

The Gospel Changes People

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[0:00] Colossians chapter 2 and verse 6. We're going to read through the end of the chapter. As we make our way through the book of Colossians.

Colossians chapter 2 and verse 6. So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

In him, you were also circumcised in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with a circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

[1:13] When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code with its regulations that was against us and that stood opposed to us.

He took it away, nailing it to the cross, and having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Therefore, do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink or with regard to a religious festival, a new moon celebration, or a Sabbath day.

These are a shadow of the things that were to come. The reality, however, is found in Christ. 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, and his unspiritual mind puffs him up with idle notions. He has lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews grows as God causes it to grow.

[2:29] Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules? Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

These are all destined to perish with use because they are based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations, indeed, have an appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Well, tonight we are going to begin with a story that you've heard before and a story that you heard recently, but it's a good story, and good stories are worth hearing more than once.

You remember Augustine. He grew up in, he grew up in, what is modern day, Algeria, in the late 300s, and he was a very sinful and wicked man, but then Christ changed him.

And you remember that story, we just heard it not too long ago, one of his old flames saw him and called out to him. She was saying, Augustine, Augustine, and he didn't acknowledge her.

[3:47] And so she finally said, Augustine, it is I, and he turned and he said, what? You remember? Yes, but it is not I.

It's not I. Don't you like that story? I like that story because it shows that in this world where things do not change, people do not change, there can be change.

This world is a pretty hopeless place with so many people really wishing they could change, but nothing seems to do the trick. Nothing seems to do what they want it to do.

I read a story not too long ago of an overweight woman who went to see the doctor about weight loss surgery. And the doctor said to her, don't you want to be able to fit down the aisle of the airplane?

Don't, wouldn't it be nice if people didn't stare at you when they saw you coming? And she hated him for saying it, but yet she thought it was true.

[4:58] Life is for the skinny, so he said. And so she thought. And so she had the surgery. She thought the surgery would be this life-changing event.

And over the next months, indeed, her physical body did change. She lost weight and more weight and more weight and a year and a half after the surgery, she had lost 180 pounds.

It was strange. She talks about how strange it was and how weird it was to see this new person in the mirror. But you know what it wasn't? It wasn't life-changing.

It wasn't a fairy tale. She didn't live happily ever after. Listen to what she said. The problem was that I lost all those pounds, but I didn't have to change a thing about myself.

I didn't have to address any of the emotional or psychological issues. I didn't have to figure out why I had been so depressed, why I was still so, so depressed, despite the fact that the one thing I thought had been ruining my life was suddenly gone.

[6:09] I was skinny, finally, and I was fascinated by the physicality of it. It was like my skeleton had floated up to the surface from the bottom of a murky pond.

It wasn't pretty. I lost so much weight that I didn't look like myself, and then I lost past that to the point where I looked like a sick stranger.

briefly, I was a size two. Sometimes I was disappointed that I couldn't be a size zero. Augustine changed.

This woman didn't. She didn't become someone new. But the gospel can and really does change people.

That's what we're going to look at in Colossians. Look at Colossians 1, in verse 2. I didn't read it because we've read it several times before. But Colossians 1, in verse 2, we've already looked at who has written this book.

[7:13] Now we're going to look at who it's written to. Yeah, who it's written to. To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace and peace to you from God our Father.

So, dear brothers and dear sisters, my fellow children of God. Before we get into this verse, don't we understand enough to worship?

And what I mean by that is this is what we are. But this is not what we were. Holy? Faithful? Brothers? That's not how we were. We weren't any of those things. Romans 1 tells us what we were. Senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

And although we knew God's righteous decrees that those who did such things deserve death, not only did we continue to do those very things, but we also approved of those who did them.

[8:24] but then God changed us. God made us new people. And so we say not unto us, not unto us, but to your name be the glory.

Because that change came from above. That didn't come from the inside out. It came from the outside and it came in. And so into our world, into your world, into your personal world of stagnation and decay, God reached out and made us new.

He loved those little selfish trolls and he made us new. And so we can say it's not I. It's not I anymore. It's a new me.

