

Colossians and Us

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[0:00] Let's turn in the scriptures to Colossians chapter 1 and verse 1. Colossians 1, and we'll read the first 23 verses.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace and peace to you from God our Father.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints, the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.

All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace and all its truth.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

[1:16] For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you might have great endurance and patience and joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

[2:33] He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Isn't Jesus Christ wonderful? I have an important question that I want us to think about. I want you to think about as we begin. And here is the question.

[4:00] How can we make sure or try to make sure that in 100 years from now, Grace Fellowship Church will still be holding firmly to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

We'll still be a valid, legitimate church of Christ. 100 years. It's not common at all, is it?

It almost seems inevitable that churches become unfaithful and they fall apart and the glory departs. Most churches don't stay faithful for that long. So can you imagine someone standing up here and not preaching the word of God and saying whatever he or she wanted to say?

That's a terrible thought, isn't it? So how can a church stay faithful? That is what the book of Colossians is about. And that's why it was written.

[5:09] And so tonight we are going to, we're going to be looking at Colossians. We're going to have a big picture look of Colossians. And as we look at it, I want you to be thinking about what does this teach us about how Grace Fellowship Church can stay faithful in a hostile world?

And I have three points this evening. And the first point is that I want you to see how alike the church in Colossians is to Grace Fellowship Church. How alike our situations are.

Colossians was a small town in a bigger context, in a big, wide world. Colossians wasn't on the cutting edge of things. Colossians wasn't where the leading thinkers were.

Colossians was a small town in a bigger context. Colossians was a small town in a bigger context. And Bremen isn't either. It's not New York City, is it? It's not Wall Street. It's not Madison Street. It's not Washington.

It's not Hollywood. It's not where the culturally influential people live and work, is it? So much of our culture comes from the coast, the east coast, the west coast.

[6:16] And it moves in to the middle. And so we get it about 20 years after they do. Colossi wasn't Athens. It wasn't Rome.

The church was in a small backwater town in the middle of a world of ideas and a world of pervasive cultural influences that made, that were working and pushing, just by the sheer weight and the sheer number of all these other ideas, pushing them away from Jesus Christ.

It was in the middle of a hostile ocean. And that seems to me to be a lot like us. And so when I read Colossians, I'm reading what God has to say to a people that are like us.

But the church of Colossae was a lot like Grace Fellowship in another way. There wasn't yet, at this point, an acute, obvious, immediate problem.

The church hadn't compromised yet. The church hadn't fallen yet. They were still holding on to the truth. Paul never comes out, if you read the book of Colossians, Paul never comes out and explicitly attacks any false teachers directly, like he does in so many of his other letters.

[7:41] Let me just show you what I mean. There's nothing like what there is in his other letters. Turn back a few pages to Galatians chapter 1. Galatians chapter 1 and verse 6.

And again, I'm saying there's nothing like this in the book of Colossians. Look at what Paul writes here. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

Evidently, some people are throwing you into confusion or trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let him be eternally condemned.

The church in Galatia has an acute problem, an immediate, obvious problem. They are in the middle of cold and flu season, but they don't have the cold yet.

They have full-blown pneumonia. And Paul here is hooking up the IVs. He's filled the bags with antibiotics. He's trying to save this church.

[8:57] The patient is in the hospital and things are dire. That's Galatia. Or turn back a few more pages to 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

1 Corinthians 15 and verse 12. You remember the context.

He's talking about some people are... He's talking about resurrection. But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there's no resurrection of the dead? There's no resurrection of the dead that not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless, and so is your faith.

And on he goes. The situation in Corinth was acute. It was obvious. It was immediate. The problems were already in the church, and there were people already believing what was being said.

[10:02] There were people denying the resurrection, and in so denying the resurrection, they're denying the whole gospel. And that was Paul's point there. In Colossae, things weren't like that. The church wasn't already sick, but it was living, and this is the important thing, but it was living in a world where...

It was living in the middle of flu season. It was living in the world of germs. It was living in the world of ideas that would come in and make that church sick.

And if they weren't careful, it would kill them. So the danger was all around them. So the question is, why did Paul write this book of Colossians?

