

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS



July 12 – August 3, 2025

PRINCE OF PEACE
LUTHERAN CHURCH

For four weeks in July and August this year, our second reading in worship each week will be from Paul's four chapter letter to the Colossians. The selections of scripture will start in the first chapter and move in order through the third chapter, skipping some verses and ultimately even the final fourth chapter, all with the hope that the congregation will read the verses in between the appointed worship readings on their own during the week.

This follows an ancient practice called *Lectio continua*, (Latin for continuous reading) which is the practice of reading scripture in sequence over a period of time. Doing so, provided the listeners (now also readers) a context and helped them. These four weeks might be called *Lectio semi-continua*. It also will give us another glimpse of how and why the creators of our appointed worship readings chose what is heard in worship and what is not.

Our liturgy, hymnody and sermons (even those of a guest pastor) during these four weeks will all be connected to our worship readings from Colossians.

Last summer we read Ephesians together in a similar manner, and received positive feedback as a way of "grounding us so faithfully in the gift of scripture" and "making connections between then and now."

So, we're doing it again with Colossians this summer, adding another book of scripture to our collective life together.

Pastor Jim Wilson

On the cover:

Folio from Papyrus 46, which contains verses from Paul's letter to the Colossians, early 3rd century.

In addition to our worship, music and proclamation each Sunday, we offer this schedule of readings and questions for our reflection and discussion as we journey in scripture together this summer.

May God be praised and our faith grow deeper.

COLOSSIANS

Reading Schedule

	Date	Saturday & Sunday Worship Reading	<i>Lectio Continua</i> Reading
Week 1	July 12 & 13	Colossians 1:1-14	<i>Colossians 1</i>
Week 2	July 19 & 20	Colossians 1:15-28	<i>Colossians 1 (again)</i>
Week 3	July 26 & 27	Colossians 2:6-19	<i>Colossians 2</i>
Week 4	August 2 & 3	Colossians 3:1-11	<i>Colossians 3--4:1</i>
Week 5	<i>Bonus Week!</i>	<i>Not read in worship, but...</i>	<i>Colossians 4:2-18</i>

This information can also be found on our website at
princeofpeacedublin.org

Brief Background to Colossians

Despite references in the letter itself, it is not at all clear that Paul wrote this letter, or even that he had visited the young church in Colossae, now Turkey. It may well have been written by Paul, if so around 55 AD; or likely a disciple of Paul, perhaps even Timothy, around 75–70 AD. It is clear that Paul knew the Colossian church, they knew at the least of him and together they both knew and loved Jesus, the cosmic Christ. The Church so valued this letter through repetitive reading over generations through the 4th century that it was included in our canon of Holy Scripture in both 392 (Council of Hippo) and again in 397 (Council of Carthage).

Even then not all scripture was thought to be of equal weight. In part, this begins our practice of selected readings in worship. The scope of the letter moves from the near creedal statement of the Christ as *“the image of the invisible God, first born of creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created”* to *“give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house.”* Both are important, but in very different ways. The letter follows an ancient structure of letter writing, beginning with a greeting and giving thanks and concluding with personal greetings and his final thoughts.

The first half of the body of the letter (chaps 1–2) focuses on Paul’s teaching regarding “the Christ.” We read in worship all of those verses, with nothing omitted. You may, we hope, recognize many of these words in both our worship music and the creeds themselves, which this letter predates. The second half of the letter (chaps 3–4) is about how to practice being a Christian (like the Christ), which is far more contextually dependent and has changed over generations. Hence, much is omitted in our worship readings today.

In short, Paul used this letter to remind early believers, and still us today, that because we have been united with “the” Christ in baptism, the love, peace and forgiveness of that Christ should both feed us and inspire all our relationships with others, whom God also dearly loves.

Pastor Jim Wilson

A note about our study: We have included passages that are omitted from the Lectionary readings (worship readings). The extra passages are intended to be read as part of this study and are printed in *red italics* in this booklet.

Four Weeks with Paul's Letter to the Colossians

Week 1

July 12-13

Colossians 1:1-14

No *italicized text* is omitted from our worship reading.

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

²To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. ⁷This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, ⁸and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you

may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Week 1 Discussion Questions

- It is unlikely that Paul has met these believers (see 2:1), yet he is attracted to them. Why do you think that is? What types of people are you attracted to in a church?
 - Why do you think faith and love are products of hope? (vs 5)
 - Paul ends a long two-sentence prayer (vss 9-12) which includes *leading lives worthy* and the term *good works*. Vs 13 is what keeps that from being “works righteousness” or an admonishment to earn God’s love. What does it mean for you say that you have *been rescued from the power of darkness*?
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No *italicized text* is omitted from our worship reading, since it will all be read in worship this week again!

¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; ¹⁶for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers — all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

²¹And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him — ²³provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.

²⁴I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church. ²⁵I became its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, ²⁶the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints. ²⁷To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the

hope of glory. ²⁸It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Week 2 Discussion Questions

- *First born rights* aren't such a legal thing today as then. Still, what right does Jesus have (vss 15-18) to be *first place in everything*?
 - At times it can seem others want to be more powerful than Jesus. Even ourselves (vs 21). How do you respond to the idea that all are under Christ's dominion? How do we be *steadfast in faith without shifting from the hope promised in the gospel*? (vs 23)
 - How can Paul, or anyone, *rejoice in my sufferings for your sake*? (see also 2 Cor 12:9-10) What does that have to do with being *the Church*? (vs 24).
 - What do you think about (vs 28), specifically the relationship between *he whom we proclaim* and also presenting *everyone mature in Christ*? How best to do both of those?
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Week 3 July 26–27 Colossians 2: (1–5) 6–19 (20–23)

The *italicized text* is omitted from our worship reading this week.

