

Colossians: Growing in Christ

Introduction

**“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”
(Colossians 2:6)**

The Christian faith never reaches a peak; it never reaches a level of completeness in this life. As disciples, we are to grow in Christ. That is the big theme of Paul’s letter to the Colossians that we will be studying in September and October. All of us in church, adults and children, will be studying the same passages together in our various groups, which we hope will be a helpful way of encouraging one another in our walk with Christ.

Context

The Book

The authors of this letter are Paul the apostle, and Timothy his protégé (1:1). Paul writes to this church from prison (4:18), so it is not written in glib and happy circumstance. He has not met this church (1:3-4), but is thankful for them. We’ll discover why in the next section.

The Bible

We are of course in the New Testament. The apostle Paul is a first hand eye witness of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection. The gospel is going out to the ends of the earth, and churches are being established to continue this ministry of disciple-making discipleship. As such, the saints and faithful believers in Colosse are in a similar context to us, the saints and faithful believers in Poynton.

The World

To be a Christian was to mark oneself against the world around you in the days of the Colossians church. It was a church situated in what we now call Turkey, in a city not too far from Ephesus and Laodacia (both mentioned in Revelation), and apparently the city was destroyed in an earthquake, and has never been excavated. Most scholars note the composition of Colossians was around AD 60-61; which means it is not long at all after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

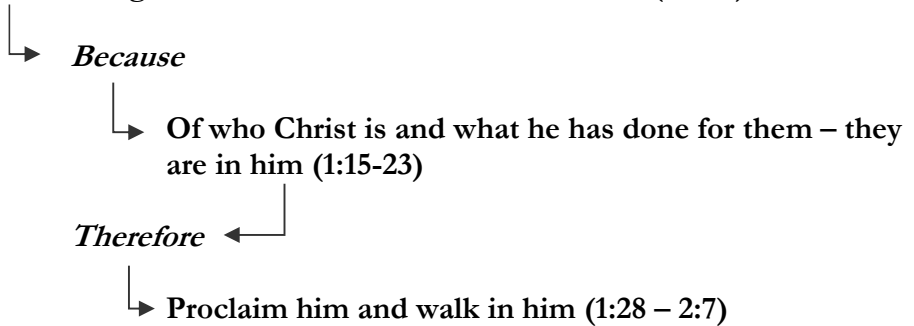
Structure and main themes of the book

Chapter 2:6 is a helpful summary of what Paul wants to say to the church in Colosse. Too therefore we have an idea of what God wants to say to us through his written word: as Christians united to Jesus Christ by faith, so we are to continue in him, to walk in him, just as we have been taught.

Our culture is into privatisation; the privatisation of our faith from the public square. It is not fashionable to note how one's faith affects their everyday life: from how they view the world, to how they conduct their relationships, to how they form and display their ethics. Yet Colossians challenges us: our faith is not a private matter. To be in Christ means everything we think, say or do, matters to him.

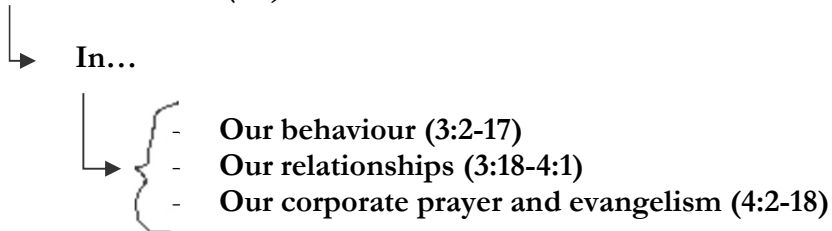
The order of logic of the letter goes like this:

Paul wants the Colossians to grow as Christians: in faith, in morality and so living a life of endurance and thankfulness (1:1-14)



This is *growth in Christ* (2:6-23) ←

Here is what growth in Christ looks like:- *Live like who we are – raised with Christ* (3:1)



In other words Paul writes to: -

- 1) Confirm them in faith
- 2) Warn them against the danger of moving from it
- 3) Establish them in lives that are outworking of their faith.

Paul does this by: -

- 1) Reminding them of Christ and set before them the brilliance of God's purposes in Christ
- 2) Challenging their faith and showing how Christ answers these challenges
- 3) Instructing them in living consequent to their dying and rising in Christ

Applications + pertinent phrases

In Christ: This is a prominent New Testament theme that Paul uses most often when he writes of Christian believers. Romans 5:11-9:1 is a helpful section to see how Paul teaches and applies it. It is also a promise that Jesus makes to his disciples in John 14-17. What is it saying? For Christians, we do not just have faith in a historical event; we have faith in a person who is present with us, by his Spirit. Christ is in us, and we are in him, by faith. Where he goes, we go. He took our sin and took us with him into death and into resurrection life. So, our life looks like someone raised from the dead; because Jesus has risen from death and we are in him. What is true of him, is true of us.

Growth in Christ: If we are united with him, we grow. We mature as disciples in various ways by the work of the Spirit. These various ways include but are not limited to the following:-

- Engagement with God in his word
- Responding to God in our words thoughts and actions
- Engaging with God in prayer
- Enduring faith in God during our trials and suffering
- Meeting together and spurring one another on in growth as a church family

This is the application of the letter: grow in Christ. Carry on in our normal life of discipleship: show what it looks like in your behaviour, your relationships and your priorities. Colossians is a book rich in doctrine and teeming with practical application. It is going to be a very helpful book for us.

Christian Relationships: Pastorally we will enter challenging waters when we look at 3:18-4:1 together. This is just as much of God's word as the other sections, and so we are to engage with it as well. Examine the surroundings: everything Paul says in 3:18-4:1 is part of what it means to

live lives raised with Christ. To put on the new self is to live in what relationships we have in a way prescribed and encouraged by God's good word. This is nothing to be ashamed of; but something for us to delight in. Wives are to submit to their husbands; this is not sexism, not is it a call for men to lord it over women, not in the slightest. Mutual submission in marriage is biblical; for as men and women we are equal and different. That is what it means to be made in the image of our Triune God. Too it is biblical for children to obey their parents; this is not suppression; this is part of the household of faith. Children can show they love God by obedience to their parents. Finally, masters treat their servants well. This is not a condoning of slavery; it is just an application pertinent to the context. Those of us in employment are to respect and obey are employers, whilst those of us who employ others are to treat our employees fairly and justly. To put on Christ has all sorts of practical applications.