

connect360

STUDY GUIDE

*The
Fullness
of
Christ
Doctrine and Duty*

A STUDY OF
Colossians

Tom Howe

Ed Jordan

Patrick Wilson



BaptistWayPress®

Dallas, Texas

*The Fullness of Christ: Doctrine and Duty (A Study of Colossians)—
Connect 360 Bible Study Guide*

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How to Make the Best Use of This Issue

Whether you're the teacher or a student—

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. Overview the study. Review the table of contents and read the study introduction. Try to see how each lesson relates to the overall study.
3. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. (You'll see that each writer has chosen a favorite translation for the lessons in this issue. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translation chosen for that unit, of course.)
4. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the writer's comments. The comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible.
5. Read the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application.
6. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and they can also be used in the class session itself.

If you're the teacher—

Do all the things just mentioned, of course. As you begin the study with your class, be sure to find a way to help your class know the date on which each lesson will be studied. Here are some suggestions to guide your lesson preparation:

- A. In the first session of the study, briefly overview the study by identifying for your class the date on which each lesson will be studied. Lead your class to write the date in the table of contents on page 9–10 and on the first page of each lesson.
- Make and post a chart that indicates the date on which each lesson will be studied.
 - If all your class has e-mail, send them an e-mail with the dates the lessons will be studied.
 - Provide a bookmark with the lesson dates. You may want to include information about your church and then use the bookmark as an outreach tool, too. A model for a bookmark can be downloaded from www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” menu.
 - Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.
- B. Get a copy of the *Teaching Guide*, a companion piece to this *Study Guide*. The *Teaching Guide* contains additional Bible comments plus two teaching plans. The teaching plans in the *Teaching Guide* are intended to provide practical, easy-to-use teaching suggestions that will work in your class.
- C. After you’ve studied the Bible passage, the lesson comments, and other material, use the teaching suggestions in the *Teaching Guide* to help you develop your plan for leading your class in studying each lesson.
- D. Teaching resource items for use as handouts are available free at www.baptistwaypress.org under the “Teacher Helps” tab.
- E. Additional Bible study comments on the lessons are available online. Call 1–866–249–1799 or e-mail baptistway@texasbaptists.org to order the *Premium Commentary*. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website, www.baptistwaypress.org. The price of these comments for the entire study is \$5 per person. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Commentary* free. Call 1–866–249–1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org to purchase or for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

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- G. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.
- H. You may read a preview of each new lesson from the Baptist Standard at www.baptiststandard.com. Click on the “Resources” tab. The Baptist Standard is available online for an annual subscription rate of \$10. Subscribe online at www.baptiststandard.com or call 214-630-4751. (A free 90-day trial subscription is currently available.)

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Introducing

The Fullness of Christ: Doctrine and Duty

A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

Who is Jesus Christ? Two thousand years ago the Apostle Paul wrote a letter to a church in modern-day Turkey to help them answer this question. He wrote this letter because there were teachers called “Gnostics” who were teaching that Jesus really wasn’t God in the flesh. To correct this growing heresy, Paul hammered out some simple, yet profound truths about the identity of Jesus Christ. Although this letter was written long ago, it contains principles and lessons that speak straight to the needs we have in our 21st Century culture.

What does it mean to experience God’s fullness? How do you know when you’re full of God? The secret to a fruitful Christian life is found in the **fullness of Christ**. Need faith? Jesus gives us faith in the fullness of knowing him. Need help loving unlovely people? It is his love flowing out of us that spills out on those close to us. Need hope? It comes when we realize that the “Christ in me” gives us absolute assurance of heaven.

The theme of Colossians is “fullness.” The key passage of Colossians reveals the dual aspects of fullness: “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness . . .” (Colossians 2:9–10).

Each fall our Connect 360 Bible Study series focuses on a book from the New Testament. For a complete list of our studies see www.baptistwaypress.org.

Background on the Church at Colossae

It may be a surprise to know that Paul did not start the church at Colossae (2:1). The founder of the church was Epaphras. The scriptures tell us that the Colossians heard the gospel from him (1:5–7). He was a native of Colossae and planted the church after returning from a trip to Ephesus during Paul's visit there. His concern for the church was so great he traveled over 1,000 miles to Rome to visit Paul in prison.

