

connect360

BIBLE TEACHING GUIDE

The Fullness of Christ

Doctrine and Duty

A STUDY OF
Colossians

John Duncan • Chuck Gartman • Ronny Marriott
Brad Williamson • Patrick Wilson



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

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How to Make the Best Use of This *Teaching Guide*

Leading a class in studying the Bible is a sacred trust. This *Teaching Guide* has been prepared to help you as you give your best to this important task.

In each lesson, you will find first “Bible Comments” for teachers, to aid you in your study and preparation. The three sections of “Bible Comments” are “Understanding the Context,” “Interpreting the Scriptures,” and “Focusing on the Meaning.” “Understanding the Context” provides a summary overview of the entire background passage that also sets the passage in the context of the Bible book being studied. “Interpreting the Scriptures” provides verse-by-verse comments on the focal passage. “Focusing on the Meaning” offers help with the meaning and application of the focal text.

The second main part of each lesson is “Teaching Plans.” You’ll find two complete teaching plans in this section. The first is called the “Discovery Plan,” which emphasizes discovery learning techniques; and the second is called the “Discussion Plan,” which provides questions and suggestions for dialogue about the Scriptures. Choose the plan that best fits your class and your style of teaching. You may also use and adapt ideas from both. Each plan is intended to be practical, helpful, and immediately useful as you prepare to teach.

The major headings in each teaching plan are intended to help you sequence how you teach so as to follow the flow of how people tend to learn. The first major heading, “Connect with Life,” provides ideas that will help you begin the class session where your class is and draw your class into the study. The second major heading, “Guide Bible Study,” offers suggestions for helping your class engage the Scriptures actively and develop a greater understanding of this portion of the Bible’s message. The third major heading, “Encourage Application,” is meant to help participants focus on how to respond with their lives to this message.

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. You might use one or more of the following methods:

- 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 in their *Study Guides* 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 of 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” tab.
- Develop a sticker with the lesson dates, and place it on the table of contents or on the back cover.

Here are some steps you can take to help you prepare well to teach each lesson and save time in doing so:

1. Start early in the week before your class meets.
2. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers meet for lesson overview and preparation, plan to participate. If your church’s adult Bible study teachers don’t have this planning time now, look for ways to begin. You, your fellow teachers, and your church will benefit from this mutual encouragement and preparation.
3. Overview the study in the *Study Guide*. Look at the table of contents and see where this lesson fits in the overall study. Then read or review the study introduction to the book that is being studied.
4. Consider carefully the suggested Main Idea, Question to Explore, and Teaching Aim. These can help you discover the main thrust of this particular lesson.
5. Use your Bible to read and consider prayerfully the Scripture passages for the lesson. Using your Bible in your study and in the class session

can provide a positive model to class members to use their own Bibles and give more attention to Bible study themselves. (Each writer of the Bible comments in both the *Teaching Guide* and the *Study Guide* has chosen a favorite translation. You're free to use the Bible translation you prefer and compare it with the translations chosen, of course.)

6. After reading all the Scripture passages in your Bible, then read the Bible comments in the *Study Guide*. The Bible comments are intended to be an aid to your study of the Bible. Read also the small articles—"sidebars"—in each lesson. They are intended to provide additional, enrichment information and inspiration and to encourage thought and application. Try to answer for yourself the questions included in each lesson. They're intended to encourage further thought and application, and you can also use them in the class session itself. Continue your Bible study with the aid of the Bible comments included in this *Teaching Guide*.
7. Review the "Teaching Plans" in this *Teaching Guide*. Consider how these suggestions would help you teach this Bible passage in your class to accomplish the teaching aim.
8. Consider prayerfully the needs of your class and think about how to teach so you can help your class learn best.
9. Develop and follow a lesson plan based on the suggestions in this *Teaching Guide*, with alterations as needed for your class.
10. Enjoy leading your class in discovering the meaning of the Scripture passages and in applying these passages to their lives.

Premium Commentary. Plan to get the additional Bible study comments available online. Visit our website, 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. The price of these comments 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 for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

Premium Teaching Plans. An additional teaching plan is also available in electronic format (PDF) by visiting our website or calling 1-866-249-1799. The price of these plans for an entire study is \$5 per person. It is available only in electronic format (PDF) from our website. A church or class that participates in our advance order program for free shipping can receive the *Premium Teaching Plans* free. Call 1-866-249-1799 or see www.baptistwaypress.org for information on participating in our free shipping program for the next study.

