



**Studies in the Letter
to the Colossians**

Term 2, 2017

St Alban's Press

The Sufficiency & Supremacy of Christ

CONTENTS

Study 1	A Fulfilling Faith	Colossians 1:1-14
Study 2	The Supreme Christ	Colossians 1:15-23
Study 3	A Labour of Love	Colossians 1:24-2:5
Study 4	Guard the Treasure!	Colossians 2:6-23
Study 5	Fashion for the Faithful	Colossians 3:1-17
Study 6	A Family Affair	Colossians 3:18-4:1
Study 7	Prayer & Proclamation	Colossians 4:2-6
Study 8	Partners in God's Eternal Purposes	Colossians 4:7-18

Bibliography & Suggested Reading:

"Colossians & Philemon"
 'The Message of Colossians'
 'Epistle to the Colossians'
 'Colossians'
 'Be Complete' - Colossians
 'The Complete Christian'
 Bible Study Booklet

Peter T. O'Brien
 R.C Lucas
 F.F. Bruce
 R. Kent Hughes
 Warren W. Wiersbe

Matthias Media

Background Information

The Church at Colossae came into existence during a period of vigorous evangelistic activity associated with Paul's ministry at Ephesus (AD 52-55, Acts 19). Paul held daily evangelistic 'dialogues' in the hall of Tyrannus in Ephesus and they were so effective that 'all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.' Acts 19.10.

From the letter of the Colossians we infer that the congregations of Colossae, Laodicea and Hierapolis were the fruit of Epaphras's evangelistic endeavours. He was a native of Colossae (4.12) who probably became a Christian during a visit to Ephesus.

Epaphras had visited Paul, presumably in Rome and informed him of the state of the churches in the Lycus valley. While much was encouraging he was concerned about some false teaching which had recently been introduced into the congregation. Paul had never visited these churches but he writes in response to this urgent need.

The false teaching known to scholars as the 'Colossian Heresy' is difficult to identify with certainty. It was set forth as 'philosophy' 2.8 based on tradition which was supposed to impart true knowledge 2.18, 23. Basically the heresy seems to have been Jewish, because of the references to food regulations, the Sabbath and other prescriptions of the Jewish calendar. This teaching promoted spiritual elitism as it was based on asceticism and mysticism that urged people to press on in search of greater wisdom and knowledge and so attain fullness. Paul throughout this letter affirms the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ. It is in him and him alone that we experience fullness and true spiritual maturity.

As you work through this letter may you be filled with the knowledge and wisdom of God that comes through Christ.

Michael Erickton

A Spiritual Evaluation

At the start of 2017 we outlined a fresh vision for spiritual growth in the life of our Church. It was agreed that it would be helpful to focus on two things in particular:

- i.) Our **personal devotional life**. Making it a priority to spend time each day reading God's word and praying.
- ii.) **Being part of an MP3** and make a commitment to pray for at least five people we know who as yet do not follow the Lord Jesus.

This was all with the view of becoming a church of disciples who make disciples. We wanted it to become the norm to be able to ask each other, 'How are you going spiritually? & 'What has the Lord been teaching you from his word lately?'

So we have embarked on a new venture together to try and encourage each other to be doing the important things in our lives. The spiritual disciplines we are talking about are not new but trying to hold each other accountable is!

We are setting out **EXPECTATIONS** for ourselves which require our **EVALUATION** (ie. Accountability - checking up on how we are going?) and then thirdly to consider the **CONSEQUENCES**. (ie. What are we going to do or change in response to our evaluation.)

Once again it is important to emphasize that we are doing this process NOT in order to heap guilt on ourselves but because we want to grow spiritually and honour the Lord who has called us to make him the centre of our lives.

There are a number of tangible and measurable ways we can evaluate our level of commitment and Christian priorities. Consider each one and give yourself and honest mark out of 10 for how this aspect of your life has fared this past term.

