

Suggested songs

668 Teach me my God and King
272 From heaven you came, helpless babe
529 Prayer is the soul's sincere desire
661 Give me the faith which can remove
520 Give thanks with a grateful heart
483 We are marching in the light of God

Prayers

Adoration: MWB p.28 A
Confession: MWB p.30 B
Intercession: MWB p.35 B
Dismissal: MWB p.38 A

Gospel Reading

Luke 17.1-10

Children's activity

Set up a variety of different 'prayer stations' around the church. There are some great ideas here:

<https://www.prayerspacesinschools.com/topten>

Let the children (and/or adults!) work around them and try out different ways of praying to God. Ask them which they liked best.



30 DAYS IN

[COLOSSIANS]

4

Thoughts

[Make sure that everyone has a copy of the text in front of them - either in a Bible, or use the sheet.]

This is the final week of Bible month 2019! Next year we'll look at a very different short book: Ruth.

This week we are going to look at end of the letter to the Colossians. We're going to call the author Paul, though in reality it might have been written by one of his associates. We are going to focus on several aspects of the letter.

1. The section of text between verses 3.18 and 4.1 is contentious.

a) The language is rather different to the rest of the letter, using several peculiar words, and interrupts it's flow. This makes scholars suspect that Paul copied this from an existing piece of writing. This is a very commonplace thing in the Bible.

b) It contains several uncomfortable instructions that make modern readers wince! It condones slavery, and marital violence.

c) It contradicts the earlier section (3.11) which says that there are no longer any slaves, and also a similar thought in Galatians 3.28 which says that there are no longer distinctions between men and women.

2. Some people think that Paul copied this pre-existing piece of writing, and added counterpoints. For instance, maybe the original just said 'Wives, be subject to your husbands' and Paul added the riposte: 'Husbands, love your wives'. The word for love is agape, the self-sacrificing love exemplified by Jesus. The same pattern applies to children and slaves.

Reflection: what do you think of this way of reading the text?

3. The section on slavery is embarrassing. It has been used in the past to defend slavery as a Christian activity in England and America. The pioneering Methodist scholar James H. Cone tells his mother's story. She grew up a slave in Alabama, illiterate. In her old-age, once emancipated, James used to read the Bible to her. She refused to let him read any of Paul's letters, as every week in church the white preachers would read passages like **Colossians 3.22** to remind them that it was God's plan that they were slaves. John Wesley was

a pioneer in the movement to abolish slavery in England. He had a very strong respect for the Bible, and he managed to over-ride passages like this where they were contradicted by a wider, bigger picture of God revealed in scripture: God who frees slaves from Egypt, who makes all people in his image.

Reflection: how do you reconcile the various obnoxious Biblical texts like this, which justify abuse, violence, and exploitation, which are known collectively as **texts-of-terror**?

4. After that somewhat awkward interlude the narrative continues with a chunk of practical advice on spiritual living (**verses 4.2-6**).

5. We are told to devote ourselves to prayer.

Reflection: how do you do this?

6. We are told to be alert to outsiders, and not waste time. Presumably this is so we can create a good impression and hope to bring them into the Christian life. Jesus was all about the outsider!

Reflection: what would it look like as a church to use our time for the benefit of evangelism, for the good of outsiders? Is church for us, or them?

7. The letter finishes in a typical manner with a section of greetings. One of these mentions a lady called Nympha (**verse 4.15**). Nympha is interesting since she owns a house, and runs a church in it. And she was a lady. In Methodism we've been quite progressive in allowing women to be equal in ministry to men, and other denominations are getting there too. Paul's letters are often used by those who are opposed to women in ministry to argue their cause, yet right here at the start we have Nympha, female church leader.

Reflection: why do you think the church has taken so long to recognise the ministry of women?