FREE! Downloadable teaching resource items for use in your class are available at www.baptistwaypress.org. Watch for them in the “Teaching Plans” for each lesson. Then go online to www.baptistwaypress.org and click on “Teaching Resource Items” under the “Teacher Helps” tab for this study. These items are selected from the “Teaching Plans.” They are provided online to make lesson preparation easier for handouts and similar items. Permission is granted to download these teaching resource items, print them out, copy them as needed, and use them in your class.

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lesson 1

Great News!

MAIN IDEA

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

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

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

TEACHING AIM

To challenge adults to take practical steps to experience the fullness of Christ in our world



Bible Comments

Understanding the Context

The city of Colossae rested below Mount Cadmus in the Lycus River Valley, south of the region of Galatia. When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Colossians, the city stood in the shadow of two bustling nearby cities: Hierapolis and Laodicea. Colossae declined while the other towns flourished, but its location fit nicely on a major trade route. Its primary industry included “colossinus,” peculiar purple wool. The trade route and the wool industry meant that people passed through the city, creating a mix of Greeks, Romans, Gauls, and other Gentile peoples. Years earlier, a transplanted group of Jews located to the city. This mix of Gentiles and Jews factored into the evangelization of Colossae. The church in Colossae struggled with church identity, conflict, and a blend of religious ideas that were found in this multicultural city.

The Apostle Paul never visited or preached in Colossae. While on his third missionary journey, he ministered in nearby Ephesus. While there, he sent a man named Epaphras to evangelize and minister in Colossae (1:7). A small Christian community formed, a church was launched, and its members began to struggle with establishing their identity in the person of Jesus Christ. Many competing philosophical concepts and religious ideas floated around in Colossae due to the varied background of the people who lived there, both a multitude of Gentile ideas and Jewish religious practices. The worship of angels was a pervasive Jewish concept due to the belief the archangel Michael had appeared in Colossae years earlier. One of the significant challenges of the early church involved anchoring the church’s identity in Christ.

Paul wrote this letter as a prisoner in Rome between A.D. 62–63. Nero served as the emperor, and Christians often felt pressure to conform to Roman law, customs, and cultural influences. These Roman factors often made formulating a church identity challenging. When battling them, along with a multitude of Greek philosophies and religious ideas, the new church needed solid theological teaching about Christ. Paul was a master

of anchoring faith in Christ, clearing up confusion, and providing practical instruction for the churches.

Several key Christian leaders (Timothy, Epaphras, Philemon, and Archipus) helped Paul develop disciples in the Colossae church. Paul wanted to help the Colossian Christians hear, understand, grow, and bear the fruit of Christ by the power of “God’s grace in all its truth” (Col. 1:6). Epaphras preached and ministered in the surrounding cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis as well. The Apostle John called Laodicea a lukewarm church in his vision of the seven churches (Revelation 3:14). The depth of Paul’s love and struggle for the church (“agony” Col. 2:1) comes out clearly in this letter.¹

Interpreting the Scriptures

Simple Greeting (1:1–2)

1:1. Paul called himself an *apostle*, that is, “one sent with a message.” He carried the message of Jesus Christ in his life and work. Paul’s message and primary calling were focused on two things in the Book of Colossians: 1) the cross; and (2) the will of God (1:1; 4:12). The cross of Jesus—his suffering and his purpose—stands central to all Paul believed and taught. With the cross as his backdrop, Paul communicated faith, love, and hope—a trilogy of words packed with meaning, vitality, and resiliency for future faith. Paul stressed that the will of God involves knowing Christ, learning his ways through discipleship, and living the right way by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Paul gave himself the title “apostle” as a means of adding authority to his letter and message. He then mentioned Timothy. Timothy served Paul and the church as he shared the hope of Christ. Timothy was gifted (“stir up the gift of God within you,” 2 Timothy 1:6). He might have been gifted in administration to assist Paul on his missionary journeys, but he also possessed a servant’s heart. Timothy was close to Paul and served as an asset to the apostle and the churches as he focused on building God’s kingdom (1 Thessalonians 3:2, “fellow worker;” 1 Timothy 1:2, “my dear son”).