Why did he write to the church in Colossae? It wasn't to cure a problem. It was to prevent a problem. An ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure, we say. Colossians is vitamin C during cold season, and so you're not yet sick, but there's germs all around, so what do you do? You take your vitamin C, you wash your hands, you're careful about who you shake hands with, and so forth.

[11:15] And so he's writing, so they won't fall into some error. And so the word for us, the word for us, is take heed, lest you fall.

Take heed, lest you fall. By God's grace, and I mean that, by God's mercy, Grace Fellowship has not yet fallen into some error.

We haven't fallen so far, but there's no room for pride. There's no room for self-congratulations. There's no room for self-accomplishment, a feeling of self-accomplishment, a feeling of invincibility, as if it could never happen to us.

Satan can play us like puppets if we do not watch out. He's been at this far longer than Grace Fellowship Church has. He'll have us dancing naked down the street like the emperor with no clothes on if we don't watch out.

And so let me strongly encourage you then to read Colossians. If you don't read your Bible, read it.

[12:36] Read it. How else will you stand against the world's lies? How will you stand against the devil's lies? If you don't have your sword, then you're exposed. You can't see the truth from falsehood.

You're vulnerable. If you aren't reading and meditating and coming to a deeper understanding of God's word and how it applies to you, then you are a soldier going to battle without his weapon. And I fear that is how some of us may be going to the fight. We're going to the fight with a butter knife and it's not going to cut it.

And so if all we have is secondhand truth, if all we have is the most basic doctrines of truth, in the letter to the Hebrews, he talks about that.

We should be past these things. We should be past these things, he says to them. So if all we have is the most basic truths of Scripture and we haven't meditated and haven't come to understand the deeper truths of Scripture, then we are exposed.

[13:44] So how will we stand? How will we stand against the devil's lies? How will we be kept from falling into his trap? How will we stand if our grasp of the truth is so shallow?

You know, Satan is not a shallow thinker. He goes much further than just the surface of things. He's cunning. He's crafty.

The world thinks about how it can seduce us. There are people who are paid to manipulate you. That's their job.

And so we can't be lambs. Christ has said, be as wise as serpents. So where do we get that wisdom except for the Word of God?

We saw it this morning. This Word is able to make us wise unto salvation. It's able to train us how to think. And so brothers, sisters, young people, children, read your Bibles.

[14:48] I plead with you to study God's Word. If you can read, then you should be reading it.

That's my first point. We are in a very similar situation to the church in Colossae. And so we should be reading this book.

That's the first point. The second point is, let's look at what was threatening them. What was threatening them? What was going to pull them away from Christ if they did not watch out?

Now, commentators and scholars have had all sorts of problems and all sorts of guesses and trouble nailing down what is the particular false teaching behind this book.

Sometimes they're able to do that. They're able to look at a book and by what Paul is saying or what Peter is saying, what is going on behind the scenes? And they're able to do some deduction.

And so they've tried to do that with this book. And it's proven to be very difficult to try to figure out what was going on. What was the false teaching that was threatening this church?

[15:53] And it's almost amusing when you put all their guesses together because they're completely contradictory. They don't make any sense when all the guesses come out. And there's been basically four ideas and I want to give them to you.

You don't have to understand them all. We're not going into any great detail, but I just want you to get the gist of what was going on in that world. What was going around that was surrounding the church of Colossae, that was threatening them?

There's been four ideas and here's the first. It was that Paul is writing it against a kind of Essene Judaism. And if you don't know what I'm talking about, that's okay.

The Essenes were a kind of a strange sect in Judaism. And they thought the rest of the Jews were wrong. They lived separately from the rest of the Jews.

And they were into asceticism, into treating your body badly. And maybe even depriving your body in order to get yourself into a state where you could see things and have visions.

[17:03] Have you heard maybe of Native Americans doing that, going out in the desert and you don't eat and you don't drink and you're all alone and after three days or four days of no sleep and no food and no water, you start to see things.

Well, something like that might have been going on here. That kind of thing happened in that area. So there might be something to that.

Look at chapter 2 and verse 18. Colossians. If you're still back in 1 Corinthians, turn over to Colossians 2 and verse 18. Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize.

Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen. See that? They're talking about people seeing things. And his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions.

