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Experiencing Christ in Colossians

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Week 5 | Colossians 2:16–3:4

## Memory Verse for the week:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. (Colossians 3:1–2)

# Day 1

## Read

### Colossians 2:16–17 (NIV)

16Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

## Study

* The conjunction “therefore” is used to indicate cause and effect. So, whenever you come upon the word “therefore,” you’ll want to ask what the “therefore” is there for. Since we took a break from Colossians last week, take the time to go back and see how Paul has arrived at the conclusion he expresses in verse 16. Review [Colossians 2:13–15](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Col2.13). Why should the Colossian Christians reject the judgment of those who condemn them for not following Jewish food laws and calendar observances?
* Look up [Romans 10:2–4](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Ro10.2-4) and [Galatians 3:24­–25](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Ga3.24). What is the relationship between Christ and the Law of Moses?

## Think about

The substance of our Christian life is Jesus, not our personal religious accomplishments. All our spiritual practices, from reading the Bible to attending church services to serving those in need, flow from our relationship of Christ as our supreme, sufficient Savior and Lord. They don’t create that relationship. We don’t do those things to earn Christ’s love and mercy, because we already have them. We don’t need to impress others with our religious devotion, because our identity is in Christ. We don’t work for admittance into the family of God because our faith in Christ granted us entry.

Yet, the more we know Christ and his love, the more we will live for him. We’ll want to know him more and more. Is that true of you today? If not, what do you think is getting in your way experiencing the reality of Christ? (v 17)

## Pray

Generation after generation didn’t know. They were given glimpses of God’s plan through the rituals, laws, and customs found in the law of Moses. Now Christ has come, and we know the reality. Praise God for all that he has done for you in Christ. Ask the Spirit to direct your worship. Sit in silence before the Lord, turn on praise music and sing to him, or take a walk outside and thank him for the beauty you see.

## Talk about

*Have a meaningful conversation about this passage with one of your CF Encouragers, your small group, or join us virtually in the Faithlife Community. (Search groups for Engage God Daily. For full instructions,* [*click here*](https://cfhome-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/lscheffler_cfhome_org/EYNh8cUxJRxClFV-Wt6QNe0BtkK34MHJDqeHamAwxlGmbQ?e=RL3RSh)*.)*

* As Christians, how do we judge each other based on the spiritual practices we do or do not follow? Discuss how you differentiate between encouraging others to follow Christ and judging them for not following him the same way you do.

# Day 2

## Read

### Colossians 2:18–19 (NIV)

18Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. 19They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

## Study

* In his commentary, Douglas Moo gives us a helpful summary of verse 17: “We find Paul to be asserting four things about the false teachers: (1) they put a great deal of stock in ascetic practices [such as fasting], perhaps to induce visions; (2) they are so concerned with calling on angels as a means of protection from evil forces that they are virtually worshiping them; (3) they focus on visions they have experienced, perhaps citing the content of those visions in their teaching; and (4) they display, perhaps because of their boasting about visions, an arrogance that reveals a worldly orientation.”[[1]](#footnote-2) How does this summary help you understand what was going on in Colossae?
* Bible Dictionaries contain articles about certain topics found in the Bible. Through Biblia.com, you have access to the *Faithlife Bible Dictionary*. If you’d like to know more about asceticism, [click here](https://biblia.com/books/lbd/word/asceticism).

## Think about

The false teachers had gotten so far off track that they had lost connection with “the head.” Paul reminded the Colossian Christians that Christ is the head in [1:18](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Col1.18), and now he is insisting that only Jesus can nourish and grow his body, the church. The false teachers of Colossae had taken practices from Scripture (fasting, praying, seeking communion with God), but misinterpreted and misapplied them. In their arrogance, they led people away from Christ.

The same thing happens today. We live in the information age where it’s never been easier to hear all kinds of ideas from all kinds of Christians. A big red-flag that we should look for is the extent to which a “Christian” teaching is human-centered or Christ-centered. For example, does it come from people who are Christ-promoting or self-promoting? Are the practices they teach meant to know and worship Christ or puff up those who follow a “special” path to “greater” spirituality? Based on the content of the teaching, is the goal to build up Christ’s body or exalt the teacher and his or her ministry?

## Pray

Pray for Christ Fellowship, that as a body, we would be well connected to Jesus Christ, our head and that we would grow as God causes us to grow.

## Talk about

*Have a meaningful conversation about this passage with one of your CF Encouragers, your small group, or join us virtually in Faithlife Community. (Search groups for Engage God Daily. For full instructions,* [*click here*](https://cfhome-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/lscheffler_cfhome_org/EYNh8cUxJRxClFV-Wt6QNe0BtkK34MHJDqeHamAwxlGmbQ?e=RL3RSh)*.)*

What red flags do you look for when evaluating sermons, Bible studies, and/or Christian videos and podcasts? Share with one another how you discern whether an idea, teaching, or method is helpful for your spiritual growth.

# Day 3

## Read

### Colossians 2:20–23 (NIV)

20Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: 21“Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? 22These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. 23Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

## Study

* Do a close reading of this passage. These verses help us clarify the motives of the false teachers. What were they trying to accomplish? Which verse tells you this?
* Now go back and look at all the descriptions Paul gives us of this false teaching: [Col. 2:8](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Col2.8), [Col. 2:16­–23](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Col2.16). In your own words, how would you describe the false teaching that Paul was combatting in Colossians?

