

The Grace of God in Truth

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Russ, for serving us today. Russ will be reading chapter 1 of Colossians, starting at verse 1 and down through verse 8. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossians, praise 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 the 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 learned 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.

Thank you, brother. Father, it is our privilege to be here and to gather together to have songs to sing that honor you, to have copies of your word, holy scripture that we can have in our hands and hold and read.

Thank you for the freedom that we continue to enjoy together in this way. Thank you for giving us a place to gather in. Father, we affirm what we have already sung together, that Jesus, our Redeemer, is a wonderful gift of grace and that there is no more now for heaven to give.

[1 : 51] Thank you, Lord Jesus.

For loving us and for coming to save us, for rescuing us from sin and death and hell that we rightly deserved because of our rebellion.

Thank you for reconciling us to the Father, welcoming us into the family of God. Thank you for giving us your Holy Spirit.

Holy Spirit, would you please lead and guide and direct us as we continue in this time of worship. We do desire to hear what you would say to us from your word.

Make it plain to our understanding. And as you make it plain, help us to listen, to believe, and to obey. We ask all of this in Jesus' name, for your glory, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and for our good.

[3 : 14] Amen. In many areas of life, growing means moving on. For example, you start in kindergarten, and then you move on to elementary school, and then you move on to middle school, and then you move on to high school.

Sometimes from there, you will move on to college, and then sometimes from there, you may move on to graduate school, or you move on and you get a job.

Now, if you get a job, you may start in a cubicle somewhere, if you're in an office. And then you may move on to an office, like a real office with a window.

And then you might move on from that office into a corner office, like one of those nice offices.

Multiple windows. And then maybe you move on from that corner office to retirement.

Growth often means moving on. You start in a stroller. When you go for a walk, you are in a stroller. And then you graduate to a trike, maybe from there to a Hot Wheels, right?

[4 : 32] And then to training wheels, and then to, what, you know, like a dirt bike or a 10-speed bike or something like that. And then the goal is to keep moving on, and eventually a motorcycle, I suppose, or a car, right?

You don't go typically from the 10-speed bike back to the Hot Wheels. Growth often means moving on. You start somewhere, and then you move beyond it.

I think we tend to assume that Christianity works the same way. We start with the gospel. What is sin? What is grace? What is mercy? What is salvation?

And then we move on from the gospel, you know, to deeper things. Spiritual gifts and spiritual fruit and deeper truths about theology.

And we dig into the scripture real deep, you know? Walking by faith. What is sanctification? Maybe even someday we move on and we progress and we study Revelation or Ezekiel, which you all know, that to me would be someday the real pinnacle if I could ever wrap my hands around Ezekiel. [5 : 46] But what if this assumption is wrong? What if growth as a follower of Jesus does not mean moving on from the gospel, but going deeper into the gospel?

Not leaving it behind, but understanding and appreciating it more. What if the gospel is not just where you start, but where you stay?

Over the next several weeks in the book of Colossians, I'd love for us to keep coming back to this question. Is the gospel enough?

Is the gospel enough? Is it enough for our identity to hold us securely in who we are? Is the gospel enough for our struggles? Is the gospel enough for our future?

Is the gospel enough for our maturity in the faith, growing increasingly like Jesus? Is the gospel enough?

[6 : 53] Brothers and sisters, I want to tell you right at the outset, the gospel is enough. And the reason why I can say that so confidently is because Colossians tells us that Christ is all.

The gospel is enough because Christ is all. If you've read other letters in the New Testament, then you will recognize that Paul and Timothy begin this letter to the Colossians in a familiar way.

They introduce themselves, and then they affirm something true about the recipients. Look with me again at verse number one. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God, our father.

Now, these words are familiar to us, but we should be careful not to move on too quickly. Because this introduction is intended to motivate us to listen, to believe, and to obey what we are about to study together in this book.

Why should we be motivated to listen and to believe and obey? Well, first, Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus. Do you see that in your Bible?

[8 : 22] He is an apostle of Christ Jesus. Christ, to Paul's mind, to the Hebrew Jewish mind, is the Messiah.

In other words, the one who will rule and reign. So when Paul says, an apostle of Christ Jesus, he is saying, an apostle of King Jesus.

Paul is a messenger of King Jesus. And notice, it is by the will of God. So when we read this letter, it is not suggestions.

It is not Paul and Timothy's opinions. They are not sitting around, jotting down some helpful life hacks and then handing them off to the church. This is a message, a letter, a proclamation of King Jesus under the authority of God himself.

And the letter begins with words of comfort. Notice, Paul and Timothy, they are mediators of God's grace and peace. They don't just greet the church with grace and peace.

[9 : 34] This is grace and peace from God. They are messengers and they are mediators. What do we know about the recipients of the letter?

Well, we know that they are saints. And the word underneath this word, translated in our English language, saints, this word means dedicated to God and therefore set apart from common, normal, everyday usage.

I recently purchased a new pair of tennis shoes. And I have this kind of weird thing that I do. I have a hard time taking those shoes and beginning to wear them out and about in just everyday circumstances.

