

- SEPTEMBER 5 -
INTRODUCING COLOSSIANS
LEADER GUIDE

Small groups at Faith Fellowship are designed to provide the context and resources to help every person at Faith Fellowship take their next step as disciples of Jesus, even if their first step is their next step. Consider these questions and ideas to help you take your next step as a disciple.

Interact with the Passage

Read the entire book of Colossians this week using your ESV Scripture Journal. Consider reading and meditating on one section of the book per day by using the H.E.A.R. method. Engaging the text in this way will help you better understand and discuss the Scripture with your small group.

- **Highlight:** Read and observe everything in the passage.
- **Explain:** Based on your reading, discover what the passage means in its context.
- **Apply:** Understand how the meaning of the passage affects your life.
- **Respond in Prayer:** Pray God's word back to him, asking to believe, share, and put the Bible into practice in your life and relationships.

Feel free to interact with the Scripture at your own pace throughout the week. Remember to interact with the Scripture and think through the discussion questions before you're small group meets. In small groups, we'll discuss what we learned from the Scripture the previous week as well as our answers to the discussion questions together.

Open It Up

- Generally speaking, what do you expect from studying the Bible? What do you want from this study of Colossians? What role has Colossians played in the shaping of your faith up to this point (that you are aware of)? What do you know about Paul coming into this study? What is the significance of him being an "Apostle"?

Discussion Questions

- Read the book of Colossians this week. Consider reading a chapter per day. What stood out to you in your interactions with reading Scripture this week? Listen to the book of Colossians on the CD in your Faith at Home envelope. Consider listening in the car on your way to work or appointments. What stood out to you in your interactions with listening Scripture this week?
- Watch the Colossians Overview from The Bible Project at faithfellowshipfortbend.com/colossians. What stood out to you from this video?
- Read Colossians 1:15-20. One of the major themes in the book is the supremacy of Jesus. In fact, these verses are actually a hymn the early church sang. Your Bible translations might even format this part of the text differently, like a poem or the lyrics to a song. The section begins by saying Jesus is the image of the invisible God. How did Jesus display the character and nature of God while He was on earth? (*Hint: Consider the article on the Supremacy of Christ on page 10 of the Disciple Guide.*)¹

¹ These leader notes were adapted primarily from John MacArthur's study on Colossians and Philemon. *MacArthur, John F. Colossians and Philemon (MacArthur Bible Studies) (p. 42). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.*

Leader Notes - Colossians 1:15-20

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Image of the Invisible God (v. 15): The Greek word for “image” means “copy” or “likeness.” From this term we get our English word icon, referring to a statue. Jesus Christ is the perfect image—the exact likeness—of God and is in the very form of God (John 1:14; Phil. 2:6), and has been so from all eternity. By describing Jesus in this manner, Paul emphasizes that He is fully God in every way.

The firstborn over all creation (v. 15): The Greek word for “firstborn” can refer to one who was born first chronologically, but most often refers to preeminence in position or rank. “Firstborn” in this context does not mean “first created” for several reasons: (1) Christ cannot be both “first begotten” and “only begotten” (see John 1:14, 18; 3:16); (2) if Paul was teaching that Christ was a created being, he was agreeing with the heresy he was writing to refute; and (3) it is impossible for Christ to be both created and the Creator of everything (v. 16). Thus Jesus is the firstborn in the sense that He has the preeminence and possesses the right of inheritance “over all creation.” He existed before the creation and is exalted in rank above it.

Read more about the image of God in Scripture in these verses: Gen. 1:26-27; Exodus 20:4-6. Consider the following questions to take your group deeper into the text.

- **According to these verses, how would you describe a biblical definition of “image”?** (An image is someone or something that represents God. Humans were made in God’s image—in His likeness. Idols attempted to make a physical representation of God on earth.)
- **Why do you think God didn’t want images made of Him? What about a human-created image is insufficient?** (A created image isn’t God. God didn’t want a tangible representation of Him on earth that misrepresented who He is. He also wanted Israel to have faith in Him.)
- **Why, then, is it okay that Jesus is the image of God?** (Jesus is God. He is the physical representation of God on earth. He images God by being fully God and fully human.)

