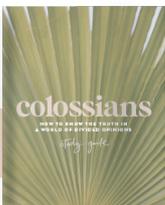


# Letter to Colossians: The Writer

The New Testament book of Colossians is what we refer to as an epistle. This simply means it is a letter. Let's take a moment to look at who wrote this letter.

Formal letters would begin with the name of the sender. Colossians 1:1 starts out with *"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother."* Oftentimes a letter would be dictated while a secretary or assistant transcribed the words. This is what we believe took place with Colossians. Paul dictated while Timothy transcribed. The letter of Colossians appears to have been written at the same time as Philemon and Ephesians, as these all were delivered by the same person. (Ephesians 6:21; Colossians 4:7) This places the letters around A.D. 62, meaning Paul would have been imprisoned in Rome during this time. Paul used his time in prison to continue sharing, spreading and strengthening the gospel Truth.



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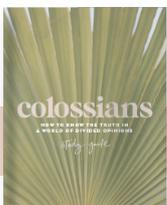
Since we live in a world of divided opinions today, it is important to point out that Paul was quite familiar with such a world. On one side, he had his fellow Jewish population, many of whom felt threatened by Jesus and His teachings. On the other side were Paul's fellow Roman citizens, who didn't know what to make of Christians and their different way of living. Even within the new, growing body of Christians, Paul experienced divided opinions! Paul had disagreements with the Apostle Peter on several occasions, specifically over gentile inclusion. One noteworthy disagreement Paul had was with his friend and ministry partner, Barnabas. On their missionary journey together, they had brought along a man named John Mark. From this point forward, we'll refer to him as "Mark" since this is the name by which he is more commonly known. Somewhere along the way, Mark bailed out. When it came time for a second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark again; Paul did not. Neither was right or wrong; they just had different opinions that ended with the two men going different ways. Yet what is so fascinating is that here in the letter of Colossians, years after this event took place, we see Mark's name mentioned again, this time as a friend and fellow worker with Paul. (Colossians 4:10) What happened? Had Paul's opinion of Mark changed? Or had

Mark changed? Perhaps both. Either way, we can learn from the life of Paul that differing opinions are a normal part of relationships, both outside and inside the Church.

But there was one thing that Paul never wavered on, and that was the Truth. In Colossians, Paul said that "*Christ is all*" (Colossians 3:11). There is only one gospel, only one Truth, and that is Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 10:5, Paul says, "*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.*" No other argument or opinion matters, only the truth of Christ. Paul also believed in speaking this truth "*in love*" (Ephesians 4:15). This meant patience and kindness, not envy or boasting, not arrogance or rudeness, not irritability or resentfulness, not even insistence on one's own way! (1 Corinthians 13:4-5) Paul believed in the power of God to reveal the truth. He knew his job was only to share Truth. If a person still thought differently than him, he left it in God's hands. (Philippians 3:15)

Paul was no stranger to the shifting sands of dividing opinions. But he also knew his feet were planted on the solid foundation of Truth, which is Jesus Christ.

IN WHAT WAY IS IT REASSURING TO LEARN THAT THE EARLY CHURCH ALSO LIVED IN A WORLD OF DIVIDED OPINIONS, YET THE TRUTH OF CHRIST STILL STANDS TODAY?

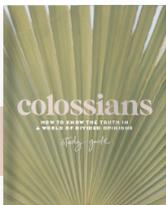


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# Letter to Colossians: The Recipient

During the times of Paul, letters followed a standard style. As we've mentioned, the first line was the name of the sender. The second line was the name of the intended recipient. Colossians 1:2 says, "*To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.*" Let's take a look at the church in Colossae.

The ancient city of Colossae was located in modern-day Turkey — although today the city is nothing more than an unexcavated mound. It was located a little more than 100 miles to the east of Ephesus in what was known as the Lycus River valley. At the height of its existence, Colossae prospered as a city on the trade route linking the Aegean Sea and the Euphrates River. It was well known for its textile industry, particularly a distinctive, glossy, deep-purple wool. This location also made Colossae a region diverse in ethnicity, religion and culture.



