

Colossians: Introduction (Part 2)
"The People of Grace"
Colossians 1:2

Intro: Recap of Last Sunday:

- **Last Sunday we answered the question:** Who wrote Colossians? The answer is the Apostle Paul and we called him the Apostle of Hope because in a Roman prison he wrote one of the most Christ exalting letters we have in the New Testament.
- **This Sunday we are going to answer the questions:**
 - (1) To whom did Paul write?
 - (2) Why did he write to the church in Colossae?
- **Main Point:** Genuine obedience to God flows out of gospel-identity in Christ.
- **To whom did Paul write?** He wrote to the members of the Colossian church.

I. In v. 2, Paul told the believers in the Colossian church three things about themselves.

A. First he told them they were "*in Christ*." (v. 2c)

- **"*In Christ*" is a major phrase in Paul's writings.**
 - There are many people who call themselves Christians, they profess to know Christ, to ascribe to Christianity and confidently call themselves Christians but they are not "*in Christ*."
- **What does it mean to be "*in Christ*"?**
 - The Bible only gives us two places we can be in relation to God: "*in Christ*" or "*in Adam*."
 - **Illst:** The concept of being "*in Christ*" or "*in Adam*" is a representative concept. We understand . . .
 - **"IN ADAM":** This is exactly how the Bible understands all of humanity to function. Here's the idea. As a human being you're part of a representative system. Adam was our representative before God in the Garden of Eden and when he sinned it carried with it implications for our lives whether we like it or not. "In Adam" Scripture teaches we all sinned. It is as if we were all in the Garden when Adam made his decision to eat the fruit and sinned against God. You may not think that was fair but that is not the way God designed it. We are all affected by Adam's decision. "*In Adam's fall, sinned we all*" the old saying goes. His sin separated us from God and meant we are all born separated from God by our sin or another way to say it is that we are all born "*in Adam*."
 - **"IN CHRIST":** What we have in this phrase is that God is taking people who were "*in Adam*" and taking them out of this group or this system and God is creating a new people who are "*in Christ*"—the church, the people of God. So if you are "*in Christ*" you are delivered from the curse and the effects of sin that came "*in Adam*." We are delivered from the consequences and implication of Adam's sin.
 - **So . . . you are "*in Christ*" or "*in Adam*."** There is no middle ground or neutral position.
 - **3 Questions to help you determine if you are "*in Christ*" or "*in Adam*."**
 1. **Do you hate sin? Colossians 3:5-9**
 2. **Do you desire to live a godly life?**
 - a. **Colossians 3:10-14**
 - b. **This is an internal desire to live for Christ.** Not that you want to please your family, your friends or someone important to you or that you are trying to impress someone with your godliness.

- c. **Illst:** Students at HP dressing up for Sunday lunch when they had not gone to church that morning but wanted to make everyone else think they had gone to church. These kids had taken off their old bedclothes and put on their dress clothes but there was no internal desire to love God. It was all external and pretending. *Is your desire for Christ an internal desire to love God and love others or simply posing?*
3. **Do you glory in or boast in Christ Jesus?** (Are your affections alive for what He has done for you?)
- a. **Colossians 1:27; 3:1**
 - b. One of the marks of being "*in Christ*" is that you glory in the cross of Christ, you delight in His gospel, and your desire is to find your satisfaction in Him alone? You want to see Him honored and lifted up.
 - c. **Application:**
 - i. If these things are true of you then you are in Christ
 - ii. However, if they are not true of you then it might mean you are good at attending church, are religious and you know the facts but your HOPE is not in Christ.
 - iii. **IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE A PROFESSOR OF FAITH AND NOT BE A POSSESSOR OF FAITH.** This means you need to repent of your sin of pretending and genuinely seek Christ and place real faith in Him.

