

In Christ, In Colossae Colossians 1:1-8

If you go to Colossae today, there's nothing to see but this little un-excavated mound [Pictures].

- (Laodicea and Hierapolis – 15 min drive; Ephesus 2 ½ hours). “**The Triangle**” (4:13)
- We know very little about this agricultural town of Colossae in the time of Paul.
 - Colossae sat on the main East-West road from Ephesus to the East ...
- At one time it was a thriving city.
- But by the time Paul wrote, it's significance had diminished. It was a small town.
- This is one of the least influential cities to receive a letter from Paul.
- He wrote it around AD 60-62.
- The church would have been founded roughly 7 years earlier (AD 53-55)
- Epaphras is with Paul in prison (likely in Rome), and he has shared a report about the church; and Paul writes to address the issue of false teaching.
- As we put the pieces together with the book of Philemon, we see that Philemon had a house church in Colossae, and there was likely more than one house church there.

“in Christ, in Colossae”

- These saints live in Colossae, but more importantly, they live *in* Christ. (V. 1-2)
- They have a dual identity, with “in Christ” being most important.
- **In Christ, in Raleigh**. “No matter where you are geographically and physically, what you are spiritually will never change. You may be at work, at play, overseas, under the weather, out of money, but you are always and unchangeably in Christ! You may be down in the dumps, over the hill, or beside yourself, but you are always and unchangeably in Christ! You may be at paradise or in prison, at the movies or in Chicago, but you are always and unchangeably in Christ.” (Storms)
- Sometimes people ask, “Do you like where you live?” You may not particularly care for your physical location, but the saint says “Oh, I love where I live. I'm in Christ.”

The situation of the church in Colossae is important for us to understand:

- A “philosophy” (as Paul calls it, **2:8**) was threatening this little group of new, predominantly Gentile Christians. It was “not according to Christ.” (2:8)
- Epaphras had founded the church (Acts 19), but there were brewing problems.
- Some call this doctrinal threat “the Colossian Heresy” but what it consisted of exactly is not entirely clear.
 - Was it gnostic Judaism?
 - Was it a gnostic or pre-gnostic mystery religion?
 - Was it a form of Greek philosophy?
 - Was it syncretism, mixing of Jewish theology with pagan philosophy?
 - Were these opponents inside or outside the church?

I will spare you from 2,000 years of debate and say it is not entirely clear.

But in my judgment it's best to see this false teaching
being mostly Jewish, but with pagan elements mixed in (so Beale).

(Part of the reason for the lack of clarity is that Colossae remains unexcavated).

- Paul clearly mentions Jewish elements throughout the letter. (Days, food, drink, shadows/substance).
- But there are also references to the worship of angels, visionary experiences and forms of asceticism.
- So it was probably a form of Jewish syncretism: Jewish beliefs with Greek philosophy (references to spiritual powers and forms of asceticism) and perhaps local Phrygian folk religion (which had forms of magic and ritual power).

Whoever these opponents were (and whether they had wormed their way in the church, or remained outside), what they were doing is clear:
they were trying to undermine the sufficiency of Jesus.

And they were doing it with **smug superiority.**

- They were saying, “you new Christians need something else...”
- They found “fullness” (a repeated word in the letter) in their philosophy.
- They were attacking the security of the saints, and the satisfaction of the saints, saying you need something more than Christ!

So Paul writes so they can understand that they are secure in Christ and they have all they need for spiritual fullness in Christ. References:

- He rejoice in the “firmness of faith in Christ” (2:5)
- The theme verses are 2:6-7 – “rooted, and built up in him”
- His ministry aims to bring them to “maturity” (1:28)
- Epapharas has labored so they can be “fully assured” (Col 4:12)

So regardless of the specific problem, the solution in Colossians is clear:

Recognize the totally sufficiency and complete adequacy of Jesus Christ.

These opponents belittled the sufficiency of Christ.

- They sought to eat away the certainty and contentment of the believers.
- But Paul affirms again and again: “Christ is enough.”
- Salvation is only found in Christ, and you do not need to add something else for spiritual satisfaction or security.
- When you become a Christian, you do *not* go somewhere else for growth (2:6-7)

Here is a truth that is timeless: Christ is enough.

- He’s enough for our salvation.
- He’s enough for a sanctification (ch. 3)
- He is enough to shape our relationships and ethics (ch 3)

Every NT letter exalts Christ, but the Christology in Colossians is remarkable:

- The “Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1:3);
- Jesus is “the Son he loves” (1:13).