¹⁶ For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through Him and for Him.

All things were created through Him and for Him (v. 16): As God, Jesus created the material and spiritual universe for His pleasure and glory.

thrones or dominions or principalities or powers (v. 16): These are various categories of angels whom Christ created and over whom He rules. There is no comment regarding whether they are holy or fallen, since He is Lord of both groups. The purpose of His catalog of angelic ranks is to show the immeasurable superiority of Christ over any being the false teachers might suggest.

Leader Notes - Colossians 1:15-20 (Continued)

¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is before all things (v. 17): When the universe had its beginning, Christ already existed; thus, by definition, He must be eternal (Mic. 5:2; John 1:1-2; 8:58; 1 John 1:1; Rev. 22:13).

All things hold together (v. 17): Christ sustains the universe, maintaining the power and balance necessary for life's existence and continuity (see Heb. 1:3).

¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

head of the body (v. 18): Paul uses the human body as a metaphor for the church, of which Christ serves as the "head." Just as a body is controlled from the brain, so Christ controls every part of the church and gives it life and direction (see Eph. 4:15; 5:23).

the beginning (v. 18): This refers to both source and preeminence. The church had its origins in the Lord Jesus (Eph. 1:4), and He gave life to the church through His sacrificial death and resurrection to become its sovereign Head.

the firstborn from the dead (v. 18): Jesus was the first chronologically to be resurrected, never to die again. Of all who have been or ever will be raised from the dead, and that includes all men (John 5:28-29), Christ is supreme.

¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

all the fullness (v. 19): A term likely used by those in the Colossian heresy to refer to divine powers and attributes they believed were divided among various emanations. Paul countered that by asserting that the fullness of deity—all the divine powers and attributes—was not spread out among created beings, but completely dwelt in Christ alone (see 2:9).

Read more about the deity of Christ in these verses: John 1:1-5, 18; Heb. 1:1-4; Phil. 2:5-11. Consider the following questions to take your group deeper into the text.

- **What truths about Jesus do we learn from these verses?**
- **How do these verses contribute to the discussion of Jesus's supremacy?**
- **How are these verses similar to what Paul says about Jesus in Colossians 1?** (In John and Hebrews, it mentions Jesus is the agent of creation. Philippians talks about Jesus's life, death, and resurrection.) Jesus is fully God. Scripture clearly states it as fact. In His deity, Jesus rules with authority and power.

²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Reconcile (v.20): The Greek word for "reconcile" means "to change" or "exchange." Its New Testament usage refers to a change in the sinner's relationship to God. Man is reconciled to God when God restores man to a right relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. An intensified form for "reconcile" is used in this verse to refer to the total and complete reconciliation of believers and ultimately "all things" in the created universe. This text does not teach that, as a result, all will believe; rather, it teaches that all will ultimately submit (see Phil. 2:9-11)

- When “theological” debates begin, how do you feel? Why do you think it is valuable to think through such things? What are some best practices or even “guardrails” that are important to remember when discussing such things?
- Read Colossians 1:24-2:5. How could Paul’s perspective shape the way you view your present circumstances? What could be different about us and the way we perceive the situations we’re in if we remembered Jesus’s victory on the cross?

Leader Notes - Colossians 1:24-2:5

24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church

my sufferings (v. 24): Paul’s present imprisonment (Acts 28:16, 30) fill up

what is lacking (v. 24): Paul was experiencing the persecution intended for Christ. In spite of His death on the cross, Christ’s enemies had not gotten their fill of inflicting injury on Him, so they turned their hatred on those who preached the gospel (see John 15:18, 24; 16:1-3). It was in that sense that Paul filled up what was lacking in Christ’s afflictions.

the sake of His body (v. 24): Paul’s motivation for enduring suffering was to benefit and build Christ’s church.

