

Knowing and Growing in the Real Gospel

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon all. It's really nice to see everyone here. Welcome to everyone. If you could all grab a seat and get yourselves comfortable, that would be great and we could make a start.

Before we start, you'll notice that on your seats we've got these wee cards advertising our Christmas Wednesday lunchtime services. They're happening over the next three Wednesdays. And please do take one away and prayerfully share it with a colleague or a friend. And they're an excellent chance to get someone into church to hear the message of Jesus and see what Christmas is really about and how much better it is than anything the world has to offer. So please do take away a card with you. And today we're going to be looking at Colossians chapter one, which we're going to be reading shortly. But before that, let's pray together and ask God for his help.

Our Lord and Father, we thank you so much for your word that you speak to us through it, that you speak clearly through it today.

[1 : 00] So please, Father, as we read this, help us to understand it, to grow in knowledge of you and your word. And please, Father, let that knowledge flow out into our lives so that we might walk in a manner worthy of you.

We thank you for everything you've given us in Jesus, and we pray this in his name. Amen. So if you all turn to Colossians chapter one, it's in page 983 in the Blue Bibles.

So Colossians chapter one, I'm reading verses one to 14. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

Grace to you and peace from God, our father. We always thank God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we pray for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

If this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, as it also does among you.

[2 : 13] Since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and is made known to us your love in the spirit.

And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son and whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

Amen. Have you ever felt like you're missing out as a Christian? I think it's very easy for us to feel like we don't quite have the whole package, that we are missing out on something extra that other people seem to have.

[3 : 31] Maybe it's when you hear very impressive testimonies from people and you feel like, well, yours just doesn't quite match up when you compare them. Yours is very unimpressive. Or your friends talk about having big spiritual experiences.

Or you see very emotionally charged praise worship. And you feel inferior. You feel like it's a different world entirely.

You feel less. Like you're missing out on something. Well, there was a bit of a storm brewing in Colossae because the Christians there were being told that they were missing out on something. Colossae was in Asia Minor, which is now part of modern day Turkey. And the church there was not founded by Paul, but by Epaphras. But Paul was very thankful for this church.

He always gave thanks for them and had real love for them. The tone throughout the whole letter is one of real, genuine warmth, care, love, and friendship.

[4 : 31] But it seems that at some point, some people came into the church and told the Colossians that they didn't quite have the whole gospel. They were missing out on something.

And there was more than what simple Epaphras was telling them. If you flick over to chapter 2, verse 4, Paul says that they had persuasive sounding arguments.

Telling the Colossians that they needed more. They needed to observe more laws. To eat this or that. To celebrate more festivals. To worship angels. To have visions. To have big, spiritually impressive experiences.

They were telling the church that they needed more than just what Epaphras was offering them. With his simple, unimpressive sounding, no frills, no strings attached gospel.

Because all he was offering them was Christ. No fancy add-ons. No bonuses. No extra perks. He wasn't offering them all the promises of the others.

[5 : 32] He was just offering them Jesus. But Paul said that those convincing sounding philosophies from others, as plausible as it sounded, were, in 2 verse 8, empty.

In truth, they offered nothing at all. They were worthless because they actually took away from Christ alone. Anything that takes away from him is just nonsense.

It's worthless. That's the situation Paul was writing to. With some people making the Colossian Christians feel like they don't have it all. Like they're not at that next level of spirituality.

It's a very easy thing to believe. To see others promise big spiritual experiences that look really impressive on the outside. And then feel like you're smaller.

And you're missing out as a result. That you're less than them. That you've got it wrong. But Paul wants them to know that Epaphras had it right all along.

[6 : 36] That they had everything they could ever need as Christians in Jesus. Simply by having faith in him. That they were actually the most qualified people on the planet. They are like cups full to the brim with no need for a top-up.

They don't lack. They're not missing out on anything. Because they're joined to Jesus. Who in verse 18 of chapter 1 is preeminent in everything.

And to verse 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. If they have Jesus, then they have everything. Well let's dig into our passage this afternoon.

We're going to look at it in two halves. Firstly looking at verses 1 to 8. Where Paul says that the ordinary Colossians know the real gospel. They know the real gospel. And here Paul is assuring the ordinary Colossians that they are the real deal.

That they are the full-fat, nothing-held-back Christians. Because they have believed the real gospel. Paul starts off in verse 1 by calling himself an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.

[7 : 45] And it's more than just him saying hello. This is a statement that since he is an apostle commissioned by Jesus to speak on his behalf. That he is a voice to be listened to. So in a church where there's many persuasive and convincing sounding voices around.

