

## Preaching Colossians

### Background

- A. I preached a series of 24 sermons through Paul's letter to the Colossians for the College Church of Christ in Searcy, Arkansas during the 1996-1997 school year.
- B. The title of my series was ***Christ! No more, no less***. The words come from Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Colossians 1:26-28 in *The Message*:  
  
"We preach *Christ*, warning people not to add to the Message. We teach in a spirit of profound common sense so that we can bring each person to maturity. To be mature is to be basic. **Christ! No more, no less.**" (Emphasis mine)
- C. Through the experience, I came to appreciate the power and clarity that Colossians offers in a pluralistic postmodern culture like the United States today.

### First Recipients

- A. "To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae" (1:2).
- B. Located in ancient Phrygia from which some of the visitors on Pentecost came (Acts 2:10) and part of the first century Roman province of Asia.
- C. The church in Colossae seems to have been established during the ministry of Paul in Ephesus when he taught in the hall of Tyrannus. (Acts 19:10)
- D. 100 miles east of Ephesus, sizeable population of Jews (2,000-3,000), missed by highway during Roman Empire and devastated by an earthquake in A.D. 60.
- E. Paul appears *not* to have visited Colossae (2:1).

### Characteristics of Colossian Epistle

- A. It can be said that Colossians is much like Ephesians but *very* different.
- B. "As an alternative (to the 'elemental spirits of the universe,' 2:8), Colossians presents a worldview whose central focus in Christ, whose creative, redemptive work has reconfigured the universe." (Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 398)
- C. "Colossians pushes us to an expansive vision—to see each thing in relation to every other thing and all things in relation to Jesus Christ." (Carl R. Holladay, *A Critical Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 405)

- D. Epaphras, a member of the Colossian church who was with Paul at the time of this writing, was deeply concerned about the problems in the Colossian church (4:12).

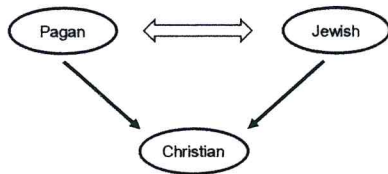
### The Colossian “Heresy”

- A. Preachers of the Colossian letter are sometimes paralyzed by the inability to determine the specifics of what is often called “the Colossian Heresy.”

- B. Elements of the problem:

1. Jewish elements (2:11, 16-17)
2. Ascetic elements (2:14, 21)
3. Visionary elements (2:18)

- C. Interplay in Colossae among various thoughts



- D. Much discussion and little consensus about the *stoicheia* (2:8). The thought on this ranges from “basic components” to “heavenly bodies” to “fundamental principles” to “transcendent powers that are in control over events in the world” to “ABCs.” For the preacher, the key characteristic of the *stoicheia* is that they are “not according to Christ” (2:8).

- E. “It would seem that there was no intent to deny Christ, but rather to add to faith in him.” (Tony Ash, *The College Press NIV Commentary: Philippians, Colossians & Philemon*, p. 186)

### The Message of Colossians

- A. “. . . an intelligent appreciation of the doctrine of Christ is the best safeguard against most forms of heretical teaching.” (F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, p. 55)
- B. The strategy of the Letter to the Colossians is the exact opposite of the strategy of one who plays the arcade game Whac-A-Mole. Instead of attacking every heresy that raises its head, Paul lifted up Christ. When Christ is seen for all that he is (1:15-20 where “all” appears eight times in six verses), every rival and pretender is exposed for the fraud that they are.

# College Home Bible Studies

## Colossians

### -Lesson 1-

#### *The Greatest Threat to the Church Today*

The first sermon in our new series on Colossians introduced the letter with the question “What is the greatest threat to the church today?” There are many possible answers, some of which we listed on the lesson sheet. My conclusion was that **the** greatest threat to the church today is the very same thing that was the greatest threat to the Colossian church when Paul wrote them around A.D. 60.

*The greatest threat to the church in any age is the tendency to make Christ anything less than everything in the life of the church or of the individual Christian.*

Paul’s response to the competing teachings in Colossae was simply to preach Christ again. When we remember all that Christ is, there is no more room for rival thoughts and competitors.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. What are the most commonly discussed “greatest threats to the church today”?
2. Read Colossians 2:8, 16-23. Compile a list of things which characterize the false teachings which threaten the Colossian church.
3. Paul’s approach in writing the Colossian letter is simply to preach Christ (1:15-20; 2:9-15). What problems today would be helped by the same approach?
4. What apparently “good” things that we do in the church today might have the unintended effect of lessening the significance of Christ in the church?
5. What can we do to keep Christ at the center of our lives? At the center of the church?