See, he thinks he's found some great truth, but really it's an empty truth. And then look down at verse 23. Paul here is talking about these people who did these sorts of things.

[18:14] And he talks about self-imposed worship. So this isn't from God. This isn't God's idea of how you should worship. This is self-imposed. This is my idea. Self-imposed worship, false humility, and the harsh treatment of the body.

And so some have said that's what Paul is writing against, this Essene Judaism. And others have said, no, no, Paul is not writing against that. He's writing against pagan, a pagan mystery cult, which those were very common back in the Roman world.

And they were basically these groups of people that got together and they said, by doing these certain ceremonies, by having these certain, doing these certain things, that you could come to a place of understanding mysteries.

You can have enlightenment. You can have understanding. We even read that of Paul saying, I pray that you'll have understanding. You'll have wisdom. Well, these people were saying, you can have wisdom and understanding by doing these strange ceremonies.

Others have said, no, it's not that. It's a combination of Judaism and paganism. So on one hand, they have some people saying it's Judaism, some people saying it's paganism, and now others are saying, no, it's a mixture.

[19:33] And then other people are saying, no, it's not a mixture of that. It's a mixture of Judaism and Christianity. So it's not Judaism and paganism. It's Judaism and Christianity.

And they were into asceticism. So they're into finding fulfillment. They're into keeping these rules. But they also are into believing in Jesus. So, which is it?

Well, you kind of get the idea. If you put them all together, Paul is arguing against the Jewish pagan Christian. And the problem is, there's no such thing. What Paul is talking about doesn't seem to fit in particularly well with any one of those.

But it does seem to cover pretty much all of them. He's referring to a lot of things. And that's why recently many people have started to agree that what Paul is writing against, what the problem in Colossae was not just one thing.

It was a whole culture. It was a variety of ideas out there about how you come to know God. How do you live with God? How do you read your Bible?

[20:41] How do you live together in community? It's not a particular problem. It's a general problem. It's a cultural problem.

And so Paul is writing them. Before any one of those things got into the church, he's writing to protect them. Colossians is vitamin C during flu season.

They haven't caught a disease yet, but there's a lot of germs floating around. Now, you see Colossae, the Colossian world, is a lot like our world.

Do we just have this one big problem out there that if we can avoid that one problem, then we're safe? No. It's not just one idea competing for our attention. It's not just one idea knocking on the door, saying, come away, you don't need Christ, I have an alternative.

It's a whole bunch of things. In Colossae, it was Judaism and paganism and heretical Christianity. They were all saying, no, Christ isn't enough. He isn't enough.

[21:51] You need to add this as well. You need something more than him. Well, that was their context. What's our context? Isn't it very similar? Now, ours isn't Judaism, paganism. It is heretical Christianity.

But we live in a secular culture. We live in a culture where naturalism and evolution is just the dominant thought.

So what is there that is real? Well, if you can't count it, you can't weigh it, you can't measure it, then it's not real. That's what the world says. And then we live in the world of scientism.

And what I mean by that is most modern Americans, for all intents and purposes, believe in the religion of science. Who has the right to tell us what is true?

Is it this book? No, it's scientists. Who's going to save us? Well, scientists. Who speaks the truth to us?

[22:57] Ministers of Jesus Christ? Christ? Jesus Christ himself? No, the scientists tell us what is true. They're the judge. They're the jury. They're the salvation.

So it's not just that either. That's out there. Naturalism's out there. But there's all sorts of Christianity mixed in too.

There's all sorts of echoes of Christian morality and Christian ideas. Our past is still telling us things. There's what I would call statism, which is the worship, the faith, the domination of the state, the government.

So who's going to save us? Jesus Christ? No, the government can't fix that. Who can bring in a better world? Well, only as we work all together.

And who's, what's the only entity that can have as much money and power as it needs to fix us?

Well, it's only the government, they say. And then there's this, the growing entertainment industry, fun industry.

[24:09] And it's growing because now with YouTube and things like that, we're all in the fun industry. We're all trying to make each other happy, to speak to each other, to say, think about this, this is what's important, think about that.

And it's all mixed up, isn't it? But it's all together definitely saying to us the same thing that the world was saying to the church in Colossae.

