redemption and the forgiveness of sins?

NOW READ ISAIAH 52.

What powerful imagery stands out to you in this passage as it pertains to redemption and forgiveness?

As there are echoes in this Colossians passage of God's redemption of His people out of exile, there are also echoes of the exodus of God's people out of slavery in Egypt. Specifically, Paul uses the dark and light imagery to help the readers see the connection.

Go through these passages in Exodus and make notes of the dark and light imagery.

Exodus 10:21-23

Exodus 14:20

While we, God's people, are not corporately going through a literal exodus from one geographic place to another, we are going through a spiritual exodus from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son. In Luke 22:53, Jesus says these words to the soldiers as He is betrayed by Judas and allows Himself to be arrested (and later executed on the cross), "When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." In a glorious irony, in order to deliver us from the kingdom of darkness, Jesus willingly subjected Himself to the power of darkness. Three days later Jesus is shown to be victorious over Satan, sin, and death as He bursts from the grave, the first man in the new creation. And like Him, we will rise! We're delivered spiritually at first, and then in the final resurrection we are delivered in totality. We belong to the kingdom of God's beloved Son even now, and our inheritance is guaranteed; yet we are waiting for the day of redemption when Christ's kingdom will come in full, and we will obtain the inheritance of the saints in light. All of this—deliverance, transferring of citizenship, redemption, forgiveness of sins—is accomplished for us by Christ on our behalf.

Do you actively hope (Col. 1:5) in the things Paul discusses in these verses? If not, what are some ways you can remind yourself to have hope in Christ and His work?

Would you consider yourself to be delivered from darkness, redeemed, and forgiven by God? If so, what are some of the temptations you face that cause you to doubt or forget these truths? If not, what assurances do you find in this passage in Colossians that these things are possible for you because of Christ?

Acts 13:38-39 says, “Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers and sisters, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you. Everyone who believes is justified through him from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses” (CSB). Jesus purchased our redemption from sin at the cost of His own blood on the cross. Jesus canceled our debt, and therefore, we are pardoned for our sin!

Reflecting on Colossians 1:1-14, what does this new freedom look like in the life of a believer?

Looking back over verses 13-14, and keeping in mind the whole message of Colossians, what do you think are some of the reasons that Paul wants his readers to see and understand their connection with Jesus—the fact that they are now “in Christ”?

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! We have so much to be thankful for, and so many things to pray for ourselves, for our loved ones, and for the billions of unreached people who do not even know the name of Jesus. Praise God today for the work He has done and is doing in your life and for the work He is doing as His fruit-bearing, ever-increasing gospel goes throughout the whole world. And let’s look forward to gathering together to fellowship around the Word of God.

DISCUSS VIDEO ON COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

What does the apostle Paul want the Colossians (and us) to know?

Why is this message a matter of eternal life and death?

What is the means by which Paul communicates this important truth in Colossians?

Who are the Epaphrases among you? (Hint: The answer is all of you who have heard and obeyed the good news!) What are some of the challenges you face in sharing the gospel with people in your community? How does this text encourage you?

We are all prone to wander away from the purity of the gospel. What are some of the ways you (and those in your community) are tempted to add to the gospel or detract from it? How does this passage in Colossians correct such thinking?

CLOSE

We are all indebted to the grace of God in sending His Son, Jesus. Let's close in prayer together now, thanking the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for loving us in this way—even while we were still sinners. Thank Him for delivering you from the kingdom of darkness and transferring you into the kingdom of His beloved Son. Pray that those who do not yet believe would behold the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.