

Colossians 1:1-8

Vv. 1-2. by the will of God—Greek, “through,” and **Timothy**—(also **2 Cor 1:1**). He was with Paul at the time of writing in Rome. He had been the companion of Paul in his first tour through Phrygia, in which Colossae was. Hence the Colossians seem to have associated him with Paul in their affections. Neither Paul nor Timothy, probably, had *seen* the Colossian *Church* (compare **Col 2:1**); but had seen, during their tour through Phrygia, individual Colossians, as Epaphras, Philemon, Archippus, and Apphia (**Phm 1:2**), who when converted, brought the Gospel to their native city.

V. 3. Thanksgiving for the “faith, hope, and love” of the Colossians. So in the twin Epistle, the book of Ephesians, sent at the same time and by the same bearer, Tychicus (‘faith and love’, **Eph 1:15-16**). **We**—I and Timothy. **Give thanks to God the Father—praying always for you**—with thanksgiving (**Phil 4:6**). See **Col 1:4** on love. God is recognized as the cause of this goodness in His people.

APPL. “I am thankful for you,” those five words are life-changing in that timely encouragement has the power to rejuvenate us—especially in times of weariness in well-doing. We doubt at times; “am I really making a difference, or just spinning my wheels?” But, the Lord often uses fellow believers to build us up, encourage us, comfort us, even admonish us. “Just know that God is working through you, please keep it up!” We know that in this epistle, Paul is most thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ and His preeminence and superiority. Therefore, when the apostle expresses thanks for the Colossians, he is not just expressing thanks for them in general, but gratitude for the work that God is doing through them (instruments in the hand of the Redeemer). The Colossian believers were the gracious objects of the transforming power of the preeminent Christ (channels, and conduits in the Lord’s hands).

V. 4. Since we heard—The language implies that he had only heard of, and not *seen*, them (**Col 2:1**). **love ... to all**—the absent, as well as those present. **Faith**—is the soul looking up to God in reliance upon Him. **Love** looks outward to the welfare of others. **Hope** looks forward to what God has promised in the future. **Faith rests** in Christ and His finished work in the past, **Love works** in the present, and Hope *exercises* spiritual sight in anticipation of the future.

Faith and love are seen here as springing from the confidence of what God will do in the future. These controlling, animated graces/virtues are produced by the gospel. Thus, those who are unregenerate (not born again), spiritually dead (even though churchied), will not manifest these gospel fruits. Know where you stand!

APPL. As to the Colossians’ faith; the Person of Christ and all of His benefits He has won for believers **is received by faith**. But faith does not stand alone as some positive virtue such as optimism, no gospel faith is totally and intimately linked to its object; the Lord Jesus Christ. (EX. see Bonar here on the error of ‘generic’ faith in God,

general love and mercy—why it cannot save. Bonar notes that martyrologist, John Foxe said the following to his Roman Catholic contemporaries: “as there is no gift of God given to man, no virtue, work, merit, nor anything else that is part or cause of salvation, but only this gift of faith to believe in Christ Jesus. . . faith itself does not justify unless it be directed to the body of Christ crucified as its object.”)

Many who have grown up in church have the false security that they are right/fine with God because of their faithfulness to attend church, that they sit under good ministers and hear reliable teaching, and are involved in church activities—yet they have never abandoned themselves to (cast themselves upon) Christ the Lord.

Is it any wonder then that they are not excited about Christ, or about making Him known, or about receiving holiness from Him, or about the gospel power needed to put sin and temptation to death?

We are going to see in the next few verses that biblical faith is trust in Christ which leads to action. How different this true faith is from the initial professions of faith made by many (described in the parable of the soils (**Mt 13:18-23**))—they appeared to sprout, germinate, even show some enthusiasm about the gospel, but never grew to the point of bearing fruit.

