

Bible Month 2019 – Colossians: towards a new pattern of life

Hymn suggestions from *Singing the Faith* to accompany Professor James Dunn’s introduction to St Paul’s Letter to the Colossians.



1. God revealed in Christ
2. Christ revealed in his followers
3. Remember your baptism
4. Household rules
5. Suffering
6. The importance of greetings

1. God revealed in Christ

This is the dominant theme of Paul’s letter to the Christians in Colossae, especially in the opening chapter. Jesus is described as existing before creation – “the firstborn of all creation”. Ivor Jones spells this out in [Christ, our King before creation](#) (StF 318).

Moreover, Paul says that, in Christ, “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” ([Colossians 1: 19](#)) – a claim that James Dunn describes as “astonishing”. Hymns that explore this understanding include:

[We give immortal praise](#) (StF 16)

[Sing of a God in majestic divinity](#) (StF 13), which encompasses both Christ’s dying and rising for us (vv.2 & 4), and God’s constant presence as the true guide to our thinking and action (v.3)

The sense of exultant confidence conveyed by Paul is nowhere better expressed than in [And can it be](#) (StF 345), which sings of the freedom found in Christ (cf. [Colossians 2: 20-23](#))

2. Christ revealed in his followers

This gospel message implies an expectation that Christians should not simply accept the divine truth revealed in Christ, but live it out too:

[May the mind of Christ my Saviour](#) (StF 504)

[Happy are they who find the grace](#) (StF 500)

Compare the words of this hymn with [Colossians 1: 9-10](#) – “We ask God that you may receive from him full insight into his will, all wisdom and spiritual understanding. . .”

[What shall we offer our good Lord](#) (StF 671) echoes those same two verses, especially in v.4: “O multiply the sower’s



Colossae in context – with

seed! / And fruit we every hour shall bear, / throughout the world they gospel spread. . .” *Ephesus 130 miles to the west*

Paul expands on this theme by emphasising the full meaning of baptism, and by his careful reminders about how we relate to each other as family and friends (below). And as always with Paul, underpinning all his teaching and explanation is the desire that we “persevere in prayer, with minds alert and with thankful hearts” ([Colossians 4: 2](#)) cf. [Pray, without ceasing, pray](#) (StF 528).

3. Remember your baptism

In chapter 2 of his letter, Paul focuses on the idea of dying and rising with Christ through the sacrament of baptism: “For you were buried with him. . . you were also raised to life with him.” Mary Rose Jensen references many of the phrases and emphases of Paul’s letter in [Covenant child](#) (StF 533) – a hymn for baptism and thanksgiving services which nevertheless reflects the ongoing relationship of Christian seekers with God.

In [Baptise us with your Spirit](#) (StF 369), Brian Wren reflects “a new pattern of life” (as James Dunn puts it in Week 3’s session), as we re-clothe ourselves ([Colossians 3: 12](#) ff.) with “habit-forming virtues”. Closing his hymn, Brian challenges us to invite to God’s table “our neighbours, one and all” – which for Paul meant including Gentiles as well as Jews ([Colossians 1: 27](#)).

4. Household rules

Chapter 3 includes what Professor Dunn calls Paul’s “household rules” – ways of relating to each other that are marked by love and mutual respect. A number of hymns in *Singing the Faith* unpack this theme, especially in the [Human Life and Relationships section](#) (StF 608 – 622).

As in Professor Dunn’s notes, these “rules” have implications well beyond Paul’s specific examples (which need to be placed carefully within their historical context), leading us to Paul’s underpinning desire that we reflect the self-giving love modelled by Jesus E.g.:

[All praise to our redeeming Lord](#) (StF 608)

[As we gather in your presence now](#) (StF 609), esp. v.2

[Let love be real, in giving and receiving](#) (StF 615) – “with no manipulation, no secret wish to harness of control”, v.3

5. Suffering



On the road from Colossae to Laodicea, home to another young Christian community mentioned by Paul

We are made aware of Paul's imprisonment and suffering for his faith – but also of his utter commitment to mission and to caring for the small Christian communities that he and others have founded ([Colossians 1: 24-9](#); [4: 18](#)).

[Fight the good fight with all your might](#) (StF 634) echoes Paul's tone

[Through the love of God our Saviour](#) (StF 639) proclaims that "all must be well"

6. The importance of greetings

For what is a relatively short biblical letter, the final messages of greeting and sharing of news take up a considerable amount of space ([Colossians 4: 7-18](#)). They emphasise the need to move forward together as Christians – a theme picked up by Fred Pratt Green in his hymn [What shall our greeting be: sign of our unity?](#) (StF 691). His words are inspired by a conversation in 2 Kings 10: 15 that John Wesley quoted in his sermon, A Catholic Spirit: "Is your heart right, as my heart is with your heart? . . . If it is, give me your hand."