

Colossians

IGNATIUS CATHOLIC STUDY BIBLE QUESTIONS

Welcome

“You are approaching the ‘word of God’. But for thousands of years, ... the Word of God has been approaching you.”

The following guide is provided to enhance your reading of the Letter of Saint Paul to the Colossians using the *Ignatius Catholic Study Bible*. If you are new to this resource or to reading the Bible, we recommend you read the general Introduction before you begin. It explains what it means that Scripture is the Word of God as well as how we understand and interpret it as Catholics. It also introduces the special features of the Study Bible and tells how they can enrich your reading and study. Additionally, the *Introduction to Paul and His Letters* will provide valuable context for your reading.

A simple rhythm of prayer followed by reading and reflection is offered below to guide you through the book one chapter at a time. Questions draw attention to key footnotes and word studies to lead you into a deeper understanding of what you read and then prompt you to consider how to apply what you have learned. For a deeper dive, take advantage of additional features as you go: not just the other footnotes but also cross-references to Scripture and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)* that are provided above the footnotes as well as any maps, charts, or essays that are not touched on in the questions.

Don't miss these helpful icons as you read! They highlight footnotes that pertain to the Church's criteria for interpreting Scripture (see CCC 112–14):



Be attentive to the content and unity of Scripture

Notes marked with a Bible icon connect Old Testament passages and New Testament mysteries, fostering appreciation for God's unified plan.



Read Scripture in light of the Church's living tradition

This icon marks notes drawn from the Holy Spirit's guidance of Church teaching and the spiritual senses of scripture. Here you'll find official teaching as well as interpretations from Fathers, Doctors, and saints of the Church.



Be attentive to the “analogy of faith”

Explore notes marked with an icon of keys to learn how the mysteries of faith, revealed in Scripture and defined by the Church, clarify and connect with one another in a unified, coherent way.

May God bless you as you read his word!

of God,* did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷but emptied himself,[†] taking the form of a servant,[‡] being born in the likeness of men.[§] And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.[¶] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,^{||}that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,^{|||}and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Shinin
12 Therefore, obeyed, so now much more in salvation with f work in you, bo pleasure.
14 Do all thi tioning,¹⁵that y children of God crooked and per

2:9–11: Rom 10:9; 14:9; Eph 1:20–21. 2:13: 1 Cor 15:10. 2

2:7 emptied himself: The Greek verb *kenōō* means “empty out” or “render void”. The idea is, not that Christ divested himself of divinity when he united himself with humanity, but that he restricted his rightful exercise of certain divine abilities during his earthly life and accepted certain limitations of the human condition. In effect, the Son of God made himself poor in order to make us rich with his grace (2 Cor 8:9) (CCC 472). • Christ emptied himself by compressing the glory of his Godhead within our smallness. What he always was remained perfect and incomprehensible, but what he assumed was in proportion to the measure of our nature (St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Apollinarius*).

2:8 death on a cross: The ultimate indignity. Death by crucifixion was the most awful and degrading form of criminal execution in the ancient world. The Romans reserved it for slaves and insurrectionists. See note on Mk 15:24.

2:9 exalted him: By raising him from the dead, enthroning him in heaven, and clothing his humanity with divine glory. A similar destiny awaits all who humble themselves as Jesus did (3:21; Lk 14:11).

2:10 every knee should bow: An allusion to the divine oath in Is 45:23. • Yahweh swore that all peoples, to the very end of the earth, would acknowledge his Lordship and bow before him in homage. Paul moves Christ into the center of this prophecy as the divine Lord destined to be revered by all. **heaven ... earth ... under the earth:** The three principal realms in the world view of ancient Israel (Ex 20:4). Homage will come from all creatures great and small—the angels and saints above, the family of man and beasts spread over the earth, and the dead and the demons of the underworld.

2:11 confess: I.e., acknowledge. Included in this open dec

serious that we pur sense of awe at ser the prospect of sinn Encouragement con readers that God's g desire (intention) at 21; CCC 308) (CC “work”, he address and trembling”, he good deeds were th not boast of your g within you (St. Augu **2:15 pervers** • Deuterono poetic lawsuit that and ingratitude du

A Thing to Harpagmos (G in the Greek O Occurrences of “robbery”. Its considerable d the leading vi (1) Some, like “something sel

Prepare

Read the Introduction to Colossians, paying particular attention to the *Purpose* and *Themes and Characteristics* of the book. What one thing stands out to you, that you would like to remember?

Read the Outline of Colossians to get an overview of the book. What are its major divisions?

Pray

Use the following questions to guide your reading of Colossians, going at a pace that is comfortable to you. Before you begin each new section, pray simply for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit:

Come, Holy Spirit, open my heart to hear and receive these words as what they truly are, the Word of God. Enlighten my understanding and give me grace to put what I read into practice in my life. Amen.

Read and Reflect

Read and reflect on Colossians as follows:

- Pray before you read
- Read a section of biblical text by itself
- Read the text again, referring to the notes that accompany the text
- For deeper understanding and to aid in applying what you read, answer the questions that follow. The references at the top of each numbered question correspond to particular notes.