My friends, faith’s outcome (*fruitful growth*) is as important as faith’s object (*the Lord Jesus Christ*). Faith without obedience is not real faith—true believers obey Christ as Lord. Many people have only dead faith and are deceived (**Jas 2:14-26**); they are spiritually asleep under the deception of false security. This is reminiscent of the character, ‘Ignorance’ in John Bunyan’s book, *Pilgrim’s Progress* (here is the account of Mr. ‘Ignorance’ on judgment day):

Then they asked him for his certificate, that they might go in and show it to the King; so he fumbled in his bosom for one, and found none. Then said they, Have you none? But the man answered never a word. So they told the King, but he would not come down to see him, but commanded the two Shining Ones that conducted Christian and Hopeful to the City, to go out and take Ignorance, and bind him hand and foot, and have him away. Then they took him up, and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the hill, and put him in there. Then I saw that there was a way to hell, even from the gates of heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction. So I awoke, and behold it was a dream.

‘Ignorance’ had no roll, no scroll, in other words, he had no evidence of assurance of salvation. His professed faith was a sham. In life he was buoyant, lively, care free, and he boasted of an easier way, a shortcut to the Celestial City which did not involve perseverance and difficulty. He is a picture of the false believer. He wanted religious comfort without a cost, heaven without a cross. He showed no evidence of being committed to doing the Father’s will (he did his own will, not the Father’s will, **Mt 7**).

V. 5. “The love which ye have to all the saints” (**v. 4**) **because** of (literally, ‘*on account of*’) the hope. The hope of eternal life is operative in the true believer as an active principle, always producing “love.” “Nothing is more effectual for this purpose of love than the sense of God’s free grace” [CALVIN]. **laid up**—a treasure *laid up in heaven*—Greek, “in the heavens,” so as to be out of danger of being lost (**2 Ti 4:8; 1 Pet 1:4**). *Faith, love, and hope* (**Col 1:4-5**), comprise the sum of Christianity. Compare **Col 1:23**, “the hope of the Gospel.”

whereof ye heard before—namely, at the time when it was preached to you. That “hope” formed part of “the word of the truth of the Gospel” (compare **Eph 1:13**), that is, part of the Gospel truth preached unto you. (EX. A dive master saying in Navy SEAL training: you can live three weeks without food, 3 days without water, 3 minutes without air, but you can’t live 3 seconds without hope.) Gospel ‘hope’ theme in Col.

APPL. The blessed riches of the gospel are rooted in hope. Thus, the hope you have as a believer is the result of the gospel having worked in you (see **1 Pet 1:4; Heb 6:19**). Gospel hope plants an eternal value system in a person. That individual will not be consumed with getting everything possible out of life (the hope-filled believer is the polar opposite of the unbeliever who has a slavish fear of death and consequently lives for this present world, **Heb 2:14-15**). In Christ, the believer’s heavenly inheritance is beyond our comprehension; more than we can imagine. As a result, the true believer is someone who is able to wait. He or she is not controlled by instant gratification.

This gospel hope is intensely practical because it causes a Christian to live with his eye on the prize, on his inheritance. That is why the believer is always planting now preparing now, building now, sowing and watering now—with a view to that coming day of harvest (making provision for the next life now). The day of reaping is coming, will it be a harvest you enjoy forever (**Gal 6:7-8**)? The person who has lived for this life alone will reap a harvest of thorns—a sobering, broken expectation (**Jer 12:13**).

Love and faith spring from this substantial gospel hope. This hope of harvest is a function of continually walking by faith. An eternal value system shapes the believer’s character. Faith and hope make the believer able to suffer now, to work now, to even be ridiculed now, humbled now, endure mistreatment now, even be rejected and die now. How different is the mindset of the unbeliever! For the unbeliever is consumed with having everything his way now (unbeliever’s reason: *I just want to be happy*). How does the Christian reason? “I am not afraid of failure; I am afraid of succeeding at things that don’t matter” (Wm Carey).

This love of the present world manifests itself in the messages we hear from politics, education, entertainment, and advertising. In the media we hear of utopian schemes in which fallen men and women imagine that they have the power to usher in an ideal society of human flourishing through legislation and social engineering. If you listen carefully to political speeches and you will hear them filled with this kind of language—as if apart from the gospel, mankind has the ability to produce a world

without oppression or war, a world without victims, a world totally inclusive that works for everyone. Those kinds of false promises are like an addicting drug (they feed human pride as in the ‘boastful pride of life’ targeted in **1 John 2:15-17**). There will be no peace, no ideal society until Christ returns and takes His throne on earth.

