

NT Reading Plan 2020

Living Hope Fellowship
Colossians

Colossae

Colossae was a small town (the smallest place to which Paul wrote a Bible letter) and yet it had big problems of **understanding** and **applying** the full implications of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Far from diminishing this church's ability to have adequate resources for theological training or manpower for meaningful church service or outreach, Paul wrote this majestic letter to encourage this church in taking full advantage of what they have in Christ for life and doctrine, within the church and with outsiders. Paul expected great things from this church and knew the answer to their ailments was to reinforce the implications of the gospel for what the Colossians believed and how they behaved.

1. Do you think our church is big, small, medium sized? Do you often think about how we might be able to serve God better as a church if we only had a bigger building, more people, more money, etc., etc.? How can you flip that and think about how you can best take full advantage of the sufficiency of Christ working through the resources he has given you?

Prayers of Thanksgiving & Joy

Colossians opens and closes with prayer (like many of our church services! See 1:3-8, 9-14; 4:3, 12). In these sections, Paul interweaves the themes of this short letter, particularly in the opening paragraphs of chapter 1. The headings below will explore these themes a little deeper. For now though, as you track through this letter, be on the lookout for *thanking* words, "hope," and joy/rejoicing words.

2. **Why** is Paul full of *thanks*? **What** gives Paul *hope*? **When** does Paul *rejoice*? (See 1:3, 5, 11, 12, 23, 24, 27; 2:5, 7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2).

Knowledge

God has revealed the knowledge of who he is (doctrine) through the word of truth (also called the gospel, 1:5) which focuses on the Father's redemptive work through Christ. This theme of knowledge and revelation weaves through every paragraph of Colossians.

- This revelation = truth (1:5, 6).
- The proper response to this revelation = faith *in Christ Jesus* (1:4).
- This revelation must be proclaimed (1:23) to be heard / learned / understood (1:5, 6, 23)
- Gospel ministers give thanks when they hear how the gospel of Christ was supernaturally heard with understanding (1:3, 6, 9).
- This knowledge is spiritually discerned and understood so Paul prays to God for the Colossians to be filled up with this revelation (1:9).
- Christ is preeminent, therefore he is superior to all other revelation (1:15-23).
- This revelation is why Paul is in ministry (1:23, 25).
- This knowledge is a *mystery*, it was once hidden but has now revealed to God's saints (1:26)
- It is only divinely revealed by God (1:27).
- God chose not only to reveal to Jews but to the Gentiles (1:27).
- The greatness of this revelation = "riches of the glory of this mystery which = Christ in you,

the hope of glory.

- Therefore Christ is the content of proclamation & preaching (1:28).
- The revelation of Christ requires warning and teaching in wisdom (1:28).
- The goal of proclaiming this revelation = the maturity of every saint in Christ (1:28).
- For the sake of this message, Paul worked tirelessly with God's strength (1:29).
- Christians must grow in understanding this revelation which = Christ (2:2).
- The revelation of Christ features "ALL the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (2:3).
- This revelation is therefore a safeguard against worldly wisdom (2:4-23).

And that's just the first two chapters. You get the point. This book has a lot to do with the wisdom we have in Christ, revealed by God in the gospel!

3. Colossae suffered from false wisdom teachings. How does chapter 2 show the superior revelation of Christ over and above any made up religion or philosophy?

4. What's one way the church communicate this revelation to one another (see 3:16)?

5. In reference to this revelation, what is Paul's prayer for in 4:3?

Power

The revelation of Christ in the gospel demonstrates the **power** of God in raising Christ from the dead but that same **power** is also at work in raising believers with Christ in newness of life (compare 2:12 with 3:1). With new life comes changed lives, people who now **act** in keeping with the revelation God has made known to them (for example, see 1:9-11 where the main themes of **knowing** and **doing** are interwoven). **Doctrine** is always meant to result in **practice**.

In order for Christians to do spiritual things, they need spiritual power. Spiritual power comes from God through the revelation of spiritual truth in the gospel. Not only does God reveal Christ to us through the gospel so that we now have spiritual wisdom and understanding, we are now enabled to do Christian things as we live out our faith. Christians aren't mature in their thinking or behavior so we need to keep pursuing both as we look to Christ!

Just as the concept of revelation weaves through the whole letter, so does the power of God which enables believers to live the Christian life. While this can be seen in 1:10-11 and 1:29-2:1, it is most notable in the second half of Colossians. The exhortations for the church to **do** something in response to what they **know** starts in 2:6, then in 2:16, followed by 3:1-4:6).

6. Read each paragraph of chapter 3 independently. Ask yourself three questions: What does this teach about God's revelation? What does this teach me to do about it? How does this connect to Christ?

In Christ

One of Paul's beloved concepts is the fact that Christians are in Christ (you can plumb lots of these depths in this letter alone)! Christ also is in you, the hope of glory (1:27). It should come as no surprise that every argument and exhortation of this book relates to who Christ is, what he has done, who we are in him, and how we are to live with Christ.

7. How does being in Christ (being so connected to him that your identity is in who he is and what he is doing) serve as the basis for effectively dealing with sin in your life? In other words, what is it about being connected to Christ that makes a Christian able to defeat sin?