

Grow in Grace

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[0:00] I invite you to turn to Colossians chapter 1 this morning. We'll be looking at the first 14 verses of Colossians chapter 1. And while you're turning there, I want to hit some high-level points about this book as we start into it.

The book of Colossians was written by the Apostle Paul, probably dictated by Paul, and written by a secretary, most likely Timothy. It was written in the early 1660s A.D., but primarily written and delivered at the same time that Paul wrote the book of Ephesians and Philemon.

And his overarching theme in this book is the superiority, the supremacy of Christ. It contains both explanations of doctrine as well as commands.

But Paul consistently drives home that both doctrine, devotion, and duty are all bound, grounded, and rooted in the work of God through Christ.

This book is also very Trinitarian. There are many places where Paul points to things accomplished by the Father, but that are tightly connected to the death and resurrection of the Son. For example, Paul says in verse 13 and 14 in our passage today, that it was a Father that qualified us and transferred us from the domain of darkness to Christ's kingdom, and that the Son is where we get our redemption and forgiveness from.

[1:18] Or chapter 2, verse 15, this is speaking of the Father. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

God, through Christ, has triumphed over his enemies. Colossians is as much about the supremacy of Christ as it is about the success of the Godhead bringing and working salvation for a people.

So with that in mind, let's take a look at our passage this morning. Colossians chapter 1, verses 1 through 14. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers of Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, as indeed of the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing, as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

[2:30] Just as you heard it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, he is the faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, and all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints of light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for your word, and I thank you for this letter that was written to this church, and the glimpse we have into the relationship that Paul has with this church, and the ways that he feels moved to pray for them, and to thank God for them, and to point them to the gospel.

Lord, I ask that this would be an encouragement to us. It would help me to not be in the way, but help your spirit and your word to be speaking through me, that would be encouragement to all of us who hear it.

In Jesus' name, amen. It's tempting when we're starting a new book, whether it's a novel or a textbook or a book of the Bible, to kind of skip over the introduction, or look past or forward.

[4 : 07] We want to get to the real stuff. We want to skip the boring things and get to the story. Maybe we skip the introduction to a book, or we fast forward through that long scrolling text at the beginning of Star Wars.

Either way, something in us wants to skip the pleasantries and get to the good story. This passage could easily be no different. If you've read one of Paul's greetings, you've read them all, right? But as I've poured over these 14 verses, trying to decide, is there one sermon here? Is there three different sermons? Should I skip it and there's no sermon here? I've become convinced that Paul's greeting, introduction to this church, in a little city in modern-day Turkey, is not worth skipping. Not only is it not worth skipping, it would be dangerous for us to miss it. It contains valuable theology, and information that God sovereignly and purposely gave to his universal church. This small letter to a small church has deep, rich, Christ-exalting, God-glorifying, spirit-empowering, spirit-enlightening principles that we need today in Hazleton in 2021.

[5 : 19] Even in the first two verses, we can see the grace and mercy of God. Paul says in verse 1 and 2, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ the Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Paul gives them an apostolic blessing of peace and grace. He does that very frequently in his letters. But notice he also calls them brothers, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ. And he also calls God our Father. Paul had never met this church. It wasn't a church he planted in a missionary journey. He heard about this church from Epaphras, who was involved in his creation. We know from Philemon that Epaphras is at the time of this writing in prison with Paul. So Paul hears about this church, this body of believers from his fellow prison mate Epaphras, and he decides to write them a letter.

This church is probably largely made up of Gentiles, full of people Paul had never met. But as soon as he is done telling them who he is, I'm an apostle of Christ Jesus, his first thing is to make sure that he greets them as brothers.

[6 : 35] He calls them saints and faithful brothers and gives them a blessing. Paul connects these believers not on a shared history or shared ethnicity or even shared parentage, but a shared Savior and a shared Heavenly Father.

That should be our case too. As believers, we have more in common with a Pacific Islander that's been recently saved than the pagan or agnostic next door to us. We have more in common with a brand new Christian than an unsaved family member.

Paul makes it even more clear in verse 13 where he says that God has qualified us to share in the inheritance, the inheritance of the saints of light. Paul was moved with love for them even though he doesn't know them personally, hasn't seen them.

He still feels a love for the people in this church. And that should be the case in our hearts. We should love each other whether we be across the aisle, across the street, or across the ocean. We have so much more in common with each other through Christ than we have with the world. In the opening verses of the cousin epistle to the Ephesians, Paul says, He, God, predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of His will.

[7 : 55] As we'll see in this passage and throughout this book, our standing, position, and righteousness before God is 100% completely God's doing and is enabled and facilitated by the cross of Christ.