# College Home Bible Studies

## Colossians

### -Lesson 2-

### *It's All There in the Greeting!*

#### (Colossians 1:1-2)

Greetings and introductions can be lifeless and boring. But, then again, they can contain the heart and soul of a letter. The latter is the case with Colossians. The Sunday sermon was organized around four names found in the first two verses of the letter:

Paul  
Timothy  
Colossians  
Christ

This week we locate the Colossian letter in its life situation. Paul is in prison, near the end of his life (though he was probably released from prison in A.D. 62, he was martyred just two years later in Nero's persecution), Timothy was facing the approaching loss of his beloved mentor and the transition into senior leadership, and the Colossian church was dealing with life in the Lycus River Valley in Asia Minor in the first century. The torch of the faith is being passed, and the crucial issue which could not be dropped was Christ. Remember, *Christ! Nothing more, nothing less*. In a sense, the whole letter is right there in the Greeting!

### Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever received a letter where the greeting spoke volumes about what the writer was communicating?
2. On what occasion in your life have you keenly felt the passage of time? How did it make you feel? How did it impact your relationship with God?
3. How many "generations of faith" have you witnessed in your own life to this point? Describe them.
4. Have you ever had an experience where someone "passed on the torch" of leadership or responsibility to you? What was your greatest fear at that time?
5. How does one generation insure that the next generation will remember "Christ is everything?"

# College Home Bible Studies

## Colossians

### -Lesson 3-

### *Christ in Education*

At the request of the Christian College Chancellors' Organization, this past Sunday, September 22, was "Christian Education Sunday" around the country. We devoted Sunday morning to the theme of "Christ in Education." Though planning at first to leave Colossians for the week, I eventually decided that Colossians 1:17 was the perfect text for such a day. "In him (Christ) all things hold together." Jesus is the "glue" of the universe, the "core" of all truth. True education requires that Christ be acknowledged as the one who "holds together" any and every field of study.

### Questions for Discussion

1. J. B. Lightfoot wrote, years ago, that Jesus makes our world "a cosmos instead of a chaos." Cosmos (or universe) implies an orderly, harmonious, systematic world. What are some ways we all demonstrate that we believe in "a cosmos instead of a chaos"?
2. In the Harding faculty meeting before the start of school this fall, F. LaGard Smith came and spoke on "What Makes A Christian University Christian?" In his presentation he called for every truly Christian University to "**think Christianly.**" What do you think it means to "think Christianly"? How would one "think Christianly" in your major field of study? What evidence of "thinking Christianly" have you seen at Harding?
3. The three primary spheres of Christian Education that we discussed Sunday are:
  - a. Home
  - b. Church
  - c. SchoolWhat are the strengths and limitations of each of these spheres of Christian Education?
4. In the third sphere, school, we discussed both public education and private Christian education. What are some ways a Christian teacher make an impact for Christ in a public school? In a Christian school?
5. In most places (perhaps all!) where there is a Christian School (K-12), there seems to be conflict and suspicion between those connected with the Christian School and those connected with the public schools. What can we do to "turn down the heat" on this problem and, instead, build bridges of understanding?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 4-

### *Answering the Prayer of God* (Colossians 1:9-14)

A prayer was a typical way for the Apostle Paul to begin his letters. Though at first these prayers might appear like mere general introductions, they are, in fact, a crucial part of his letters. In some ways they provide an outline of the letter by expressing the major concerns on the Apostle's heart as he sits down to write. This prayer, which finds much of its vocabulary from the thanksgiving in 1:3-8, naturally falls into three sections, each expressing a key concern:

1. **Prayer that they might be filled with knowledge (1:9).**
2. **Prayer that they might live a life worthy of their calling (1:10-11).**
3. **Prayer that they might be filled with joy (1:11-14).**

### Questions for Discussion

1. Paul prays that they might be "filled" with the knowledge of God. What is the role of knowledge and wisdom in living the Christian life? Why are these things important?
2. Sunday morning I said that it is possible at Harding to make an "A" in Bible and an "F" in life. How can this happen? How can we make sure that good grades in Bible translate into good "grades" in life?
3. What does it mean to "live a life worthy" of our calling (Colossians 1:10; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 2:12)?
4. What is the basis of the joy Paul mentions in 1:11? Have you ever known a Christian who was truly joyful regardless of circumstances? What is it that makes joy a way of life for some people?
5. Sing and discuss the words of the song *Without Him*. How does this relate to the topic of "joy"?
6. What is the relationship between Christian thinking, Christian living, and Christian rejoicing?
7. The title of this lesson comes from the idea that Paul's prayer is actually a Spirit-inspired prayer. In a sense it reveals not only the heart of Paul, but also the heart of God. God longs for these things for all of us. Discuss the way our response to God is actually an answer to the prayer (longings) of God.