And so if you don't get anything out of these verses, you can worship here at this fire. You can warm your heart to worship here. So what has God changed us to?

How should we think about ourselves and how should we think about those people that are sitting around us? How should you think about those people? So many of our problems with sin and so many of our problems with other believers comes from not remembering who we are and who they are.

[9:39] We don't think about ourselves and we don't think about those people sitting next to us biblically. And so again, even in this simple greeting, God is pushing us to change our thinking, to be renewed in our own minds.

You wouldn't treat a king, you wouldn't treat a president like dirt because of who they are. But it is amazing what you will do to a child of God, isn't it?

You will snub a child of God. You will ignore, you will not forgive, you'll have so little mercy for the sons and daughters of God Almighty. And James has it right when he said these things should not be.

So we need to be reminded, we need to be admonished about who we are, about who those people, those Christians sitting around us are. And so let's just take these things one by one. It's not going to be anything new, but it's going to be a reminder to us of who we are in Christ. And the first thing that you notice about Colossians 1-2 is that Paul is writing to ordinary Christians. [10:45] He's writing to ordinary Christians. He's writing to normal people like you and me. Who wasn't it written to? Who wasn't Colossians written to?

Well, it wasn't written to exceptional people. It wasn't written to theologians. It wasn't written to theology professors. It's not even to pastors. It's written to ordinary church members. So are you an ordinary church member? Then this book is for you. Who needs this book? You do. You do. Now the second thing I want you to notice is that Paul says that these Colossians, that we are holy. We're holy. Colossians was written to a gathering of the saints. Now that word can be translated as holy or to saints. Now that's wonderful. That should warm your heart. In Roman Catholicism, you have to do a miracle or have a miracle done in your name in order to become a saint.

[11:48] And it's this big long process where the world, where the church identifies you. But I haven't done a single miracle and certainly no one's done a miracle in my name.

Praying upon me. But what does God call me? What does God call you? He calls you holy. He calls you a saint. He's made us holy.

He's consecrated us. He sanctified us. We talk a lot about the process of sanctification. That's that process where we become more and more holy.

Where our character becomes more and more godlike. But the Old and the New Testament talks more about a definitive sanctification. A one-time sanctification.

A once-for-all a sanctification that has already happened. A being made holy that is accomplished. Just take, for example, 1 Corinthians 6.11.

[12:49] It's a very familiar passage. You remember he's writing to them and he's saying that the sexually immoral, the drunkards, the swindlers, they will not inherit the kingdom of God.

And remember what he says next? And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. You were sanctified. Past tense. Not you are being sanctified, but you were sanctified. You were set apart to God. So once you lived in all these ways, you lived for yourself.

That was the direction of your life for yourself. And that resulted in all this wickedness. But now you have been taken from that, taken and pointed to God, given to God.

Once you lived for yourself in all those evil ways, but now God has put his name upon you. Set apart. He said, you're mine.

[13:49] So how can Paul call us holy? How can Paul call us who continue to sin holy? Not because we've reached a state of perfection. Not because our sanctification is complete and we are like God in our character, that we don't have any more sin.

But because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we have been purified and set apart to God. We have been brought, we have been set apart, we have been consecrated to God.

So dear Christian, why must you act holy? Because that's what you are. That's why you have to act holy, because that's what you are.

You are holy. That's why you should pursue holiness. That's why it should be the number one goal in your life to be like Christ, to love Jesus Christ, to have your heart and your mind renewed in his image.

Why? Because you're his. His name is written on you. You belong to him. You've been taken out of this world and you've been given to God. You've been consecrated to God, to his service.

[15:04] Is that how you think of yourself? Is that how you are living? Is that the equation of your life? I am holy, therefore I must pursue holiness.

holiness. Don't think about anyone else. Don't think about others. What about you? Is that how you're thinking? I'm holy.

That's good news. But that is the kind of good news that puts us to work. Puts us to work. So God in his grace has reached down. He's taken us. He's moved us out of this world.

He's given us to himself. But his grace doesn't leave us inactive. It doesn't leave us lying in there. So now I must live out of my status as holy.