- There is the majestic Christ hymn: Christ as Lord over creation, the church, and the Christian (1:15ff)
- 1:15, 1:19, 2:9, affirm that Jesus is God!
- He is the one who reconciled us to God through his death on the cross (1:21ff)
- The “word of God” (1:25) is also “the word of Christ” (3:16).
- 1:28 — Christ is the subject of our proclamation!
- The “mystery of God” is “Christ” (1:27; 2:2).
- God raised Jesus from the dead (2:13).
- It is by holding on to Christ, the “head,” that God provides growth to the body (2:19).
- Christ is now seated at “the right hand of God” (3:1), and believers’ lives are now “hidden with Christ in God” (3:3).
- Everything we do should be “in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (3:17).
- Paul asks prayer that God might “open a door” to proclaim “the mystery of Christ” (4:3).
- The “kingdom of God” (4:11) is also “the kingdom of the Son he loves” (1:13).

This Christ is enough!

- The Colossians’ faith is in Christ (1:3)
- Epaphras is a faithful minister of Christ (1:7)
- Christ is in the believer, the Christ who is the hope of glory! (1:27ff)
- It is the peace of Christ that rules where the word of Christ dwells (3:15-16)

This is an important word for us:

We must go back to the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ so that we don’t lose our foundations both in understanding and behavior.

Christ is enough. Drink deeply from the wells of his salvation.

This is not just a doctrinal truth to affirm, but a truth for the heart to enjoy.

- Do you feel like you there is something more for your Christian life?
- Do you feel discontent? Unfulfilled?
- Several years ago Timmis preached on this idea of “Christ is enough,” and brought out how deep discontentment works through our veins.
- Commercials tell us we need a newer car, a bigger house, a hipper phone.
- But also in the Christian life, we have a sense that **we lack joy, we lack peace, we lack power, we desire more** — but the issue **is where do you go for that desire to be satisfied?**

We go to Christ.

Joy, peace, power, love are benefits that come to us *through* Christ.

They aren’t the reason we go to Christ; *if so then, Christ becomes a means to an end.*

No, Christ is enough.

**We don't need more than Christ;
we need more of Christ.**

- **He is not a means to an end: He is the end: There is nothing greater than himself.**
- **In whatever season of life you are in! (Single, Married, young, old): Christ is enough.**

In all of our pleasures, Jesus is better.

In all of our sufferings, Christ is enough

Let us rehearse this in our hearts today: Christ is enough.

IF you are **not a Christian**, this is what we are saying: Christ is enough.

When we say Christ is enough, we are also saying **“the Gospel is enough.”**

- For when the true gospel is preached, Christ is preached.
- The Colossians didn't need more than the gospel; they need to simply apply the gospel more.
- By embracing the gospel, as preached by Epaphras, the Colossians embraced Christ himself, and he was enough.

Paul thanks God for the Gospel in these opening verses...

Greeting (1:1-2)

1: “Paul” writes as an “apostle,” with apostolic authority.

“by the will of God” – Christ called him and empowered him for this unique work.

- He was set apart from his mother's womb (Gal 1:15-16)

“Timothy” is a co-sender and is Paul's **“brother.”**

- So Timothy is with Paul (in prison)
- We see here another example of Paul serving alongside other Christians;
- He was no lone ranger. Paul works with a team of ministers.
- The end of the letter shows us that not only do we work with other Christians, but there is *partnership among other churches (4:10-14)*

2: “To the **saints** and **faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae**” – literally **“in Christ in Colossae”**

“Saints” implies their **status**; and **“faithful”** speaks of their **stance**.

“Saints” – Christians are saints; they have been set apart *from* the world, and set apart *for* God.

- This doesn't mean we need to go around calling each other “Saint Hollis” and “Saint Shaddix” but it's true.
- One time on a PHD paper I put at the top of the page, as the bibliographic entry, “Augustine, Saint.” Of course my class had a field day with me. Saint is not his first name, but it is his identity, and ours.

- We are **not** saints because of our moral superiority.
- We are saints **because** Christ has atoned for our sins.
- Christ claimed us for himself. **“Mine” he says.**
- Paul calls one of the worst churches in the 1st century, **the Corinthians, “Saints.”**
 - It wasn’t because they were in Christ.
- **“Prayer walk among the saints” according to one Catholic church. We do that every Sunday!**
- Now, we are to remember who we are and live out this identity.
- **Holiness is about becoming what we already are!**

“Faithful brothers [and sisters]”

- This is the only greeting where Paul uses the word **“faithful.”**
 - These greetings and these thanksgivings are not mindless formalities; they usually lay the **groundwork** for themes to come.
 - But Paul calls them, faithful, that is, **“steadfast under pressure”**
 - The letter is written so that they may remain faithful
 - **See 1:23; 4:12**

“brothers and sisters” – family.

