

Associated Canadian Theological Schools
BIE 732 Colossians: An Ancient-Future Letter for Today's Christian and Culture

Roger Helland, DMin.

Summer 2010

3 credit hours or audit

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Class Dates: June 9-12, 2010

Class Times: Wed and Thurs, 6:30pm-9:45pm;

Fri and Sat, 8:30am-4:00pm

Venue: BGCA Office, Taylor Seminary,

Edmonton, 780-438-9126

COURSE DESCRIPTION

What does it look like to live a faithful and fruitful life as a Christian in today's postmodern culture? How can Christians deal with the challenges of syncretism and legalism in the church as well as a culture that largely values pluralism and popular philosophy and spirituality? Colossians speaks to today's Christian and culture. Come explore these questions as we probe its ancient-future message, chapter-by-chapter, section-by-section, and do Christian theology in context for spiritual formation, mission, and cultural engagement.

COURSE INSTRUCTOR

After teaching in a Bible College for 6 years and pastoring in three different churches for 16 years, Roger now serves as the District Executive Coach of 27 churches in the Baptist General Conference in Alberta. As a Bible teacher, he has taught as an adjunct instructor at Taylor Seminary, The Journey, YWAM, Alberta Bible College, and as a visiting instructor at ACTS Seminaries, and Rocky Mountain College. He has written three books and numerous articles, is currently co-authoring a book on missional spirituality, and holds a Th.M. in OT from Dallas Seminary and a D.Min. in Leadership and Spiritual Formation from Trinity Western University.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Affective

- Release your imagination with your being complete in Christ who is supreme over all!
- Feel confidence in engaging your culture theologically.
- Feel increased joy with vision for a more faithful and fruitful life in Christ, in prayer, in witness and missional leadership, and in community.

Cognitive

- Know the historical-cultural background, problems, message, and structure of Colossians.
- Understand challenges and strategies you must explore to engage culture with the Gospel.
- Acquire insight into the nature of syncretism and legalism and ways to counteract them.

Behavioral

- Trace the argument and interpret Colossians, section by section, and relate Chap. 3 to 1-2.
- Identify and interpret texts and trends of our culture and apply Colossians theologically.
- Preach, teach, or in another way present the core meaning and application of Col. 2:6-23.

COURSE OUTLINE

Section 1: Introducing Colossians—Context Then, Christians Now

Like the sons of Issachar, Christians “must understand the times and know what to do” (1 Chron. 12:32). What does it mean to interpret Scripture as well as interpret our postmodern culture? A task in Bible interpretation is to study the historical-cultural context of a book and relate it to today. What if we explored what the Christians in Colossae faced in a pluralistic and religious culture? What if we explored how the language in this letter directly challenged the common language the original hearers heard? How might we hear the book of Colossians today as we bridge then and now?

Section 2: Colossians 1—Christ is Supreme: Theology and Mission

Central to Christian theology is Jesus Christ and his mission through the Gospel. The *task* of theology is to understand the times theologically and guide the church in “faith thinking.” The *purpose* of theology is to serve the church in its missional vocation to live as the people of God in their cultural context. Through Paul’s prayer and proclamation, Chapter 1 sets the heart of Christian theology and mission: Christ is Supreme! As we study chapter 1 section by section, let’s discuss how we might think, live, and pray Christian theology, not just believe it!

- Colossians 1:1-14
- Colossians 1:15-23
- Colossians 1:24—2:5

Section 3: Colossians 2—Complete in Christ: Syncretism and Legalism

Chapter 2 reveals the core issues at Colossae: syncretism and legalism drawn from a pluralistic and religious culture. The lines between syncretism and cultural relevance are not easy to draw. Through teaching a magnificent doctrine of Christ, Paul tackles these issues. Historically, Christians have chosen three main responses: escape, accommodate, or engage culture. Paul argues for a spiritual life that is complete “in Christ”—grounded theologically with Him. As we study chapter 2, section by section, let’s discuss how we might engage our culture complete in Christ.