A Personal Evaluation

1. Weekly Church Attendance (8 weeks of the term)

1. _____ 5. _____ 10. _____
 Poor (2 out of 8 weeks) Reasonable (4/8) Terrific (8/8)

2. Growth Group Attendance (Out of 8 weeks)

1. _____ 5. _____ 10. _____
 Poor (2/8) Reasonable (4/8) Great (8/8)

3. Devotional Life (Daily Prayer & Bible Reading)

1. _____ 5. _____ 10. _____
 (Almost never) Occasionally Daily

4. MP3 or Praying for Non-believers intentionally

1. _____ 5. _____ 10. _____
 (Almost never) Occasionally Regularly

5. Serving in the Life of the Church

1. _____ 5. _____ 10. _____
 (I don't do anything) (I do too much)

6. Financial support of the Church (ie. Does my giving reflect Gospel faith and generosity trusting in God's provision)

1. _____ 5. _____ 10. _____

Prayerfully and thoughtfully consider **two areas** you want to improve on in the Term to come & share with the group:

a.) _____ b.) _____

Study 1***The Supremacy of Christ*****A FULFILLING FAITH Colossians 1.1-14**

1. People by their very nature are looking for fulfillment in their lives. They may not articulate it as such but that is what most are searching for. We seek fulfillment in our working lives, in our relationships and in our leisure time.

Is there anything wrong with this desire? Are there any potential dangers in the pursuit of this? Discuss.

How would most people define being fulfilled? For example if you have a fulfilling career or relationship what does that mean—spell it out?

What about a fulfilling spiritual life? How would most Christians define that?

Read Colossians 1.1-14

2. Does anything strike you about Paul's introduction v1-2?

3. Paul begins with a very strong affirmation of the Colossians in v3-6.
 What does Paul thank God for in regard to the Colossians? v4-5
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____
 - iii. _____

4. The foundation of the Christian faith is the gospel. What does Paul tell us about the gospel in v5-7?

5. Paul, having identified the gospel as the word of truth and as the means of experiencing God's grace, tells us that they 'heard' it from Ephraim. What do we know of this man? 1.7, 4.12

In what way is the example of this unsung hero an encouragement to us?

6. When we pray for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, what do we tend to pray?

7. What does Paul pray for the Colossians and with what purpose in view? List them in v9-12

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

v. _____

8. Do our prayers contrast substantially from Paul's? Do you think our prayers often focus on being happy and asking God to remove our struggles rather than and on growing in spiritual maturity?

If that is the case what can we do to change this focus?

9. Paul prays that the Colossians might live a life worthy of the Lord? v10. What are the characteristics of such a life as he expresses them in 10-12?

Which of these do you feel are lacking in your walk with the Lord?

What are the barriers to such a life for the Christian today?

10. Why do you think Paul prays that they might have great endurance and patience? Endurance and patience for what?

11. V12-14 are an exciting climax to this incredible opening prayer of thanksgiving. According to Paul we have been 'qualified' and 'delivered'. What for?

How should this effect the way we live and approach life?

12. What hope does the Christian have of living the sort of life Paul has in view in this prayer? See v11.

How have these opening verses challenged you, how have they encouraged you — today?

ACTION: Is there something you personally need to do or change as a result of what you have learned? What is it?

I need to: _____



Points I want to remember in my prayers

Study 2***The Supremacy of Christ***

Review: How did you go, in applying what you learnt last week?

THE SUPREME CHRIST Colossians 1.15-23

1. Throughout history well-meaning Christians have been led away by often subtle, yet false teaching. This seems to have been the case at Colossae. They seem to have accepted Christ as Saviour but this new teaching offered more. In being drawn to the 'more' they were in danger of losing the foundation and substance of their faith.

Can you think of examples of false teaching in the wider church today that say, 'but there's more'? How can 'ordinary' Christians protect themselves from being misled?

Read Colossians 1.15-20 & Hebrews 1.2-4

2. What similarities and differences do you note in these two amazing descriptions of Christ?
3. It may be helpful to list the ways in which Paul describes who Jesus is and what he has done!

Who is Jesus? v15-20

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

v. _____

vi. _____

What has Jesus done for us? v21-23

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

v. _____

4. What does it mean that Christ is the first born over all creation? v15

How would you argue with a Jehovah's Witness who uses this verse to suggest Jesus is just a created being?