Jesus isn't enough. He's not enough. You need more than him. So why was the book of Colossians written? And here's the third point.

How do you avoid the world's pool? How can Grace Fellowship Church stay faithful for a hundred years? And the answer that Colossians gives us is by living on Christ, by living in Christ, by having Christ take the preeminent place in our hearts, the preeminent place in our minds, the preeminent place in every single one of our actions.

So let's look. Let's take a tour of what the book of Colossians says. How do you get to know God? That's the first question we'll ask. How do you get to know God?

[25:30] The world was saying, beat your body, keep these rules, rules, believe this philosophy. We have human teachings that teach us about God. What does Colossians say?

Look at chapter 1 in verse 15. He, speaking of Christ, is the image of the invisible God.

God, how do we know what God is like? Do we think about him? Do we measure him? Do we count him? Do we philosophize about him?

No. We look at Christ. For in Christ, the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. All of what it means to be God in bodily form.

So what do we see when we see Christ? We see what God is like. So God says, this is my son.

With him, I am well pleased. That is a father telling us what he thinks of his son.

[26:36] But if you think about that, if you see a son there, and he's making his dad proud, doesn't that tell you something about that dad's heart? What's important to him?

What that dad thinks? When that child, when that son says something and dad smiles and says, yeah, doesn't that just say something about the father's heart? So here's Christ.

How do we get to know God? We look at Christ. How do we understand God? Through the lens of Jesus Christ. Well then, how do we understand the Bible?

That's an important question. A lot of voices out there. In that day, you had a lot of people saying, this is how you understand the scriptures. You had Jews saying, this is how you need to understand

the scriptures.

In our day, we have people telling us, this is what you need to think about the Bible. This is how you need to understand the Bible. Well, what does Colossians say? Look at chapter 1, verse 25.

[27:39] I have become its servant, the church's servant, by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness.

Now let's pause there. God has commissioned Paul to present the word of God in its fullness, in its completion. After you've unfolded the word of God, what is Paul going to show you?

To present the word of God in its fullness, the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. To them, God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

We proclaim him the word of God in its fullness. we proclaim him. How do you keep from going off the tracks in your reading of scripture?

How do you keep from adding your ideas? How does a church keep from adding their own ideas and a pastor keep from adding his own ideas or her own ideas into the word of God?

[29:01] Well, you have to stick with Christ. Christ. You keep him in view. He's the subject. When the word of God is folded out and its full picture is shown to you, you see Jesus Christ.

And if you don't see him, you've misread the entire book. You've missed the whole point. Now, you remember those two disciples on the road Deuteronomy a few days after Jesus was crucified.

They're sad. They're confused. They're sad because Jesus is dead, but now they're confused because people are saying, well, we've seen him. And you remember Jesus came alongside of them and he said, how foolish you are and slow to believe, slow to heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.

what was their problem? Well, they didn't see Christ in the Old Testament like they should have. They knew the scriptures, but they hadn't seen Christ in them like they should have. They didn't believe all that the prophets had written about his suffering and the glory that was going to follow.

[30:18] And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the scriptures concerning himself. So what is the Bible about?

It is about Jesus Christ. He's the center. He holds the word of God together. To preach Christ is to preach the word of God in its fullness.

So what should you do if you want to stay faithful in your Bible reading? You stick with Jesus Christ. What does a church need to do to stick to the Bible and understand it properly and preach it properly?

You must always go back to him. Preach Jesus Christ. But staying faithful is not just a matter of right beliefs, is it? I think there's probably some churches that believe everything just right for the most part.

But there's more than staying faithful than just right beliefs. There's holy living, isn't there? an unholy church is an unfaithful church. So how do you grow in sanctification?

[31:24] This was a very important question for the people in Colossae. They wanted to know, what do I need to grow? What do I need to get to know God better? What do I need to live a holy life?

And some people are saying, keep these rules. We're going to see what those rules are later on.

You have to celebrate these festivals. You have to beat your body. You have to do this.

Do not touch. Do not taste. Do not handle. You need to have these great visionary experiences.

You need to visit with angels even.

And that might sound strange to us, but our world is no different. There's all sorts of teaching out there, and a lot of it labeled Christian, that tells you this is what you need to do to be holy.