B. The second and third things are that he called them "saints" and "faithful brothers" (and sisters) in Christ. (v. 2)

- If you are "*in Christ*" then you are a saint and part of God's family . . . a brother and a sister in the family of God.
- a) **"SAINTS"**
- Compare and contrast saint as understood by Roman Catholics and the Bible (not bashing Catholics). This is an effort to teach what the Bible says about the word "*saint*" and to help us understand our identity as a "*saint*" we will contrast the two ideas.
1. **"Saints" in the Roman Catholic Tradition**
- In Roman Catholic tradition you can only become a saint if you:
 - 1) Live a life of heroic virtue. It is not enough to simply live a good life or be a good person but you must have been a heroically good person—a Mother Teresa type of person.
 - 2) Then you must die
 - 3) Then you must be nominated and voted on by the Pope and the college of cardinals
 - 4) Then you must do two miracles after you die
 - 5) Then if you do all of these things you can be voted on to be a saint
2. **This is very different from the biblical definition we have of a "saint".**
- 1) **According to Scripture, everyone who is in Christ is a saint.** The word "*saint*" is simply a word that means, "*set apart*" or "*holy one*". What the Bible recognizes is that if you are "*in Christ*" then you have been called out of the "*world*" or from being "*in Adam*" and placed "*in Christ*", in the family of God.
 - 2) **What we are going to see this unpacked in Colossians is that identity determines behavior.**
 - i. **In the Catholic version of sainthood behavior determines identity.** In other words, if you live a good enough life, if you behave virtuously then after you are dead you might be conferred with the identity of saint. BEHAVIOR DETERMINES IDENTITY, this is backwards to what Scripture teaches.

- ii. **In the biblical understanding of sainthood—*identity determines behavior*.** In other words, if you are already a saint, already holy, already “*in Christ*” then this affects your behavior. We are to live a certain way. Paul tells the church in **v. 10** to “*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him . . .*” So the biblical understanding is that ***IDENTITY DETERMINES BEHAVIOR***. We must get this right or we will go through life living the Christian life backwards.

Application:

- So how are you doing with this one? Are you living out of the new identity Christ has given you or do you have it backwards? If you need help with this, I (or our elders) would love to visit with you to help you read the Scriptures and begin to live out of the grace of a new gospel-identity *in Christ*.

b) “FAITHFUL BROTHERS”

- Again what we are seeing in this little phrase is how *genuine obedience to God flows out of a gospel-identity in Christ*.
- “**Brothers**” is a **familial term** that is identifying Paul’s relationship with them and their relationship with the larger body of Christ. They are all brothers or, we may also say, sisters in Christ.
- **When he places the adjective “faithful” in front of the word “brothers”** he is implying that their relationship also carries with it a designation that they love and obey Jesus together as a family.
- **So here are two things to consider as we apply what it means to be a “faithful brother” or a faithful sister in Christ.**
 - 1) **Genuine obedience flows out of a gospel-centered identity.** We do not obey our way into the family of God. Our identity is given to us by faith in Christ and we are transformed by that identity and begin to love and obey Jesus as a “*faithful brother*.”
 - **Illst: Employee vs. Son**
 - An employee works for compensation. If your boss tells you he is not going to pay you any more then . . .
 - However, a son works out of love . . .
 - **Illst: The biblical example of this is the Prodigal Son parable:**
 - **The elder brother** obeyed his father like an employee and he treated his father as if he owed him because he had been obedient
 - **The younger brother** learned to follow and obey his father out of love and simply because his father loved him
 - **This is the real difference between religion and Christianity.** Religion approaches God as an employer, “God I will do these things and you owe me reward, eternal life or an easy life.” However, genuine obedience flows out of gospel-identity that places us in the family of God. Then we will be called as “faithful brother in Christ” or a “faithful sister in Christ.”
 - So a son or daughter of God will obey out of love or we might say out of their gospel-identity as a member of the family of God.
 - 2) **The second way to apply the phrase “faithful brothers” is by considering that Apostle Paul addressed them as “faithful brothers”.**
 - i. Can you call those you go to church with “*faithful brothers*” or “*faithful sisters*” *in Christ* even if you disagree with them?

- ii. **Paul knew he was writing to a church that had problems.** He knew the church was not perfect and yet He chose to love them in spite of their imperfections and address them as "*faithful brothers*" in Christ even through there were many areas where they were failing.
- iii. **How could he do that?** It was not because his hope was in the ability of people to please him but his hope was in the grace of Christ to transform their lives over time and so they would become who Christ says they are.
- iv. **Can we talk to one another like Paul talked with this church?** Perhaps instead of being critical or suspicious or holding others at arms length we can find ways to encourage and even invest in one another and trust God for the results of that investment.