That includes our adoption in the family of God. God has set His love on us. God has predestined us. He's called us. He's justified and sanctified us.

And He will glorify every one of His children, even the ones we struggle to love. But like most of Paul's letters, He doesn't just give us rules. He doesn't just give us doctrine and theology. He lays out doctrine and then encourages believers to live out of that, to live and work in the work the Father has already accomplished through Christ, through the Holy Spirit, with the intention of spiritual maturity.

We'll see this thread in the next verses. The structure that Paul really lays out in these next few verses, he gives thanks to God for what God has already done, verses 3-8. Then he reveals how he's praying for them in verses 9-11.

[8 : 59] Then he's going to ground all of that in the mighty acts the Father has accomplished in salvation, verses 12-14. So let's take a look at the first section here, Paul giving thanks to God for the work of the gospel.

In verses 3-8, Paul tells the church that when he prays for them, he's thankful. Most of Paul's officials start this way, with the exception of Galatians. He thanks God for what God is doing in them through the gospel.

He says, We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing, as it also does among you. since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you heard it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. Paul has heard of their faith in Christ, their love for all the saints, and he makes the connection that that's because of the hope laid up for them in heaven.

[10:14] The spiritual fruit of God working faith in a person's heart is hope. It's the love of the fellow saints is a fruit.

What does he say, what does he mean when he says the love, sorry, what does he mean when he says the hope laid up for us in heaven? The answer is in the next sentence. He says, of this, so of this hope laid up for you in heaven, you have heard before in the word of truth the gospel which has come to you.

So walking this argument backwards, Paul says, the gospel has come to you and you heard it. In the gospel, you came to know about a hope laid up for you in heaven. This hope laid up for you in heaven has caused you to love the saints and have faith in Christ.

This hope laid up for us in heaven is more than just a hope that we get to heaven, a desire, a wish that we get to heaven. It really speaks to the all-encompassing work that God has done to redeem his people, to call them and make him his children.

One commentator summarized it as the totality of blessings that await the Christian in the life to come. But I think it's a bit more than that. I think Paul certainly intends all the heavenly blessings that await us.

[11:32] But it's more than that. It's the work of God to work our redemption. It's a settled judgment of our justification. It's the adoption we have into the family of God.

It's really our salvation. And we see Paul giving thanks for the fruits of their salvation. He thanks God for all the ways that God has worked in their life in their response to the gospel and the resulting fruits of faith and love.

We try to flip that sometimes though, don't we? We spent many weeks this past few months in adult Sunday school going through Sinclair Ferguson's book *The Whole Christ*. And we saw time and time again throughout church history the tendency of people to flip this order of salvation, to look for the fruits before we share the gospel or to make salvation and justification dependent on a person having enough repentance or enough tears or enough faith before we'll grant them that they're saved.

And Paul clearly states here that you heard about their faith and you heard about their love and he makes the connection that those came from the hope that they heard about when the gospel was preached.

Paul goes further and says the gospel doesn't just produce fruit in Colossae. It bears fruit and increases throughout the whole world. That's what accomplished that's accomplished by people.

[12:57] The gospel is spread throughout the whole world and is increasing by people by you and me. This church heard it from Epaphras. Paul says, Just as you learned it, this gospel, from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, he is a faithful minister of Christ in your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Remember, according to Philemon, Epaphras was also in prison with Paul. Paul and Epaphras were in chains but the gospel was not. Others had heard this gospel from them and they shared it with others.

They shared it with others. And 2,000 years later, here we are, gathered together to hear the word of God that was written to encourage this small church with people we know only by name, written by prisoners, in prison for sharing the gospel.

Yet here we are, reading and sharing the gospel that Paul says was growing and increasing. The gospel has and is bearing fruit.

It is increasing throughout the world today. So Paul's thankful for that. Paul's thankful for the way that this church has heard of the gospel. He's thankful for the way that the gospel is increasing. He's thankful for the way that people have shared the gospel.

[14 : 10] He's thankful for their faith in Christ and their love for the saints but he's not content for them to stay there. In the next few verses he's going to explain to them how he's praying for their spiritual maturity.

He lists the following things he's been praying for ever since he heard about them from Epaphras. He prays that they would be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

He prays for them to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord fully pleasing to him. They would bear fruit in every good work. They would increase in the knowledge of God that they would be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy.

If you've ever wondered to yourself what are some things that I can pray for that are 100% in alignment with God's will Paul just gave you the list. Paul's given thanks for what God has already done now he moves to ask God to continue working to grow them to strengthen them to shape them into the image of Christ.