5. Note the use of 'all' in these verses? What is the point?
6. How do you understand the phrase 'first born from among the dead'? How does this highlight his absolute supremacy?
7. Jesus is supreme over creation and over the Church? What is the connection—is it essential that he be supreme over both? How does Jesus reconcile all things?

Re-read Colossians 1.21-23

8. What do these verses tell us was the purpose of Christ's saving work?

9. Free from accusation' - who is accusing us and what of? Why is Christ the only way to be free?

10. Is our faith conditional according to Paul? v21 If not, what is he saying?

11. Why does Paul keep emphasizing the 'proclamation' of the gospel? Do you think we underestimate the importance of this practice?

What are the consequences of the gospel not being proclaimed?

12. What is the gospel? If someone asked you, 'What is the gospel by which I must be saved?', what would you say?

Take time to write out a short description of the gospel!

If we cannot give a simple verbal explanation of the gospel how can we possibly proclaim it and what is to stop us being led away from it?

Finish by praising God for the supremacy of Christ over all things and for the sufficiency of Christ in saving us!

ACTION: Is there something you personally need to do or change as a result of what you have learned? What is it?
Perhaps learn a simple gospel outline?

I need to: _____



Points I want to remember in my prayers

Study 3***The Supremacy of Christ***

Review: How did you go, in applying what you learnt last week?

A LABOUR OF LOVE Colossians 1.24-2:5

Having given us a bold and inspiring introduction, Paul turns aside for a moment to speak of the ministry of the gospel which he and others have been called to in Christ's service. It is a high calling, it is a labour of love but it comes at a price!

Read Colossians 1.24-2.5

1. How do you account for Paul rejoicing in his sufferings?

We tend NOT to rejoice in our sufferings for Christ. Is there some thing he has understood that we have failed to grasp? Or is his suffering different to ours?

2. What do you understand by Paul saying, 'what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions'? Does Christian suffering somehow make up for some lack of it in Christ?

Whichever way you understand this verse Paul is making the point that Christ identifies closely with the sufferings of his body—the Church! When the Church suffers—Christ suffers! Eg. Acts 9.4

Peter O'Brien suggests that Paul's words have reference to a common Jewish understanding that the Messianic age was to be preceded by a definite amount of suffering. So Paul is in turn saying, his sufferings for Christ are filling up part of that suffering which is to be endured by Christ's people before he returns.

3. Paul says he is a servant of the gospel v23. and a servant of the church v25. Can you be one without the other?

4. What is the mystery that is now no longer hidden? v26

5. What is the goal of all preaching and teaching of the word? v28

6. Paul seems to see proclamation, suffering and struggling as the norm, especially for ministers of the gospel.

If this be the case how do you explain our apparent 'lack' of suffering for the gospel? Do we not speak up, are we just blessed, lucky or ...??

7. Twice Paul says he is struggling for them v29 & 2.1. How do you think he is struggling/contending? What would it involve? See 4.12

8. Chapter 2, verses 2 & 3 are gold! Try and unpack them!

The false teachers had been saying 'but there is more'.
Paul to some extent says the same but where is it to be found?

16

9. Go back through the letter from the beginning and up to this point and note the number of times Paul refers to:

a.) Completeness or fullness or filled

b) Knowledge and wisdom

What is the big point he keeps ramming home?

10. Where do most people today think the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found? v3.

How can we help people see the emptiness of worldly wisdom?

11. Paul warns against 'fine sounding arguments'. What fine sounding arguments potentially threaten the gospel and the church today?

12. Paul it seems had never met the Christians of Colossae and Laodicea and yet he speaks to them with such passion, conviction and care. How do you account for this?

Does this have anything to teach us about how we should care for other Christians who may be in danger of moving away from the gospel of truth?

ACTION: Is there something you personally need to do or change as a result of what you have learned? What is it?

I need to: _____



Points I want to remember in my prayers

Study 4***The Supremacy of Christ***

Review: How did you go, in applying what you learnt last week?

GUARD THE TREASURE Colossians 2.6-23

Up to this point Paul has been laying a strong foundation for the sufficiency & supremacy of Christ in all things - without making any reference to the false teachers. In this section he challenges them directly and gives us greater insight into the sorts of ideas they were promoting.