The authority that Paul has. It just stands head and shoulders above the rest, doesn't it? He is a voice to be listened to. Because he has personally been commissioned by Jesus to speak on his behalf.

And he calls the church both saints and faithful brothers. He's encouraging them here and it sets the tone for the rest of the letter. He's not there to beat them over the head or clip them around the ears.

But he's putting an arm around them. To encourage them. To gently push them on. And reassure them in what they're doing. They're the real deal as Christians.

They're faithful saints who are believing in the real gospel. So Paul wants to encourage them in that. To keep doing what they're doing. To keep doing the right things. And that they need to keep growing in their faith.

[8 : 54] Paul then in verse 3 says that he is thankful for the Colossians. He and Timothy writing this together are always thanking God for them. Always.

Those faithful Christians who are living out their faith. That would have been such an encouragement for him to hear wouldn't it? That every time Paul prayed. He was genuinely thankful for them.

So. Why is he so thankful? Well Paul is thankful. Because they are displaying. All the signs of real Christianity. Look with me at verse 4.

They are thankful since. We heard of your faith in Christ Jesus. And of the love that you have for all the saints. Because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Paul is so thankful. Because they are displaying the classic signs of real Christian belief. Faith. Hope. And love. Faith in Jesus.

[9 : 52] Hope in what God has laid up in heaven. And love for all the saints. They are the classic signs of Christian belief. That Paul looks for in the churches he writes to. Faith.

Hope. And love. Something that I find quite striking about all these. Is just how normal and unimpressive they seem. Did you think that?

They are not big powerful acts. Or impressive looking spiritual experiences. But they are quite ordinary. As the Holy Spirit works in the life of a believer. He gives faith in Jesus.

Assures us of the hope of heaven. And helps us to love our church family. To love each other here and now. It's all very normal stuff. Don't you think? But it's beautiful too.

As it confirms the reality of our spiritual state. That they are joined to Christ in faith. And we are joined to Christ in faith. So they start living like him. We are joined to Christ.

[10 : 52] Perfectly united to him by faith. It's like those married couples who have been together for decades. You know the ones. They are joined together as one.

And I've been for some time. So after years have passed. They start to act a bit more like each other. As every anniversary passes on. Some mannerisms are shared. Similar opinions are held. They have a common way of doing things. And you can see their personalities start to become a little bit more like their other halves. And quite often after a few decades. Married couples even start looking like each other. For better or for worse.

Well Paul was telling the Colossians that they were joined to Jesus. And it's true for all who have faith in him. That they are united to him. So they should naturally start to look more like him.

To act more like him. So how did all this come about? How do people today come to know and love the true God? It's quite simple really.

[11 : 52] We hear and believe the true gospel. Paul hadn't met the Colossians yet at the time of writing. If you notice verse 4 he's only heard of their faith.

In verse 8 their love was made known to him. And verse 9 again they only heard of their faith. So they hadn't heard the gospel from Paul himself.

Christ's apostle. But they'd heard it through Epaphras. One of their own from Colossae itself. And it would be easy for them to think that since it was only Epaphras.

One of their own. Who they all knew. And he was fairly young at this point. Well he could have got it wrong. He could have missed something out couldn't he? It would have been easy to think that his words weren't as valued.

Or persuasive. But Paul defends him. He's got his back. He says that Epaphras is a faithful minister. And that he shared the gospel faithfully with them.

[12 : 49] And it's helpful to notice the change in life that the Colossians went through. If you flick over the page again to 3 verse 5. Paul talks about their former lives. How they used to live before they were converted.

He says put to death therefore what is earthly in you. Sexual immorality. Impurity. Passion. Evil desire and covetousness.

Which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. And these you too once walked. When you were living in them. They have gone from idolatry and covetousness.

To faith. Hope. And love. There's been a remarkable transformation in these lives. Hasn't there? There's been real change. In the lives of the Colossian church.

So how did that happen? If we flick back again to chapter 1. Paul shares what brought about this great change in their lives. In verse 5 they heard the word of truth.

[13 : 51] Verse 6 they heard and understood. In verse 7 they learned it. The gospel. From Epaphras. A faithful minister. This change in life was simply brought about by hearing and believing in the real gospel.

Just as Epaphras faithfully shared it with them. He's accredited by Paul. He's got the stamp of approval from the apostle himself. As Paul calls him a beloved fellow servant and a faithful minister. Paul's in no doubt here. That the Colossians have the real gospel at work in their lives. Because faithful Epaphras has shared the truth with them. The full Christian message with nothing held back. As he preached to them Christ. Therefore. These Colossians are not to doubt what they have. Or to think they are inferior to anyone saying they don't have it all.