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By the time Paul began his missionary journeys, the trade route had changed, leaving Colossae off the beaten path. While still a large city, it was surpassed in importance by the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Also, history tells us that near the time Paul wrote this letter to Colossae (around A.D. 61-63), a massive earthquake struck the city, leaving it devastated. There was an attempt to rebuild, but as time marched on, the city did not. It was eventually abandoned at some point during the Middle Ages.

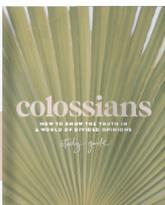
It is interesting to note that Paul seems to have never visited the city of Colossae. The church of the Colossians appears to have been planted by a man named Epaphras. (Colossians 1:7) Most scholars agree that Epaphras was likely converted to Christianity by Paul while he was in Ephesus. Epaphras then returned to his hometown of Colossae to share the Good News, which he also spread to Laodicea and Hierapolis. Epaphras later went to visit Paul in prison and told him about the condition of the Colossian church. (Colossians 1:8-9) This visit is what prompted the Apostle Paul to write the letter we are studying today.

Paul was concerned about Epaphras' report. It seems there was someone (or a group of

someones) who was spreading false teaching through the young church in Colossae. Scholars have different suggestions as to what this teaching was. Some say perhaps the false teaching was a pagan cult, but others say legalistic Judaism, and still others suggest an early form of Gnosticism — a complex belief system that emphasized special knowledge, often obtained through astrology or magic. The Gnostics believed salvation came by this special knowledge, not by faith. Gnostics also believed all matter was evil; therefore, God in Christ could never take a human body. Under this idea, Christ was either not divine or not human. All of these ideas were a dangerous untruth. The problems facing Colossae could have been a mix of all of the above. <sup>[1]</sup> What we do know is that these false teachings were undermining the complete and superior authority of Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to make clear that Christ is the Truth.

Today we can use the letter of Colossians to also make clear to us the Truth. Christ is *"before all things, and in him all things hold together"* (Colossians 1:17). If we want to know the Truth, we look to Jesus Christ.

WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU HAVE LEARNED TO RECOGNIZE UNTRUTH? HOW DO YOU GUARD AGAINST UNTRUTH?



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# What You Have To Look Forward to in This Colossians Study Guide

In addition to the background information and daily questions for studying Colossians, we have also included several elements to deepen your study along the way.



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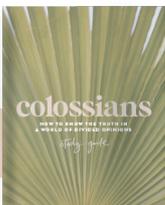
## TRUTH IN ART

Often we think of truth in terms of cold, hard facts. However, our Creator God has infused imagination, innovation and inspiration into this world that we might see the Truth in this way as well. Truth can be found in a song, a painting, a dance, a quilt. We were designed to perceive Truth in artistic forms as well. In this study guide, we look at a few truths through the lens of art.

- ▶ **Hymns of the New Testament:** It turns out one of the first Christian hymns just may be found here in Colossians.
- ▶ We also created artwork inspired by the book of Colossians for you to enjoy, including:
  - “**Rooted**” from Colossians 2:6-7.
  - “**Old Self vs. New Self**” from Colossians 3:1-17.
- ▶ You might even find a couple of places within the daily questions where you can try your hand at a little artistic expression as well.

## PRAYING COLOSSIANS

A powerful “extra” that we have added to this study guide is a daily prayer prompt to guide you through praying the scriptures of Colossians. There is so much benefit in using the Bible to direct our prayers. Turning each verse into a prayer provides us with fresh words and thoughts. We have specifics from the Word to pray over our family, our friends, our communities and ourselves. This also helps us to focus during our time of prayer. (Surely I am not the only one who struggles here!) But perhaps most important to this study, praying the Scripture is praying Truth. We can have complete confidence when we pray Scripture that we are praying in accordance to God’s will and Word. These prayer prompts found at the end of each day will help teach us how to pray the Word of God during our study time.