## Think about

There are two extremes when it comes to our desires — indulge them fully or try to restrain them completely. You may know people who have swung closer to one of end of the continuum or the other. There are those abuse food, sex, alcohol, and/or entertainment and suffer the consequences that come from misusing God’s good gifts. Then there are those who, for fear of falling down the slippery slope into debauchery, won’t even consider sleeping in on a Saturday morning or eating a slice of chocolate cake.

Because of Jesus we can do more than avoid the extremes — we can live above the continuum. We don’t belong to this world but live according to a new reality. In Christ we don’t have to be slaves to our desires nor punishers of our flesh. We can live freely and lightly because we have been raised with Christ and with him are victorious over the forces that would oppress us, including our own desires. We can learn to live a life worthy of the Lord where we enjoy God’s good gifts in the ways he intends.

## Pray

Remind yourself what is already true of you “in Christ.” As believers, we are so completely identified with Christ that his life has reshaped ours. Remember Colossians 2:6–7: “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” Make this your prayer today.

## Talk about

Discuss where in our culture you see the two extremes — indulging all desire or restraining it completely. What are the consequences to either approach? How is “living our lives in Christ, rooted and built up in him” the best way to live?

# Day 4

## Read

### Colossians 3:1–2 (NIV)

**1**Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

## Study

* In the ancient world, to sit at a ruler’s right hand was to be given honor and authority. Read the following verses and see what you learn about being at God’s right hand: [Psalms 20:6](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Ps20.6), [Psalms 110:1](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Ps110.1). Christ rules at the right hand of the father: [Ephesians 1:20](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Eph1.20), [Hebrews 1:3](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Heb1.3), [1 Peter 3:22](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/1Pe3.22). He is also there interceding for us [Romans 8:34](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Ro8.34), [Hebrews 7:25](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Heb7.25).
* What does it mean for you that Christ is right now both ruling and interceding?

## Think about

Paul invites the believers in Colossians to embrace their new life in Christ by “setting their hearts on things above where Christ is” (3:1). Commentator Scot McKnight clarifies that this does not mean Christians are to ignore this present world, but they are to live in this world “on the basis of the rule of Christ over all other powers” [[2]](#footnote-3)

The false teachers are focused on earthly things and their attention is on the “elemental spiritual forces of this world” (2:20). They have drawn the Colossians’ focus there as well. Paul wants them to lift their eyes and set their minds on Christ — bodily resurrected, fully victorious, and given all authority in heaven and earth. He is our true Lord, and it’s him we worship and serve above all else.

## Pray

On what is your heart currently set? In biblical terms, this doesn’t just mean your affection or emotion, but your will. Who or what gets your primary allegiance? What would it mean for you to fully set your mind on things above? Pray over your answers.

## Talk about

Discuss some of the practical implications for [Colossians 3:1–2](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Col3.1). How does someone live who has a heart, will, and mind that is set on Christ and his rule, rather than on earthly things? What would be important to them? What would their priorities look like? Where would they invest their time and money? How would they treat others?

# Day 5

## Read

### Colossians 3:3–4 (NIV)

3For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

## Study

* Here Paul once again connects Christ’s death with the believer. According to McKnight, “Co-crucifixion in Pauline theology is nothing less than participation in the crucifixion of Jesus and all that it accomplishes—namely, forgiveness of sins and the defeat of death, the flesh (2:11), and the powers (2:13–15). It is rather clear in all of Paul’s letters that what is said theologically—they died, they were raised with Christ—is both true and something to be realized over time[[3]](#footnote-4)
* Read the Faithlife Bible [notes](https://biblia.com/books/fsb/Col3.4) for Colossians 3:4. What do you learn?

## Think about

N.T. Wright sums up [Colossians 3:1-4](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Col3.1) this way:

“You died with the Messiah; so you don’t belong in the old world any more…Once you realize that, there appears before you the new way towards a genuine, fulfilling holiness. ‘If you were raised to life with the king, search for the things that are above!’ Learn to think about the things that are above, not the things that belong to the present world of change and decay. In fact, learning to *think*, rather than merely going with the flow of the world on the one hand, or blindly obeying what look like stringent regulations on the other, is part of the key to it all.

One aspect of Christian maturity, and certainly one of the road signs on the surprising route to Christian holiness, is that the mind must grasp the truth: ‘you died, and your life has been hidden with the king, in God!’ Once the mind has grasped it, the heart and will may start to come on board. And once that happens the way lies open to joyful Christian holiness. Don’t settle for short cuts.”[[4]](#footnote-5)

## Pray

Rejoice in prayer over the amazing truths we are uncovering in Colossians. Skim back through [our reading this week](https://biblia.com/books/niv2011/Col2.16), and praise God for all that he has done through Christ.

## Talk about

* Share what the Spirit is teaching you through Colossians. Discuss how you are applying it to your lives and pray for one another to continue to grow in the knowledge of Christ!

1. Douglas J. Moo*,* [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Col2.18&off=9087&ctx=n+in+their+visions.%0a~To+summarize+this+di)*,* The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Scot McKnight, [*The Letter to the Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nicnt72colmcknight?ref=Bible.Col3.2&off=1350&ctx=l+2:16%2c+18%2c+21).318+~They+are+%E2%80%9Cearthly%E2%80%9D+n), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Scot McKnight, [*The Letter to the Colossians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nicnt72colmcknight?ref=Bible.Col3.3&off=319&ctx=but+that+they+died.+~Co-crucifixion+in+Pa), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Tom Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Prison Letters: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)