- Since we are family, then let us love one another with familial affection.

“In Christ” means

- To have all the benefits of Union with him (Col 2)
- To be incorporated in him so that he becomes everything to us (see 3:4)
- To see our fundamental identity as being **“in Christ.”**
- To have him shape our ethics and relationships (cf., 1 Cor 6:15)
- To never be separated from him (Rom 8:38-39)
- To be joined to a new family (3:11)

What else more is there! We have Christ!

- **“There is no more than heaven now to give.”**

We are **“in Christ.”** And it is this identity that shapes and empowers new behavior.

- Look at the **“therefore”** in 3:5. In light of being in Christ, **“put to death.”**
- How do we say no to sin and ungodliness? by remembering who we are.
- Don’t let your past define you (sin, shame, abuse, suffering... success)
- Don’t even let your present define you (whether on the mountain or the valley)
- It is our union with Christ that defines us.
- It’s Christ that satisfies the human heart: **“Every time someone knocks on the door of a brothel he is looking for Christ.” (Anonymous)**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father”

- Paul’s classic Christian greeting: grace (blessed); shalom (peace/wholeness)
- This comes from God our Father, every blessing, peace, shalom.

- “Our Father” – Paul will emphasize the nearness and goodness of the Father throughout the letter (1:3)

Three Aspects of Paul’s Thanksgiving (1:3-8)

- 1:3–8** - This prayer is one sentence modifying the phrase, “we always thank God.”
- Cf., **Eph 1:15-16** (He thanked them for “faith” and “love” – “always”)
 - Philemon 1:4-5

Paul gives thanks to the Father for (1) the **Colossians’ reception of the gospel** and its work in them (faith, love, and hope); (2) then he exults in **the global impact of the gospel**, and (3) finally he commends Epaphras, **a faithful messenger of the gospel**.

Thankfulness is a big theme in this letter, and **it is one of the ways you fight discontentment, and one of the ways we stay rooted in the truth.**

- **See 1:12; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2**
- Are you thankful for the gospel today?
- **One of the old Divines said “the thankful heart has a continual feast.”**
- Why give thanks? If these traits are present in you – then you should give thanks!

If anyone could have been down, it was Paul: the criticism, the physical afflictions, the demonic warfare, the prisonment, yet he’s thankful.

- When you look at one another, is your first instinct criticism; or is it “Oh God, thank you for _____ faith.”
- Thank you for producing that love in _____.”
- Thank you for the hope I see in _____”

It is very easy to only recognize temporal and material blessings: things that God gives us – and we should be thankful for them (home, job, food, clothing, etc).

- But we should also beware of “spiritual blessings” – evidences of grace that we see in our lives, and in the lives of other saints.
- Throughout Paul’s letters, you see him not really thanking God for things; **he thanks God for people** – God’s people who bear the fruit of the Spirit.

This particular thanksgiving would have been read aloud, facilitating worship to God, and also serving as a means of instruction.

- It’s instructive because it is undercutting the false teacher’s claim – that they needed something more... that Christ wasn’t enough!
- One of the causes of a lack of assurance, and lack of contentment is due to a lack of gratitude.

Let’s look at Paul’s thankful heart in hopes of following him in this most important Christian activity: giving thanks to God for the gospel and for the people of God.

#1: Thankful for the Colossians’ Reception of the Gospel (1:3-5) [and it’s work in them]

3: Paul gives God the Father credit for the Colossians' salvation.

- He is their Father.
- He is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom they belong.
- It is not a generic God that we pray to...
- I've been asked to pray generic prayers before at certain events; I don't do this, but I've been tempted to say, "I think we have different goals: you don't want to offend people; I want my prayers to get answered!"
- We pray to our Father! He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! That's who we pray to, and that is who we think.

"Heard of their faith"

- Paul prays for people he has never met! He still feels connected to them as family, and obligated to pray for them.
- He has some people with him - Timothy, Tychicus (4:7) and Onesimus.
- They have reported things, and Paul is thankful for their faith.
- "To hear of faith" doesn't mean some "invisible faith."
- You don't hear about invisible faith; you hear about faith that functions!

The Colossians experience in Christ is marked by **three particular traits**, for which Paul gives thanks: **(1) faith, (2) love, and (3) hope.**

- He doesn't mention the things people today focus on...
- He puts his finger on what is the real heartbeat of a church — what makes a church a truly vibrant church, the apple of God's eye, with the smile of God upon it.

What traits are common in your family? Do you come from an *athletic* family?

An *artistic* family? An *intellectual* family? A *rich* family? A *poor* family? A family of *cooks*? A family of hard workers? A *military* family? A *tall* family? A *short* family?