25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

Minister (v. 25): This is a distinctive biblical idea that means “to serve” or “service.” In the Old Testament the word servant was used primarily for court servants. During the period between the Old and New Testaments, it came to be used in connection with ministering to the poor (such as the work of the seven deacons in waiting on tables in Acts 6:1-7). Paul’s practice was always to present the gospel to the Jews first in every city he visited, but his primary calling and ministry was to the Gentiles. In reality, all believers are “ministers.” The model, of course, is Jesus, who “did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45 NKJV). Jesus equated service to God with service to others. Our unselfish service should especially be rendered through our spiritual gifts, which are given by God to the saints in order that they might minister to one another. (Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

stewardship (v. 25): A steward was a servant who managed his master’s household, supervising the other servants, dispensing resources, and handling business and financial affairs. Since the church is God’s household (1 Tim. 3:16), Paul assumed the task of caring for, feeding, and leading the churches, for which he was accountable to God.

To make the word of God fully known (v. 25): This refers to Paul’s single-minded devotion to completely fulfill the ministry God gave him, which was to preach the whole counsel of God to those to whom God sent him (Acts 20:27; 2 Tim. 4:7).

27 the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.

Mystery (v. 27): The Greek word translated as “mystery” is *mysterion*. Our English word, *mystery*, implies there’s a secret that people have been trying to uncover but failed to do so. The Greek word *mysterion* speaks to a deeper meaning—it’s something previously unknown but God has disclosed it to His people. Through Jesus’s death and resurrection, God revealed the mystery of His redemptive plan that involves both Jews and Gentiles.

27 To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Gentiles . . . Christ in you (v. 27): That believers, both Jew and Gentile, now possess the surpassing riches of the indwelling Christ is the glorious revealed mystery of which Paul writes (John 14:23; Rom. 8:9-10; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 1:7, 17-18; 3:8-10, 16-19).

Leader Notes - Colossians 1:24-2:5 (Continued)

²⁸ Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. ²⁹ For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

I . . . labor, striving according to His working (v. 29): “Labor” refers to working to the point of exhaustion. The Greek word for “striving” gives us the English word “agonize” and refers to the effort required to compete in an athletic event.

Read more about how the Gentiles have been brought into the family of God from the following verses: Acts 10:34-35, 44-45; Acts 11:15-18; Gal. 3:26-28; Eph. 3:1-6. Consider the following questions to take your group deeper into the text.

- **Did the believers in the early church think Gentiles could be part of God’s family at first? How did Peter’s experience change their minds? Why would Paul encourage the church to be one in Christ? How might have unity been difficult for Jews and Gentiles?**
- **How do we still face disunity today? What do these verses have to say about it?** God desires a unified and diverse people. As members of His family, we should strive to be unified as one. Each of us partakes in the mystery—Christ is in each of us. We can be united through Him.

¹ For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you and for those at Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face,

great a struggle (v. 1): The word means “striving” and comes from the same root as in 1:29. Both the Colossians and Laodiceans were among those for whom Paul struggled so hard in order to bring them to maturity.

Laodicea (v. 1): the chief city of Phrygia in the Roman province of Asia, located just south of Hierapolis in the Lycus River valley

² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God’s mystery, which is Christ, ² in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

all the treasures (v. 3): See vv. 9-10; 1:19. The false teachers threatening the Colossians claimed to possess a secret wisdom and transcendent knowledge available only to the spiritual elite. In sharp contrast, Paul declared that all the richness of truth necessary for either salvation, sanctification, or glorification is found in Jesus Christ, who Himself is God revealed.

⁴ I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments.

That no one may delude you (v. 4): Paul did not want the Colossians to be deceived by the persuasive rhetoric of the false teachers, which assaulted the Person of Christ. That is why throughout chapters 1 and 2 he stressed Christ’s deity and His sufficiency both to save believers and bring them to spiritual maturity.