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 5-

### *The Song of Christ* (Colossians 1:15-20)

From reading the entire Colossian letter, it appears that the message of Christ was not being directly attacked. That is, it does **not** seem that the problem in Colosse was that people were saying that Jesus had not lived or that He was not the Son of God. Rather, the problem seems to have been that Christ was simply being **devalued** by the way other things (visions, angels, laws, asceticism, etc.) were being elevated in importance. To counter these things, Paul and Timothy, did not write a thorough attack on each issue. Instead, they sang a song of Christ, Colossians 1:15-20. We do not know if this was a song they already knew or was original with this letter. What we do know is that Paul and Timothy brought spiritual clarity to a religiously confusing situation by reminding the Colossians that Christ is everything. *Christ! Nothing more, nothing less.*

**Stanza 1 - Christ and the Cosmos (1:15-17)**

**Stanza 2 - Christ and the Church (1:18-20)**

### Questions for Discussion

1. It is generally agreed that our text is written as a song. Share a time when a Christian song made a significant difference in your life.
2. Make a list of things (parents, homework, etc.) that we sometimes neglect not because we mean to, but just because other things demand so much of our attention.
3. What are some of the ideas competing with Christ today for our attention and devotion?
4. Read the text, Colossians 1:15-20. How many times and in how many ways do Paul and Timothy assert that Jesus is all/everything/supreme/the greatest/etc.?
5. How does this text relate to the importance of Christian worship?
6. F. F. Bruce (*Colossians*, 55) writes, "...an intelligent appreciation of the **doctrine of Christ** is the best safeguard against most forms of heretical teaching." What does "an intelligent appreciation of the doctrine of Christ" teach us about the issues raised in question #2?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 6-

### *The Main Thing* (Colossians 1:21-23)

It has been said that “the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Having begun their letter with a greeting, a praise, a prayer and a song, Paul and Timothy allow the song to flow into a summary statement of the gospel. The text divides naturally by verses into three component parts of the gospel proclamation:

*Once you were* (21) - The message of our lostness without Christ.

*But now* (22) - The message of reconciliation in Christ.

*If you* (23) - The message of obedience to Christ.

### Questions for Discussion

1. “We only appreciate how good the good news is when we appreciate how bad the bad news was.” What examples of this can you think of from your own experience?
2. Read verse 21. Why is it important that we remember our lostness without Christ? What can we do to keep that memory alive?
3. What do you think most people think of when they think that God is watching them? Is it good or bad news to them?
4. Read verse 22. How do we now “look” to God because of the Cross? How do we make this reality become the way we “feel” about ourselves and God?
5. Read verse 23. As recipients of the gospel, what are we expected to do?
6. It seems to be very difficult for Christians to hold together the ideas of grace and obedience. Why do you think this is? What are the dangers of such one-or-the-other thinking? How can we hold on to both grace and obedience?
7. Friedrich Nietzsche, a very unlikely source to say something we would admire, wrote,

*The essential thing “in heaven and earth” is...that there should be long obedience in the same direction; there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living.*

Describe a Christian you have seen exhibit “long obedience in the same direction.”



# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 7-

### *It's That Simple* (Colossians 1:24-2:5)

Russell H. Conwell's book *Acres of Diamonds* tells the story of Ali Hafed, a man who lived near the Indus River in ancient Persia. A wealthy man who owned much land, Ali one day heard from a foreign traveler all about the beauty and power of diamonds. Before long he became so obsessed with diamonds that he sold his land, left his family with a neighbor and went out into the world in search of diamonds. Some years later he found himself in Spain, seemingly at the end of the world, knowing that his search had been a failure. A tired, sick, broken man, Ali simply waded out into the surf, ending his life. The sad irony of the story is that the man who bought Ali Hafed's farm back in Persia was one day watering his camels down at the stream which ran through his land when he saw something glistening in the bottom of the stream. He took the shiny stone to people who knew about these things and soon discovered that he had found a diamond! Before long, the new owner found that his land contained acres and acres of diamonds!

This text from Colossians is about the spiritual "acres of diamonds" which we have in Christ. Paul and Timothy remind weary spiritual searchers of what God has **already** given us.

*All the Mystery of God* (1:24-27)

*For all the People* (1:28-29)

*All Wisdom and Knowledge* (2:1-5)

### Questions for Discussion

1. What are some indicators that we all live searching for "something more" than we already have?
2. Read 1:24-27 (See also: Ephesians 3:1-3). What is the mystery of God? How much of the mystery have we received?
3. What are some indications of how individualistic we all are?
4. Paul says in 1:28 that Christ "fits" everyone ("everyone" appears three times in this verse in Greek). What does this mean about the gospel and various backgrounds? Various races? Various countries? Various world views?
5. Read 2:1-5. How much wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ? What does this mean to people are presently working on a college education?
6. How does it change our lives when we realize that in Christ God has already given **all** of us **all** mystery, **all** wisdom and **all** knowledge?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 8-

