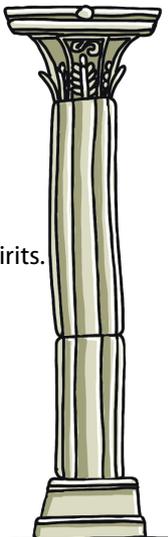


Bible Month 2019: Daily Reading Guide for **COLOSSIANS**

- 1** 1. All of the Biblical letters have a blessing in their greeting, which is unique to Christian letters; Jewish contemporary letters didn't have this. The word **grace** encompasses forgiveness, all we need to get through the day, and the strength of God. **Peace** is more than a calm feeling, it signifies the restoration of harmony between God and people, and between people groups. Remember this when we get to chapter 4!
- 2** 1. Most of Paul's letters have an expression of gratitude at the start. Paul never visited Colossae, but news had spread to Rome where he was imprisoned. Paul notes their faith and hope, which they heard through the **word of truth**, the **gospel**. This doesn't mean the gospel books of the Bible, or the Bible itself, but Jesus as the embodiment of God's good news.
- 3** 1. The word of God was communicated to the Colossians by a person - a man called Epaphras. We think he founded the church there. Are you aware of your divine **role** in spreading the good news?
- 4** 1. Paul now intercedes for the people in Colossae. Specifically, that they might be filled with knowledge of God's **will**. This is what leads to them being fruitful. Do you ask for this in prayer?
- 5** 1. The letter talks a lot about being saved, using a wide range of metaphors to help the Colossians to grasp what has happened to them - and us. They share in an inheritance. They have been **rescued** from the power of darkness and **transferred** into a new kingdom. They are **redeemed**: set free, like the Israelites in the exodus. This is coupled with the idea that their sins have been **forgiven**. Do you fully grasp this reality for yourself?
- 6** 1. This is probably an ancient hymn that has been adapted for this letter. Jesus is presented in a most cosmic scope, a bit like John 1. Jesus is the **image** of the invisible God; if we want to know what God is like, we now know. This is why reading the four gospels is so important. And Jesus is the **head** of the church. We all need to remember this!
- 7** 1. More metaphors for salvation here. We are not estranged, but **reconciled**. We are presented as holy and blameless, but there is a condition: we never lose the hope of the good news of God. Note that the gospel has already been proclaimed to **every creature**. God's good news really is about restoring **all things**.
- 8** 1. Paul writes that the **word of God** has been present, but hidden, in all people from the start. But now, though Jesus, it has been revealed clearly. What do you make of this?
- 9** 1. It is us, the **saints**, who God has chosen to make clear the hidden mystery of God's word in people we meet. This suggests that we need to be generous in our dealings with people who seem to be far from God. Their separation is only superficial. How do we help them go deeper?
- 10** 2. Paul's **struggles**, which he referred to as sufferings in 1.24, were very real. He wrote this letter from prison, which would not have been nearly as comfortable as our modern ones. Are you prepared to struggle and suffer for the gospel?
- 11** 2. Paul uses two military terms here, which get a bit obscured in our English translations as **morale** and **firmness**. The sense is that we are to be different from other people: trained, rooted, belonging to a bigger purpose, on a mission.
- 12** 2. The town of Colossae was famous for its pagan spiritual practices. There were temples to various Hellenistic deities, and an extreme version of Judaism was also practised. The main purpose of this letter seems to be to warn the church to stay rooted in Christ. How do you reconcile the Manx pagan spirituality (Mannanan, fairies, etc) with your faith in Christ?
- 13** 2. We have more metaphors for salvation here: **spiritual circumcision**, baptism as burial followed by **resurrection**, and the intriguing idea that a written record of our wrongdoings has been **erased**. When someone was crucified a piece of paper describing their crime was nailed to the cross. Our records are pinned to Jesus' cross.
- 14** 2. This was the original understanding of the meaning of the crucifixion: **victory** over the devil and evil spirits. Christ is portrayed as a triumphant warrior who parades those he had conquered in public. This understanding of atonement is quite different to the rival model of a debt being paid for sin.
- 15** 2. Again, Paul is encouraging the church to stay rooted in the faith and not be tempted to take part in spurious worship practices. Back to basics!
- 16** 2. Are there equivalent regulations in our church culture that are simply **human commands**, that appear good but are merely self indulgent?