- Colossians 2:6-15
- Colossians 2:16-23
- Syncretism, Legalism and Culture

Section 4: Colossians 3—Centred in Christ: Spiritual Formation and Family

According to Chapter 3, Christians are called to be *both* heavenly minded and earthly good! All Christian theology finds its way to an appeal and application in holiness and ethics centered in Christ. The transitional “since then” of 3:1 turns Paul’s theological treatment of the issues in the Colossian church to that of spiritual formation. This chapter also shows how a Christian family (household) should function. As we study Chapter 3, section by section, let’s discuss “practices for holy living and Christian households”—spiritual formation and family.

- Colossians 3:1-11
- Colossians 3:12-17
- Colossians 3:18—4:1

Section 5: Colossians 4—Case Studies: Witness and Community

In this final Chapter with further instructions and final greetings, Paul leaves us with some unique insights into the nature of Christian witness and community. In our postmodern culture where conversation and community are core values, Chapter 4 will serve as concluding case studies full of personal and practical applications where Paul shows he did not write an abstract theological term paper but a real letter to real people. As we study Chapter 4, section by section, let’s discuss how we might grow in Christian witness and community in our postmodern culture.

- Colossians 4:2-6
- Colossians 4:7-18

COURSE TEXTS AND PHOTOCOPIES

Required

- Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. The Pillar NT Commentary. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008. (350 pgs)
- Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation: Reaching Out Without Selling Out*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004. (178 pgs)
- Dean Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*. Chapter 3, “Paul’s Letters: Doing Theology in Context.” Chapter 4, “Paul and Culture: Engaging the Greco-Roman World.” Chapter 7, “Colossians: The Gospel and Syncretism.” IVP, 2005. (81 pgs)
Photocopied pdf files will be made available to each course participant.

Optional (for advanced study):

- Brian Walsh & Sylvia Keesmaat. *Colossians Remixed*. IVP, 2004.
- Sidney Greidanus. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. IVP/Eerdmans, 1988.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A core assumption in this course design is that teaching, learning, and spiritual formation best occur in community with others. A key value and practice in the philosophy of *The Journey* is *mentored* settings. Therefore, each course participant must form a mentoring group with at least

two others (one of them being a mentor) that will meet three separate times for three hours each, to give a personal context for the course participant to present each of the three assignments to the others. You will lead three discussions (or in the last assignment have the option of preaching it) aimed at doing theology in context, spiritual formation, and mission.

1. READING AND DISCUSSION OUTLINE (20%). TO HELP ORIENT YOU TO COLOSSIANS:

Develop an introductory 3-hour discussion on Colossians. Develop a 2-page **discussion outline** for each three 1-hour session below (**6 pages total**). For preparation:

1. Read the entire book of Colossians in the NIV, OUT LOUD in **one** sitting or standing.

Now read the Introduction and Analysis from Moo's commentary, pages 25-71.

Based on your reading of Moo, develop a 2-page discussion outline for **Session 1: The Historical-cultural Context, Content, and Structure of Colossians.**

2. Read, Dean Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*, Chapter 7.

Based on your reading of Fleming, develop your 2-page discussion outline for **Session 2: Colossians—The Gospel and Syncretism.**

3. Read Colossians in Eugene Peterson's, *The Message*. For **Session 3:** Develop a one-page chart that identifies the key structure and themes of Colossians and then a one page outline that discusses the question, How is spiritual formation portrayed in Colossians 3 and how does the argument of chapters 1-2 relate to chapter 3?

Meeting 1: Present your material and invite discussion in your group. Give handouts of your outline and chart to your group members. Draw some applications together. How is Colossians an ancient future letter for you and your church setting in terms of how its message addresses syncretism and spiritual formation? Pray together.

Discussion Outline and Meeting 1 due by June 7th.