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## WEEKEND MATCH-UPS

At the end of each week, we'll compare two different concepts. At times, we may think one of these beliefs is a little more important than the other. (For example, should we express more truth or more grace?) Other times, the two ideas might look like completely opposing opinions. Our goal is to take both sides and simply allow the Bible to reveal the truth. You will have an opportunity to write down what you learn and to brainstorm ideas to apply that truth for the week. Our Weekend Match-Ups include:

**Truth vs. Grace**

**Condemnation vs. Conviction**

**Worldly Wisdom vs. Spiritual Wisdom**

**Humility, Meekness, Submission and Servanthood vs. Modern Society**

**My Personal Relationship With Jesus vs. My Relationship With the Church**

## APPLYING THE WORD TODAY

To take our two main ideas for this study (“knowing the Truth” and “divided opinions”) just another step further, we have two additional sections to help us apply the Word to our lives today. These two sections include:

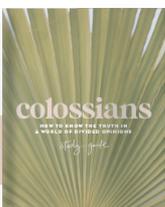
**How To Spot (and Stop) False Teachings**

**The Great Divides**

## IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING

Wrapping up our study guide, you will find 10 verses from Colossians that maybe you have heard somewhere before. Our First 5 team has written a quick study on each verse to take you even deeper into the meaning, context or Greek origins. This is your chance to get into the fun details of Scripture and have an even richer understanding and appreciation of God's Word the next time you hear a verse used.

**WHICH OF THESE CONTENT FEATURES  
ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO?**



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# Colossians 1:1-2

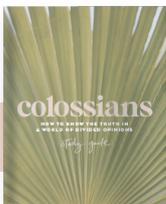
PAUL (AN APOSTLE OF JESUS) AND TIMOTHY  
WROTE TO THE CHURCH OF COLOSSAE.

The letter of Colossians opens with the typical letterhead greeting of the time. The greeting first tells us the sender, followed by the intended receiver. Let's take a look at both.

According to Colossians 1:1, who are the two senders of this letter, and what titles or qualifications follow their names?

The term “apostle” referred to someone the risen Christ called and commissioned. And Paul says this term applied to him “*by the will of God*” (Colossians 1:1). This is important because it gives this letter a different level of authority. During the days of the early Christian Church, as these letters and accounts were being copied, shared and gathered together to eventually form what we know as our New Testament, a letter known to be sent from the Apostle Paul would have been unquestionably added to the canon (which is a fancy word that refers to the exact collection of works that make up our Bibles). Because Paul was an apostle of Jesus, by the will of God, we believe the words he wrote to be inspired by the Holy Spirit and truly the words of God.

Read Peter's words in 2 Peter 3:15-16. Peter compared Paul's letters (and some people's tendency to misunderstand or twist them) to the other \_\_\_\_\_. Meaning Peter believed Paul's letters to be considered what? (Hint: It's the same word.)



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What does 2 Timothy 3:16 say about the origin of Scripture?

In this study, we will talk about how to know the Truth. It is important to know where Truth comes from. It doesn't come from the majority. It doesn't come from "within ourselves." Truth, by definition, needs a standard, a reality.

According to Jesus' prayer in John 17:17, what is Truth?

Next, let's look at the original receiver of this letter.

Colossians 1:2 says it was written to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ located where?

The church of Colossae was filled with a mix of Jewish and gentile converts. Each person came with their own background, their own worldview and their own unique experiences. For the first time in history, these people were working to unite together under Christ. And contending with the church on the outside was the indulgent, superstitious, extravagant worship of whichever Roman deity you chose, as well as the tradition-soaked, law-filled worship of the Jewish community. Talk about a world of divided opinions!

Where do you see divisions in the world today? Do any of these affect you directly?



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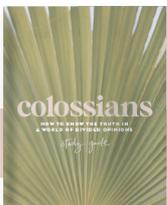
When you think about divided opinions, what words or phrases come to your mind to describe that atmosphere?

