

The Faith and Love of the Colossians

Colossians 1:1-4

All Stand and Read Scripture

Colossians 1:1-4 (NASB)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are* at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³ We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

Prayer

INTRODUCTION:

We will be starting a new series of messages this morning from the book of Colossians. We just finished Philippians which described the attitude, mindset and outlook we as believers must have if we want to experience the joy of the Lord.

Colossians was written by the apostle Paul while he was in prison, probably in Rome around 60-62 A.D. It was one of four epistles that he wrote while in prison. They are referred to as "prison epistles". The other three epistles are Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon.

Colossea is approximately 400 miles NW of Jerusalem in present day Turkey. The city was 13 miles from Hierapolis and 10 from Laodicea. It was a place of great importance in the fifth century B.C. but as the neighboring cities, Hierapolis and Laodicea, increased in importance, Colossae declined because of changing trade routes. Based upon (2:10) "all of those who have not seen my face", it is not likely that Paul visited the place in person. Based upon (1:1) "and Timothy our brother" (1:7) "just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant" we learn that the church was established due to the efforts of Epaphras and Timothy. It was the home of Epaphras according to (4:12) and the home of Philemon. Philemon's hometown is not mentioned in Paul's letter, but Colossians 4:9 indicates that Philemon's slave, Onesimus, was a resident of Colossae. Since Onesimus lived with his master Philemon at the time Colossians was written, Philemon must also have lived in Colossae.

In the 12th century the church was destroyed by the Turks and the city disappeared. Its site was explored in the 1830's. The ruins of the church, the

stone foundation of a large theater, and a necropolis with stones of a peculiar shape are still in existence, but the site has not yet been excavated

In the epistle, Paul writes the Colossians on how to counter and respond to heretical teachings that they are facing based upon information that he has learned from Apaphras about the church.

In religion the Colossians were especially lax and worshipping angels. (2:18) *“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,”*

Another problem was a Judaic-Gnostic heresy that sought to mix Greek philosophy with Christian theology. Gnostic philosophy taught that matter was evil. In order to avoid having their pure god create evil, they had created a system of lesser deities that overflowed from their god. These lesser gods were far enough removed from the pure god that they were able to create the universe (which was, in their eyes, composed of evil matter).

They named this lesser deity the Jehovah God of the Hebrews.

This heresy was rejecting the deity of Jesus Christ, probably teaching that He was just a “unique man”. Paul warns not to *allow anyone to lead them astray with philosophy, trickery, or by traditions of men*. Paul then assured the church that Jesus is God, (2:9) *“in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form”* and that He, (1:20) *“reconciled all things unto Himself”*, and He did it by, (2:14) *“having nailed it to the cross”* (2:14) referring to our sins. Because Jesus Christ is God, He was able to pay the penalty of sin in order to rescue mankind.

Thus, the theme of Colossians is Christ’s preeminence and absolute supremacy and the sole sufficiency of Christ. He teaches one of the most powerful passages attributing the divinity of Jesus Christ who is God in flesh as found anywhere in the Bible.

Paul also writes to the Colossians to encourage them to serve with fervor and passion.

In chapters 3-4, Paul encourages the church to focus on God, and keep their eyes on the goal, *“set your mind on the things above”* (3:2).

So that leads us into today’s message from Colossians 1:1-4. Although the church was facing false doctrine, Paul still referred to them as “saints”. There were three things he mentions that indicated that they were still serving the Lord.

1. They were receiving grace and peace from God.
2. They were remaining faithful to Christ.
3. They were loving one another.

BODY:

I. Receiving Grace and Peace from God.

Colossians 1:1-2 (NASB)

1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

²To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ *who are at Colossae*: **Grace to you and peace from God our Father.**

Have you noticed that at the beginning of each of Paul's he says, "Grace to you," and at the end of his letters he says, "Grace be with you."? The only exception is Hebrews, where it is only mentioned at the end of the book.

I am told that "Grace" is mentioned 170 times in the Bible.