Some Bible scholars believe Timothy penned the letter to the Colossians because of Paul’s statement in Colossians 4:18, “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.”

Paul named Timothy as a brother (Col. 1:2 and 4:15, “brothers”). The importance of the word communicates how the Christian community operates as a close-knit body united by Christ and formed to serve Christ as a strong family unit.

1:2. Paul wrote to his brothers in Colossae, his Christian family who were both holy and faithful. As “holy,” they were set apart for God’s service. As “faithful,” they were as reliable as a legal contract, a solid piece of metal that can withstand tremendous pressure, and a trusted friend. Do not overlook the words “in Christ.” Paul used this combination seven times in Colossians (1:2, 1:4, 1:28, 2:5, 2:9, 2:10, 2:17). This phrase identified Paul’s desire for each person to anchor his or her life in Christ: “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

Paul included his usual greeting of “grace and peace,” as two clear directions for his letter: God’s grace had been exacted through the cross and brought God’s peace to the human heart. Grace and peace stood in contrast to the oppression and so-called “Roman peace” (*Pax Romana*) which was bound up in war, domination, and the fierce obligations of Roman law. Grace included God’s truth, Christian activity (“let your speech be full of grace,”), and God’s presence (“grace be with you,” Col. 1:6; 4:6; 4:18). Peace, for Paul, started with the cross, ruled in the heart, and served as a key element in resolving church conflict, thus keeping the body of Christ unified in mission (Col. 1:20; 3:15).

Thanks, Prayer, Faith, and Love (1:3–8)

1:3–4. Paul began the body of his letter with thanks. Never subtle, Paul used the Greek word *eucharisteo*. If you say the word out loud, you hear *eucharist*. If you delve into the word’s meaning, it combines two words: good and grace. Paul’s thanksgiving focused on God’s grace in the salvific work of Christ on the cross. Paul stated that he was thankful for the saints and believers at Colossae. You might picture the church at Colossae sharing the Lord’s Supper, gathered around a communion table, breaking bread and drinking the cup together (“eucharist”).

Paul thanked the Father of “our Lord Jesus Christ,” and described him as powerful and personal. Paul’s thanks led to prayer. The anatomy of his

prayer indicated that he prayed for the church consistently. Paul attended to prayer as a serious routine and offered prayer as a staple of the diet of his spiritual life.

Paul affirmed the good news of the Colossians' faith in Christ Jesus and their Christlike love (*agape*, sacrificial love like Christ's—John 3:16, "God loved the world . . ."). Paul had heard through Epaphras of the Colossians' strong faith and their love "for all the saints." Paul's precise language highlighted two emphases: first, the vertical—a relationship with Christ; and second, the horizontal—a relationship with one another. The Colossians shared a mutual faith and care because of Christ who shed his blood on the cross. The church by faith looks to Christ, and the church by love unites, serves, and ministers to the body of Christ. For all of this, Paul gave a simple word of thanks ("eucharist") and prayed for the church.

1:5. Paul's letters retain a deep sense of time: past, present, and future. Faith looks back to the cross and up to Jesus who reigns in heaven, trusting in Christ's work in the past. Love accepts faith's reality, energy, trust, and finds daily strength in Christ's love shared with others in the present. Hope results when faith and love collide in a human heart and give a person the ability to persevere and find ultimate meaning in what Christ has done, is doing, and will do because of his death, burial and resurrection. Hope anchored in Christ secures confidence for the future. It also strengthens faith under the grace of Christ.

Paul looked at the Christians in Colossae and appreciated their faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13) that was at work. For Paul, who sought to strengthen the church's identity and solidify their theology, pointing to the word of truth and the gospel was natural. Here again, God's word, his person, and work are powerful and personal. Truth is powerful because it creates stability in life, society, and the church. Where would your life, our culture, or the church be without truth, and more importantly, God's truth? Chaos and falsehood (untruth) result when truth is absent. Truth is vital to the gospel, the good news. The gospel, as such, becomes personal to you.