I think of words like “conflict” or “judgment.” However, what two words does Paul use in Colossians 1:2 to greet the church and set the tone?

How might these two words make a difference in our world of divided opinions as well?

### **Praying Colossians 1:1-2**

THANK GOD FOR THE GIFT OF HIS WORD AND HIS TRUTH.  
PRAY FOR GRACE AND PEACE OVER YOUR HOME, WORKPLACE,  
CHURCH AND CITY.

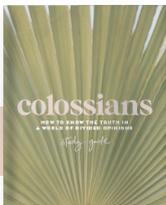


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# Colossians 1:3–5a

INDICATORS OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER ARE FAITH, LOVE AND HOPE.

Today's reading begins with the mention of prayer. Paul prayed for the Christians in Colossae. However, what is interesting is that Paul likely never traveled to Colossae. He did not know this group personally. But this did not stop him from praying for them.

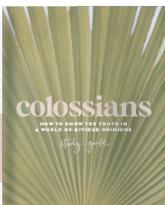
How often in your own prayers do you pray for someone or some group that you do not know personally?

In verses 4-5a, we come across what are sometimes known as the three pillars of “theological virtues.” These are three principles that define the Christian life.

Fill in the words for Colossians 1:4-5a (we will use the ESV translation).

*“...since we heard of your \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ Jesus and of the \_\_\_\_\_ that you have for all the saints, because of the \_\_\_\_\_ laid up for you in heaven.”*

What three words are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:13?



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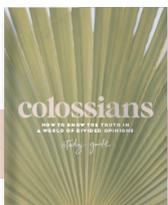
I like Pastor Charles Swindoll's description of these three pillars in his commentary *Living Insights*. He says, "Faith **looks back** to the anchor of salvation — Jesus Christ's person and work. Love **looks around**, building up the body of Christ through selfless service toward one another ... Hope **looks ahead** to the unalterable promise of God the Father, that He will one day usher us into His presence" <sup>[1]</sup> (emphasis added).

Use the space below to draw some kind of representation of faith, love and hope in your life. Do not worry if you are not a great artist. The idea is simply to create a visual that will help you remember this biblical truth.

Why might these three principles be foundational to Christianity?

### Praying Colossians 1:3–5a

TAKE A MOMENT TO PRAY FOR SOMEONE YOU HAVE NEVER PERSONALLY MET. THANK GOD FOR THEM. ALSO PRAY FOR OTHERS IN YOUR LIFE, BY NAME, TO GROW IN THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST, IN THEIR LOVE FOR OTHERS AND IN THEIR HOPE FOR HEAVEN. FINALLY, PRAY THE SAME FOR YOUR OWN HEART.



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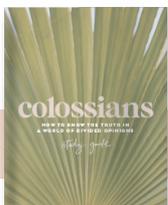
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# Colossians 1:5b–8

THE GOSPEL IS THE WORD OF TRUTH.

Before we begin today, let's take a quick moment to review something we learned on Day 1.

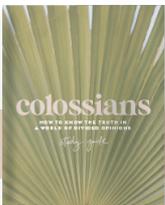
According to Jesus' prayer in John 17:17, what is Truth?

Now fill in the blanks for Colossians 1:5b.

*"Of this you have heard before in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the truth, the \_\_\_\_\_,"*

What does this teach us about truth?

The gospel of Jesus Christ is Truth. Listen to how New Testament scholar N.T. Wright describes it: "[The gospel] is not, primarily, either an invitation or a technique for changing people's lives. It is a command to be obeyed and a power let loose in the world."<sup>[1]</sup> In other words, the gospel of Jesus Christ isn't a suggestion or an opinion. It isn't one of many ideas we might choose from. The gospel of Jesus is the Truth.



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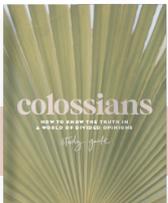
Write down Jesus' words from John 14:6.

We live in a time of divided opinions. The world says you can have “your truth” and I can have “mine.” What does today’s passage teach us about truth?

