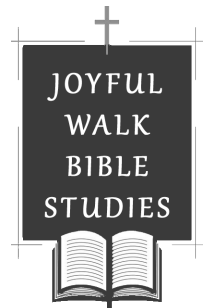


Healthy Living

A Study of Colossians & Philemon

*Dwelling in truth you can know leads
to healthy living!*

MELANIE NEWTON



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Using This Study Guide

This study guide consists of 11 lessons covering Paul's letters to the Colossians and Philemon. Most of the lessons are short. However, if you cannot do the entire lesson one week, please read the Bible passage covered by the lesson and try to do the first page of the lesson.

THE BASIC STUDY

Each lesson includes core questions covering the passage narrative. These core questions will take you through the process of inductive Bible study—observation, interpretation, and application. The process is more easily understood in the context of answering these questions:

- What does the passage say? (*Observation: what's actually there*)
- What does it mean? (*Interpretation: the author's intended meaning*)
- How does this apply to me today? (*Application: making it personal*) Questions identified as **“Staying Healthy”** lead you to introspection and application of a specific truth to your life.

STUDY ENHANCEMENTS

Deeper Discoveries (optional): Embedded within the sections are *optional* questions for further research of subjects we don't have time to cover adequately in the lessons or contain information that may enhance the basic study. If you are meeting with a small group, your leader may give you the opportunity to share your "discoveries."

Study Aids: To aid in proper interpretation and application of the study, additional study aids are located where appropriate in the lesson:

- Historical Insights
- Scriptural Insight
- From the Greek (definitions of Greek words)
- Focus on the Meaning
- Think About It (thoughtful reflection)

Other useful study tools: Use online tools or apps (blueletterbible.org or “Blue Letter Bible app” is especially helpful) to find *cross references* (verses with similar content to what you are studying) and meanings of the *original Greek words or phrases* used (usually called “interlinear”). You can also look at any verse in *various Bible translations* to help with understanding what it is saying. Feel free to add your own study at the end of each lesson.

PODCASTS

Find podcasts coordinating with these lessons at melaniemnewton.com/podcasts. Follow along with the “Podcast Listener Guides” for each lesson.

NEW TESTAMENT SUMMARY

The New Testament opens with the births of Jesus and John (known as “the baptist”). About 30 years later, John challenged the Jews to indicate their repentance (turning from sin and toward God) by submitting to water baptism—a familiar Old Testament practice used for repentance as well as when a Gentile converted to Judaism (to be washed clean of idolatry).

Jesus Christ, God's incarnate Son, publicly showed the world what God is like and taught His perfect ways for 3 – 3½ years. After preparing 12 disciples to continue Christ's earthly work, He died voluntarily on a cross for mankind's sin, rose from the dead, and returned to heaven. The account of His earthly life is recorded in 4 books known as the Gospels (the biblical books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John named after the compiler of each account).

After Jesus' return to heaven, the followers of Christ were then empowered by the Holy Spirit and spread God's salvation message among the Jews, a number of whom believed in Christ. The apostle Paul and others traveling with him carried the good news to the Gentiles during 3 missionary journeys (much of this recorded in the book of Acts). Paul wrote 13 New Testament letters to churches & individuals (Romans through Philemon). The section in our Bible from Hebrews to Jude contains 8 additional letters penned by five men, including two apostles (Peter and John) and two of Jesus' half-brothers (James and Jude). The author of Hebrews is unknown. The apostle John also recorded Revelation, which summarizes God's final program for the world. The Bible ends as it began—with a new, sinless creation.