Have you ever wondered what Paul meant when he said "Grace to you"? Consider some of the ways it can be defined:

1. Grace is God's unmerited favor. That is, grace is God doing good for us that we do not deserve. In the Bible, grace and mercy are like two heads of the same coin.

Mercy is God withholding judgment or evil that I deserve.

Grace is God giving me blessing or good that I do not deserve.

Because of God's mercy, I do not receive the judgment of God against my sins.

Because of God's grace, I receive eternal life and a promise of heaven though I do not deserve them.

Both mercy and grace come to me though the Lord Jesus Christ.

2. Grace can also be defined as God's sufficiency or God's fullness in the life of the believer. He is all we need as a Christian.

2 Corinthians 9:8 (NASB)

⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed;

We are to trust that God's grace working in us will be sufficient for every good work that we do through God.

This being the case, you can see that grace is first of all necessary for salvation.

Ephesians 2:8 (NASB)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is the gift of God;*

One aspect of salvation is called justification. That is the act by which we are declared just (or righteous) before God on the basis of the payment Jesus Christ made for our sin. The Bible clearly teaches that we are justified by the grace of God.

Titus 3:5-7 (NASB)

⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the hope of eternal life.*

So, obviously, we need the grace of God. We need it first of all for salvation (which is past tense for the Christian). Without the grace of God, we cannot have eternal life. However, we also need the grace of God for our daily walk with God (which is present and future tense).

We are weak and prone to stray. Jesus told us that we can do nothing without Him.

John 15:5 (NASB)

⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.

But God provides daily strength through His grace working in us. We should seek this grace for living from him. Then, we should believe that He will provide what He has promised and walk with assurance that His grace is working in us.

Remember, in last week's message we learned that we cannot out give God? All we have is **from him** and **through him** and **to him**. If we were to give him all of our self and all of our time and all of our possessions, we could never out give the grace of God. He **gave His Son** that we might be forgiven of our sins and be made righteous before God and live eternally with Him in Heaven. He also gives us joy, peace, contentment, and, as we have just talked about, GRACE!

The second reason that Paul thanked God for the Colossians was that they were ...

II. Remaining Faithful to Christ.

Colossians 1:3-4 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

Paul was thankful for their faith. Notice the OBJECT of their faith. Paul was thankful for their faith “in Christ Jesus”. He is thankful because it is in the RIGHT OBJECT!

Faith in and of itself has no value. Faith is only as good as the OBJECT it is in.

ILLUSTRATION:

Let's imagine you are in a river and do not have the strength to swim to shore. You are in a river that is also flowing toward a giant waterfall. There are ropes that are thrown out to you. We would say that grabbing hold of that rope is like faith.

One rope is tied securely to a log that is floating down the river with you.

One rope is laid out on the edge of the river and attached to nothing.

Another rope is tied to a dead limb that is hanging over the river that is too rotten to hold.

A final rope is securely fastened to a very heavy boulder that is 90% into the ground.

You can exercise faith and grab onto whichever rope you choose, but only one rope will save you. It is the one that is anchored to the boulder.

When we talk of faith, our faith in and of itself is as useless as the ropes that will not hold you. Our faith must be in Christ. Our faith is only as good as the object that secures it.

ILLUSTRATION:

We can say that the Islamic terrorists, who crashed the planes into the twin towers in New York City in 2001, had faith. They were men of great faith! They really believed what they believed. They were willing to die and kill thousands of others because they believed so strongly. They had great faith. But, their faith did not good, because their faith was in a lie. Their faith, like the insufficiently attached ropes, was useless!

The Colossians had faith. Their faith was in Christ Jesus. The OBJECT of Biblical faith is always and only in Jesus Christ. It is Him alone that SAVES!

Acts 4:12 (NASB)

¹² And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

It is one thing to know that we must have faith in Christ, but we must also understand the Biblical meaning of faith.

If someone came to you and said “I am lost. I want to put my faith in Christ! What is faith?”