### *Lashing Ourselves To the Cross* (Colossians 2:4-10)

The lesson on Sunday was introduced with the story of Odysseus and the Sirens from *The Odyssey of Homer*. As the Greek Hero, Odysseus, was making his way home to Ithaca from the Greek victory over Troy (remember the Trojan Horse?), he was warned of the dangers that lay ahead for him and his men. One of these dangers involved the island of the Sirens. The Sirens were bird-like women who had beautiful, enticing voices. As sailors would sail past the island of the Sirens, the Sirens would sing their sweet song and lure the sailors closer and closer to the island, until they would shipwreck and die on the rocky coastline. Odysseus was warned to take precautions against the songs of the Sirens. As they neared the island he instructed his men that they would have to lash him to the mast with cords. Furthermore, he warned them that when he pleaded with them to untie him they were instead to tie him with even more cords. So Odysseus put melted wax in the ears of his men, his men lashed him to the mast, and then the sailors began rowing past the island of the Sirens. Their music was sweet, and Odysseus longed to go to the island. Yet, because he had been forewarned, he and his men sailed past the island and survived the alluring songs of the Sirens.

The sermon on Sunday was organized around the two figures of the Sirens and the mast to which Odysseus was tied.

*The Sirens* (2:4, 8)

*The Mast* (2:5-7, 9-10)

### Questions for Discussion

1. Read verses 4 and 8. What were the “Siren songs” that threatened the Colossians? What are some “Siren songs” that threaten us today?
2. We said Sunday that the greatest problem in Colosse (and in our world today!) was not direct spiritual attack but rather spiritual seduction. Do you agree with that statement?
3. How do we protect ourselves against “fine-sounding arguments” and “empty and deceitful philosophies” today? What are some examples of these things?
4. Paul told the Colossians to continue in the faith they were taught (2:7).
  - a. What are some indicators of our American fascination with things that are new?
  - b. How can this work against us spiritually?
  - c. How can we remain committed to the “old, old story” and avoid getting bored with it?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 9-

### *God Did Not Go To Heaven and Sit Down* (Genesis 12:1-3)

This Sunday we did not study Colossians because two members of the Uganda Team, John Barton and Brent Abney returned on their first furlough to speak. Sunday morning, John's message was about "The Story." By that he meant the large panoramic story of the Bible, from the Creation to the promised Second Coming of Christ. John said, "We should be people of mission because God did not go to heaven and sit down." The Basoga people (the tribe our Uganda team works among) believe in the One God who is the Great Creator. Yet, their idea of God is that He created the world and then went away and sat down, ignoring His creation. Consequently, one of the major messages of the Uganda Team has been to re-define the Basoga image of God by telling the story of God as contained in the Bible.

At first this might all seem far removed from our study of Colossians, but it is not. Both the Basoga and the Colossians are dealing with flawed understandings of God. One of the commonly flawed expectations of new missionaries is that they will be working with people who are a "blank slate" and have no understanding of God. Instead, what they encounter are people who are "very religious" (Acts 17:22) but who have serious **misunderstandings** about God. In this way the Uganda Team has the same challenge in working with the Basoga people that the Apostle Paul had in writing to the Colossians.

### Questions for Discussion

1. The Basoga think that God created the world and then went away and sat down. What are the common misunderstandings about God which we encounter in our culture today?
2. To this point we have studied Colossians 1:1-2:10. Read this section together, looking for things it offers the Basoga concerning...
  - a. Their understanding of God the Creator?
  - b. Of the world?
  - c. Of Christ?
3. John told a marvelous story about Steve Meeks, another African missionary, who wanted to work with street children in Africa (Most are glue sniffers, most are seriously malnourished, and most are victims of frequent violence at the hands of other street children). Steve got to know the "gang" in his town and one day landed upon a plan to start changing these children. He took 100 bars of soap to town and gave one to each child. He told them that if they would take a bath and wash their clothes, they could eat a free meal and drink a glass of milk at the local diner. The plan was a total flop. The younger children had their soap stolen by the older children who, in turn, sold the soap to buy glue to sniff! Steve then realized that if anything could be done for these children it would probably be by choosing **one** street child, giving him a home and food and an education. Hopefully, then, this child could someday help the others. Compare this with God's plan to save the world in Genesis 12:1-3.
  - a. What does this tell you about the way God works?
  - b. How does this help you as you seek out the mission of God in your life?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 10-

### *What Happened When You Were Baptized?* (Colossians 2:9-12)

As we continue our study of the Colossian Letter (*Christ! No more, no less*) we come to this paragraph which deals with what happened when we were baptized. In an effort to “spiritually vaccinate” the Colossians against the temptation to add other philosophies and religions to Christianity, the Apostle Paul reminds them of the “fullness” that is in Christ, a fullness which they came to experience (2:10) when they were baptized (2:12).