TRUTH—THE PRESCRIPTION FOR HEALTHY LIVING

Heresy (an opinion or belief that contradicts established religious TRUTH) is an infection in the Body of Christ. It's not just error; it is anti-truth! And like an infection in the human body, it always affects life so it must be addressed. Thankfully, the answer to all heresy is TRUTH! Knowing truth gives us a spiritual immune system that fights and prevents infection. Truth is the prescription for healthy living. The prescription for healthy living has three parts: 1) Dwell in truth you can know, 2) Humbly accept the "I don't know or understand," and 3) Discern teaching through the complete revelation of God's Word. We will see how that works throughout this study of Colossians and Philemon. *Enjoy healthy living!*

DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDELINES

1. **Attend consistently** whether your lesson is done or not. You'll learn from the other women, and they want to get to know you.
2. **Set aside time** to work through the study questions. The goal of Bible study is to **get to know** Jesus. He will change your life.
3. **Share your insights** from your personal study time. As you spend time in the Bible, Jesus will teach you truth through His Spirit inside you.
4. **Respect each other's insights.** Listen thoughtfully. Encourage each other as you interact. Refrain from dominating the discussion if you have a tendency to be talkative. ☺
5. **Celebrate our unity** in Christ. Avoid bringing up controversial subjects such as politics, divisive issues, and denominational differences.
6. **Maintain confidentiality.** Remember that anything shared during the group time is not to leave the **group** (unless permission is granted by the one sharing).
7. **Pray for one another** as sisters in Christ.
8. **Get to know the women** in your group. Please do not use your small group members for solicitation purposes for home businesses, though.

Enjoy your Joyful Walk Bible Study!

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "Truth Is the Prescription for Healthy Living" at melanienewton.com/podcasts as an introduction to the whole study.

Truth Is the Prescription for Healthy Living

Just as physical bodies are attacked by germs that make us sick, we are attacked by spiritual infections that leave us weak and dissatisfied. The only way to fight or avoid infection is to be satisfied by the truth of God we have in Jesus Christ. That gives us a strong immune system to fight and prevent spiritual infections.

WHAT IS A SPIRITUAL INFECTION?

- A spiritual infection=any opinion or belief that contradicts established biblical truth.
- The prescription for healthy living has three parts: 1) dwell in the truth of God you can know, 2) humbly accept what you don't know or understand, and 3) discern any teaching that you read or hear through the complete revelation of God's Word.

PRESCRIPTION PART 1: DWELL IN TRUTH YOU CAN KNOW.

- To dwell in truth is to make your home there. That means God's truth dominates your thoughts and attitudes, governs your life, and satisfies your heart.
- God gives us plenty of truth in the Bible that we can know and trust.
- God wants us to know the truth He has revealed to us, to make our home in that truth.
Ephesians 1:17-19

PRESCRIPTION PART 2: HUMBLY ACCEPT WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW OR UNDERSTAND.

- Some things we read in the Bible we don't understand now but might in the future.

"The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." (Deuteronomy 29:29)

- There is so much we can know now. But, there are things we'll never know or understand.
- We must make the choice to humbly accept what we don't know or understand. And, be satisfied with it.

PRESCRIPTION PART 3: DISCERN TEACHING THROUGH THE COMPLETE REVELATION OF GOD’S WORD.

Evaluate what you read and hear by comparing it with the whole Bible.

- Read any verse in the context of the passage where it is found—the paragraph, the chapter, and the book.
- Examine the original words to see what the writer meant and what the audience likely understood.
- Look at other verses with similar content to let the Bible interpret itself. And, you should always ask the Holy Spirit for understanding.

Avoid the “look-imagine-see” dragon when viewing any verse.

The “look-imagine-see” dragon shows up this way: someone *looks* at a verse or passage, *imagines* what they want it to say, then in their mind *sees* what they have imagined through twisting word meanings and interpretations. Once it starts, it’s like a fiery dragon burning truth in its path. Cultural influence on Bible study feeds this dragon.

- Tame the “look-imagine-see dragon” by considering the Bible as sufficient on its own, not needing to be “improved.”
- Tame the “look-imagine-see dragon” by basing your faith on what **is** in God’s Word, not something you’ve just heard about it and not something you’re imagining to be there.
- Tame the “look-imagine-see dragon” by following the inductive process for Bible Study—observation, interpretation, and application. Then, you can dwell in truth you can know.

Think About It: We’ll never know all there is to know about God. There will always be some mystery about Him. But, there’s plenty enough revealed in the Bible to satisfy your desire to **know him truthfully** and to know how to live your life in Christ truthfully.

Infection is bad. Untreated infection can be deadly. Knowing the truth of God that you have in Jesus Christ gives you an immune system that fights and prevents spiritual infection.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart needs with His truth and His love so you can get well and stay well.