2. READING AND ESSAY (30%). TO HELP YOU DO THEOLOGY IN CONTEXT:

Read Dean Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*. Chapter 3, "Paul's Letters: Doing Theology in Context." Now read Douglas Moo's commentary on Colossians (text).

Finally, using the above sources, write an 8-page (2,000 word) academic essay that uses the apostle Paul and Colossians as a case study in contextualization (doing theology in context). Answer: *How shall I do theology in my cultural context?* **Use Colossians 1:15-20 as your key theological text.** Interpret and apply it in both the ancient and now future contexts. *For how to write an essay, see:* <http://www.wikihow.com/Write-an-Essay>

Meeting 2: Send a copy of your paper to your group members to read before Meeting 2. Present your material and invite discussion in your group. Draw some applications together.

Discuss how to do theology in your cultural context today and draw out the theological significance of Colossians 1:15-20. Pray together.

Reading, Essay and Meeting 2 due by July 12th.

3. INTEGRATIVE COURSE PROJECT (40%). TO HELP EQUIP YOU TO ENGAGE CULTURE:

Using the class reading, discussion, and experiences, develop an **integrative course project** that interprets and applies Colossians 2:6-23 to spiritual formation and mission—namely use this as a core passage in how you will deal with the threat of syncretism and legalism for you and your church today and the calling of the church to be missional (on mission). *As a Christian what challenges and strategies must you explore to engage your culture with the Gospel?* Part of this challenge is to do cultural interpretation alongside biblical interpretation. **The integrative project may be presented in the form of a 12-15 page research paper or a 30-minute presentation with relevant handouts and a script or detailed outline.** (See options below.)

Kevin Vanhoozer states, “The church is to be a community of interpreters.” Our task is to read the Bible in one hand and a newspaper or Internet in the other hand. *In this project, identify some key texts and trends of our Canadian culture and what specific philosophies, traditions, and values they communicate.* The “texts” are those things we can “read” and interpret. For example, television programs, movies, music, the Internet, Facebook, Twitter, literature, entertainment, celebrities, politics and law, advertizing, architecture, art and images, customs, institutions, and indeed the “anxieties” of our culture. How would you critique our culture theologically from Colossians? How do you apply Colossians 2:6-23 from the perspective of spiritual formation and mission?

The written component of the integrative course project will be comprised of 10-13 pages (2500 words) for the main paper/outline followed by 2 pages (500 words) that contain a summary and reflections of your mentored group experience in the three meetings (the last two pages will be written after the 3rd meeting and added to the 10 page integrative course project).

In this last section, before you develop your project,

- Read Dean Fleming, *Contextualization in the New Testament*. Chapter 4, “Paul and Culture: Engaging the Greco-Roman World.”
- Read Mark Driscoll, *The Radical Reformation* (text). Highlight key points in his book.

Then develop your integrative course project from a variety of options that you choose below, or a combination, or something not listed. **Students must submit all proposals to the instructor for approval. Be creative and tailor your project to your needs/interests.**

- A Seminar on Christianity, Colossians, and Culture based on Col. 2:6-23
- A 30-minute creative Power Point Small group Discipleship Presentation on Col. 2:6-23
- A Dialogue between two opposing fictional characters based on the issues of Col. 2:6-23.

- An Exegetical Paper or Theological Essay on Col. 2:6-23
- A 30-minute video presentation similar to the Truth Factor based on Col. 2:6-23
- A 30-minute Podcast on Col. 2:6-23
- A Manuscript with PowerPoint with key images for a 30-minute Sermon on Col. 2:6-23
- Another Option You would suggest or combination of above (approved by the instructor)

For those who would like to tackle a more advanced project and submit an academic term paper or a more in-depth academic teaching lecture based on an interaction\book review on the issues of postmodernism and hermeneutics in the book below applied to Col. 2:6-23:

- Read, Brian Walsh & Sylvia Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed*. IVP, 2004.