Read Colossians 2.6-23

1. How do you?
 - a.) receive Christ Jesus as Lord
 - b.) continue to live in him
 - c.) be built up in him

2. Paul has also had a strong emphasis on thankfulness in this letter. See 1.3, 12, 2.6.
 What is at the heart of Christian thankfulness? Do circumstances affect it?

Are we often lacking in this fundamental Christian characteristic? Wherein lies the problem? Are we ungrateful grumblers or what? What is the remedy for un-thankfulness?

3. Identify some of the possible false teaching starting to gain momentum in the church of Colossae. See 2.8, 16-23
 - i. _____
 - ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

v. _____

4. What three warnings does Paul give in these verses?

v8. _____

v16. _____

v18. _____

Which of these, do you think, is the greatest threat to the church today?

5. In opposition to the false teachers Paul makes a remarkable claim in v9-10, what is it?

Is this how you see yourself? What difference should this make to our self image and approach to life?

6. Contemplate for a moment that Christ is the 'head over every power and authority!' v10.

If this is true and we are in him, what do we have to fear? What do we tend to still fear? Why?

How should this truth affect the way we view corrupt governments in the world? Those who want to persecute us?

What difference should this truth make to our daily lives and interactions with others?

7. How does Paul connect circumcision, burial and resurrection with fullness in Christ? v11-12

Circumcision was an external act that was a sign of ones commitment to God. Can you think of externals that sometimes are imposed on Christians today as essential to salvation or a means to greater 'fullness'.

8. Paul in 13-15 draws attention to our freedom in Christ. What have we been freed from?

Why do you think that throughout Church history, Christians have repeatedly turned back to the bondage of regulations and laws? How can we be sure we don't do the same?

9. Growth in the Christian life is not about 'spiritual experiences' according to Paul - v18. That being the case how does Paul say the Christian is ensured of spiritual growth? V19 How do we do this?

10. In verses 20-23 Paul seems to summarize his argument to this point. In Christ alone is there freedom from the world, freedom from the law and freedom from the flesh.

Can you think of ways in which we are tempted to, or allow ourselves, to be enslaved by them again?

11. The false teachers delighted in regulations, false humility and the worship of angels. Where is true delight to be found? How do we experience it?

ACTION: Is there something you personally need to do or change as a result of what you have learned? What is it?

I need to: _____



Points I want to remember in my prayers

Study 5***The Supremacy of Christ***

Review: How did you go, in applying what you learnt last week?

FASHION FOR THE FAITHFUL Colossians 3.1-17

In the first two chapters of Colossians, Paul lays down a strong theological foundation for the sufficiency & supremacy of Christ in all things. He now turns to give strong exhortation, as to what that will mean in the daily life of the believer.

Dick Lucas notes, *'Paul refuses to teach the doctrine of the faith without insisting that they be translated into corresponding conduct and behaviour. Nor does the apostle call his hearers to a new way of life until they have understood what it means to be new persons in Christ.'* p132

In this next main section Paul gives a very clear picture of practical Christianity. Lucas sees the section set out in the following way which is helpful for our purposes:

- The Christian and Christ 3.1-8
- The Christian and the Church 3.9-17
- The Christian and his family 3.18-21
- The Christian and his daily work 3.22-4.1
- The Christian and the outside 4.2-6

Read Colossians 3.1-17

1. Identify the four imperatives of Christian spirituality that Paul lays before us here:

i. _____ 3.1

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____ 3.8

Note the connection between 2.20 and 3.1

2. 'Set your heart' or to 'pursue the things above' 3.1 is at the heart of the Christian life. Having died with Christ (2.20) and raised with Christ (3.1) this should be our joy.

If 3.1 was about the affections of the heart then 3.2 has much to do with the cognitive processes of the mind. What will it involve for us to set our minds on things above?