I must live a holy life because I am holy. So is that how you think of yourself? I am holy. I am holy. I belong to God. Is that how you think about those sitting around you?

[16:09] Is that how you think about those sitting around you? What respect and love and joy and esteem you should have for your fellow Christians?

They are holy to God. Those ordinary Christians are sacred, set apart for God.

And what esteem you should have for them then. What regard, what love, what joy you should have for them. They are holy. That's the second thing.

We've seen that they are ordinary, they are holy. The third now, you see that they are faithful. They are faithful to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

They are faithful. If your translation is anything like mine, you probably have a letter or a little number besides that word with a footnote because that word that the NIV translates as faithful can also be translated as believing.

[17:18] As believing. So the word can either describe someone who can be trusted, they are faithful, they are steadfast, or there is someone who is trusting, who is believing.

So you see the difference. If we take it to be faithful like the NIV has it, then Paul is saying, you brothers are keeping on, you are steadfast. I am talking to you, you steadfast believers.

But even then I gave it away. If we take it as believing, well then he is saying, what marks you as faith? What marks you as faith?

So which is it? Is it faithful or is it believing? Well, it's almost impossible to tell from the context because there is so very little immediate context and either one could be true, but in this case I don't think we really need to make that choice because both are true.

The folks in Colossae are holding on, but they are holding on by their faith. Their faith is steadfast.

They are staying faithful but they are also believing.

[18:29] After all, the go on believing is how you stay faithful. You don't go on steadfastly without going on believing. So Paul said as much.

Look at chapter 1 verse 23. In this verse, he's, well in verse 22, he's talking about what God has given Jesus Christ for.

He's given him to present you holy and blameless without blemish and free from accusation. And I think that verse has this future outlook that on the day of judgment, God is going to look upon you and judge you and there's not going to be even a hint of accusation.

So it has this future aspect, but then in verse 23 it tells us what is it going to take to get there if you continue in your faith established and firm not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

So how are they going to persevere to the end? They're going to persevere by going on believing, by staying firm, by holding on to the hope that they have. See, perseverance isn't powered by human stubbornness.

[19:40] Perseverance is powered by persevering faith. Some of you live in difficult trials.

Some of you have seen and are living through things that I sincerely hope I never see or live through. But you're still here. You're still here.

How is that? How is that? Isn't it your faith? Your faith which is more precious than gold? When things are dark, faith looks and sees light.

And Christ comes in and the Holy Spirit stirs up faith and you look beyond yourself and you get up and you go on. That's the power of faith.

So when the waves are crashing, they're crashing upon you and yet you're still here. You're still holding on. God and I know what you think or I know what you're tempted to think and that is I'm not making any headway.

[20:50] My progress is so slow. I don't have as much fruit as I want. These trials are so painful. I never feel like I can make much progress. Others are doing so much better than me.

Others are so much more useful than me. But you know, faith isn't only seen in activity. Faith isn't only seen in producing good works, invisible progress, we'll put it that way.

Faith also has another face. So picture a mountain climber and he's on the cliff, he's on the mountain and it's steep and faith has fingers like a mountain climber that holds on to the rock and the winds are blowing and there's hardly anything to grab on to and yet there's your faith.

There's your faith holding on. And it gets a hold of that rock and it's gripping hard and the wind blows and yet your faith is holding on. That's how you can see if someone's believing. Now the winds were blowing in Colossi and the people were holding on and the winds are blowing here and

some of you and you are holding on.

And our faith does not fail us. And we're going to see why in a couple of weeks. Because our faith comes from God. And it's anchored in Jesus Christ who is in heaven.

[22:18] And so our faith does not fail because God does not fail. We'll see more of that in a couple of weeks. So here's a picture of us. Here's a picture of these dear ordinary believers.

They're ordinary, they're holy, they're faithful, and you see what's next. They're brothers. Fourth, they're brothers. Now we're family. We're family.

We're brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. And so this fight to be holy, this fight to be faithful, is not a fight that we have to do on our own.

This is something that we do with our family. So when the world excludes us, our family receives us. And when the world is against us, our family looks after us, and they're for us, and they're cheering us on, and they're praying for us.