Paul's subsequent letter was to warn the church against the growing heresy that contained elements of paganism and Judaism. The pagan culture of Colossae worshiped many gods. The temptation to return to the old way of life must have been strong within these new Christians. Also, Judaism added works to salvation which denied the sufficiency of Christ (2:11; 3:11). Therefore, the sufficiency of Christ or better yet, the fullness of Christ, becomes the theme of the Book of Colossians (2:9–10).

The Book of Colossians in Our Day

In Jesus Christ we see the fullness of God. But the personal application of that doctrine is that we have been given the **fullness of Christ**. Colossians follows the pattern of **truth followed by application**. In chapters 1–2, the Apostle Paul provides the doctrinal foundation for who we are; then in Chapters 3–4 we learn what to do. To put it another way, chapters 1 and 2 teach us what to believe, and chapters 3 and 4 teach us how to behave. The pattern of doctrine followed by duty is repeated in many of Paul's letters. In other words, the Bible teaches us **what to believe** (doctrine), but then teaches us **how to behave** (duty).

Christianity is more than just knowing the truth. **It is living the truth.** How will you live?

**THE FULLNESS OF CHRIST
A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS**

Lesson 1	Great News!	Colossians 1:1–8
Lesson 2	Paul's Prayers	Colossians 1:9–14
Lesson 3	Who is Jesus?	Colossians 1:15–19
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Lesson 6	A Genuine Church	Colossians 2:1–7
Lesson 7	Fullness in Christ	Colossians 2:8–15
Lesson 8	Spiritual Intimidation	Colossians 2:16–23
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Lesson 11	Wisdom for Relationships	Colossians 3:18–4:1
Lesson 12	A New Message	Colossians 4:2–6
Lesson 13	Paul's Unsung Heroes	Colossians 4:7–18

Additional Resources for Studying the *Book of Colossian*¹

- William Barclay. *The New Daily Study Bible. The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1975, 2003.
- Bruce Barton. *Philippians, Colossians, & Philemon. Life Application Bible Commentary*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995.
- G. K. Beale. *Colossians and Philemon. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019.
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- Ben Witherington III. *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians. A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.
- N. T. Wright. *Paul. The Prison Letters. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

Notes

1. Listing a book does not imply full agreement by the writers or BAPTISTWAY PRESS® with all of its comments.

lesson 1

Great News!

MAIN IDEA

Paul thanked the Colossians for their love, faith, and hope in Christ.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

Does my love, faith, and hope in Christ help me to find meaning in my Christian life?

STUDY AIM

To understand that we need to take practical steps to experience the fullness of Christ in our world

QUICK READ

You can discover depths of love, faith, and hope that can help you experience a greater fullness of Christ and fill any spiritual emptiness you may have.



Introduction

Colossae, an ancient city that was a leading commercial center for more than 500 years, lost its preeminence to neighboring Laodicea. Like our multicultural municipal and commercial centers of today, it was a city with many competing and blended religions. There was even a growing heresy within the early Christian community. Its adherents taught that Jesus was not God in human flesh, but instead, a spiritual emanation that appeared as a human to reveal how one could overcome mental ignorance and the confines of the human body. To that heretical group, knowledge was the key to release from the physical world. The Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*, would later give this group its name—the Gnostics.

Paul took the Gnostics on directly throughout this letter to the Colossians, while also giving practical guidance about how to experience and live out fullness in Christ. Though mainstream Christianity has long forgotten Gnosticism, its vestiges have held on and even crept back into the contemporary worldview through philosophies and theologies found in New Age thinking and Hinduism and Buddhism, among others. Paul wrote to affirm the coming of Jesus as divine in human flesh (Colossians 1:19; 2:9) and that we are redeemed entirely, including our physical bodies.