Often when I think of my spiritual journey, I think of it in terms of how “I came to Christ.” However, Colossians 1:6 uses very different language. It says that the gospel of Christ “*has come to you.*”

Do you also think in terms of you coming to Christ? In what ways have Christ and the gospel come to you?

The gospel of Christ is so much bigger than just us. Verse 6 says it has come to “*the whole world.*” In the times of the Old Testament, the plan of God was tied to the line of Abraham. Now, under Jesus, that plan has been unleashed into all the world. In the whole world, it is “*bearing fruit and increasing*” (Colossians 1:6). The truth of Jesus transcends nationalities, cultural differences and differing worldviews.



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How does seeing the gospel at work throughout the whole world strengthen and confirm your belief in Jesus?

While we have learned that the gospel is Truth and that this Truth comes to us, let's talk for a moment about **how** it comes to us. Romans 10:14c says, "*And how are they to hear without someone preaching?*" God often uses His faithful followers to spread the Truth to others.

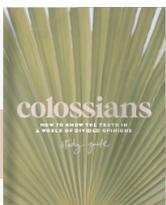
According to Colossians 1:7, who taught the church in Colossae about Christ? What do we learn about him from this verse?

Who was instrumental in your life to teach you the truth of Christ?

### **Praying Colossians 1:5b-8**

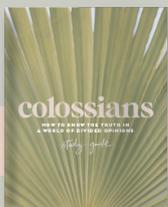
PRAY FOR THE GOSPEL OF TRUTH TO BE UNLEASHED IN THE WHOLE WORLD. PRAY FOR IT TO COME TO SPECIFIC PEOPLE BY NAME. PRAY FOR GOD TO SEND THEM AN EPAPHRAS. PRAY THAT MORE OF US WOULD RISE UP TO BE AN EPAPHRAS FOR SOMEONE ELSE.

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# Applying God's Word Today:

HOW TO SPOT (AND  
STOP) FALSE TEACHING



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One of the problems facing the church in Colossae was the influence of false teachers. There were people teaching additions to the gospel that were not in line with Christ, and Paul made it his mission in this letter to warn against such false information.

Just as it was for the church in Colossae, false information can also be an issue for the Church today. So how do we spot (and stop) false teaching as Christians?

When we come across information, the first thing we should do is assess its believability. Is it consistent with what we know to be true? In the Church, we have the added gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us in Truth. (John 16:13) If we hear a teaching that does not sit right with us, do we dig in to understand why? Are we paying attention to the promptings of the Spirit — those gentle stirrings and nudges that prick our conscience? These warning signals are gifts from the Spirit.

The second step to spotting false teachings is to examine the source. In society, we have what are referred to as primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are the immediate, firsthand accounts. This is pure information. Secondary sources, on the other hand, are one step removed from the information. These sources will (hopefully) access primary sources but will often put their own analysis on the

information. Obviously, the farther away you go from the primary source, the more layers and opinions get added to that information. And like in the “telephone game,” it can sometimes come out on the other side as a totally different message than when it started. So when taking in information, pay attention to the sourcing. In the Church, our primary source is the Bible. It is so important that we read it and know it well. Our secondary sources will be our pastors, teachers and, yes, even this Bible study in your hands. Hopefully, we are all doing our best to stay true to the primary source, but it is up to YOU to check. Check those Bible references. Check that teaching against the Scriptures. Is the information you receive always, always, always lining up with the Word of God?

Now we know how to spot it, so how do we stop false teachings from spreading?

Number one: Let’s not take information at face value. We need to stop, to think, to pray, to research. Pay attention to the nudging of the Spirit, ask good questions and check everything against our primary source, the Bible.

Number Two: Let’s not repeat/share/repost/reteach any information until we have done so. Let’s be known for sharing only the Truth.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE “SECONDARY SOURCES” FOR SPIRITUAL INFORMATION? DO YOU STOP TO CHECK THEM AGAINST THE PRIMARY SOURCE (THE BIBLE)? WHY OR WHY NOT?



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