1: The Gospel Received

Colossians 1:1-8

DAY ONE STUDY

The ABCs of Colossians

AUTHOR

Paul identifies himself as the author of this letter written to the church at Colosse. Paul, whose Hebrew name was Saul, was born in Tarsus, a major Roman city on the coast of southeast Asia Minor. Tarsus was the center for the tent making industry; Paul was trained in that craft as his occupation (his primary paying profession). As a Jewish Pharisee from the tribe of Benjamin, Paul was trained at the feet of Gamaliel, a well-respected rabbi of the day. Saul was an ardent persecutor of the early church until his life changing conversion to Christianity.

After believing in Jesus Christ as his Savior, Paul was called by God to take the gospel to the Gentiles. This was an amazing about-face for a committed Pharisee like Paul who ordinarily would have nothing to do with Gentiles. Paul wrote 13 letters that are included in the New Testament. Tradition has it that Paul was beheaded shortly after he wrote 2nd Timothy in 67 AD.

BACKGROUND

The country village of Colosse lay in the beautiful Lycus Valley about 100 miles east of Ephesus in modern Turkey. It was 1 of 3 ancient towns (Colosse, Hierapolis, and Laodicea) situated close to each other along a major trade route between the big city of Ephesus to the west and the Euphrates River to the east. What each city did affected the others. The population of Colosse was mostly Gentile of Greek descent. But, a large Jewish group had been relocated there from Mesopotamia by Antiochus in the second century BC, bringing with them eastern influences. Because of being near a major trade route, the town was influenced by ideas and practices from both the east (Mesopotamia) and the west (Rome). So, the mindset was mainly Greek with influx of new ideas from the East and other parts of the Roman Empire. Over time, the road system changed, and Colosse lost its importance. Laodicea became the greater city. In the 7th-8th centuries, the people moved to a fortress south of the city and in the 12th century, the Turks destroyed Colosse. Today, Colosse is composed of uninhabited ruins. Motorist guides to Turkey point out Laodicea's ruins but do not even mention Colosse.

On his third missionary journey, Paul spent 3 years in Ephesus (~54-57 A.D), a large city of 250,000 people. While there, Paul held classes every day for anyone wanting to learn about Jesus Christ, having their sins forgiven, and gaining a new way to live. The gospel spread throughout that part of Asia Minor. One of Paul's students named Epaphras traveled 100 miles east back to his hometown of Colosse to bring the gospel to the people living there. A few Jews believed the message about Jesus, but it was mostly the Greeks and Romans who listened and trusted in Jesus to take away their sins. They started worshiping God together as a church. Epaphras also started churches in Hierapolis and Laodicea. The churches grew larger. Then, false teaching began to infiltrate them.

While Paul was imprisoned in Rome for 2 years, Epaphras headed to Rome to discuss with Paul what was happening back home. The church was now about 5 years old. Paul had never met the Colossians, but he loved these young Christians very much. The heresy (an opinion or belief that contradicts established religious truth) that Paul discovered in Colosse was like an infection in the

Body of Christ there. False teachers taught that Jesus was not *the* Lord, just a lord. They were teaching that faith in Jesus was not enough for them to be spiritual. They needed to add other “experiences” to the mix. To contradict this infection, we find in Colossians the greatest declaration of Christ’s deity and sufficiency found in Scripture.

Focus on the Meaning: I love this truthful phrase regarding Jesus Christ and our salvation through Him that was so aptly worded by a dear Bible teacher in the 1980’s (Vickie Kraft). *“Jesus Christ is above all powers and authorities, in all believers, and is all we need for earth and heaven!”* ‘Nuff said. We are going to hang onto that truth!

CONTEXT

From his prison confinement, Paul wrote a general letter to pass around to the whole region of Asia Minor (the letter to the Ephesians) as well as a letter specifically to the churches in the Colossian area (the letter we know as Colossians). He wrote a third letter, a personal one, to a rich landowner named Philemon about his runaway slave Onesimus. These three letters plus the one to the Philippians are called the “Prison Epistles” since Paul wrote them while he was imprisoned in Rome. Paul’s co-worker Tychicus delivered the letters to Ephesus and Colosse. Onesimus delivered the personal letter to his master, Philemon.