Paul also wrote about our fullness in Christ and the completion of the spiritual journey—that we are to live worthy lives, bear fruit, grow in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10), and that we can be brought into fullness in Christ (Col. 2:10). As in his other letters, Paul stated his doctrinal principles in the first half of the letter; then he described how to practically live out Christian lives in the latter half of the Book of Colossians. Though Colossians showcases many theological truths (Jesus: the all-sufficient, supreme, wholly man/entirely God Savior who is the creator, redeemer and sustainer of all things), it offers encouragement and practical steps for us to become completely devoted disciples of Christ.

This beautiful epistle should be read as a challenge and a guide to walk the Christian journey. In other words, Paul told us what to believe and how to behave. Facing direct opposition, Paul took a swipe at the Gnostics, who focused solely on knowledge, and challenged believers to go beyond mere knowledge and follow the living truth provided by Jesus, who is indeed truth in human flesh (John 1:14 and 14:6).

Unlike many other churches in the New Testament, Paul did not start the church at Colossae. He was aware of them but had not met them (Col. 1:4, 9; 2:1). However, two things are true: Paul had great concern for them—and what he heard about them, he liked. He knew the challenges they faced and was confident they would stand firm in the faith.¹

Colossians 1:1–8

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse:
Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— ⁵the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Paul Heard of Their Faith (1:1–4a)

Paul commended the Colossians for their faith about which he had heard. Their reputation preceded them. The Greek word for faith is *pistis*, and it is the combination of belief, trust, and loyalty. It is believing something so much that one acts. It is not merely mental agreement, but the difference between the missionary who goes and stays in a harsh place, and the person who thinks it would be an excellent idea to go and serve in difficult circumstances.

It is the faithful pastor who leaves his family, friends, and community, and launches a church in another part of the country—and has the sticking

power to stay when others would give up. It is the husband or wife who sticks with his or her spouse even when life gets overwhelming and hard. Paul knew that the Colossians had abounding, steadfast faith in Jesus Christ, even in the presence of those who were contentious within their midst. They were committed and loyal disciples, totally trusting Jesus to guide them through all the tough things life would throw at them.

Do you have abounding faith when your family rejects Christ and ridicules you for following him? Do you totally trust Jesus when you hear the dreaded diagnosis from a doctor? Is your faith steadfast when you stare at the negatives of your finances? There have always been, and there exists even today, Christian martyrs throughout the world who demonstrate a confident faith in Jesus even in the face of death and persecution. Do you have such faith? Do you have an active faith that is loyal to Christ in all ways like the Colossians? “Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith” (Hebrews 12:1–2).

Paul Heard of Their Love (1:4b)

The evidence of the love the Colossians had “for all the saints” had reached Paul. Love is an action verb. The Greek word *agape* denotes the highest form

The Greatest Hope

Christian hope is a lifeline for believers as we navigate the uncertainties of living in this sin-tainted world. Not diminishing the realities of hope the gospel presents for us in daily life, the greatest hope rests in eternal life, where we will complete the final transition into what God has designed us to be, namely like Jesus. “But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2b). Our hope will be made complete in heaven, where we will embrace the presence of God and dwell forever with him: “. . . we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, where our forerunner, Jesus, has entered on our behalf” (Hebrews 6:18–20).

of love one can have for another individual—unconditional, sacrificial, and dynamic love that propels one to support or assist another despite the circumstances. The fruit of the Spirit is love (Galatians 5:22). John wrote, “let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7). Love is patient and kind; it always protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres (1 Corinthians 13:4, 7).

Biblical love is more than emotion or sentiment; it is action. Love is more than wishing someone well; it is taking the burden of caring for his or her well-being. A husband demonstrates love by sitting by a sick wife and making sure she has medicine and food. A sister shows love by listening to the woes of a tough day at work. A friend loves when he maintains the yard of an injured neighbor. A stranger shows love when he cares for one found beaten on the side of the road and left for dead (Luke 10). The Colossians had such love.