II. Why did Paul write to the Colossian church?

- **He wrote to correct false teaching.** However, when you read Colossians you will notice he did not address this false teaching directly but exalted the all-supreme, all-sufficient, all-satisfying person of Christ.
- **The Colossian church was drifting from the gospel.** The culture they lived in was causing them to water down the gospel and they were drifting into moralism, mysticism, then they were blending Christianity with Phrygian folklore and Jewish angel worship. It was Jesus plus some of these religious practices. The conversation probably sounded like this . . .
- **The dominant philosophy or influence of the culture always tries to push its way into Christian doctrine.** It always wants to be considered the mainstream thought or newest Christian trend. It is always Jesus plus some kind of religious effort.
- What we are not necessarily talking about is something overt and explicit. What happens is that over time skewed ways of thinking about the church and the gospel merge with the church and so what happens it is very subtle. Many well-meaning believers don't run away from the gospel. No . . . instead they gradually drift away from the gospel over time as the gospel becomes watered down or corrupted.
- **There are two ways of thinking about the gospel in our culture that are watering down the gospel:**
 1. **Post Modern Pluralism:** This is the idea that there is no such thing as truth when it comes to religion or spirituality. With this view you are just free to pick and choose from any world view you want and kind of make up your own view of the world you want because all of these various religions are trying to get at the same thing anyway and whatever works for you is great. This is very common in our culture and it only makes sense that it will begin to affect how we think as a church.
 - a. **The problem with this is that this idea is foolish.** It is because all religious traditions, Christianity included are making statements about what is ultimately true. A religious system or tradition is a way of processing ultimate reality. It makes statements about the way things actually are or ought to be.
 - b. **Illst:** There was a pastor taking a flight from California to Philadelphia one stormy night. It was late, but the man in the next seat learned that he was a pastor and wanted to talk. The man said, "I believe that going to heaven is like going to Philadelphia. You can get there by airplane, by train, by bus, by automobile. There are many ways to get to Philadelphia." The pastor said "When we started descending into Philadelphia, the place was covered in fog so thick we could not see. The wind was blowing, the rain was beating on the plane, and everyone looked nervous and tight. As we were circling in the fog, I turned to the theological expert on my right and said, "I'm certainly glad the pilot doesn't agree with your theology." He asked, "What do you mean?" I replied, "The people in the control tower are giving instructions to the pilot. 'Come in north by northwest, three degrees, you're on beam; don't deviate from the beam.'

I'm glad the pilot's not saying, 'There are many ways into this airport. There are many approaches we can take.' I'm glad he's saying, 'There's only one way we can land this plane, and I'm saying on course.'"¹

- c. **This is what is common in our culture today.** People want to divorce truth from spiritual things and say these things don't count as truth. It is very disingenuous to say about the founder of any religion that there are many ways to understand the world, to understand spirituality and to get to heaven because all of the founders of these religions were saying something about ultimate reality. Jesus told us about what is true about the world, God, how to know God, who we are in light of God, what happens when we die and how to prepare to meet God. He was giving us ultimate truth and all other religions are false. Many churches in the face of the tide of postmodern pluralism are watering down the gospel to make it more inclusive of other faiths.
2. **Moralistic-Therapeutic-Deism.** Christian Smith and Melinda Denton coined this phrase based on their research with teenagers in the church and in our culture. It is basically *Me-Centered Christianity*. What they discovered were these 5 religious traits or beliefs among adolescents: 1. "A god exists who created and ordered the world and watches over human life on earth." 2. "God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions." 3. "The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about oneself." 4. "God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when God is needed to resolve a problem." 5. "Good people go to heaven when they die."² In other words, Christianity is about—ME! So instead of me begin created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever now it's the business of giving me my best life now. God exists to meet my needs, fill my emptiness and solve my problems. In essence Jesus becomes a cosmic therapist to help me overcome my neurosis.
- a. **Do you know who is promoting this false teaching?** Modern Evangelical Christianity. If you go to 90% of the churches in America on any given Sunday you will hear a "how to" sermon. How to be a good parent, how to overcome your anxieties, how to succeed in life, how to get out of debt, how to be a better husband, wife or parent. These are all good things but they are topical and "how to" driven. They are all about God existing to help me solve my problems and get the most out of my life.
- b. If you want to learn more about this topic you should read Michael Horton's book, *Christ-less Christianity* and his companion book *The Gospel-Driven Life*. His thesis in *Christ-less Christianity* is that we still have Christianity but it is just Christ-less. You can go to any given church on Sunday and hear a sermon on how to be good or how to succeed but you will not hear the gospel.
- c. **Michael Horton says,** "*My concern is that we are getting dangerously close to the place in everyday American church life where the Bible is mined for 'relevant' quotes but is largely irrelevant on its own terms; God is used as a personal resource rather than known, worshiped and trusted; Jesus Christ is a coach with a good game plan for our victory rather than a Savior who has already achieved it for us; salvation is more a matter of having our best life now than being saved from God's judgment by God himself; and the Holy Spirit is an electrical outlet we can plug into for the power we need to be all that we can be.*"³