You do this, and you do this, and you don't do that. You keep these sets of rules, or it's just a matter of self-discipline. These people had no problem with self-discipline if need be.

[32:21] Or it's just having these supernatural experiences. Speak in tongues, have visions, hear God's voice. But look at chapter 2, verse 23.

such regulations, and this is what is so telling, such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom.

They seem right. They seem smart. They make sense, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

At the end of the day, no one is any better off for doing all that. They seem right, but they are useless. Then how do I live a better Christian life?

How do I grow in holiness? How do we as a church grow together in holiness? chapter 3, verse 1, since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is.

[33:27] How do you grow in closeness to God? Isn't that what sanctification is? Growing in closeness to God, like him, being with him more. How do you fight sin? It's not by keeping a list of rules.

It's not by having radical spiritual experiences. You dwell on Christ. You live in Christ. You think about your status as he is my life.

And when he appears, I will appear with him in glory. But again, staying faithful isn't just about right beliefs and right living. It's about how we do church.

Because we could have right beliefs and individually we could be living somewhat holy lives, but if we don't do church right, if we don't organize ourselves properly, if we're not aligned properly, then we're not going to stay faithful.

So how do we live and serve together? How is Grace Fellowship Church going to stay relevant, and in the best sense of that word, relevant and faithful for years to come?

[34:33] Well, today a lot of people are saying a lot of things, aren't they? We all have our own ideas. What does Colossians say? Turn over to Colossians chapter 3, verse 15.

Colossians 3, 15. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. This is a church passage.

One body you were called to peace, and be thankful. let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God, and whatever you do, in word, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

who is at the center of that passage? Isn't it Jesus? Isn't it Christ?

The peace of Christ? The word of Christ? The name of Jesus? Christ Jesus must consciously, and that word I use it purposely, he must consciously be the center of what we are doing here.

[36:04] if Christ isn't consciously at the center of all of our activities, then whatever is going on on the outside, we aren't acting like the church of Jesus.

We're the bride of Christ, and a bride is obsessed and in love with her bridegroom. And so as we end, let's examine ourselves.

Examine yourself. Is that how you think? Is Christ everything to you? Is he how you see God? Is he how you read your word, scriptures, the Bible? Is he how you live? Is he how you live in the church?

Can you say, as for me to live is Christ? Not for me to live as work, not for me to live as to be the best mom I can be, not for me to live as to play sports, or to have as much fun as I can have, or getting respect, earning the favor of others, but for me to live is Christ.

[37:26] Christ. He's what I'm about. My life is defined by him in every way. Christ is my life, Colossians 3 says.

And when Christ, who is your life, appears, you will also appear with him in glory. Can you say that? If Christ isn't your life, then what life do you have?

What life do you have? Only your life. And what does your life hold for you? What does it hold out to you in the end? Is there glory at the end?

And if you're an unbeliever, it's time to put down that life. Time to put down your life and take up Christ. It's time to stand on Christ the solid rock. Because there is a storm coming.

And all other ground is sinking sand. That's what we sing in number 582. 582 in our hymnals.

[38:37] We're going to sing it to a more familiar tune. So how will we make sure that Grace Fellowship Church is holding on for the next 100 years?

Well, we stand on Christ just for this week. next week we come back and we start all over again.

We do it again. So let's pray that God would help us to stand on Christ this week.

Let's pray. Oh God, we are so easily led astray and so I pray that you would draw us by your spirit into Jesus Christ.

Help us to see that he is all that we need. He is a complete salvation. He is a mighty Lord. He is a great Savior.

Oh God, show us what a great and thorough Savior he is. When we are wrestling and struggling this week, will you give us to lean on him and rest on him?

[39 : 48] for those who are still guilty and exposed to your anger and wrath, I pray open their eyes and then open their eyes to see Jesus and save sinners.

Save sinners this week. Please help us to stand. Please help us to be faithful. And I would pray that Grace Fellowship Church would just not be another casualty in the battle.

But we will be faithful to the end. Pray that you would do it, not because we are so good or so worthy, but do it because you love us and for Jesus' sake.

And it's in his name I pray. Amen. Amen.