But they are to know that since they have Christ. They have it all. They have the real gospel faithfully taught to them by Epaphras. And we too may have been taught the gospel in a way which doesn't look that impressive.

[14:59] Our pastors. Our Sunday school leaders. Our parents even. They might not have looked that powerful. It's easy to look around and feel like what we're doing doesn't have much power behind it.

Or that we're not going to change the world around us. But if we have the real gospel. Then that's all that matters. Because it has the power. Not us.

Not our power. Not our experiences. Not our charisma. The gospel has the power. The people around them who were saying that they needed to have big spiritual experiences.

Who kept on adding unnecessary things onto the gospel. Seeing you need to give up certain foods. Worship angels. To observe more laws. They looked impressive on the outside. But Paul knows that they are full of rubbish.

Paul and Epaphras could smell a rat from a mile off. Because they knew and were convinced in the real gospel. So as persuasive as the false argument sounded to the Colossians.

[15:59] They were to keep going with what they've got. Sticking with Jesus and the real gospel they learned from Epaphras. Their faithful minister. And since they had the real gospel.

Paul wanted them to keep growing in it. And that's what we see in verses 9 to 14. They know the real gospel. So are to grow in the real gospel. Paul has just prayed in thanks for the Colossians. And now he prays that they would grow in the truth. So how are they to grow? Well Paul prays that they would be full as Christians. Look at what he says in verses 9 to 11 with me.

He prays that they would be filled with the knowledge of his will. In all spiritual wisdom and understanding. So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Fully pleasing to him. Bearing fruit in every good work.

And increasing in the knowledge of God. Being strengthened with all power. According to his glorious might. For all endurance and patience with joy. Did you notice the common thread there?

[17:02] Filled all fully. Every all all. Paul's not missing his mark here. He wants them to have everything. They can have as Christians. He and Timothy have not stopped praying for them.

And he prays that they would be strengthened. And increasing in knowledge, wisdom and understanding. He wants them to know God's will and his ways. And they are to gain their wisdom and understanding.

From their faithful minister. Who shared the word of truth with them. Epaphras. And the knowledge, wisdom and understanding. Is not to remain only in their heads.

It doesn't just stay up there. But it's to spill out into their lives. Into how they love their church family. And witness to their Lord and Savior. In verse 10 Paul says. That they are to be filled with knowledge.

So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Bearing fruit in every good work. When the Colossians grow in knowledge. It must transform into godliness.

[18:02] In their everyday lives. And God's going to help them do it. Verse 11. They are going to be strengthened with all power. According to his glorious might.

I don't know what you think of. When you imagine a Christian full of God's glorious and mighty power. I tend to imagine people who are spiritually huge. With great thunder and lightning conversion stories.

Very passionately able to preach. Great communicators. With big public displays of sacrifice. And just looking like they've got it sorted. Because they've got something extra. Something more. Than what I have.

With my simple faith. But what does Paul say. A Christian full of God's glorious power and might looks like. Paul says at the end of verse 11. That it's. Enduring.

Patiently. With joy. All the while giving thanks to God. For all he's done. Is that the picture you had in your mind.

[19 : 01] Of a Christian full of God's power. Because it wasn't in mine. I was really surprised when I read this verse. Is that really. What God's power at work in people looks like.

But Paul says that yes. This is exactly what God's power at work. Within the ordinary Christian life looks like. And it's just wonderfully normal. Isn't it? Christians full of God's power. Just keep going. With the real gospel. With an attitude of thankfulness and joy. That's true Christian power. And it's. It's about as spiritual as you can get.

Growing in knowledge of God. Having faith in Jesus. Hoping in heaven. And loving his people in church. That's what the Colossians were to keep doing. That's how they were to grow.

In very. Ordinary ways. To keep doing more. Of what they already were. Loving all the saints. Loving their church family. Even the tricky ones. Who are hard to bear with. And they can endure patiently.

[20 : 01] With joy and thankfulness. Because of. All. That God himself has done. In verse 12. God has. Qualified you. To share. In the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has. Delivered us. From the domain of darkness. And transferred us. To the kingdom of his beloved son. In whom we have redemption. The forgiveness. Of sins. The Colossian church. And we too. Can patiently endure. With joy and thanks. Because we have been. Qualified. To share in something. That nothing in this world. Can come even close to. To share in Christ's kingdom. Under God's perfect rule. In the new creation. God has delivered. And transferred us. From the death. We so rightly deserve. To the life. And kingdom.

Of his son. And we have all of this. Because we are joined. To Jesus. Notice verse 14. In whom. We have redemption.