### Questions for Discussion

1. Have several people in the group share the story of their baptism?
2. How did you feel when you were baptized?
3. Read 2:9-12 and discuss the many things which happen when we are baptized.
4. What does it mean to “put off the sinful nature” in verse 11?
5. According to verse 12, when we are baptized what things do we do “with Christ”?
6. What is the relationship between faith and baptism in verse 12?
7. Sunday morning, we presented the idea that it is better to say that in baptism we **participate** in the death/burial/resurrection of Christ than to say that in baptism we **symbolize** the death/burial/resurrection of Christ. What is the distinction between these two ideas? Which one deals more with the ancient past? With the present?
8. In the context of this passage, discuss the following statement:

*Most of our spiritual problems are a result of forgetting our baptism.*

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 13-

### *Since, then....* (Colossians 3:1)

Just as the school year divides naturally into two semesters, the Book of Colossians divides naturally into two sections. We spent the entire Fall semester studying chapters 1-2; this semester we will turn our attention to chapters 3-4. As we begin this new section we are not merely “going forward” into the book we have already been studying; we are actually “shifting gears” into a different type of material. Sunday evening we used the following chart to illustrate the differences between chapters 1-2 and chapters 3-4:

### 3:1 As The Hinge of Colossians

Colossians 1-2	Colossians 3-4
Kerygma	Didache
Theology	Ethics
Indicative	Imperative
Realizing	Doing
He did	We do

### Questions for Discussion

1. Can you think of a story (perhaps one that has been told for years in your family) that has helped to shape the way you think and act?
2. Given the difference between the first two chapters and the last two chapters of Colossians, why do you think it is important that these two blocks of material appear in the order that they do?
3. If you could choose between hearing a sermon on “realizing” (doctrinal) and hearing a sermon on “doing” (practical), which would you choose? Why?
4. Do you agree with the statement that “in Scripture, God always acts first”?
5. Sunday night, I closed the sermon with the following quotation from Dr. John Mark Hicks, a professor at Harding Graduate School of Religion:

*Sometimes we (preachers) get it backward. We think we have to get our people in line before we can talk about God. In reality, we should begin with preaching God. Then people will fall in line.*

Do you agree with him? Why or why not? How does this relate to Colossians?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 14-

### *Christian Living: Present, Past and Future* (Colossians 3:2-4)

As we begin the ethical (behavior and practical living) section of the Colossian letter, we pause to remember that the last two chapters are built on the doctrinal teaching of the first two chapters (that Jesus Christ is sufficient for **every** spiritual need we have). Each verse of this week's text deals with a different "tense" of Christian living.

Verse 2 - Present Tense (What we are to do now)

Verse 3 - Past Tense (What has already taken place in our baptism)

Verse 4 - Future Tense (What we have to look forward to in Christ)

### Questions for Discussion

1. Do the things we listen to/think about/look at/watch shape our behavior? Discuss this as it relates to...
  - a. Movies
  - b. Music
  - c. Television
  - d. Sports
2. Paul instructs us to set our minds on things above and not on things below.
  - a. What are examples of "things above"?
  - b. What are examples of "things below"?
  - c. How do we cultivate this "above" mind set?
3. "Died" in verse 3 is a completed past action (cf. Romans 6:1, 6, 11). In what sense is salvation a past action? Why is this good news?
4. Our lives are now **hidden with Christ in God** (vs. 3). There is a great deal of "good news" in being "hidden." What are some of the things that come to mind?
5. Verse 4 turns our attention to our future tense.
  - a. Why is heaven not more of an emphasis with us these days?
  - b. What are your favorite songs about heaven?
  - c. What can we do to remind each other more often of the reality of heaven?
6. Christians have sometimes been criticized for being so "other-worldly" that we are of little use in "this world." Paul, though, calls us to being "other-worldly" (verses 1-4) at the beginning of a section that is extremely practical and down-to-earth. How can we serve "below" while our minds are "above"?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 15-

### *Getting Real About Righteousness* (Colossians 3:5-10)

In this week's text, Paul and Timothy plunge into a very frank discussion of Christian behavior. As the specifics of their message are discussed, it is important that the following things are remembered:

1. The theology of Colossians 1-2 lays the necessary foundation for Colossians 3-4. (God acts and we respond to His actions.)
2. Paul and Timothy's message of morality (3:5-10) is addressed primarily to the church, not to people out in the world.
3. The Colossian church was apparently made up mainly of Gentiles who were coming from a background where basic morality could not be assumed (in contrast to a Jewish church where the O.T. basis of moral living **could** be assumed).