V. 6. Which is come unto you—Greek, “Which is present among you,” and remains with, you. He speaks of the Word as a living person *present* among them. **as it is in all the world**—*virtually*, as it was by this time preached in the leading parts of the then known world. **Bearing fruit** (Grk. *Pres. Middle Participle*, the gospel is bearing fruit of itself), “As in all the world it is bringing forth fruit *and growing*, even as it does in you also.” What is asserted is not that the Gospel has been preached in all the world, but that it is **bearing fruits of righteousness (Gal 5:22-23)**, and (like a tree *growing* at the same time that it is *bearing fruit*) (outward expansion of inward growing).

Heard of it—rather, rather, “came to know”; became *fully* experimentally *acquainted* with it. **the grace of God in truth**—that is, in its truth, and with true knowledge [ALFORD].

APPL. Genuine gospel faith is a living, animating thing which produces growth, bears fruit, and brings fruit to maturity. God’s people are transformed by the gospel—they are placed on a path to maturity. The gospel sets believing persons free from self-absorption so that they might find their happiness in investing in others (**Gal 5:13**) (EX. ‘Freedom is dangerous is not used to serve others). Wherever and whomever the gospel reaches, it produces spiritual growth and it bears this kind of fruit (gospel produces: ‘clear channel’ service: **1 Tim 1:5**).

There is the need for realism here; it is valuable at this point. In our culture we are immersed in instant gratification (ads). And, the patience involved/needed in fruit-bearing can at times be accompanied by discouragement and tired-ness. No wonder the Scriptures speak of overcoming weariness in our quest to be fruitful and make a difference (the Bible is honest about this need for stamina in well-doing)(see **1 Cor 15:58; Gal 6:9-10**). Fruit-bearing takes time. And gospel faith and hope counsel us along these lines that, indeed, if we want to see fruit, we will have to be patient.

I certainly think of the patience involved in disciple-making. The fruit may not be easily quantifiable at first, but the long-range benefits are immeasurably wonderful. Paul says so in **1 Thessalonians 2:19-20**. This spiritual investment in others works itself out in love springing from hope—and reaching maturity.

APPL. The riches of Christ in the gospel are revealed through the grace of God. This gospel hope is not solely a fixed mindset about what God promises, it is also the experience of God’s love. In the riches of the gospel, God’s love for His Son is shed abroad and poured out upon believers (Jn 17:23, 26; **Rom 5:5**; Eph 2:4).

Gospel hope is revealed to us, and communicated to us by God’s grace. That means that the gospel is not a special opportunity sitting on a shelf (like a plan in a

package), waiting for a consumer to come by and pick it up. No, Christ tells us that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (**Lu 19:10**). If He had not done the seeking, we would have remained in our lost condition (having no relationship with God). The faith to take hold of Christ believingly is a gift of God (**Phil 1:29**) (EX. One minister/divine, “Who started religion in you?”). Therefore, in keeping with this theme of God’s grace, the gospel is the power of God (**Rom 1:16-17**); for it comes bringing to the elect the power to believe and repent—to those whom God effectually calls (**Acts 2:39; 2 Thess 2:14; 2 Tim 1:9**). This concept of divine calling is not a fine point of theology, it essential to grace. You need God to find God.

Before C. S. Lewis was saved, he had the wrong idea about grace. He thought that he understood how God’s forgiveness works. He imagined that forgiveness was the reward for sincerity, for earnestness, and doing one’s best. But, God showed him otherwise; that he was a lost man, and that salvation is not a transaction. But, through trust in Christ alone is salvation. By God’s grace, the sufficiency of Christ to save burst upon his mind and heart. He then was able to perceive that the righteousness which justified him was not in himself, but was in his Savior, in Christ who was seated at the right hand of the Father.

To see Christ in this manner is to be a saved person. John Bunyan’s personal testimony is very similar. In his book, *Grace abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Bunyan speaks of his initial trust and reliance on Christ. Bunyan says, I saw Christ in all His fullness, at the right hand of God, as my righteousness—my chains fell off, my temptations lost all their power—there was nothing but Christ before my eyes.