So, right now, if you see me and you happen to see me walking towards the sports center, you will see me wearing my normal, everyday shoes and then carrying my brand new tennis shoes because I want to keep them looking new.

They are set apart. They are dedicated to the purpose of walking at the gym. And I'm not just wearing them anywhere right now where they could get all dirty and nasty.

[10 : 52] Now, for the Jews, this word would be very familiar. In the Old Testament, God set apart his people, Israel, the people of Israel.

And everything associated with the tabernacle and the temple, all of that was set apart. Spoons and bowls and curtains and bread and even special perfume, ointment.

It was set apart. You couldn't just say, oh, we got some extra leftover of the ointment that we use to anoint the priests. I'll just splash some of that on myself and go home today.

No, it was set apart. That's these people in Colossae. They are saints. Set apart.

Here's what's interesting, I think, about this. Most of the people who receive this letter are not Jews. They are Gentiles, like most of us.

[11 : 56] So this should catch our attention. Wait, Gentiles? Those folks living in that city, in the Roman Empire?

They are saints? Yes, they are. These saints are faithful. They believed what they heard about Messiah Jesus, his death and resurrection.

And they give evidence of their faith in good works. They are faithful. They are in the little city of Colossae. But more importantly, infinitely more importantly, they are in Christ.

This is one of Paul's favorite terms in the New Testament. In Christ, we are justified. In Christ, we have eternal life.

It is in Christ that there is now no condemnation. In Christ, we are reconciled. In Christ, our minds, Philippians 2, have been renewed.

[13 : 06] In Christ, we are one body. In Christ, Philippians 4, we have abundant spiritual riches. All of this is activated when Paul says, in Christ.

This is who they are. Let's pull this together. This is a message from King Jesus to people who are set apart for God, who are already in Christ, whose faith is real and visible.

Did you notice what this means? These saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, they're a lot like us.

And there's another way they're like us. Paul did not plan to the church at Colossae. He has never been there. He has only heard about their faith.

Read with me at verse number three. 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.

[14 : 23] Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus. Now, drop down in your Bible to verse number seven. How did you hear about this, Paul? How did you come to know about our faith in Christ Jesus?

Verse seven. Just as you learned 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.

Epaphras brought the gospel of Jesus to the city of Colossae. And now he has brought back a report to Paul.

And the report that he brings back is an encouraging report. And we'll get to that in just a moment. But Paul and Timothy also have reasons to be concerned.

Have you ever sat on the water in a kayak or a canoe or a fishing boat? I'm not much of a water guy, but I think this applies.

[15 : 31] I understand a thing or two about physics. And you're just sitting on the boat, in the boat, on the... I know a thing or two about prepositions, too. You are sitting... You are sitting in the boat, on the water.

And if you don't do anything, your boat will drift. Even if you're on a lake, somewhat of a stagnant body of water, it will drift.

Why will that happen? Well, the wind will blow. Another boat with a jet ski will go by. And they will create some waves. And your boat will drift.

Now, maybe this illustration doesn't work for you. So maybe this one will work. You are driving down interstate, going 78 or so miles an hour. And you reach down to change the song on the radio.

And the next thing you know, you have what? Drifted. You have drifted off. And you have hit the shoulder. And those little rumble strips drive me crazy.

[16 : 34] They always think they know better than I do where I am on the road. You have drifted. Something similar happens in our spiritual lives.

We can drift. We can drift from trusting Christ to trusting in our own efforts. Nobody drifts this way on purpose.

And that is what makes it dangerous. The recipients of this letter are not in danger of rejecting the gospel.

They are in danger, as we will see as we continue through the book, of drifting from it. Even with this concern in mind, Paul and Timothy, don't start with correction.

You want to be encouraged? Then hear this. Chapter 1 and verse 3. Epaphras plants this church in the city of Colossae, and then he returns to Paul and Timothy to tell them about the church.

[18:07] And they are so thankful for their faith. Not a one-time decision somewhere in the past. No, faith that is continuing to believe.

They are holding on to Christ. They are persevering. They are also thankful for their love. Not love that's just a feeling or a sentiment.

Real, visible, costly love. Love, Paul and Timothy say, for all the saints. They are present with one another.

They are aware of each other's needs. They are helping with each other's struggles. They are urging one another towards Christ. And they are able to believe, and they are able to love like this, because of their hope.

Do you see that in the text? Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

[19:18] Hope is not some kind of wishful thinking. This is a settled, unshakable confidence in what God has promised. Their future is incredibly bright, and they are looking forward to it, and they are certain that their future is secure.

What an encouragement these words must have been to a young church in a relatively small city in the Roman Empire. But notice what Paul does next.

He zooms out. Look at this in verse number five, right in the middle of the verse. of this hope 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.

If you're taking notes, you might notice that's the second time we've seen that word truth. End of verse six, also in verse five. The faith that you are holding, the love that you are showing, the hope that you are resting in, these are not accidents.

[20:56] These are not coincidental. Faith, love, and hope. They are the fruit of the word of truth.