We have a family, and it's a big family. Now think about Paul and the Colossi. Paul is probably writing in a prison in Rome, and he's writing a letter to Colossi, which is in Greece, and he finds family there.

[23:29] he finds a whole bunch of brothers and sisters there. Last week I told you about Daniel, the pastor in India.

Remember, he has leprosy, his nose is pretty much gone because of it, and he has nothing, and he said, all I have is Christ. All I need is Christ.

All I want is Christ. Daniel is your brother. Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that fantastic?

It's good for us to think about that. We sing that song, O Church Arise, and we sing, and saints of old line the way, retelling triumphs of his grace. Well, it's not only the saints of old that are lining the way, telling us to go on, to keep persevering, to be holy.

It's brothers and sisters alive today. It's brothers and sisters like Daniel that encourage us. It's brothers and sisters primarily here at this little ordinary church that encourage us along the way.

[24:39] And I see you holding on, and I see you fighting through your trials, and I see you praying, and I see you getting up and having joy and worshiping, and it does me good.

We need to be together. Remember what we saw in Hebrews last week, let's not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.

Jesus didn't mean for us to go to heaven alone, so he put us in a family. So those people around you are your family. They'll be your family forever.

This is where we belong, and this is where we will belong forever. we're brothers. One of the questions that we always ask the people being interviewed for membership is, how do you feel about the saints here at Grace Fellowship?

We always ask, are they your people? And we're looking for something in their heart to go out to us and say, yes, they're my people. They used to not be my people, but man, I'm growing into it.

[25:49] And usually they're young believers, and so they're just starting to get to know you, and they're just starting to get to feeling like they belong, and yet there is something in them that says, yes, they're my people, I belong to them, and we want to see that grow and grow.

Well, what else? You see the next words, in Christ, in Christ. And this is such a huge idea. There's no way we can go into any really great depth this evening, but as you look closely through Colossians, and we're going to see this theme being developed, and I've mentioned it before, that Paul has this theme of a new humanity, a new resurrection life in Christ.

Christ is the second Adam. To be in Christ is what it means to be part of a new humanity, a redeemed, a resurrected humanity. And he says there's no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all.

That's what it means to be in Christ. All those old barriers that used to divide us, economic, social, cultural, all that is torn down.

And in Christ, all the old ways of living dies. The old humanity is replaced with a new humanity. And the old way of living a human life is replaced with a new way.

[27:17] So Christ is the second Adam. In Eastern Orthodoxy, there is a tradition, and there's no way it's true.

I'm not saying that it is. There's a tradition, but it's a good illustration that said that Christ was crucified over the bones of Adam.

It's not true. but in there are many pictures, you can see Christ on the cross, and he's bleeding, and underneath the cross is the grave, the skeleton, the bones of Adam.

And blood is flowing down over Adam, his death. And I think in some ways that is a good illustration. Because what we had in Adam, death.

what we had in Adam was being cursed and guilty and sinful and separated from God. God imputed to us Adam's unrighteousness and we were unrighteous.

[28 : 24] All that was replaced with Jesus. And out of Jesus' life, out of his death, our life came. And so we lived in Adam.

That's where we lived. And I would encourage you to look at your New Testament and read it and see that theme coming out. We lived in Adam and that meant that our relationship with God was separated.

We were separate from God. We were guilty. We were ashamed. And the only letters that were coming into our mailbox were bills saying, you must pay.

You must pay. And we were delinquents and we were criminals waiting for our trials. The only letters that we got were saying judgment's coming.

Our conscience, which is God's sheriff, gave us no rest. And we were powerless. We were in this state of absolute poverty and we had no way of fixing it.

[29 : 30] That's what it means to be an Adam. It means to die, to be dead, to be powerless, to be condemned. We couldn't do anything to pay our bills. We couldn't do anything to stay the execution.

Every day the calendar changed and we just marched closer and closer to our execution, to our everlasting destruction. That's what it means to be in Adam.

And that's how our children are and that's how we must pray for them, that God would take them and save them. And then what did God do to us, dear believers? He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and he brought us into the kingdom of the son that he loves.