- I remember the second or third time I visited Kimberly's family, we were having a nice dinner, but then when dinner was finished, they moved the table, turned on some music and started dancing! Like real dancing.
- I was pretty sure the dance moves that I knew as an unregenerate college student were not appropriate; this wasn't the Macarena... They could really dance.
- She comes from a musical family (as well as a military family; I came from neither).

Paul thanks **God for the spiritual traits of the family of God: (1) faith in Christ, (2) love for all the saints, and (3) hope in heaven.**

These traits should mark every brother or sister in Christ.

These traits were present in them because the gospel has radically changed them.

Wherever you see these traits, you should give God thanks.

- This holy triad is mentioned elsewhere (1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8)
- But here, faith and love **arise out of "hope"** (love springs from hope" NIV)
- Likely Paul puts it this way because the Jewish opponents were dissing their hope
 - "Christ in you, the hope of glory"

- The gospel promises a certain hope.

These are not generic characteristics, but are **Spirit-produced, Christ-centered, God given traits.**

- In our culture people love to talk about “faith” — but it’s faith *in faith*.
- People hear “love” and they think being “nice” or “tolerant”
- People are all about “hope”
 - You may hear “hope changes everything” — but what kind of hope?
 - Hope in what? Hope in whom?

These traits have come about by God’s grace, that’s why Paul thanks God for them:

(1) Faith in Christ (1:4)

- Notice the object of their faith: Christ Jesus.
 - **My car: “Never rely solely on backup camera”**
 - **Well you can and must rely solely on Christ.**
 - “When John G. Paton was translating the Bible in the Outer Hebrides, he searched for the exact word to translate *believe*. Finally he found it: the word meant “lean your whole weight upon.” (Hughes)
- **He is enough for our salvation.**
- His salvation is glorious in Colossians
- 1:13, delivered and transferred
- 1:21-22, Reconciled
- 2:6 – as you received Christ Jesus....
- “raised with Christ” by faith (2:12)
- forgiven (2:14-15); and we lack nothing
 - **Bill, “he couldn’t believe guilt could be totally removed”**

If you are in him, then **you are one with other believers.**

- There is no “first class” and “second class” believer “in Christ.”
- There’s a glorious equality in Christ.
- Our sufficiency is in him alone!

- **Talking to Ben — people not interested in the church/gospel... you don’t meet a lot of Christians, you learn to truly give “thanks for faith.” Do that!**

(2) Love for all the saints (1:4b)

- “Faith working through love” is what counts (**Gal 5:6**)
- “Love for one another” is how the world will know we are Christ’s people.
- 1:8 – “your love in **the Spirit**” – a God-given, Spirit-enabled love for one another should mark Christ’s people.
- **2:1-2** — this is Paul’s longing, “knit together in love.”
- **Read 3:12-17** – what this looks like
- The most challenging this here is this word “**all.**”
- Don’t just love the idea of the church; love real people in the church.
- Elsewhere, we read that Paul prays for love to abound more and more... (Phil 1)

(3) Hope laid up in heaven (1:5a)

- Hope doesn't mean wishful thinking
- Hope is a certainty for the saint
- “Can you teach my daughter about heaven; I don't believe in it, but I think it would give her some peace.”
- Heaven, for the Christian, is a glorious certainty.

This reality enables us to endure, and notice in this passage, it also enables us to love. Paul says the source of this faith and love is “hope” – notice “because”

- Faith and love spring from the hope in heaven.
- Truly being heavenly minded does not lead to **escapism**, it leads to love!
- How can you love people when they've been unloving to you? Your hope is in heaven.
- The hope of heaven inspires love on earth.
- You come to realize that life is more defined by “not yet” than it is “already.”

I haven't thought about this enough; this is very relevant when dealing with reconciliation between people: are you thinking too earthly?

- Heavenly minded thinking; setting your hope on heaven, puts these differences in their proper perspective.
- They are petty in view of eternity; so squash them as a citizen of heaven!
- It seems that many of the rivalries that exist between Christians, churches, and institutions are not heavenly-minded attitudes; they are selfish and earthly.
- Think on heaven, and you can love people on earth.
- **Philippians 3:1 - Rejoice in the Lord.** 4:2 - “Agree in the Lord.” Their names are in the book of life! “Help these women.”
- 3:12-14 — what beautiful words.
 - As the forgiven, forgive; as those who have been shown kindness, and compassion be kind and compassionate...

How did all of this happen? “You heard the word of truth, the gospel” (1:5b)

- The gospel changes everything.
- It creates this faith, love, and hope...