Would you be able to give them a Biblical definition of faith and support it with scriptures? What is this faith that Paul was so thankful for?

I would suggest that FAITH is a personal trust in Jesus Christ. It can be broke down into two aspects.

1. A belief in the facts of Jesus.

We see a hint of this in verses 5 and 6.

Colossians 1:5-6 (NASB)

of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as *it has been doing* in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;

Paul refers to the gospel message as TRUTH. Truth that they have understood. The implication is that in order to have faith, you must **know certain facts**, you must **understand them**, and you must **believe them**.

You must know that

- Jesus is who He revealed Himself to be.
- He is the God man.
- He died for sin.
- He rose from the dead.

Faith believes those facts. But faith is more than that.

The second aspect is...

2. Faith is a belief that issues forth a submission to Jesus Christ.

Understand that mere intellectual knowledge of the facts is NOT FAITH!

John 3:36 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³⁶ He who believes in the Son has eternal life; (now, you would expect the next part of the verse to read, “but he who does not believe will not have eternal life”. Right? If you are reading the KJV or the New KJV, it will, but the word in Greek is not a negative believe, it is a totally different word and the NASB reads **but he who does not obey** the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

John 3:18 (NASB)

¹⁸ He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

In this verse the second believe is a negative “believe”.

The point is that the Bible describes belief as an obedience to God.

ILLUSTRATION:

Imagine if you would that I am sitting upstairs in my office here in the church and a man comes running in and says , “Pastor, the church is on fire!”. And I look at them and say, “Alright, I hear you”. Just sit down in the chair right there and when I am done, we will deal with this.”

Now, would anyone in their right mind think that I believed what he was saying? You would probably think that I knew something about this guy that would cause me to disbelieve him.

But, if I really believed this guy, I would run through the church and tell everyone to leave. **The church is on fire! Belief would issue an action!**

Belief in Christ is the same way. If we truly believe that Christ is who He says He is and He has done what He has said He has done, **why would we not obey!**

James 2:17-18 (NASB)

¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, *being* by itself.

¹⁸ But someone may *well* say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

Belief issues forth obedience. This is the faith that the Colossians had.

The third reason that Paul thanked God for the Colossians was that they were

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III. **Loving One Another.**

Colossians 1:3-4 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

³ We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus **and the love which you have for all the saints;**

Once again, we need to understand the Biblical meaning of love. As modern Americans, we tend to view love as emotional and sentimental. We view love as strictly a feeling, but that is NOT what Biblical love is.

When Paul thanks God for the Colossians love, he is not suggesting that they all had the exact same overflowing affection for every saint.

Biblical love is a **concern for** and a **willingness to** serve others. Love is an action to serve God or other people.

1 John 3:16-18 (NASB)

¹⁶ We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

We are told to "love God with all our heart, soul, and mind and to love our neighbor as ourself".

Love is important because it shows evidence to us that we are serving the Lord.

1 John 3:14 New American Standard Bible (NASB)

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.

CONCLUSION:

Like the Colossians,

- We should trust that God's grace is sufficient for all our needs.
- We should exhibit an active faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- We should practise an active love to God and others.

Life as a Christian requires obedience to God's will. The most important offering that we can make is of ourselves. It is not a duty, it is a privilege; it is an attitude.

If you have never turned your life over to Christ, today could be your day of salvation. Christ wants you to start living your life for Him and have an active faith and love in Him. Christ died for all of your sins. Sin separates us from a perfect and Holy God and prevents us from knowing Christ. By God's grace our sins have been wiped away by His Son and we have been made righteous.

He has given us mercy and grace, how can we not give back to God?

If you have not turned your life over to Christ, I want to give you that opportunity this morning.

If you are in need of prayer, or want to become recognized as a member of Greenwood Christian church, please come forward this morning as we sing the invitation hymn.

He is Lord.

He is Lord. He is Lord.
He has risen from the grave and He is Lord.
Every knee shall bow, every tongue confess
That Jesus Christ is Lord.