At the end of each chapter, review what you have written and linger where you feel drawn, asking the Lord to speak to your heart and into your life. What do you hear? Respond in prayer and ask his help to live what you hear in your attitudes and actions this week.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

For understanding

1. **1:13.** From what and to what does Christ “transfer us”? What did the Council of Trent declare in A.D. 1547 about the effects of justification in Christ?
2. **1:15–20.** What does the hymn quoted in these verses extol? What does the hymn say Christ’s redeeming work transforms? What Old Testament personification does Christ’s preexistence and role as Creator recall? Where else does Paul make this association?
3. **1:15.** Although Adam was created *in* God’s image, what does it mean to say that Christ *is* the image of God? If Adam was the first to bear the image of God, what happened because of his rebellion against God? What is the role of Christ, then? To what does the term “first-born” refer in this verse? What is Paul’s point in using the term?
4. **1:18.** To what does the analogy of Christ as “the head” point? What can it be used to stress? How is the Resurrection of Christ reproduced in the lives of believers?

For application

1. **1:3–5a.** How grateful are you for the faith that you have? How often do you give thanks for the faith of others when you pray for them?
2. **1:9–10.** Read Is 11:2. What is the relationship between **wisdom** and **understanding** (two spiritual gifts you received at Confirmation)? How can you use them to grow in the knowledge of God and of his will?
3. **1:21–23.** Locate the “if-clause” in these verses. What is the condition on which the salvation Jesus won for you will be realized? To what two theological virtues does Paul encourage continuing fidelity?
4. **1:24.** What could possibly be “lacking” in the sufferings of Christ for the Church? How might you make up in your own life for what is lacking in them, as Paul did in his time?

Chapter 2

For understanding

1. **2:8.** How was the term “philosophy” understood when Paul was writing? What meaning does Paul probably have in mind here? Of what “human traditions” is Paul thinking? Which traditions would Paul consider worth obeying?
2. **Word Study: Elemental Spirits (2:8).** To what can the Greek term *stoicheia* refer? How are these ideas associated with worship among both Gentiles and Israelites? Why does Paul group the worship of both peoples together? How does he contrast the Christian approach to the old order?
3. **2:16.** To what do the listed items “food . . . drink . . . festival . . . new moon . . . sabbath” refer in this verse? Why does Paul look on them as “only a shadow” in v. 17?
4. **2:21.** Why does Paul strike out sarcastically at the Jewish agitators in Colossae in this verse? What does he imply, by contrast?

For application

1. **2:8.** Since God gave you a mind, how does he want you to use it to increase your understanding? How well do you know your faith? If not well, how can you defend your faith against relatives, friends, or teachers who challenge it with apparently rational arguments? What are you doing to increase your understanding of the faith?
2. **2:18–19.** What do you think a “good Catholic” is? How would you compare Paul’s warning here with what you hear—or for that matter with what you say—about spiritual practices or experiences? Based on these verses, how do you think Paul would describe a “good Catholic”?
3. **2:20–23.** In view of these verses, why does the Church insist on the need for personal penance and mortification? If Paul dismisses practices that “are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh”, what would he promote? How do you try to tame your self-indulgence into submission?

Chapter 3

For understanding

1. **3:5.** What does Paul urge us to do to the “old man”? What does he want us to do with our lives instead?
2. **3:11.** Into what are believers drawn? Who are the “barbarians” Paul has in mind? Who are the Scythians?
3. **Word Study: Peace (3:15).** To what does the biblical notion of peace apply? In what is the peace of Christ rooted? How are Christians to spread this peace?
4. **3:16.** What is “the word of Christ” in this passage? How did the early Church honor the Lord in song? How is musical praise reflected in the Book of Revelation?

For application

1. **3:1–2.** Make a list of the top ten things in which you are most interested, including the things that most occupy your attention. How many of them have to do with “things that are above, not things on earth”? If you are concerned with practical matters (such as finances or raising children), how can you include them in the “things that are above”?
2. **3:5–11.** Of all the vices listed in these verses, which plagues you the most? How have you tried to “put it to death”? How serious are your efforts in this regard? How can your being a “new man”, with a new nature in Christ, be a help to you?
3. **3:12–17.** How might the practices Paul recommends here help you answer the previous question? Of all these virtues, which are most and least characteristic of you? (How readily would your closest friend agree with your assessment?)
4. **3:18–22.** If you are married, how well do you respect your spouse? In what condition is your relationship with your parents (regardless of how old you are)? What motivates you in the way you do your job at work? How closely do any of your answers match what Paul would expect of you?

Chapter 4

For understanding

1. **4:2.** What kind of prayer does Paul promote here? Why?
2. **4:16.** In what setting were Paul’s letters to the Churches most likely read publicly? What is “the letter from La-odicea”?
3. **4:18.** How did Paul write his letters? What did his own handwritten remarks do for the letters?

For application

1. **4:1.** If you are an employer or a supervisor, how do you treat your subordinates? What does it mean in your circumstances to treat them with justice?
2. **4:2.** How regular are you in your prayer life? If you have not prayed regularly, what are you now doing to establish a habit of prayer? If you do pray regularly, do you include thanksgiving and adoration in your prayer, as well as requests for what you and others need?
3. **4:5–6.** How do you conduct yourself toward persons who are not Christian? What image of Christianity would your friends and acquaintances have based on your behavior in mixed company?
4. **4:17.** How do you encourage bishops, priests, deacons, religious, and others who work for the faith in their apostolates? How often do you pray for them?