

If you belong to Christ ...

Paul's letter to the

Colossians

Study Series prepared by Graeme Offer
(Revised 2010)

Foreword

The church at Colosse is the least important of any church to which any gospel writer wrote, and yet the letter is one of the richest in the New Testament as it presents a great treatise on the pre-eminence of Christ. Together with the Ephesian letter and the letter to Philemon, Paul presents a trilogy. The Ephesian letter emphasising the church, the Colossian letter emphasising Christ, and the Philemon letter emphasising our responsibilities to one another as Christians.

Throughout the studies, I have mostly quoted from the New International Version (NIV) and the New King James Version (NKJV), and have attributed the quotations accordingly. Occasionally, I have used a word or two from the King James Version (KJV) or other translations where those versions (in my opinion) better describe the point the author is trying to get across. On occasions where quotations appear that are not referenced, they are my paraphrase of what the verse says, and may or may not bear similarity to recognized translations.

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My usual teaching style is to hand out the outline for each lesson at the start of the lesson. I will often discuss last week's homework, or the background / introduction section as a way of getting the class "into gear" whilst I am handing out the outline at the start. The questions on the outline are designed to help us come to a grasp of the main issues that Paul wants the readers to understand, and to form an outline of the class. They are not designed to identify the micro-issues, although the class discussion may get into some of these. I hand out the notes at the end of the class. They are designed to answer all of the questions that were raised in the outline sheet – often in more detail than what was covered in the class. I almost never hand out the notes at the start of the class, and I have found that where I have done that it always results in people reading what is on the page and feeding that back during the class without really thinking about or sometimes even comprehending what is there. The notes also serve the very useful purposes of allowing those who may miss one of the classes to *catch up*, as well as providing a review of the material covered for those who were present.

I **always** set homework, and that includes a few thought-provoking questions that go beyond the things that we have covered in the class.

My prayer is that those who use this material will find it exciting, edifying, encouraging, and relevant to our present situation as together we consider some of the practicalities of the gospel and the implications and relevance of God's grace to our walk with God and our daily struggles to live the Christian life.

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This study series was initially prepared for the Innisfail church of Christ, beginning in January 2006, and revised in 2010, for the Cairns church of Christ.

Introduction to the Series

Several factors have merged resulting in this series of Bible Studies. I have long believed that there is a great need to study the New Testament books in their original context. I had observed that when I had undertaken exegetical studies of some New Testament books that the things that they taught did not match some of the points that we would extract from them when we undertook subjective studies.

I had taught the book of Acts (my favourite book of the Bible) on several occasions, and had developed outline notes to go with the studies. The thought occurred to me that I should develop some "proper" notes to go with the studies the next time that I taught the book.

When attending a lectureship dealing with the book of Ephesians, none of the speakers before me (and I was the final speaker) dealt with the context of the book – what was Paul trying to say to them, and why? When was the book written, and why did Paul write it? Whilst the studies were good, I observed that what we were doing was like "looking at the leaves on the tree" but we had not stepped back to observe the big picture – the structure of the tree and how it contributed to the whole effect of the garden – or even why someone planted it there in the first place.

Shortly afterwards, circumstances (which I believe was God's providence) resulted in my relocation to a different city, with a different job. I had been given the skills, the background, and now the opportunity and the time to teach classes on the books of the New Testament, and to write study notes to go with them. The first set of notes written was for Ephesians, and was followed shortly after by Acts and Hebrews. My intention was to write the notes to go with the studies, and then the next time that I taught the class, to spend as much time re-writing and improving the notes as I did writing them in the first place. [So far (April 2010) the only revised notes are Ephesians, Acts, and Romans. There is much work still to do].

My purpose is to equip others to be able to teach others also (2 Tim 2:2) as well as to provide a "commentary" on the New Testament that will help us to better understand God's word. Commentaries usually tend to be either very basic, which help "the ordinary bible reader" but provide little depth to the material, or, they are scholarly works which provide great depth but are not written to allow the "ordinary bible reader" to understand them. Also, there are a lot of good study guides around that ask probing questions on bible chapters, but then provide little information to help us understand the point that the writer was addressing in the first place. People should be able to read the notes, understand the chapter, and then use the notes to teach others.

I have tried to draw all of these together – a background study on the book that helps us to understand the context, the history, and the culture – as well as easy-to-read notes that can be understood by those who are new in the faith, and that also provides some challenging thoughts to those who are mature in the faith. A revision study for each of the books (or in some cases, groups of books) is designed to refresh our memories, and at the same time provides a succinct overview of the whole of the book. It is an excellent place to start when approaching the book, together with the background study.

The homework is designed to include a few thought-provoking questions that go beyond the things that we have covered in the class.

We must never think that we can improve God's word! The word stands alone, and we can only stand in awe of it! My sole aim is to help people to understand it better.

My prayer is that those who use this material will find it exciting, edifying, encouraging, and relevant to our present situation as together we consider some of the practicalities of the gospel and the implications and relevance of God's grace to our walk with God and our daily struggles to live the christian life.

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