1:6. Truth, like a tree growing and bearing fruit, not only has "come to you," but has also gone out to others. Paul said the gospel had gone all over the world. Paul acknowledged that truth like a seed had taken hold in the soil of

their hearts; it had grown and bore fruit. Paul named the gospel as “God’s grace in all its truth.” He rejoiced in remembrance of when they first heard the gospel. He might have been thinking of when he first heard of the Colossians’ newfound faith in Christ.

1:7–8. Epaphras’ name appears as the one who reported to Paul (1:8) and made clear the Colossians’ understanding of the gospel (“what they learned”), and their love produced by the Holy Spirit. Epaphras, a key leader in the church, served together with God, Paul, and the church to build faith and love in the people. Epaphras also proved faithful as a minister—*diakonos*, “deacon.” As a servant and deacon, Epaphras demonstrated faith, love, and a willingness to voluntarily take up menial tasks for the sake of the gospel.

Focusing on the Meaning

We can glean four practical things from Paul’s introductory words to the Colossians. First, the gospel is at work in local communities and human hearts as God’s grace in all its truth is shared and lived. Second, the church is a family—brothers and sisters in Christ who serve Christ faithfully, voluntarily, and sacrificially. Simply put, as different as people in a church are, each is a creation of God and needs others in the body of Christ.

Third, faith and love anchor the church as twin pillars of hope which motivate a church to plant gospel seeds, grow, and bear fruit. In what ways do you and your church share and show Christ’s love to each other and the world? Fourth, prayer as a regular practice should center on Christ. Prayer should see God in his truth and grace and produce gratitude. Prayer changes the world *and* those who pray.

Teaching Plans

DISCOVERY PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Say, *Imagine yourself sitting down for a lunch buffet. There's plenty of food to sample. Ask, How do you know when to stop eating? How do you know when you're full? Discuss.*
2. Say, *The New Testament refers to being "filled" spiritually. In Matthew 5:6, Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Acts 2:4 reads, "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit . . ." In Ephesians 5:18, Paul said, "be filled with the Spirit."*

Say, *Let's return to the lunch buffet. There's a cup on the table. You request water. Ask, How do you know when the container is full? (Answer: just before it overflows).*
3. Say, *The Book of Colossians focuses on fullness. In this study, we will explore the meaning of experiencing God's fullness.*
4. Pray, asking God to teach class members and help them experience his fullness.

Guide Bible Study

5. Say, *Using our Bibles, the Study Guide, or previous knowledge, let's compile a list of what we know about the Book of Colossians and its author. List answers on the markerboard. Recruit a volunteer to read Colossians 1:1–2 aloud.*
6. Say, *Paul wrote to encourage the believers in Colossae and to pray for them. He applauded them in three areas: their faith, their love, and their hope; three spiritual essentials which bring growth and fullness to a believer's life.*
7. Form three small study groups: Faith group, Love group, and Hope group. (Duplicate groups if your class is large.)

Assignment: Read Colossians 1:3–8 and look for your group’s assigned word and evidence of its characteristics. Next, read your group’s additional assigned verses. Define your group’s title word and explain why it is essential for Christian growth. Describe how it can be cultivated and increased. Consult the *Study Guide*, including the sidebar, “The Greatest Hope.” Be prepared to share your definition and insights with the larger group in ten minutes. (A copy of these instructions is available in Teaching Resource Items for this study at www.baptistwaypress.org).

Faith group: Ephesians 2:8–9; Hebrews 11:1–13; Matthew 8:5–13; 1 Corinthians 13:13

Love group: 1 John 4:7–12; 1 Corinthians 13:4–13; John 15:9–13

Hope group: 1 Corinthians 13:13; Romans 5:3–4; Jeremiah 29:11; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:11

8. Allow groups approximately ten minutes to work and then read 1 Corinthians 13:13 aloud.

Say, *Paul consistently talked about the importance of faith, hope, and love.* Have the groups report.