His prayer for them centers on two areas their doctrine and their devotion. Doctrine meaning to grow in understanding God and his will to know him to increase in the knowledge of him and to get that knowledge from the right place in the right way and then devotion to walk and work out this salvation to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and to bear fruit.

[15 : 41] We'd be miserable Christians if we just focused on one of those. If we focused on devotion we could become monks people carefully keeping the rules don't touch don't taste don't handle don't eat living life trying to please God without knowledge of him or what he has done and really without love for him because doctrine without because devotion without doctrine becomes drudgery.

If we focus on and hold on the doctrine it'd be easy for us to become academic professors people who love knowledge able to hold long discussions on eschatology and explain all five points of communism clearly but we could easily have all that knowledge and not affect our lives.

We'd be like talkative in Pogum's Progress the man who meets faithful and Christian on the road and is happy to talk about things heavenly or earthly moral or evangelical sacred or profane foreign or domestic essential or incidental you get the idea he'll talk about anything with anybody.

After a lengthy discussion about the work of God in man's heart faithful asks talkative have you experienced this working in your heart? Does your life bear fruit from this work?

Or is your religion just based on things you talk about with little care for your behavior? Talkative is suddenly defensive and ends the conversation. Paul's prayer is that we would have wisdom knowledge and understanding but that it would come from God and that it would lead to bearing fruit and walking in a manner worthy of the Lord.

[17 : 21] Paul wants us to have good theology good doctrine but he's written a large portion of the New Testament to bear that out to teach it but he doesn't want us to just have knowledge he wants us to live out of the knowledge of God that he's presenting.

It's a common theme in Paul's letters he strongly desires growth and maturity both in our knowledge of God and in how we live. Further in Colossians in chapter 2 verse 6 he says therefore as you received Christ Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in him rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught abounding in thanksgiving or even Colossians chapter 1 28 hymn we proclaim warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

Paul proclaims Christ he warns and he teaches with wisdom so that he could present them mature to Christ as mature Christians.

In Ephesians 4 11 and 13 he says and he gave apostles the prophets the evangelists the shepherds the teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

You're here today you're in a pew or you're watching from home hearing the word of God read hearing doctrine hearing the apostles heart for Christians to grow in the knowledge of God his prayer for them to walk in that knowledge.

[19 : 05] I don't want you to walk away this morning with just theological knowledge. Paul's going to give plenty of it in this epistle but doctrine should always lead to devotion and then to duty.

We shouldn't take knowledge we gather to win a Facebook argument. We shouldn't take knowledge we've gathered to beat each other over the brow with it. This is how Paul has written his letters most of his epistles he starts off here's doctrine here's what God has done the second part is devotion and duty so then walk in it live according to what God has done.

Theology should lead to doxology the glorious truths of the gospel are not just things for us to pick up and inspect like a wine taster might critique a bottle of wine if you've seen a wine taster critique wine they pick the bottle up and they inspect it they pour a glass they swirl it around and they smell it they sip some of it and they spit it back out because they don't want to have the effect of the wine they just want to taste it the truths of God and the doctrines and theology of God are not 1928 Cabernet that you can sip and critique and not consume they're meant to be consumed they're life-giving water that we drink yes they're tasted yes they're enjoyed but they're not sipped and sat down the truths of who God is who we are and what God has done for us should be readily available to us in our hearts in our minds they're beautiful and should lead us to what God to worship God for what he's done for us we shouldn't pick up a book or study a systematic theology book or watch an apologist debate somebody on Facebook with the only intention to have something to say at

Christmas dinner or to win a Facebook argument Paul is praying to God for this church's spiritual growth he's explaining and telling them the doctrine of God to get them there to get them to maturity I'm convinced we would be well served today to meditate on the next three verses in our passage and allow it to warm our hearts in praise and worship of God we'd be better served today encouraging each other with the mighty acts of God in our salvation than to hold it at arm's length admire it only to lay it back down again Paul gives us a summary of the gospel in the next three verses he says giving thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints of light he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption the forgiveness of sins this is a linchpin this is the hope that's laid out for us in heaven this is the gospel that is bearing fruit and increasing this is a powerhouse that drives all of

Paul's prayers for maturity in a Christian I don't want you to miss Paul's point here he prays for spiritual maturity in a few chapters he's going to lay down rules he's going to lay out rules for family order he's going to tell them to put on the new self but all that works out of the work of God in our hearts both doctrine devotion and duty are all bound grounded and rooted in the work of God through Christ he wraps up this greeting and introduction and prayer for their spiritual growth with a powerful statement of what God the father has done through Christ the language here is almost like a Hollywood movie or an epic novel we hear of God's right arm working salvation for him through the Old Testament and here we see it accomplished the father is said to do three things in bringing this salvation to us he qualifies us to share in the inheritance of the saints of light he delivers us from the domain of darkness and transfers us to the kingdom of his beloved son