- 17 3. The mysterious phrase 'your life is **hidden** with Christ in God' is a bit of a mindbender. It seems to suggest that we are somehow incorporated into the Godhead. If so, then it is natural that our focus will be on higher things.
1-4
- 18 3. The two lists of **earthly things** that we need to 'put to death' are common pieces of writing that Paul has cut-and-pasted here. Some have a clear meaning, but others are actually very hard to translate. The first, fornication, is one of these. It is by no means clear that our understanding of what that word means today is the same as the original Greek word, *porneia*, which probably referred mainly to cultic prostitution and casual promiscuity.
5-8
- 19 3. We have another metaphor for salvation here: **changing clothes**. When people were baptised back then they took off their clothes at the river bank, went in naked, and were given new clothes when they emerged. As Christians we have new clothes. Ideas such as nationalism are old-clothes. Barbarians and Scythians were regarded as crude, frightening foreigners.
9-11
- 20 3. These are the **new clothes** we are to wear. Again, an existing list that has been pasted into the letter.
12-14
- 21 3. This passage has been rightly cherished for its beautiful vision of Christian community life: peace (remember, this means harmony between people and God), thankfulness, teaching, gratitude, singing. Amen!
15-17
- 22 3. The letter takes an awkward shift in direction here. Verses 3.18 - 4.1 interrupt the flow, and some scholars think that they were added in later. The content seems incongruous with the earlier statements about all people being hidden in Christ, clothed with a new self, etc. Taken blindly these injunctions can be extremely damaging. What if a husband is abusive? Each group mentioned is part of a pair, with the traditionally subordinate partner mentioned first. Some think that Paul took an existing list of social commands, that originally only addressed the subordinates (wives, children, slaves), and added the partnering statements to the dominant people to make them kinder.
18-21
- 23 3. These verses have been widely used to justify the horrors of slavery. What do we do with 'texts of terror' like this? A wider view of scripture teaches that all people are made in the image of God, the same God who liberates slaves from Egypt. I think whenever isolated texts like this contradict the broader good news of God we have to put the toxic verses to one side in order to read scripture seriously.
22-4.1
- 24 4. The original thread of the letter resumes! We, like the Colossians, should devote ourselves to **prayer** - the connection to God.
2-4
- 25 4. The Colossians Christians were encouraged to make the most of their time, so that **outsiders** might be made insiders. Is that true for us? To season our speech with **salt** means to make it wise.
5-6
- 26 4. The letter ends with a section of personal greetings. Interesting here is the character Onesimus, who we learn in the letter to Philemon is a runaway slave. Here Paul omits that fact, and instead describes him with his 'new clothes on' as a faithful and beloved **brother**.
7-9
- 27 4. What a description - **co-workers** for the kingdom of God. May it be true for us!
10-11
- 28 4. Remember that **Epaphras** founded the church in Colossae, and even when apart from them he prayed hard for them. Do you pray daily for your church family?
12-14
- 29 4. **Nympha** is fascinating: she ran a church in her house. All churches were in houses at this time, so that isn't remarkable. The fact that she is a lady, however, is! It was much later that the (clearly unbiblical) idea that only men were suitable church leaders emerged.
15-17
- 30 4. The way that Paul specifies that he wrote this final greeting with his own hand implies that someone else wrote the rest on his behalf. Maybe he was physically unable. The final blessing is very brief, by Paul's standards. But what a fantastically rich way to end. May **grace** be with you, too.
18

Andy has also recorded four videos on Colossians. These are available to watch on **YouTube**. They give a bit more in depth coverage of the letter. <https://www.youtube.com/andyfishburne>.

The **Methodist Connexion** has also produced a range of supporting materials which can be found here: <http://www.preachweb.org/biblemonth>.