¹ <http://oakridgechurch.com/riggs/2th2-1ob.htm>.

² <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/04/11/moralistic-therapeutic-deism-the-new-american-religion-2/>.

³ <http://www.racinebible.org/christless-christianity/>.

3. **False teaching is** a subtle under current that begins slowly and gradually pulls us away from the true gospel. It loosens our moorings so that our hope is no longer anchored in Christ but in "*Christ plus something else.*" You see any time you have Jesus plus something what you are really doing is deny the supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus.
 - a. **Two things will cause us to subtly drift in our faith.**
 - i. **One is that we do not understand our faith.** When we do not understand our faith, the word of God or doctrine we are likely to water down the gospel and accommodate cultural expectations. Paul wrote to the Colossian church and to us as well to help us grasp the rich glories of all that God has done for us in Christ Jesus.
 - ii. **Second we will drift because we have little confidence in the word of God.** When this happens we are easily shaken by false claims or challenges. Paul wrote to strengthen our hope in Christ alone and affirm that God's divine purpose in creation has been brought to fulfillment in Christ. This letter affirms the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as the fullness of God as our Creator and Redeemer.
 - iii. **The question for application** is what will you do to understand your faith and grow in our confidence in the word of God and in Christ? Come to Foundations? Join a small group? Be disciplined by a mature believer?

Conclusion

Paul ended v. 2 with "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*" This biblical blessing is what Paul gives at the beginning of his letters. It is a blessing that stands on the gospel of Jesus Christ.

1. **Grace and peace only come through the cross of Christ.** Peace with God only comes from the fact that Jesus took our sin and paid for it on the cross and transformed us from being enemies with God to being God's children, in His family. **For Paul these two words are shorthand for the gospel.** You cannot have grace or peace with God without the work of Christ on your behalf.
2. **The only way we are able to have this blessing is because Jesus became our curse. He ended the war between us and the Father.** He healed our relationship with Him in order to bring us into the family of God so that we are transformed.
3. In this blessing we not only find that we belong to Him but God gives Himself to us—"*Grace and peace—TO YOU—FROM THE FATHER.*"
4. The reason Paul is able to write this amazing letter filled with the supremacy of Christ, magnifying the sufficiency of Christ is because in the bottom of the *House of Darkness* Paul knew he was not alone. He knew He belonged to God but he also knew God had given Himself to Paul in Christ. Paul was not, in a way, *in prison*, Paul knew he was *in Christ*.
 - Friend are you in Christ this morning? If you are not in Christ . . .
 - Brother and sister in Christ are you:
 - living out of your identity in Christ or out of duty, legalism or moralism?
 - Do you feel like you are drifting in the sea of cultural false teaching? Are the waves of cultural influence beating on your heart and mind so that the moorings of your heart are loosened from the gospel? Brother and sister call out to Christ to anchor your heart in His gospel alone for Jesus is our all-sufficient, all-supreme and all-satisfying Savior. Find a mature Christian friend who will challenge you and help you grow, come to Foundations and get in a small group.