Colossians is found in the New Testament with Ephesians and Philippians, the other two letters written about the same time during Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome. Philemon, though written at the same time as Colossians, is the shortest and so is located at the end of the letters from Paul. As you will discover, small doesn’t mean less important.

1. What grabbed your attention from the ABCs above?

GET THE BIG PICTURE

Ask the Lord Jesus to teach you through His Word.

What does the Bible say? (This is the “Observation” step in the process of Bible Study.)

Where do we begin? Have you ever heard the saying, “You can’t see the forest for the trees?” The best way to study any book of the Bible is to begin with the “forest” (survey the whole) and then proceed to the “trees” (the individual parts). We will start by getting an overview of what Paul wrote in his letter to the Colossians. Today’s study will be longer than usual. For your convenience, a copy of the letter is included in this study guide before Lesson One. Read Colossians as it was intended—a letter from one dear friend to another. Read it at one sitting. Ready? Go!

2. What grabbed your attention from this first reading of Paul's letter?

3. Skim over the letter again. Using the letter printed in this study guide before Lesson One:
- Mark anything that refers to being "in Christ" (also in Him, by Him, through Him, with Him, in the Lord).

How many times does Paul emphasize this relationship? _____

- Paul, the master communicator, often uses the enemy's very own words to refute bad teaching. Mark "fullness," "complete," "mystery," "knowledge," and "wisdom" (plus any variations on these words).

How many times does he use these terms? _____

4. Now, compared to your reading the first time, what grabs your attention about the overall emphasis of Paul's letter to the Colossians?

Respond to the Lord about what He's shown you today.

DAY TWO STUDY

Read Colossians 1:1-8. Ask the Lord Jesus to teach you through His Word.

What does the Bible say? (This is the "Observation" step in the process of Bible Study.)

5. As you read any of Paul's letters, be sure to pay attention to the introductions. What important information does Paul include in the first two verses of his letter to the Colossians?

From the Greek: Whereas older translations used the all-inclusive word "brothers" in verse 2, the Greek word (*adelphoi*) refers here to believers, both men and women, as part of God's family. The NIV translators have chosen "brothers and sisters" to use here for clarity. You will also see this in Colossians 4:15.

6. Look at the first 3-4 verses of Paul's other letters (start with Romans then go through Philemon.) In how many of them does He refer to Jesus as "Lord Jesus Christ?" Note: "Lord" (Gr. *kyrios*) means "master, sovereign." Does Paul consistently teach the same thing about Jesus to all the churches or just to the Colossians?

What does it mean? (This is the "Interpretation" step in the process of Bible Study.)

7. Looking at vv. 3-8:

- What did Paul say about their faith, love and hope (vv. 3-5a)?

- What else about this church made Paul excited and thankful (vv. 5b-8)?

Scriptural Insight: The Holy Spirit had created love for Paul in the Colossians. This is the only reference to the Holy Spirit in this epistle. In Colossians Paul ascribed the activities of God that he normally associated with the Holy Spirit to Christ. He probably did this to glorify Jesus Christ before the Colossians who were being taught that Christ was less than He is. (*Constable's Notes on Colossians*, p. 12)

8. **Deeper Discoveries (optional):** We tend to gloss over the triad—faith, hope, and love—because we have heard the words so often. But they are the marks of real spiritual life. Look up these passages and discover how the 3 words (faith, hope and love) are related to one another and are manifested in a believer's life—Romans 5:2-5; Galatians 5:5-6; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, 5:8; Hebrews 10:22-24 and 1 Peter 1:3-5, 22. Summarize what you learn.
9. Since Paul had not met these people, how do we know the Colossians had received the complete gospel from Epaphras?