3. If our life is '*hidden in Christ*', should we expect others to see our transformation through faith in him?

When will there be no doubt about our true status before God? v4

4. What are the 'earthly things' that demand your attention or perhaps tempt you, that are actually a hindrance to setting your mind on things above?
5. *'Everyone, including my parishioners seems to have a dream for their retirement, and clear goals for their finances, holidays and much more but few have a dream for growing the Kingdom of God. How can this be?'*

Do you think that is true of us?

What are your goals for spiritual growth and the Kingdom of God?

6. The call to 'put to death' is a brutal one. v5. Why is it necessary?

List the things we are to put to death that Paul mentions. Remember Paul is writing to Christians!

Do any of these seem to be an issue in your life or the life of our church?

7. 'Greed which is idolatry' How would this be evident in the life of the believer?
8. Having very clearly highlighted the old life, and what we are not meant to be like, Paul finally turns to the qualities that should be evident in the lives of those who set their hearts and minds on things above.

To clothe oneself is a deliberate and intentional action. How are we to do this with the virtues Paul lists in v12-14?

9. Paul gives us another impressive list in v15-17. Remember here he is describing the church not just individuals. With this in mind what does Paul say that the Church is meant to be like:

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

v. _____

Is this the picture we have of our church, St Alban's? If anything what do we need to work on more diligently?

10. What does it mean:

i. That 'Christ is all, and in all.' v11

ii. 'to do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus' v17.?

11. Why is having 'gratitude in your heart' and 'giving thanks to God' essential if we are to have a contented life focused on the kingdom of God?

How do you account for the joyless and grumbling lives of so many professing Christians? What needs to change?

ACTION: Is there something you personally need to do or change as a result of what you have learned? What is it?

I need to: _____



Points I want to remember in my prayers

Study 6***The Supremacy of Christ***

Review: How did you go, in applying what you learnt last week?

A FAMILY AFFAIR Colossians 3.18-4.1

Paul now turns his attention to the home truths of family life for the follower of Jesus. The person who has embraced the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ will demonstrate this in all his relationships, at Church (as seen in 3.9-17) and in the home (3.18-4.1)

1. Read **Colossians 3.18-41** and then read **Ephesians 5.21-6.4** for a fuller explanation of similar Pauline material.

Is 3.18 in conflict with Paul's teaching in Galatians 3.28?

Can you have equality and submission within such relationships?

2. As a culture we struggle with the idea of anyone submitting to anyone else.

Do you think our culture has influenced our thinking on how men & women relate in marriage, more than the Bible? (our theology) Explain?

3. How is Christ a model for the wife in regard to submission?

Why do so many Christians and non-Christians object to this teaching for a wife to subject herself to her husband?

Fill out the picture in practical terms. What would it mean for a wife to submit to her husband, as is fitting in the Lord?

Note: This is a choice for wives—not an imposition by the husband!

4. How does the Ephesians passage give us a fuller picture of the sacrificial nature of the husband's love?

5. What keeps many husbands from providing Godly loving leadership in the home?

Fill out the picture in practical terms. What would it mean for a husband to provide loving godly leadership of his wife and children?

6. Domestic violence is a national tragedy in Australia and is sometimes used as a reason why the Biblical injunction for women to submit to their husbands is opposed. Do you think this is a valid argument?

7. Children are to submit to the leadership of their parents. This doesn't seem to come naturally to most children. Is there anything Christian parents should, or could do, to encourage their children to trust and obey them?

8. We seem to live in a culture that dictates that everything to do with children must be positive. For example, no one fails any more, no one is bad at anything etc. Paul warns against the opposite - of embittering our children which would discourage them.

Give some examples of how parents can embitter their children.

What should parents do if their children say, I don't want to go to Sunday school or Youth group?

9. What can parents do to get the balance right between appropriate correction and helpful affirmation?

10. God in his providence has ordered society and particularly house holds so that relationships might prosper and grow.

What happens when God's ordering is ignored? When women don't submit, husbands don't love, children don't obey etc.

Is this not the very thing we see unfolding in our society and church communities. What can be done to encourage people, even Christians, to embrace God's plan for community life?

11. What is the foundational motivation for nearly all these instructions? How does this help in fulfilling them? v24

12. Slaves are not part of our experience in Australia, but these instructions could well apply to all employers and employees.