Do you see that in your Bible? They are the fruit of the word of truth, the gospel. And what you are seeing among yourselves, Paul and Timothy, right?

What you are seeing there in your church is not a cultural trend. It's not a regional movement. This is not a local story.

This is a global reality. The gospel that came to you is bearing fruit and increasing as it is throughout the world.

And that raises a question. What is this gospel? What is this gospel that is bearing fruit and increasing throughout the whole world?

[22:07] The gospel is not good advice. It is not a strategy for life. It is not a path to self-improvement.

The gospel is something you hear. It is an announcement, a declaration, a proclamation. God has intervened in world history.

God sent his son, Jesus. Jesus is the Messiah. He is the true king.

He lived the life that we could not live perfectly, completely obedient to God. He died the death, the very death that we deserved to die, taking our place on the cross, suffering for sins that he did not commit.

Oh, but he did not stay dead. He rose from the dead and is alive now. He is exalted at the Father's right hand.

[23:19] This Jesus, he is not just a figure from the past, you know, a historical figure, someone famous that we could read about and think about and admire from a distance.

If you will trust in him as your only hope for salvation, he will save you. He will rescue you.

He will deliver you from your sin, from death, from hell. He will give you his spirit and he will be with you, present, mindful, praying.

And he will return to establish his kingdom in the new heaven and the new earth. This is the gospel. And this gospel is bearing fruit and increasing.

But not because the people who hear this gospel are especially disciplined. Not because the people who preach this gospel are especially skilled.

[24 : 36] Not because we gather together in churches that are especially organized or authentic. The gospel bears fruit, but not because it is merely helpful or inspiring.

No, this gospel bears fruit because it is the word of truth. It doesn't work because of you.

The gospel works because it is true. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is God's message to a world desperately in need of hope. It doesn't work because of you. It works because it is true.

The gospel works, Paul and Timothy write, as you hear and understand the grace of God in truth.

[25 : 47] Do you see that at the end of verse 6? This is how the gospel works. As you hear and understand the grace of God in truth.

faith. So that means that your faith is not self-generated. I hope that's not a surprise to you.

Your faith is not self-generated. I hope this is an encouragement. Your love is not self-motivated. and your hope is not merely wishful thinking.

Your faith, your hope, your love, these are the result of the gospel doing what the gospel does, bearing fruit and increasing because it is true.

if you are in Christ then you are free to be honest about where you have drifted from the gospel.

[27 : 00] In what way are you believing that spiritual maturity is because of you and not because the gospel is true.

You can ask yourself am I trying to act like a Christian but apart from the power of the gospel at work in me?

Have I drifted from this truth and responding to this truth into some kind of empty performance? have I drifted from grace into posturing and pretending? You can repent of trusting in anything other than God's grace and you can return today to what you heard before the word of truth the gospel return to the scripture scripture listen to faithful preaching be reminded by one another by reminding each other what are God's promises to us what does God say is true how are we living out in light of what God has said to us how is our hope anchored not in how we're doing today how life is going today but in what God has said about us and about our future that is incredibly bright and secure how is our love being motivated by the love that we have received have we forgotten that we love because he first loved us these are not strategies for earning grace returning to the scripture listening to preaching spending time with the

Lord in prayer and in his word reminding each other of what is true these are not strategies for earning grace these are the ordinary means of grace by which God deepens our understanding of it grace!

[29 : 56] the grace that first saved you is the same grace that will transform and sustain you this word of truth the gospel it is bearing fruit and increasing it was bearing fruit then in Colossae and all across the Roman empire as the gospel spread but it is also bearing fruit now here among us guess what we are evidence that what Paul wrote to that church then is true here we are at the very other utter ends of the earth and yet the gospel is bearing fruit and increasing here still now why because it is true we are proof that the gospel is bearing fruit and increasing in the whole world so even when your growth feels slow even when following

Jesus feels like you take one step forward and then two steps back even when love feels costly and hope feels kind of shaky the gospel is not just where you start the gospel is where you stay growth as a follower of Jesus does not mean moving on from the gospel growth means going deeper into the gospel you don't graduate from the gospel like high school you don't move on from it like it's come kind of a training wheels you go deeper into it it is bearing fruit and increasing not because of you but because it's true let's pray together good father we are grateful to receive your word humbled by your kindness to us in

Christ thank you for the word of truth the gospel that came to us that has reached even to us thank you for those who first preached the gospel to us thank you for their ministry in our lives thank you for their faithfulness to you thank you for their boldness and their tenacity to keep preaching father thank you so much that your gospel has borne fruit in our lives that it is bearing fruit and increasing we are grateful to be those living on this side of the cross of our savior Jesus and we are grateful for the privilege of returning not to more laws not to more rules not to more regulations we are grateful for the privilege of returning to the word of truth to growing our understanding of your grace and

watching your grace the gospel of

Jesus transform us day by day little by little would you please continue to do this work in our hearts as we commit to trusting you and walking every day by faith holy spirit please lead guide and direct us make us more like Jesus help us to honor you with our faith our love and our hope we look to you to continue guiding in our time of worship in Jesus name we pray amen