Encourage Application

9. Read aloud and discuss the *Study Guide* sidebar, “Practical Need for Faith, Hope, and Love.”

Say, *When God’s love, faith, and hope are overflowing from your life to the point it spills out onto others, that is an indication of being filled with Christ’s Spirit.*

DISCUSSION PLAN

Connect with Life

1. Briefly introduce this study of the Book of Colossians by stating:
 - *This will be an in-depth study of Colossians, looking at every verse over the next thirteen weeks.*

- *The Apostle Paul wrote this letter while under house arrest in Rome.*
- *Paul did not know his audience personally, nor was he the founder of this church.*
- *Most likely Epaphras was the pastor, one of Paul's disciples.*
- *Paul heard about the Colossian believers, their faith, and about the challenges they were facing.*
- *These believers demonstrated their faith in Christ by loving people and meeting their needs.*
- *Paul wrote to encourage them, and to offer practical help for their struggles, especially concerning false teachings.*
- *Today's study focuses on living out three core aspects of the Christian life: love, faith, and hope.*

Guide Bible Study

2. Ask, *What do you know about Paul, the author of Colossians?* Allow class members to share insights. List responses on a markerboard. Include these answers:

- First and greatest Christian missionary
- Formerly named Saul
- A devout Jew and former Pharisee
- As a younger adult, he persecuted Christians
- Watched the stoning of Stephen
- Was converted to Christ on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians via a blinding encounter with Jesus

Recruit a volunteer to read Colossians 1:1–2 aloud. Add the following facts to the list:

- Paul was an apostle of Jesus. An apostle is chosen and sent.
- Paul was not an apostle by his choice. Paul's calling was the will of God.
- Paul's calling came directly from Jesus (Acts 9:1–17).
- Timothy was a younger pastor and friend of Paul. They met on Paul's second missionary journey while in Lystra (Acts 16:1).

3. Paul described the Colossian believers as "Holy, faithful brothers in Christ."

Ask, *What does the word "holy" mean? (Set apart.) Say, The word "holy" is primarily used to describe God. When describing humans, holiness is an*

attribute given to us by God's grace. It is Christ's holiness given to us at the time of salvation, not something we earn.

4. Ask, *How do people form their opinions about us?* Discuss. Ask, *How do you hope people in our community speak about our church? Do you think we're even a part of their conversations?* Say, *With a classmate, share what you hope people are noticing about our church.* Ask, *What could our church do to get our community speaking positively about our church?* Discuss.
5. Say, *Paul described the Colossians as "faithful brothers in Christ."* Ask, *What does the descriptive "faithful brothers" mean to you?* Discuss.
6. Enlist a volunteer to read Colossians 1:3 aloud. Say, *In his prayer, Paul thanked God for the Colossian believers, even though he did not know them personally.* Ask, *How can you develop an appreciation for someone you've never met?* Discuss. Say, *We can find Paul's answer in the following verses.* Read aloud verses 4–5.
7. Say, *Paul mentioned three Christian characteristics: faith, love, and hope. Understanding the Greek word for "faith" requires a combination of three English words: belief, trust, and loyalty. Faith is "believing something so much that one takes action." Faith is more than simple head knowledge or knowing about something or someone; faith results in action. If you turned the noun "faith" into a verb, it would be "faithing,"—acting as a result of believing.*
 Say, *"Love" is also an action word. God's love is more than a feeling or desire. One of the simplest definitions of God's love is "meeting needs." John 3:16 tells us that "God loved us so much that he sent his one and only Son." God saw our need, and as an act of love, acted to meet our need by sending Jesus.*
 Say, *Faith in God and love from God produces "hope." Hope is "absolute confidence in God." It is not wishing for something to happen but trusting God to do what he said he would do.*
8. Recruit a volunteer to read Colossians 1:4–8, preferably from *The Message* paraphrase of the Bible. Say, *To become Christians, we exercised faith and put our trust in Jesus. We individually accepted Jesus' love and forgiveness. After receiving his love, God's design is for us to share it with others. As you share God's love, your faith should become stronger as your hope grows. Paul indicated that faith, hope, and love work hand-in-hand. These*

three can become a Christian's growth spiral, which helps us be more and more like Jesus. The evidence should pervade people's lives. (Example: Epaphras)

Encourage Application

9. Say, *Think about your Christian growth involving faith, love, and hope. Ask, Which one of the three characteristics would those around you say is most evident in your life? Which is the weakest? Discuss. Say, This week, pray for the classmates seated on your left and right to grow in each area.*

Notes

1. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in lessons 1–8 are from the New International Version (1984).