To possess this righteous which is inherent in Another, in Christ and not in ourselves, is transformative. Everything changes for the believer—you can say the following and mean it: “My very best days as a Christian add nothing to my righteousness in Christ, and my very worst days as a Christian do not take away a single ounce of my righteousness in Christ.” This is the key to liberty in Christ; the foundation of our freedom, and source of our ability to love others as we’ll see in **verses 7-8**.

V. 7. As ye also learned—“of—from Epaphras.” dear—Greek, “beloved.” fellow servant—namely, of Christ. It is possible that Epaphras may have been apprehended for his zealous labors in Asia Minor; but more probable that Paul gave him the title; as his faithful companion in his imprisonment. **who is for you**, “who is faithful in your behalf as a minister of Christ;” hinting that he is one not to be set aside for the new and erroneous teachers (don’t be deluded! **Col 2:1–23**).

V. 8. your love—(Col 1:4); “to all the saints.” in the Spirit—the sphere or element in which alone true love is found; as distinguished from the state of those “in the flesh” (**Rom 8:9**). Yet even the Colossians needed to be stirred up to greater love (**Col 3:12–14**). Love is the first and chief fruit of the Spirit (**Gal 5:22**).¹

Note Bonhoeffer (*Life Together*), on the great difference between spiritual love

and natural love (the kind of love unbelievers have). Spiritual love is to love another for Christ's sake, problems and all. By contrast natural love is stimulated by the virtues of its object, and natural love seeks direct contact, unmediated by Christ, almost possessive relationship with its object (stabilize love object), whereas spiritual love is mediated by Christ ('how would Christ have me treat this person?').

And, as Abbott remarks, the ground of this love is not individual sympathy, or personal acquaintance, this *agape* love belongs to the sphere of the Holy Spirit's influence. By the love of the Spirit, people manifest the fruit of the Spirit (includes: *gentleness, patience, self-control*). "Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me" (the Spirit enables us to love others supernaturally, **Romans 15:30**).

APPL. **The gospel is reported by others, broadcast, and proclaimed.** Salvation is all of grace, but believers are given by God the great privilege and responsibility of being used as His co-laborers (**1 Cor 3:9**), as His ambassadors (2 Cor 5:19-20). The Colossians learned the gospel from Epaphras. EX. my Indian friend named 'Herald'.

When was the last time you cherished this privilege of being designated a 'gospel reporter'? Think about it, though our love for the Lord is so often tepid, our level of consecration to Him lacking, our victory over the remnants of indwelling sin, partial, yet—He still wants to use you. He desires that you live as a reporter of the gospel; as an agent of change.

Listen to Romans 10:14-15—"How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, 'HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!'"

Look at your feet, are they stationary during the week in terms of announcing the good news? Or are they eager to share the superiority of Christ with the lost? What good news we have to share. Our consciences correctly tell us that we habitually fall short of perfect love to God and neighbor, and God is just to condemn the sinner. But, there is good news: in Christ, there is cleansing for sin and there is covering for the unrighteous, freely given to guilty sinners who trust in Him, the Lord Jesus Christ who is preeminent.

We have seen that the gospel is not merely a plan to deliver us from judgment and bring us to God. The gospel has an outcome, it changes hearts, it makes men and women new, and it puts them on a path of spiritual growth and fruitfulness. ***The gospel transforms lives through the faith and love rooted in hope revealed by grace.***

ADDENDUM:

God makes Himself known by how He saves sinners from their sin. He does this saving through Messiah, our Substitute by the satisfaction of His unchanging standard

of His righteousness through Jesus, the One He has appointed. Our Lord Jesus Christ obeys the divine standard of righteousness perfectly, then He lays down His life as a payment for the law breaking of all who would ever believe.

Our Great Physician is friend of sinners. He makes His love known by entering our broken world in order that He might be broken on behalf of sin-broken people that they might experience the unbroken communication of God's love. This is all about the Redeemer repairing what sin had broken.