[20 : 59] The forgiveness of sins. The ordinary Colossians. Have everything. They could ever need. Or ask for in Christ. Assured without doubt. Because he has already.

Laid up their hope in heaven. He's already paid the price. And gone ahead. To prepare a place for them. Since they're joined to him. Their growth as Christians. Is to be expected.

As they're just being who they are. They're joined to Jesus. So they're becoming more like him. So the ordinary Christian. Both then. And today.

Can patiently endure. The struggles of this life. Because we know. That our future. Is completely secure. And assured. It. The Colossians. The Colossians.

May have been made to feel like. They were. Missing out as Christians. By others saying so. With their. Persuasive sounding arguments. Belittling them. For their biblical faith. Which they'd learned from Epaphras.

[21 : 53] But they were certainly. Not missing out. Not one bit. They had everything. They had the truth. They had the real gospel. And they were to keep growing. In that faith. By patiently enduring.

Marked with real. Thankfulness. And joy. For all that God's done. And since God has done. So much for them. Of course they should want to respond. By walking.

In a manner worthy of him. Pleasing him fully. As they keep going. And keep growing. In the gospel. It's a wonderful thing. That sinful people like us.

Can please. A God of perfect holiness. And it can only be done in Christ. Him alone. As we finish. This passage gives us both. A warning. And a comfort. Firstly. The warning. The warning. The warning. Is that you need to. Rigidly. Stick.

[22 : 49] To the real gospel. Big spiritual experiences. And emotionally charged worship. Can seem very persuasive. And convincing. And make you feel like. You're missing out.

Like you don't have the real deal. But Paul is very clear here. The real gospel. Is the word of truth. Found in the Bible. As that is exactly. What Epaphras was sharing with them.

When it comes to the sermons. You hear. We shouldn't be judging them. On how. Engaging. Or charismatic. They are. Or how funny. The preacher's jokes were. We should be judging them.

On what. If what they say. Is true. That is to be the priority. Are they giving you. The true gospel. So be warned. Anything outside of that.

Anything added. On top of God's word of truth. Takes away from Jesus. And takes away from. All that he's done for us. When we're looking at. Emotionally charged worship. Or other Christians.

[23 : 47] Who think. Who we think. Have something extra. We tend to think. That the grass. Is greener. Where they are. That these spiritual extras. Are what we need. To get to that next level.

That things will be better. And easier then. But the grass. Is not greener. On the other side. The grass is greener. Where you water it. So don't go out.

Seeking big spiritual experiences. But be content. In all that God has given you. Which you find. In his word. In his gospel. Secondly.

The comfort. The comfort. The comfort. Is that real Christianity. Really spiritual. Qualified. Powerful Christians. Look very. Ordinary. Actually.

They have faith in Jesus. They love their church family. And they patiently endure. Through this life. Because of the hope. Already laid up for them. In heaven.

[24 : 44] All the while. Giving thanks to God. For what he's done. That's what Paul says. Makes a real Christian. It's all very normal. Not the most impressive.

Looking from the outside. But with a deep. Spiritual transformation. Happening within. Which God sees. It's very easy for us. To feel like we're.

Less of a Christian at times. Maybe you've heard. A very impressive testimony. From someone. And felt like. Since yours was so normal. That you simply don't have. What they have. That you're less of a Christian.

Than they are. It's easy to feel like. You're missing out. Because you're not as. Outwardly impressive. But Paul says. That that is nonsense.

Because all the Colossians did. Was to hear. Learn. And understand. And understand the gospel. As it was told to them. And through that. They were brought to faith in Jesus. And were qualified.

[25 : 40] To share. In the heavenly inheritance. Of our Lord. To be in his kingdom. So if you feel like. You're lacking. As a Christian. Like you're missing out.

Then. Don't worry. Be encouraged. Because there's no such thing. As a lesser. Christian. Those who are joined. By faith to Jesus.

Don't lack anything at all. If you're joined to Jesus. Then you have. Everything you could ever need. Because in him. You have. Deliverance. Redemption.

Forgiveness. And inheritance. Already laid up for you in heaven. Let's pray as we close. Our Lord and Father.

Please help us to. Recognize. And know. That real spirituality. Comes through faith. In your son alone. Please help us to keep growing.

[26 : 40] In the knowledge of your gospel. To grow. So that we would walk. In a manner worthy. Of you. Seeking to please. And honor you. In every way in our lives. And please help us to do this.

All with. A heart of thankfulness. And joy. Because of all that you've done for us. And all that we have. And your son. In whose name we pray. Amen. Amen.