Paul Heard of Their Hope (1:5)

Paul wrote, “. . . the hope laid up for you in heaven. . .” (1:5). Hope is the basis for the two actions of faith and love. The Greek word *elpis* means a “confident expectation,” particularly of joy. It is not blind optimism such as, “I wish upon a star that I might win the lottery,” but rather the hope that is found in a lighthouse being a beacon of certainty in the darkness of the ocean waters. It is also not self-reliant, self-sufficient hope built on personal accomplishment and independence but peace-giving confidence grounded in the person, work, and teachings of Jesus Christ. In Colossians 1:5, Paul designated the true foundation of hope: the gospel. As pastor Edward Mote penned almost 200 years ago, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

Hope is something built through the problematic experiences each follower of Jesus endures, “and not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope” (Romans 5:3–4). Jeremiah spoke of this hope when he wrote, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jeremiah 29:11). The prophet did not write

about a “name-it-and-claim-it” prosperity gospel, but that as the children of Judah entered into multi-generational, decades-long captivity, God still had a plan that included blessing, hope, and a future for them.

Most who first heard these words likely never saw Jerusalem again. They were encouraged to build homes, plant gardens, and raise children and grandchildren while seeking the peace and prosperity of the foreign land in which they dwelled. This was not a hope like the immediate resolution of a thirty-minute sit-com television show. It is a generational confidence that God is in control. It is a reminder for those serving faithfully in harsh situations to stay the course. It is an encouragement for those enduring hardships that God is in control—and that confidence rests securely in him.

Faith, Love, and Hope Produces Meaning in the Christian's Life (1:6–8)

Authentic Christian discipleship is a plan that leads to gospel-based fullness in Christ, that also has recognizable and measurable fruit. Faith, love, and hope are pieces of evidence of Christian growth, but also the ingredients of it as well. The more you lean into authentic faith (trusting, loyal belief), the more you grow into the person Christ has designed you to be as he empowers you to transform into his likeness. The more you love, the more like Jesus you become. The greater your confidence in Jesus grows, the more you trust his plan for your path.

Conversely, the more you grow in Christ, the greater your capacity for faith, love, and hope. It is like developing spiritual muscles. The more you exercise them, the stronger they become. When you neglect the intentional development of your faith, love, and hope, spiritual atrophy can set in.

As a disciple of Christ, this growth should permeate the entirety of your Christian journey. Discipleship is the process of moving toward Christ—developing the disciplines, character, and practices to become more like him and strengthening your dedication to him. It includes service, devotion, ministry, worship, and more.

Certain aspects of spiritual growth develop from being in community with other believers. These include cultivating a vibrant prayer life, fasting, Christian meditation, Scripture reading and memorization, Bible study,

Practical Need for Faith, Love, and Hope

Imagine that conflict and personal attacks have shattered your small group at church. Although it might be easier to allow the group to dissolve, what are the practical unification steps of biblical restoration that demonstrate a biblical kind of faith, love, and hope toward one another?

confession, evangelism, and many other disciplines. All these disciplines fortify faith, love, and hope. Whatever we lack in these areas identifies a need in our own spiritual formation; an opportunity for discipleship and spiritual growth. Every Christian—regardless of age, maturity level, or longevity as a believer—has growth areas as a disciple. Let us strive to continue to find our fullness in Christ by growing more and more into him.

Implications and Actions

Paul wrote a letter to the Colossians because of what he had heard about them. Stop for a moment and imagine what others have heard about you. Extended family, coworkers, friends, acquaintances, neighbors, business associates, and fellow church members all have an opinion of you. Now imagine what they have told others about you—good and bad. How has your discipleship impacted your reputation, especially for those who do not know you well, or at all? If the Apostle Paul were to write you a letter today, would he say he had heard good things about you? The answers to the last two questions may very well be your witness for Jesus Christ on planet Earth.

Questions

1. Think through the phrase “the fullness of Christ.” Explore what that means to you.

2. Do you have “belief-only faith”—or faith that has unwavering trust and determined loyalty resting in Jesus? How has that faith helped you in the past?

3. Think of your home life, work life, and church life. In what ways have you demonstrated authentic and active *agape* love? In what ways have you failed to show *agape* love? How have you experienced it?

4. How would you contrast the definitions of *blind optimism* versus *confident certainty*? When have you demonstrated each kind of hope?

5. Can you look back and see measurable growth in your discipleship? What disciplines are you interested in exploring?

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–4 are from the New International Version (1984).