### Questions for Discussion

1. How different is the behavior of Christians from the behavior of the world today? Give reasons for your opinion.
2. Sunday night we were called "to become what we already are." What does this mean to Christians?
3. Divide your group into two teams. Ask both teams to read Colossians 2:12-3:9. Team A is to look for references to the past tense in the Christian's life ("you died with Christ"). Team B is to look for references to the present tense in the Christian's life ("put to death"). Have the two teams share their findings. How do we make sense of this tension between past tense and present tense in our lives?
4. When Paul lists sinful behavior to be done away with, why do you think he begins with a list of sexual sins (vs. 5)? Why are sexual sins especially damaging to us?
5. List the five sins found in verse 5. Though there is significant overlapping among these terms, see if you can define what each one means.
6. The five sins listed in verse 8 can be described as community sins. What impact does each of these things have on the church? On a family? On a life?
7. What is the key difference between the approach to morality Paul opposes in 2:20-23 and the approach to morality which Paul takes in 3:5-9?
8. What can we do to improve the morality of the church?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 16-

### (Colossians 3:11)

Sunday evening we studied this verse and the message it holds for the problem of racism. We began with the confession that all people tend toward ethnocentrism (“my group is the best group!”). Then, noting the failure of governments to destroy racism, we saw that racial hatred is destroyed in the church because “Christ is all, and is in all.” In other words, Jesus is so important to Christians that their earlier attitudes are eclipsed and left behind. Jesus becomes more important to us than the things which tend to divide us.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Sunday evening, we said that “all people consider their own group of people to be superior to others.” Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?
2. As a group, make a list of races (worldwide) which have shown a strong disdain for another race.
3. Why are governments not able to destroy racism?
4. Read Colossians 3:11. Now read Colossians 3:1-11, looking for the relationship between verse 11 and the preceding 10 verses. How are they connected?
5. The Scythians were a race of people who lived on the northern coast of the Black Sea. Josephus described them as “delighting in murder of people and little different from wild beasts.” If you could truly accept Scythians you could accept anyone. Who are the Scythians of our world today?
6. Discuss the statement, “If I am a racist, I judge myself and say that Christ is not all to me”?
7. Colossians 3:11 first destroys racism in the church because “Christ is all, and is in all.” When racism is destroyed in the church, how does that affect our racial ideas about the world at large?



# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 17-

### *There Is a Difference!* (Colossians 3:12-14)

In this study we focus on what we are to “clothe” ourselves in now that we are Christians. Colossians 3:12-14 is built around the image of putting off the smelly, disgusting, decaying clothes of the “old man” and putting on the new, Christlike garments of the “new creation” that we are in Christ.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Have you ever had an experience where you could not get a terrible odor out of your clothes, no matter how hard you tried? What did you do with them?
2. How does the image of taking off the old clothes and putting on the new clothes help us to understand the new way of life we are to live as Christians?
3. Review the three sets of 5 characteristics which Paul and Timothy list in verses 5, 8, and 12 (2 negative and 1 positive). Share a time when you have been impressed with how different these “two worlds” are.
4. Discuss each of the five virtues listed in verse 12, noting what each looks like in real life.
5. Read verse 13. What does it tell us about conflict in the church? How is our conflict different because of our “new clothes”?
6. Love is considered the greatest virtue in the New Testament (Romans 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Galatians 5:6, 14, 22). How does love “bind...together” all of the other virtues?
7. Share what you remember about Tony Timms’ story Sunday evening? How does what he experienced as a student at Harding (“I fell in love with the feeling of being loved”) point to the importance of what we are studying in 3:12-14?
8. How do we **continue** to “clothe” ourselves with the virtues in verse 12?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 18-

### *Let the Peace of Christ Rule!* (Colossians 3:15-17)

The ethical/behavior section of the Colossian letter (chapters 3-4) is built upon the theological/doctrinal foundation of chapters 1-2. This week, as we continue to study the implications of “setting our minds on things above” (3:1), the subject of Christian unity is developed in verses 15-17. At this point, Paul and Timothy have already touched on anti-social behaviors that must be “put off” as part of the old man (verse 8). Honesty (verse 9), spiritual goodness (verse 12) and forgiveness (verse 13) have been taught as things which are to fill the vacuum of leaving the old way of life. In tonight’s text, the new relationship that Christians are to enjoy together is further developed.

### Questions for Discussion

1. At this point in your life, would you say that your experience with the church has been a “peaceable” one? Why or why not?
2. Read verse 15. If the peace of Christ does not rule in our hearts, then what does?
3. We are told to “let the peace of Christ rule” in our hearts. What can we **do** to cause this to happen?
4. What is the relationship between thankfulness (verse 15) and conflict?
5. Much has been said about whether congregational worship should be vertical (person-to-God) or horizontal (person-to-person). What evidence for each view do you find in verse 16?
6. Discuss the following statement that was made in the sermon Sunday evening:  
  
*Worship should have a vertical focus with a horizontal result.*
7. As a group, compile a wide-ranging list of things we can do as we seek to “do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (verse 17).

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 19-

### *A Most Thankful Letter* (Colossians)

Many Biblical writings have distinct reputations. For instance, when the topic “rejoice” is mentioned, many people think of the Letter to the Philippians. When “sectarian spirit” is spoken of, minds turn to the First Letter to the Corinthians. What letter do you think of when the subject “thanksgiving” is brought up? James D.G. Dunn, in *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, calls Paul and Timothy’s Letter to the Colossians “one of the most ‘thankful’ documents in the New Testament.” The theme of thankfulness is the subject of our discussion of the Colossian letter tonight.