⁵ For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

absent in body. . . with you in spirit (v. 5): Because he was a prisoner, Paul was unable to be present with the Colossians. That did not mean, however, that his love and concern for them was any less (see 1 Cor. 5:3-4; 1 Thess. 2:17). Their “good order” and “steadfast faith” (both military terms depicting a solid rank of soldiers drawn up for battle) brought great joy to the apostle’s heart.

- Read Colossians 3:1-14. What efforts have you made to grow spiritually in the past? What seems to have worked? What has not worked? (Hint: Consider the article on Mortification and Vivification on page 13 of this Disciple Guide).

Leader Notes - Colossians 3:1-14

¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

you have been raised (v. 1): This verb actually means “to be co-resurrected.” Because of their union with Christ, at the moment of their conversion, believers spiritually go through the same death and resurrection that Christ experienced. They are now alive in Him and able to understand spiritual truths, realities, blessings, and the will of God. These glorious benedictions (see Eph. 1:3) are the privileges and riches of the heavenly kingdom, all of which are at our disposal. Paul called them “things above.”

sitting at the right hand of God (v. 1): The position of honor and majesty (see Ps. 110:1; Luke 22:69; Acts 2:33; 5:31; 7:56; Eph. 1:20; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 1 Pet. 3:22) that Christ enjoys as the exalted Son of God. That exaltation

² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

you have died (v. 3): The verb’s tense indicates that a death occurred in the past. In this case at the death of Jesus Christ, where believers were united with Him, their penalty of sin was paid, and they arose with Him in new life.

hidden with Christ in God (v. 3): This rich expression has a threefold meaning: (1) Believers have a common spiritual life with the Father and Son (1 Cor. 6:17; 2 Pet. 1:4); (2) the world cannot understand the full import of the believer’s new life (Rom. 8:19; 1 Cor. 2:14; 1 John 3:2); and (3) believers are eternally secure, protected from all spiritual enemies, and have access to all God’s blessings (John 10:28; Rom. 8:31-39; Heb. 7:25; 1 Pet. 1:4).

⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

put to death (v. 5): This refers to a conscious effort to slay the remaining sin in our flesh (see Zech. 4:6; Eph. 5:18; 6:17; 1 John 2:14). ***fornication (v. 5)***—Also translated “immorality,” it refers to any form of sexual sin (see 1 Thess. 4:3).

uncleanness (v. 5): Also translated “impurity,” this term goes beyond sexual sin to encompass evil thoughts and intentions as well (see Matt. 5:28; Mark 7:21-22; 1 Thess. 4:7).

passion, evil desire (v. 5): Similar terms that refer to sexual lust. “Passion” is the physical side of that vice, and “evil desire” is the mental side (see James 1:15).

covetousness (v. 5): Also rendered “greed” (literally, it means “to have more”). It is the insatiable desire to gain more, especially of things that are forbidden (see Ex. 20:17; Deut. 5:21; James 4:2).

which is idolatry (v. 5): When people engage in either greed or the sexual sins Paul has cataloged, they follow their desires rather than

⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.

wrath of God (v. 6): His constant, invariable reaction against sin

Leader Notes - Colossians 3:1-14 (Continued)

⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

put off (v. 8): A Greek word used for taking off clothes (see Acts 7:58; Rom. 13:12-14; 1 Pet. 2:1). Like one who removes his dirty clothes at day's end, believers must discard the filthy garments of their old, sinful lives.

anger (v. 8): a deep, smoldering bitterness; the settled heart attitude of an angry person (see Eph. 4:31; James 1:19-20)

wrath (v. 8): Unlike God's settled and righteous wrath, this is a sudden outburst of sinful anger; usually the eruption that flows out of "anger" (see Luke 4:28; Acts 19:28; Eph. 4:31).

malice (v. 8): From the Greek term that denotes general moral evil. Here it probably refers to the damage caused by evil speech (see 1 Pet. 2:1).

blasphemy (v. 8): The normal translation of this word refers to God. But here, since it refers to people, it is better translated "slander." To slander people, however, is to blaspheme God (James 3:9; see Matt. 5:22; James 3:10).