God found us and he sovereignly moved us. He sovereignly changed our spiritual address. He took up and he packed up our whole lives and he moved us out of Adam and he put us into Christ.

And now instead of getting bills, instead of getting the sheriff coming after us, he saved us and look what's coming in the mail now. Look at verse 2, the second half.

[30 : 38] Grace and peace to you from God our Father. Now this is a greeting, but what a greeting it is. Instead of bills, instead of you must pay, you must pay, now what's coming into your spiritual mailbox every day.

Grace and peace from God. God's heart is flung open towards you. His grace is rushing out to you day after day.

And it's like the ocean waves. They never stop. It's like the sun and the moon settled forever in the heavens. As long as they endure, God's grace will be coming to us.

We memorized it not too long ago. Therefore, since we have been justified, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

We're in a great room and it's pouring down grace. So we live in grace. We live in peace.

[31 : 51] God sends you as peace even now. He extends his olive branch even now. He says, he sends you his word and says, you're right with me.

Come to me. Come, dear child. Come and have fellowship with me. Come and be close to me. Come and live with me. Come and love me. Come, dear child.

So, dear Christian, he's at peace with you. He chastises, but he never stops loving. He will grow displeased, but he will never turn his heart away from you.

He never stops longing for you to repent and to come back. You're Lord. And why? It's because this is what Jesus has bought for you. This is what Jesus has done for you.

He's done this. You're this ever flowing fountain of grace, this peace that we can enjoy. It's not relying on us. It's not relying on our performance.

[32 : 55] Look at Colossians 1.21. Paul talks about this. 1.21. Once you were alienated from God and you were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior, but now he, that is God the Father, God the Father has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death.

God the ground, what is the foundation of all this grace and peace that God sends you? What's the key to your new spiritual address? What's the key to this new spiritual home that you live in and this grace that you stand in?

It's the sacrifice of the Son of God. Jesus died under the wrath of God. He died under the anger of God so that you would never ever have to drink a single drop of that wrath.

There is no hell. There is no wrath for anyone in Christ because for those six hours, especially for those three hours when there was nothing but darkness, and Christ cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

For those hours, Jesus bore the wrath that was due to you. He took your bills and He paid them and He bore it all.

[34 : 22] He was thrown away as unholy to make you holy. He was counted and cursed as faithless to make us faithful.

He was treated as a criminal so that we could be treated as sons. He was treated as fallen Adam so that we could be treated as Christ. And He cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? There was no grace for Him. There was no mercy for Him. He was forsaken so that you could be accepted. The peace that He forever enjoyed was wrenched from His heart so that you could have peace.

And so we live in this great house where there is grace and there is peace, but above the door of the house and on all the posts of the house is the blood of an innocent lamb.

Wrenched from His life is your life. So these words, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace and peace to you from God our Father, those are words that you can only enjoy, that are only true of you because Jesus died on your behalf.

[35 : 44] Then to my unbelieving friend, my sinner friend, do you see the love of God, the love of God for His enemies? God would look for something to give to His enemies.

And He looks, and what He can do to show His love for a fallen world, and He gives His Son. He gives Him, He gives Him to the malefactors, He puts Him in their hands, He hands them over to death that they might have life.

Do you see God's love for a fallen world? This is John 3, 16. Do you see God's love for this fallen world? And this is the good news that is preached to all the world. This is the gospel that we proclaim, that Christ has preached to you again, and God the Father comes to you in the preaching of the Word, and He says, here is my Son, here is the Savior that you need, take Him.

I give Him to you, will you not take Him? He's everything you need, He's enough. So God pleads with you even now, empty your hands, empty your hearts, throw up your sin, and feed on Christ. I give Him to you. Why won't you take Him and live? See His heart towards sinners. Well, we're going to close with a song.

[37 : 09] It's hymn 431, and I would just encourage you, if you don't know the Lord, if you are still separated from God, don't wait.

Even as we sing, don't wait, don't bring any plea except Christ died for sinners, and I'm a sinner. sinner. That's the plea that we take to God to forgive us.

Christ died for sinners, and I am a sinner. Please save me. Hymn 431, we'll sing the first tune, and let's stand as we sing. Thank you.