### Questions for Discussion

- There are seven passages in the Colossian letter where thankfulness is mentioned. Read each passage, asking of each passage the questions “thankfulness to whom?” and “thankfulness for what?”

Passage	Thankfulness to Whom?	Thankfulness for What?
Colossians 1:3		
Colossians 1:12		
Colossians 2:7		
Colossians 3:15		
Colossians 3:16		
Colossians 3:17		
Colossians 4:2		

- What patterns or message do you see in the above chart?
- Tell of a particularly thankful person you have known? On what was their spirit of thankfulness based?
- Read the story of the ten lepers in Luke 17:11-19. What sets the Samaritan leper apart from the other nine? For what does Jesus commend him? What connection between thankfulness and faith do you see?
- How can we develop the spirit of thankfulness in our life?
- Spend the closing minutes of your Bible study letting people share things for which they are thankful. Close the hour with a prayer of thankfulness.

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 20-

### *You Saw the Best There Was in Me* (Philemon)

The Letter to the Colossians (a church) and the Letter to Philemon (an individual) were evidently delivered by the same people at the same time. Consequently, Philemon has an important connection to the Colossian letter. Though Philemon may appear a bit strange at first (“Why is something like this in the Bible?”), it is actually a powerful statement that the Gospel touches every area of our lives! Slavery was a difficult, distressing social issue in the first century world. Estimates of the percentage of slaves in the Roman Empire run from one-in-five to one-in-two. Philemon was a Christian slave owner who owned a slave named Onesimus. At some point Onesimus ran away from Philemon, apparently stealing some of his master’s possessions as he escaped (Philemon 18-19). Fleeing to Rome, he somehow came in contact with the Apostle Paul and was converted to Christ. Paul then sent Onesimus back to Philemon in Colosse with this letter. Though it was written for a very difficult and unusual situation, the Letter to Philemon is a masterpiece in Christian motivation.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Begin by reading the above introduction and then reading the entire Letter to Philemon aloud.
2. What does this letter tell us about each of the key people in this situation?
  - a. Paul
  - b. Philemon
  - c. Onesimus
3. Paul begins the letter by remembering the best about Philemon (1-7). For what specific things about Philemon was he grateful?
4. Each of us has the opportunity to remember the best or the worst in any given situation. Describe a time when you have seen two people experience the same situation, and one person saw only good in it while the other saw only the bad. What made the difference?
5. Reread verses 8-16 looking for the answers to the following questions:
  - a. How was Paul seeking to motivate Philemon?
  - b. Do you respond differently to being commanded and being asked? How? Why?
6. Paul concludes his letter to Philemon by expressing confidence in him (17-25).
  - a. In what specific ways did he show his confidence in Philemon?
  - b. What impact does it have on you when someone expresses or demonstrates confidence in you?
7. How does Paul’s letter to Philemon parallel the way God deals with us?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 21-

### *From Autonomy to Community* (Colossians 3:18-4:1)

This text is typical of what is commonly called “House Tables” in the New Testament. Found in both secular and Christian settings, these guidelines for how to live in a family usually list people in pairs (wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters) and usually begin with the most central relationship in the house first (wife and husband). In the first century, a household often consisted of a husband/father/master who was the head of his household, which consisted of his family and servants. Obviously, there were very practical questions that Christianity raised about how people’s faith would impact their family. Were they to leave family? If they stayed, how were they to live in relationship to their spouse, parents, children, masters or slaves? Paul and Timothy address such issues in this text.

### Questions for Discussion

1. When 39 people killed themselves near San Diego recently, the world became acutely aware of the Heaven’s Gate Cult. Several of those who died had left their families (one woman left behind 2-year-old twin daughters) to join Heaven’s Gate. Contrast the impact Heaven’s Gate had on family with the impact Jesus Christ seeks to have on family.
2. Autonomy (“self-rule”) is promoted today as the great good which we should seek in our lives. Terry Schlossberg and Elizabeth Achtemeier (*Not My Own*, page 9), in a book that is actually about abortion, make the following observations about autonomy:

*...the highest goal in our society is to be a self-fulfilling, self-governing, autonomous and independent self. It is a sin, according to some ideological feminists, to be dependent on someone else, just as it is admirable, in the eyes of some males, to be a rugged individualist. The individual’s well-being, the individual’s rights, the individual’s happiness and independence -- those are the most important goods to be protected and nurtured in the United States of the present, and not a few of our laws and organizations are geared to such protection and nurture.*

What is good about the notion of autonomy? When does it become a negative? What does it do to family? Church? Nation?

3. “Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (3:18).
  - a. What does it mean for a woman to “submit to your husband” in 1997?
  - b. Why is the notion of submission so offensive in our culture?
  - c. Describe a positive model of a wife’s submission you have witnessed.