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⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self[with its practices

put off . . . put on (v. 9-10): These words are the basis for the command of verse 8. Because the old man died in Christ and the new man lives in Christ—this is the essence of new creation or regeneration (2 Cor. 5:17)—believers must put off remaining sinful deeds and must be continually renewed into Christlikeness.

old man (v. 9): the old, unregenerate self, originating in Adam (see Eph. 4:22)

¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

renewed (v. 10): See Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18. This Greek verb contains a sense of contrast with the former reality. It describes a new quality of life that never before existed (see Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22). Just like a baby is born complete but immature, the new man is complete, but has the capacity to grow.

knowledge (v. 10): a deep, thorough knowledge, without which there can be no spiritual growth or renewal (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Pet. 2:2)

image of its creator (v. 10): It is God's plan that believers become progressively more like Jesus Christ, the one who made them (see Rom. 8:29; 1 Cor. 15:49; 1 John 3:2).

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave,[e] free; but Christ is all, and

Leader Notes - Colossians 3:1-14 (Continued)

¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Greek (v. 11): a Gentile, or non-Jew

Jew (v. 11): a descendant of Abraham through Isaac

Scythian (v. 11): An ancient nomadic and warlike people that invaded the Fertile Crescent in the seventh century BC. Noted for their savagery, they were the most hated and feared of all the so-called barbarians.

slave nor free (v. 11): A social barrier had always existed between slaves and freemen; Aristotle had referred to the slave as “a living tool.” But faith in Christ removed the separation (1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:28; see Philem. 6).

Christ is all and in all (v. 11): Because Jesus Christ is the Savior of all believers, He is equally the all-sufficient Lord of them all.

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience,

Then (v. 12): In view of what God has done through Jesus Christ for the believer, Paul described the behavior and attitude God expects in response (vv. 12-17).

elect of God (v. 12): This designates true Christians as those who have been chosen by God. No one is converted solely by his own choice, but only in response to God's effectual, free, uninfluenced, and sovereign grace (see Acts 13:46-48; Rom. 11:4-5).

beloved (v. 12): Election means believers are the objects of God's incomprehensible special love (see John 13:1; Eph. 1:4-5).

Compassionate hearts (v. 12): This may also be rendered “heart of compassion.” It is a Hebraism that connotes the internal organs of the human body as used figuratively to describe the seat of the emotions (see Matt. 9:36; Luke 6:36; James 5:11).

kindness (v. 12): refers to a goodness toward others that pervades the entire person, mellowing all harsh aspects (see Matt. 11:29-30; Luke 10:25-37) humility (v. 12)—See Matthew 18:4; John 13:14-16; James 4:6, 10. This is the perfect antidote to the self-love that poisons human relationships.

meekness (v. 12): Sometimes translated “gentleness,” it is the willingness to suffer injury or insult rather than to inflict such hurts.

Patience (v. 12): See also Romans 2:4. It is also translated “patience,” the opposite of quick anger, resentment, or revenge, and thus epitomizes Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 1:16; see 2 Pet. 3:15). It endures injustice and troublesome circumstances with hope for coming relief.

¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

as the Lord has forgiven you (v. 13): Because Christ as the model of forgiveness has forgiven all our sins totally (1:14; 2:13-14), believers must be willing to forgive others.

Next Steps for the Week

Leader Notes - Next Steps for Next Week

IMPORTANT: Always end the small group session by giving a next step to your group. Remember to point your group to the Faith at Home envelope they received for this series. Also, remind them that all of the information and resources for this series is found at faithfellowshipfortbend.com/colossians.

- **Home:** At home or in the car this week, choose a praise song that exalts Jesus. Listen to that song to remind you of His supremacy over all things. For bonus points, sing it with your kids or grandkids really loud!
- **Hospitality:** Send a thank you text, note, or email to a neighbor this week. In light of what you have learned from this overview of Colossians, tell them how you are praying for them this week.
- **Hammers:** Ask God to transform the way you think about Him. Pray the truth that Christ is in you would settle into your heart and mind this week.