10. Using the following verses, what is the gospel?

- Acts 2:22-24 —

- Acts 16:30-31 —

- 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 —

Summary:

11. What is the significance of Paul stressing that the gospel they received had been bearing fruit everywhere?

Think About It: Heresies (such as the one at Colosse) are local and harmful; but truth is universal and helpful. One of the unmistakable characteristics of the true gospel is God's grace in all its truth. Some preach a "different gospel—which is really no gospel at all" (Gal. 1:6-7). This is because it is a gospel of grace plus works, or faith plus works. But the true gospel is one of grace alone (Rom. 11:6; Eph. 2:8-9; Titus 3:5-7). (*The Bible Knowledge Commentary New Testament*, p. 670)

What application will you make to stay healthy? (*This is the "Application" step in the process of Bible Study, designated by the phrase "Staying healthy" throughout the rest of this study.*)

12. **Staying healthy:** When did you hear the gospel and trust its message? Did what you receive match what Paul and Epaphras preached?

Respond to the Lord about what He's shown you today.

DAY THREE STUDY: TRUTH—THE PRESCRIPTION FOR HEALTHY LIVING

Heresy (an opinion or belief that contradicts established religious TRUTH) is an infection in the Body of Christ. Heresy is not just error; it's anti-truth! And like an infection in the human body, heresy always affects one's spiritual health (as well as emotional, mental, and sometimes physical health). So, heresy must be addressed. It cannot be ignored. Thankfully, the answer to all heresy is TRUTH! Knowing truth gives us a spiritual immune system that fights and prevents infection. That is the prescription for healthy living. Here's how it works:

Dwell in Truth You Can Know

To "dwell" means to make your home in. It's what dominates your thoughts and attitudes, governs your life, has the most influence on you. God gives us plenty of truth in the Scriptures that we can know and trust. There are 66 books of revelation given. 1189 chapters. If we just took 1 chapter per day and wrote down all the truths about God and our relationship with Him that is revealed to us, it would take us more than 3 years to get through the whole Bible! God wants us to know the truth He has revealed. He wants us to make our home — to dwell — in that truth. It is for our own good!

13. Read Ephesians 1:17-19. List all the truths Paul said we could know about our God.

14. Now, read Colossians 1:1-8. List the truths about God and His relationship to us that we can KNOW.

Look at all that God says we can KNOW! Each passage we read or study has plenty of truth that we can KNOW with certainty and allow to govern our lives. DWELL in truth you can know.

Humbly Accept the "I Don't Know or Understand"

In the midst of all 1189 chapters in the Bible are verses we just don't understand. Perhaps you don't understand it now but will in the future as you get more confident in Bible study and hear great teaching that helps you understand. But, there are things we will never know or understand.

15. Read Deuteronomy 29:29. What does it declare?

Notice the emphasis on the things revealed — we can KNOW them. But, there are “secret things” the Lord has not revealed yet. As we study the Bible, we can do our best to try to understand what is written—examining the original words to see what the writer meant and what the audience understood, looking at cross-references to let the Bible interpret itself, and ask the Spirit for understanding. But, you may never understand something you read. Don’t let that unnerve you.

16. Make note of anything in Colossians 1:1-8 that you do not understand at this time.

DWELL in truth you can know (the list you made in Question 14). And, HUMBLY ACCEPT the “I don’t know or understand.”

Discern Teaching through the Complete Revelation of God’s Word

To dwell in the truth of God’s Word, we must **discern what we read and hear** by comparing it with the complete revelation of God’s Word. We can’t extract pieces of it and build our foundation on that. Nor should we build our faith on experiences and feelings. There’s junk out there about God so it’s important to really get to know the God of the Bible.

Avoid the “look-imagine-see” way of looking at any verse, which leads to error. What do I mean by “look-imagine-see?” Someone *looks* at a verse or passage, *imagines* what they want it to say, and then “sees” in their mind what they have imagined through twisting word meanings and interpretations.

Cultural influence on Bible study feeds this “look-imagine-see” process. You look at the passage, imagine a way for it to fit a particular cultural slant, then you see what you want to see. Many types of false teaching through the years have started with this kind of “look-imagine-see” process. Avoid doing that by following the inductive process of Bible Study: observation (what the text says), interpretation (what was the author’s intended meaning—to him and to his audience that would read or hear it), and application (how to live this out in your life). That is the best way to study the Bible. Look at what’s there. Learn what it means and teaches you. Then, live it out in your life.