Christ puts broken people back together around Himself so that they are complete in Him (Col 2:10). In Christ, we are accepted by God, clothed with Christ's righteousness and given the status of sonship. But, my friends, we still carry the remnants of a lower nature that seeks completeness in ourselves and not Another, in Christ. We have a carnal 'religious self' (that even uses religious words), but seeks to patch up our defectiveness in our own way.

In terms of these carnal false solutions, the church at Corinth provides a nearly exhaustive catalog of fleshly ways religious people try to feel good about themselves. Here is partial list: score cards of achievement, the need to know who's on top, badges of spirituality, sectarianism, a party spirit, pecking orders, a celebrity-like following of leaders, comparing oneself with others, and seeking to comfort oneself with sensuality. All these behaviors are hostile to Christian love and unity. And, according to Paul, they constitute the world's wisdom and not the wisdom of the cross.

But, we need to keep in mind that these behaviors are natural to us. The Corinthians, like us, did not sit down and develop a malicious intent to damage the unity of the Church. Instead, these behaviors are a default way of coping with our defects. Therefore, I want you to see that Paul does not conclude his reproof with phrases such as, "hey, just quit doing that, straighten up, fly right." No, the situation will not be rectified by a bare appeal to moral will power.

The exposure we feel in our own souls, due to fallenness (and defectiveness) needs a covering. We can agree that we are frequently beaten up by the awareness of our own continual shortcomings. And as mentioned, we tend to gravitate to these fleshly strategies in order to feel better about ourselves. But, our defects must be answered by the grace of Christ in the gospel. Therefore, Paul does not simply say, "stop being bad, be good." Instead, he exhibits the supremacy of Christ. For Christ answers in His own Person all of the believers defects, faults and shortcomings.

This is going to be one of the great benefits of studying Colossians, for it is a constant display of Christ who matches our ruin with His redemption, our sinnership with His saviorhood, our fears with His faithfulness, our grievances with His graciousness. Have you become tired yet of trying to fix yourself? Happy is that man

or woman who by the gospel has properly diagnosed the disease of his or her own soul (our depravity because of original sin). For only, if you have a clear view of that disease, will you see clearly that Christ is the remedy.

(Examples of the gospel of Christ to use: Bobby's learning of the gospel from his cellmate, Christ answering the 7 abominations by His substitution, the boy with the arrows in the barn). As mentioned earlier, the gospel is not a wonderful opportunity for spiritual consumers. The gospel is a massive divine intervention in the life of the sinner who was headed for destruction.

The grace of God in the gospel is terrific news because the gospel comes bringing the power needed to comply with its requirements of faith and repentance. My friends, spiritually dead rebels do not exercise faith and repentance. They have no internal little island of righteousness by which to generate those responses. Faith and repentance are gifts of God granted in the new birth (Jn 1:12-13; Jas 1:18; 1 Pet 1:3).

The gospel comes first exposing our deadness, guilt, and separation from God. Once under conviction, the sinner attempts to clean up his own life, but in doing so he discovers his helplessness and bondage. As the Spirit continues to convict him, he is finally bankrupted of any imagined merit before God. Thus, the gospel reveals that only divine pity and compassion can save us. When a sinner cries to Christ for mercy, he is even pleading with God for even the grace needed to trust Christ alone.

This is why reliance upon Christ for righteousness is the essence of saving faith. Faith in Christ connects us to God, and therefore, faith is the foundational virtue to all other virtues. Spiritual fruit/Christian virtues flow from the complete reliance that Christ is your righteousness and not you (shapes every motive in service). He is your covenant with God, not your own efforts. He is your status, standing, and acceptance before God, not your piety or religious efforts.

So, what I don't want you to miss is that the fruit of the Spirit can only be produced in a person who knows that Christ is their entire righteousness. We mentioned earlier that the great hope given in the gospel is revealed by God's grace. My friends, in order to grasp the wonder of God's free grace in Christ, it requires a new faculty which Jesus described as *spiritual eyes to see and spiritual ears to hear (Mt 13:16-17)*. Otherwise, without that spiritual faculty, the words of life in the gospel, bounce off of hearts of stone like grains of wheat off of a polished rock.

End Notes:

ⁱ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible (Vol. 2, pp. 370–371). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.