(To aid your interaction with the book, consider: Do you agree with their portrayal of our postmodern world? How do you react to their “political” reading of Colossians? Do they make a solid case that Paul is really addressing what they propose in the historical-cultural context? What themes or issues push you the most and why? How might this book influence your approach to biblical interpretation, to teaching and preaching the New Testament?)

For those who would like to tackle a more advanced project in the preparation of a manuscript for preaching Col. 2:6-23 and using the principles and process in the book below:

- Read Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*, Chapter 12: “Preaching Epistles,” IVP/Eerdmans, 1988.

(To aid your interaction with the book, consider: How does Colossians as an epistle arise from a particular situation and speak to that situation and what are the literary characteristics of an epistle and how they are portrayed in Colossians? Then follow the specific guidelines for preaching the epistles and apply them to Col. 2:6-23). Compose a 10-page manuscript.

Meeting 3: Send a copy of your integrative course project (in whatever form it is composed in as per above) to your group members to read and/or listen to before Meeting 3. Present your material and invite discussion in your group. Draw some applications together. Discuss how to engage your culture from a missional perspective today and draw out the meaning and significance of Colossians 2:6-23. Pray together.

Integrative Course Project and Meeting 3 due by August 23rd.
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GRADING

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| 1. Reading, Discussion Outline and Meeting 1 | (20%) | Due: June 7 |
| 2. Reading, Essay and Meeting 2 | (30%) | Due: July 12 |
| 3. Reading, Integrative Course Project and Meeting 3 | (40%) | Due: August 23 |
| 4. Class Attendance and Participation, with written reflection (2-4 pages) | (10%) | |

All course work submitted must be type-written, 12 point Times Roman font, with one inch margins, with proper spell and grammar checking, style, and structure at graduate level.

All written work must be emailed as a .doc attachment to the instructor by 4pm of the due date. Each assignment will be graded within ten days and sent back to the student via email with embedded comments. Send all submissions to: roger@bgcalberta.ca

POINTS TO PONDER FOR PAPERS

1. A good paper will have a clear overall theme (or thesis) and a clear structure. It will make a definite point, and may refute an alternative view. In short, its purpose is not to convey information about a subject, but to present a specific argument, which you should be able to state in a single sentence.
2. A good paper has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Write the body first, then the conclusion and, finally the introduction. It is a good idea to begin writing your OUTLINE and tentative theme as soon as possible; you can change it, but it will guide your research, and make your work more efficient.
3. A good introduction establishes the subject of your paper, and briefly sets the context answering the general questions – “What is this paper about?” and “Why is this topic or issue important?” Within the second paragraph, there should be a clear statement of what you intend to prove, as well as a summary of how you intend to do it. A good paper will say this in such a way that the reader can hardly wait to get into it. (Just like those dramatic scenes at the beginning of action movies)
4. A good body will have three to five well-defined sections, which adhere together in some logical way. Perhaps in each section you will be presenting an alternate view, then responding with your own.
5. A good conclusion includes a summary of your theme and a fresh review of how you proved it. There may well be a statement of some additional conclusions that derive from this as well as some indicator of the significance of what you have just established. (In short, provide your reader an answer to the question, “So what?” “What temporal and/or eternal difference does this make?”)

6. Stylistic matters to keep in mind include:

Avoid contractions (don't, can't, won't, etc.) and slang (“like,” “you know,” “and stuff,” etc.) In your writing, avoid “etc.” Avoid long, tangled sentences, and overly long (or overly short) paragraphs. Just as each sentence should say one thing, each paragraph should deal with one subject, and be somewhat summarized in the first (or second) sentence. Avoid clichés. In general, avoid first person references. (e.g. “After reading all this stuff, I think that . . .”) Beyond following the recommended style manual (such as Turabian or APA) for margins, footnoting, and bibliography, do a spell and grammar check. Also document your research according to academic standards and avoid plagiarism “like the H1N1 flu virus.”