Why should the Christian workers be the best workers of all?

13. Most people in our society are motivated in their work by financial reward or promotion but Christians are meant to be motivated by a desire to please God, whatever they do, looking forward to a heavenly inheritance.

Do you think this view of work is lost for most Christians?

Do you see your work as a way of honouring God and serving the Kingdom of God? Explain.

ACTION: Is there something you personally need to do or change as a result of what you have learned? What is it?

I need to: _____



Points I want to remember in my prayers

Study 7.***The Supremacy of Christ*****PRAYER & PROCLAMATION Colossians 4.2-18**

Paul concludes his letter by affirming the responsibility Christians have to outsiders, that they might know the truth of the gospel. In these verses Paul calls all Christians to both lip and life service in witnessing to the saving power of Christ.

Read Colossians 4.2-6

1. Imagine you are given the task of drawing up the Church's plans to reach the community of Lindfield. What would your plan and strategy look like. Take a few moments to draw up your plan of attack!
2. Paul says evangelistic activity must be centered in prayer. What would it mean to 'continue steadfastly' - 'devote yourselves' in prayer? v2
3. Anglicans are not known for their persevering prayer. Why do you think that is the case? Are we activists or lazy or what? Why are prayer meetings the most universally—poorly attended meetings in most church calendars?
4. Why is 'thankfulness' critical to prayerfulness?

5. What does it mean to be watchful? Can you be prayerful and not watchful?

6. What does Paul seek prayer for?

i. _____

ii. _____

7. What does Paul's request teach us about the importance of preaching and proclamation of the gospel in God's divine plan?

Do you think we have lost faith in the power of God's word to change lives? Explain.

8. If anyone knew the gospel message it was Paul and yet he asks for prayer in it's exposition. Why would he do that? What does this have to teach us about prayer and proclamation?

9. Is there a link between prayer and making the most of every opportunity in sharing the gospel? What is it?

10. What does it mean to have your conversation full of grace and yet seasoned with salt?

11. Do we avoid the 'salt' for health reasons? ie. We don't want to upset anyone!
(Remember salt stings the open wound but also brings healing.)

12. Do you think there is a direct correlation between lack of prayer for non-Christian friends and lack of conversions? Share if you have had any gospel conversations lately!

13. MP3's were launched this year so that we might be more intentional in praying for our non-believing friends.

Do you have a list at hand you are praying through regularly? If not take time to draw one up now.

Conclude this study by praying in 3's for non-believing friends and that God would give us opportunities to engage with others about Jesus.

ACTION: Is there something you personally need to do or change as a result of what you have learned? What is it?

I need to: _____



Points I want to remember in my prayers

Study 8.***The Supremacy of Christ***

Review: How did you go, in applying what you learnt last week?

PARTNERS IN GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSES
Colossians 4.7-18

Read Colossians 4.7-18

1. What do these final greetings teach us about the way Paul operates in ministry? Is there a model to follow?

2. You may need to do some research for this question. Find out what you can about each of the mission partners Paul mentions in this final greeting:
 - Tychicus: _____

 - Onesimus: _____

 - Aristarchus: _____

 - Justus: _____

 - Epaphras: _____

 - Archippus: _____

 - Luke, Demas, Nympha: _____

3. Epaphras is said to be ‘wrestling in prayer for you’ and ‘working hard for you’. What do you think this means?

Do we underestimate the real work of wrestling in prayer? Is there anything more strategic that we could be doing? Do you wrestle in prayer very often? What about?

4. Do you see yourself as a mission partner at St Alban’s? ie. as someone committed to the vision and mission of St Alban’s.

What steps do you need to take in order to increase your commitment to prayer and mission in the life of our church?

5. Take some time to review the message of this powerful letter, written to a small church 2000 years ago!

Truth: List a couple of things that you have learnt or been reminded of about the sufficiency & supremacy of Christ (Chapters 1-2) What has God been teaching you?

i. _____

ii. _____

Action: List a couple of things that God has convicted you of that you need to apply—put into action from his word (Chapters 3-4) What is God calling you to do?

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

Finally: Pray! — praising God for the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ in all things— both now and for all eternity!