For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you and for those in Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face. ²I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ, ³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. ⁴I am saying this so that no one may deceive you with plausible arguments. ⁵For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, and I rejoice to see your orderly conduct and the firmness of your faith in Christ.

⁶As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, ⁷rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. ⁹For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, ¹⁰and you have come to fullness in him, who is the head of every ruler and authority. ¹¹In him also you were circumcised with a spiritual circumcision, by putting off the body of the flesh in the circumcision of Christ; ¹²when you were buried with him in baptism, you were also raised with him through faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he forgave us all our trespasses, ¹⁴erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands. He set this aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it.

¹⁶Therefore do not let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink or of observing festivals, new moons, or sabbaths. ¹⁷These are only a shadow of what is to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. ¹⁸Do not let anyone disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, dwelling on visions, puffed up without cause by a human way of thinking, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the head, from whom the whole body, nourished and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God.

²⁰If with Christ you died to the elemental principles of the world, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, ²¹“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? ²²All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. ²³These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence.

Week 3 Discussion Questions

- The letter is getting more personal. What is your definition of a “religious person?” How has that changed over your life? What does “*living your lives in him*” (vs 6) entail? Sit for a moment with those words *rooted, built up, established in faith and abounding in thanksgiving?* (vs 6) How does that happen?
- How many times are “*in him*” or “*with him*” included in the reading for Sunday (vss 6–19). How does this help, even protect, us from *philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ?* (vs 8) The writer encourages us to *not quit holding fast to the head* (vs 19) which holds us together. Hmm, why church?
- The second omitted verses (20–23) begin consideration of how tempting our egos are with rules and laws. Try paraphrasing both

parts of the last sentence (vs 23). What misleading teachings do you see in our modern world? Any more tempting to you than another right now?

Week 4 August 2-3 Colossians 3:1-11 (3:12--4:1)

The *italicized text* is omitted from our worship reading week.

¹So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

⁵Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). ⁶On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. ⁷These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. ⁸But now you must get rid of all such things — anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

¹⁸Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.

¹⁹Husbands, love your wives and never treat them harshly.

²⁰Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is your acceptable duty in the Lord.

²¹Fathers, do not provoke your children, or they may lose heart.

²²Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything, not with a slavery performed merely for looks, to please people, but wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. ²³Whatever task you must do, work as if your soul depends on it, as for the Lord and not for humans, ²⁴since you know that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward; you serve the Lord Christ.

²⁵For the wrongdoer will be paid back for whatever wrong has been done, and there is no partiality.

^{4:1}Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, for you know that you also have a Master in heaven.

Week 4 Discussion Questions

- How is setting your mind and heart on Christ related to what the Christ has already done for us?
 - Our liturgy for Christian burial begins with a reminder that having died with Christ in baptism, we will also rise with him in eternal life. How is that connected to vss 2-4?
 - Vss 8-14, which span the verses read and omitted this week, provide examples of behavior to get rid of and new ones to put on. Easier said than done. What might you want to get rid of? What new ways of living might you want to put on?
 - As examples of *do everything in name of the Lord, giving thanks to God* (vs 17), the writer now describes guidelines for how we should treat each other (vss 3:18--4:1). Specifics can and have faithfully changed over generations, but how might faith in the Christ positively affect our relationships today? Does it help to discern whether something is “in the name of the Lord” or not? WWJD?
 - Vs 11 ends the three-week worship reading series, rather abruptly, omitting even all of chapter 4. Does ending there with the reminder that old distinctions no longer matter, only that *Christ is all and in all* (vs 3:11) make sense as a good place to stop? How does the word “all” describe both the Christ and the whole of God’s creation?
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This **entire italicized text** is omitted from our worship reading, so this is just a bonus for those wanting to read/discuss the whole letter!

^{4,2}*Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. ³ At the same time, pray for us as well, that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, ⁴ so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should.*

⁵*Conduct yourselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.*

⁶*Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.*

⁷*Tychicus will tell you all the news about me; he is a beloved brother, a faithful minister, and a fellow servant in the Lord. ⁸ I have sent him to you for this very purpose, so that you may know how we are and that he may encourage your hearts; ⁹ he is coming with Onesimus, the faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here.*

¹⁰*Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, as does Mark the cousin of Barnabas, concerning whom you have received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him. ¹¹ And Jesus who is called Justus greets you. These are the only ones of the circumcision among my coworkers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. ¹² Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, greets you. He is always striving in his prayers on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills. ¹³ For I testify for him that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.*

¹⁴*Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas greet you. ¹⁵ Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters in Laodicea and to Nympha and the church in her house. ¹⁶ And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and see that you read also the letter from*

Laodicea. ¹⁷ And say to Archippus, “See that you complete the task that you have received in the Lord.”

¹⁸ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Week 5 Discussion Questions

- Vs 3 could be considered a mission statement that encourages those in Christ to pray for one another *that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ.*
- What is *the mystery of Christ* which the writer again invokes? How does one make it known?
- We hear a lot about the need for civility and compassion in our culture today. How might vss 5-6 guide that task?
- Lots of names mentioned in the remainder of the letter. Lectors, give thanks that it has been omitted from public reading! Is this an add-on afterthought to the letter or an intentional affirmation strategy to be emulated? Did you catch the name of a woman who leads a church in her home (vs 15)? First century feminine leadership! Onesimus in vs 9 will come up again in worship a few weeks from now, in a one-chapter letter in the New Testament called Philemon.
- The writer, whether Paul or not regardless of vs 18, emphasizes this is not just a personal letter but is to be read in another church (vs 16). Case for reading *lectio divina* style in worship, or not?

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