You want to make sure you are basing your faith on what is in God’s Word, not something you have heard before and not something you are imagining to be there. So, avoid that “look-imagine-see” way of looking at the Bible.

We will never know all there is to know about God. There’ll always be some mystery about Him. But, there’s plenty enough revealed in the Bible that we can KNOW HIM TRUTHFULLY and know how to live our life in Christ truthfully. The Holy Spirit uses the Scripture we read and study to teach us about our God so we can know TRUTH and DWELL in that truth.

17. Every week, I will ask you to evaluate something you have read or heard in light of the TRUTH you are learning—books, social media, billboards—things that sound nice and comfy but may actually lead to or be based upon error in biblical thinking. I may even throw one into the lesson for you to evaluate and discern truth or error. Does anything come to mind that fits with today's lesson? Use specific verses to discern truth from error in any saying or teaching.

Respond to the Lord about what He's shown you today.

Recommended: Listen to the podcast "[Escape the Cultural Captivity Infection](#)" after doing this lesson to reinforce what you have learned. Use the listener guide on the next page.

Escape the Cultural Captivity Infection

In the last podcast, I told you that any opinion or belief that contradicts established biblical truth can cause an infection in a Christian's heart and mind. It's usually not just error, but anti-truth. Such a spiritual infection always affects life so it must be addressed. A spiritual infection is usually fed by looking to the wrong places to get your heart needs satisfied. The results are disappointment, fear, resentment, and many other negative thoughts and behaviors.

Thankfully, the answer to all spiritual infections is the truth that has been given to us in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. Knowing truth gives us a spiritual immune system that fights and prevents infection in our hearts and minds. Truth is the prescription for healthy living.

The first step, though, is recognizing the infection.

DR. PAUL DIAGNOSED INFECTION IN COLOSSE.

Paul knew that the Colossians had received the complete gospel from Epaphras. They got God's grace in all its truth. And it was powerful enough to meet their every spiritual need. So, what happened?

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

WHAT IS THE CULTURAL CAPTIVITY INFECTION?

You've seen enough movies to be able to picture in your mind what it would look like to be taken captive. Some of you've been in bondage to something that has taken you captive. You understand that.

- Paul said hollow and deceptive philosophy had taken them captive.
- Human philosophies that do not worship Christ are under the influence of Satan and his demons.
- Before Christ, we were subject to those "spiritual forces." Through union with Christ, we die to them and are no longer bound to obey them.
- When considering anyone's philosophy, the qualifying test is this: Where does Jesus fit into their thinking and philosophy—as a way to know God or *the* way to know God?

WHAT MAKES US SUSCEPTIBLE TO THIS CULTURAL CAPTIVITY INFECTION?

“Cultural captivity looks to the culture rather than to Christ and the Bible as truth and a primary guide for living. Cultural captivity is usually caused by 3 things: Putting our trust in something other than the person or promises of Christ. Misunderstanding the truths by which Christ has called us to live. Or, a combination of both.” (Probe Ministries, probe.org)

The Colossian church had been infected with philosophy from their culture. There were three main symptoms of this infection:

- Symptom #1: Dethroning Jesus Christ.
- Symptom #2: Emphasizing works.
- Symptom #3: Elevating experiences.

TRUTH IS THE PRESCRIPTION FOR CULTURAL CAPTIVITY

In Colossians, Paul writes the strongest statement of the supremacy and deity of Christ found anywhere in the New Testament. The Greek words he used are specific for this infection, just like a doctor's prescription to treat a specific disease. There was no way those reading or listening to this letter could possibly misunderstand anything that Paul was telling them. The truth about Jesus would satisfy their heart needs. They wouldn't need to look anywhere else.

As you study Colossians, you may discover that you have a concept about Jesus Christ, salvation, or the Christian life that is based on man-made tradition or philosophy instead of on Scripture. Do you have the Cultural Captivity infection regarding who Jesus Christ is? For healthy living, you will need to recognize that infection and give it up to accept the truth about Christ presented in God's Word.

Infection is bad. Untreated infection can be deadly. Knowing the truth of God that you have in Jesus Christ gives you an immune system that fights and prevents spiritual infection.

Let Jesus satisfy your heart needs with His truth and His love so you can get well and stay well.