Here are three traits of God's people produced by the gospel.

- If you see this, you should be thankful.

#2: Thankful for the Global Impact of the Gospel (1:6a)

Paul goes on to speak of the global effect of the gospel – “in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing” – which includes Colossae.

Innermost part of heart, to outermost part of the earth.

Notice two evidences of the gospel's power: its universality and its effectiveness.

(1) The Universality of the Gospel – “whole world”

- A reference to outside Israel — the Gentile world, particularly in the large cities and towns, e.g. Damascus, Tarsus, Antioch, Corinth and Ephesus, which then spilled over into outlying areas.
- The gospel *was spreading across geographical and racial barriers!*
- An echo of Gen - be fruitful and multiply // “in all the world”
- Adam was to fill the earth with offspring (Gen 1:28); the Second Adam is filling the earth with sons and daughters of the God.
- The Colossian believers were participants in this new creation.

- It is a message that speaks to every culture and every person!
- It speaks to **universal human need** and a **universal solution!**
 - What is the greatest human need in the world?
 - What is the solution?
- Who needs the gospel? The whole world!
- Will the gospel transform people from around the world? Yes!...

(2) The Effectiveness of the Gospel – “bearing fruit and increasing” (cf., 1:10)

- The gospel continues to produce harvest after harvest.
- “Bearing fruit” means it is producing converts (Rom 1:13; Phil 1:22)

- Now, it may not have looked like a triumphant success in the Greco-Roman world, but Paul sees things differently.
- A mustard seed has been sown, and God was giving growth around the world.

Illustration: little store fronts in major cities, house churches in China, schools, steeples...

If we are going to impact this culture and the world; we must have an unshakable confidence in the gospel.

#3: Thankful for a Faithful Messenger of the Gospel (1:6b-8)

6b: Paul now goes back to the Colossians’ testimony, as he reflects on the day they “**heard**” and “**understood the grace of God in truth**”

- in truth — you don’t need some extra teaching that your opponents are espousing
- You have heard true and liberating gospel!

7: Who did they learn it from? Epaphras. (My pronunciation)

He was a truly remarkable man, worthy of honor.

- He likely heard Paul preached in Ephesus, was converted, and started all three churches in the Lycus Valley

- They “**understood**” the gospel because of his teaching.
- This word is important: for the gospel to change someone, they must understand it!
- Don’t grow weary in helping people understand the gospel.

- It may take months, years before the penny drops...

Paul also says this:

(1) **Fellow servant**

- Paul considered him a teammate, on the same mission

(2) **Faithful minister of Christ**

- He was a faithful servant of the same Master, Jesus Christ

(3) **“On your” behalf** (or “our behalf,” though “your is more likely)

- He has poured himself out on behalf of others

8: He has made know their love in the Spirit.

- He had observed, and rejoiced in the fruit he saw, then reporting it to Paul.

4:12-13 – He was also a man of prayer, who worked hard.

Thank God for faithful messengers of the gospel!

Thank God for faithful church planters.

Thank God for prayer warriors.

Concluding Reflection

In his book *How Does Sanctification Work?* The late David Powlison describes how God changes people in five particular ways:

(1) **God** changes you – this is most fundamental.

(2) **The Truth** changes you.

(3) **Suffering and struggle** change you.

(4) **Wise** people change you.

(5) **You** make changes. You must change to change you.

This is important to realize.

In our text, notice all five at work: Paul

(1) thanks **God** for changing the Colossians;

(2) describes the **truth** that has changed them,

(3) mentions their **faithfulness** in the context of **suffering**, which is changing them.

(4) highlights a **wise person**, Epaphras (and will add 3:16, “one another)

(5) and will go on to say that **they must change** – cf, 3:12ff. The qualities that he thanks God for producing he later exhorts them to take responsibility for.

So reflect on this for a moments:

1. Thank God for working in your life (cf., Phil 1:6; 2:13)

2. Be eager to study the truth for spiritual growth. (Col 3:16)

3. See your suffering as purposeful, not wasted; God is using it to change you (Rom 5:3-5)

4. Get around wise people. (Prov 13:20)

5. Make appropriate changes.

- **Don't be passive about change.**
- **How about the issue of love?**
- **Is there someone you need to express love to? Forgive?**
- **Are you complaining more than confessing sin?**
- **Is there a sin you need to put to death? Is there a new pattern you need to begin?**
- **Change in one area, affects every other area.**

As we turn to the Table, now is a good time to

(1) Thank God for his grace.

(2) To see our unity as brothers and sisters, may we have love for all the saints.

(3) To express our hope in heaven.

Let's do it all, prayerfully, repentantly, and thankfully.