[23 : 07] God the father is the initiator here we are passive he is the one working we are enemies living happily in the domain of darkness but he sets his love on us he qualifies us he makes us righteous by the blood of christ he makes us eligible to become his children in an eternity past god the father and god the son secured and made the covenant of redemption a covenant to redeem the people the son was promised a kingdom and a people for that kingdom but it would cost his life he would need to take on flesh and people the son would need to die to redeem his people he did it he died to receive the promise from the father and then qualified us as his brothers to share in the inheritance promise to him hebrews 12 2 says looking to

Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God we saw this morning in Sunday school the promise made to David to have a king sitting on his throne forever and we see that fulfilled in these verses Christ is seated at the right hand of the throne of God Christ has received his kingdom he's reigning now his death and resurrection have secured our salvation they've secured our spiritual growth they've secured our faith in Christ they've secured our love for the saints the father loved us before Christ even took on flesh and died Christ's death and resurrection purchased our redemption and our forgiveness of sins it qualified us to share in this inheritance the father and son are shown here working together in tandem we're qualified to share

in inheritance by the father father and that qualification was secured and paid for by the son the father then transfers those redeemed forgiven and delivered people into his son's kingdom as I close I want to take a few minutes just to point out a few things of application Paul says he delivered us he's transferred us he doesn't say he will deliver us doesn't say he will transfer us doesn't even call the kingdom a future kingdom brothers and sisters if you're in Christ you're in the kingdom you're in the kingdom of his beloved son you're in it the Christian next to you across the aisle from you or across the ocean with you is in it with you the growth and maturity that Paul prays for it's only found by looking here it's only found by looking to Christ by praying for yourself the same things that Paul prayed for this church by being in God's word by hearing it read by hearing it preached and working with the power of the spirit to apply it to our lives the love for the saints that's only found in seeing your sinful self properly seeing the grace and mercy shown to your miserable soul and their miserable soul next to you seeing that person as loved by God as you have been seeing them as forgiven as you have been the faith in Christ is only found by looking to him its power and efficacy are not based on how strong your faith is but the matter and subject of your faith look to Christ the founder and perfecter of our faith if Christ is the object of your faith then even a tiny mount as a mustard seed is sufficient God the father and God the son have planned and created a rescue mission to redeem sinful man the father has delivered and transferred his people the son has purchased redemption through his death and resurrection brothers and sisters lay aside the weights that encompass us from that old domain of darkness come rest in the kingdom of your beloved savior today his yoke is easy his burden is light and the father through christ has qualified you justified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light if you're listening you're not sure about this new kingdom or you don't know which kingdom or domain you're in the answer is to repent and throw yourself upon the mercy of christ and if you've been a christian for 10 years 20 years or 50 years and don't see the spiritual growth that you want or the saints the love for the saints that you think you should have the answer is the same for you throw yourself on the grace and mercy of christ repent turn to christ he says he will never cast out any that come to him let's pray father father i thank you that your word even though written 2000 years ago to a church and people we've never met and don't know can encourage our hearts lord i ask that the spirit would use your word preached help us to have a love for the saints help us to grow in the knowledge and wisdom of you help us to rely on your spirit to grow us into maturity that we may be growing in the stature of jesus christ lord help us as we end our day lord help us to meditate on the things that you had written in your word that we've talked about this morning lord help us to not have head knowledge to not be puffed up with knowledge but that we would be taking the theology and knowledge and it would be applied to our hearts and cause us to worship and love you more in jesus name amen please rise let's sing him 469 how sweet and awesome is the place drop great sails force or sweet and awesome song is the praise with Christ within the doors our everlasting love disquays the choices of her soul my love all our hearts and all our songs join to and the peace he drove us Christ with thankful tongues Lord why was I again why was I made to hear your voice and enter what is true when thousands take a wretched choice and rather sharp than come t'was the same

[31 : 34] God that spread the peace that seeked me through a sin as we have still refused to taste and perish in our sin and to come and bring the strength of God and bring the strength of God to to God send thy victorious word of God and bring the strangers home home we long to see thy churches rule that all thy chosen praise they lift one voice and heart and soul take your redeeming grace receive this benediction may the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory give you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation and the knowledge of him having the eyes of your hearts enlightened that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints and what is the immeasurable great of his power toward us who believe according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places amen amen amen