(over)

4. "Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them" (3:19).
  - a. In the Christian context, what does it mean to "love your wife"?
  - b. Why is the notion of "the husband is the head of the wife" (Ephesians 5:23) so offensive in our culture?
  - c. Describe a positive model of a husband's strong and gentle leadership in his home.

5. Mary Groom (*Married without Masks*, page 148), writes that in the life of Jesus we see modeled what is being taught in Colossians 3:18-19:

*The model of our redeemed humanity is Jesus, who perfectly patterned both initiating **maleness** (toward His Bride, the Church) and **responsive femaleness** (in His submission to the Father) during His life on earth.*

Do you agree with this quote? What does it mean to the women in your group? To the men?

6. What can the church do today to help with the general confusion about what "maleness" and "femaleness" mean?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 22-

### *Children and their Parents* (Colossians 3:20-21)

We continue this week in the household instructions of the Colossian letter (3:18-4:1). Last week we noted that there are three pairs of instructions: wives/husbands, children/parents, slaves/masters. In this lesson we deal with the second pair of relationships.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Sunday morning we noted that under Roman law children were legally treated as “property” in a household, and before they became adults they had almost the same rights as slaves! Yet, in this passage Paul does not talk **about** the children, he talks **to** them. What does that say about the place of children in the eyes of God? In the church?
2. What are children called upon to do in this verse? Are there limitations to this?
3. How long is a child a child (in the context of this passage)? What implications does this have for university students who are heading home for the summer?
4. Some contend that we should not teach children to obey their parents because some people abuse their children. What are the consequences of throwing this “baby out with the bath water”?
5. Fathers are told not to embitter their children.
  - a. Why is this instruction addressed to Fathers?
  - b. What can a mother do to embitter her children?
6. Sunday we were given the following list of ways a father could embitter a child:
  - a. No time
  - b. No tenderness
  - c. No limits
  - d. No freedom
  - e. No confidence

What other items need to be added to this list?

7. Take the list in question 5 and turn it into a positive. How does a father give time, tenderness, limits, freedom and confidence?
8. When you (as an individual) live as a Christian in your home, does that make your life easier? More difficult? Better?

# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 23-

### *Working For The Lord* (Colossians 3:22-4:1)

We continue this week in the household instructions of the Colossian letter (3:18-4:1). This week we come to the third of the three pairs of relationships discussed (wives/husbands, children/fathers, slaves/masters).

### Questions for Discussion

1. There were both slaves and masters in the Colossian church. What are some of the unusual combinations of people we find in our church today?
2. Imagine yourself as a Christian slave in the Colossian church. One Sunday this letter is read in the assembly. How would you feel about the things said to slaves? What would be your response to these things?
3. Tell about people you have known who loved their jobs. Now tell about people you have known who hated their jobs. What was the difference?
4. What can we learn from the instructions to slaves (3:22-25) that instruct us in how to do our jobs?
  - a. About the purpose of our work?
  - b. About our enthusiasm for our work?
  - c. About “politics” in the workplace?
  - d. About unfair treatment?
5. What difference does this make in the way you will do your summer job?
6. Read 4:1. What is the message here for slave owners (and bosses!)?
7. Read back through the entire household section (3:18-4:1). Try to describe the way a “Christian home” would look. Now try to describe a home where these instructions were ignored.



# COLLEGE HOME BIBLE STUDIES

## COLOSSIANS

### -Lesson 23-

### *Most Influential People* (Colossians 4:7-14)

This lesson brings to a close our study of the Letter to the Colossians. In our text, Paul and Timothy commend those who will deliver the letter and send greetings from their co-workers. Tychicus (Titus 3:12; 2 Timothy 4:12) is a trusted messenger for Paul, and Onesimus is a runaway slave who is going home to make things right with his master, Philemon. The first three friends who send their greetings are Jews: Aristarchus (Acts 20:4; Acts 19:29), Mark (Acts 15:36-41; 2 Timothy 4:11), and Jesus Justus. The last three are Gentile co-workers: Epaphras (Colossians 1:7), Luke (2 Timothy 4:11), and Demas (2 Timothy 4:10).

### Questions for Discussion

1. The focus of this study was about the most influential people in our lives. We noted on Sunday that the names Paul lists in Colossians 4 were very, very special people in his life. They shared his life, his burdens and his faith. If Paul were to compile a list of the 25 most influential people in his life in A.D. 62, he probably would have listed these people rather than Nero, Governor Festus, etc. Go around the room and have each person tell about one of the most influential people in his/her life.
2. Having heard everyone's story, try to identify what it is that makes someone a "most influential person."
3. What are the characteristics of Jesus that make Him a "most influential person"?
4. What can we do to become more influential people (Matthew 5:13-16)?
5. What is the main idea you will take with you from our study of Colossians?
6. "Christ! Nothing more, nothing less." What does this statement mean to you?
7. Since this is our last study for this year, share something good that has happened in your life this school year.