

LSB Colossians 1:1 - 14 Introduction

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. 3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and multiplying, just as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 who also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

We began this wondrous letter from Paul to the saints at Colossae last week and we took almost the entire morning just getting to know Paul a little bit. And we covered his opening salutation but stopped short of his common greeting of grace and peace.

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Most commentaries I read and teachers I listen to sort of skip over the greeting and dive into the commendation in verse 3. But I want to take a few moments and speak about both grace and peace that Paul prays for them here.

Our world is in turmoil this week. Even Tim who I work with and for said I had better pray for peace. A new axis of evil seems to be organizing itself to counter America. There were military parades and shows of power from people who oppose us.

Wars and rumors of wars grind on. Peace seems to be out of anyone's grasp. Saber wrattling is the new order of the day. But it's not new.

Grace and peace that Paul blesses his recipients with at Colossae are the exclusive benefit of christians. Think about that for a moment. God's grace is exclusively offered to christians. And peace, in this world, is exclusive to christians alone.

There's a simple reason for that. It's a very simple dichotomy. Binary, if you will. We think in terms of binary because we're all educated about computers these days. Two possibilities. Zero, and one.

The world's problem is binary. Sin. You either stand condemned and slave to your sinfulness. Or your sins are forgiven and removed by the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, in your place, on the cross.

So two possibilities. You're a slave of Satan through sin who at some level is living within his world system, in a condemned world that knows no peace, either individually within, or collectively as nations. No peace.

Or, you're a christian, who has become a citizen of another world.

Paul speaks of the binary possibility directly. Condemned, in sin, or redeemed, purchased by God, and forgiven. Listen to familiar words again from Philippians 3;

18 For many walk—of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping—as enemies of the cross of Christ, 19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their stomach and glory is in their shame, who set their thoughts on earthly things. 20 But our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by His working through which He is able to even subject all things to Himself.

Two possibilities. Citizens of earth who are under a curse, or citizens of heaven who wait for the Saviour who purchased us and rescued us out of the curse of sin, with His blood.

Two possibilities. The saints, and the aint's. And Paul's salutation blessing of grace and peace is exclusively available to christians. The world seeks it everywhere but it is elusive. There is no peace. Nor will there ever be until Christ comes out of heaven and judges this world with fire and crushes Satan's rebellion and locks him in prison for a thousand years of peace on earth under Christ's authority to reign.

Therefore, when Paul offers this blessing of peace, it is exclusive to those whose sins are forgiven. Christians enjoy inner peace while the world is disintegrating into chaos around us. Sin and peace are mutually exclusive. I'll say that twice. Sin and peace are mutually exclusive.

How is it possible that we enjoy something that is so elusive? The world searches non stop for peace and doesn't find it, cannot achieve it, and a little group of redeemed people enjoys peace from the inside out.

Paul's second word in that blessing is the cause. Grace. Unmerited favor and blessing from God. A little group, a remnant, enjoys peace because of God's unmerited love and favor.

But here's the heart breaking thing. God offered that grace to everyone on earth. Grace and peace are free for the taking. But sin has to go. So the world remains at war with God. They love their sin. The nations rage against God. And that pretty well brings us up to date.

Grace and peace are available, free, for any taker who will repent of sin, and belong to Jesus. And christians are so used to grace and peace with God that those words in that blessing are almost throw away words. We don't often stop to think about the phenomenon we enjoy. Exclusive grace. Exclusive peace.

The world seeks peace in all the wrong places. They want their sin they love and they seek peace that is only available to the forgiven. We who have had our sins removed enjoy peace with God. We dwell peacefully within our sovereign God's rule and plan for this world. We wait to hear His voice and see His face. God's grace has given us peace.

OK, salutation and blessing. Let's dive in and see what Paul has to say to these Christians who dwell at Colossae. But just to preface, we learn a bit later that Paul has never been to this church. He knows of it only from Epaphros who founded them and brings the report of them to Paul. And perhaps others have told him of them also.

3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

Paul always begins his letters with praise and thankfulness for what his people are doing well. In every case except to the Galatians, Paul begins with praise and thankfulness to God, in prayers, and then moves on into his other concerns.

Now this church is a special case in all of Paul's letters and correspondence that makes up much of our New Testament, because, Paul had never been there. He didn't know of them personally. He didn't found this church. It is independent of Paul but it is the result of the same gospel.

So Paul here marvels at the power of the gospel and the evidence of the gospel's regenerative transformation. Without him involved in any way, this church has emerged and has all of the same evidence of regenerative power that any of the churches Paul began and founded have.

It's like a proof test case. No Paul, same gospel, same result. It's as if the world might say, well, everywhere Paul went, churches exploded onto the scene, but take Paul out of the formula and the phenomenon won't happen.

But it did. Paul tells the Romans, I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God unto salvation. Perhaps. But let's see what happens with no Paul. Well, here you go. A bright healthy church with all of the identical evidences of true salvation, true new life in Christ, present. The gospel is effective with or without Paul. The gospel is the dynamite, not Paul. We need to know that.

3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel

When regeneration happens, when the Holy Spirit comes to live and dwell inside christians hearts, when they are quickened from spiritual death to spiritual life by His Spirit within them, there are three evidences that we can see distinctly in changed lives.

Paul speaks of those three things we will always see in real christians. Faith, hope, and love.

Is there an echo in the room? Has he said this before? Yes, we're all very familiar with the love chapter. 1 Corinthians 13:13. Same three evidences. *But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*

3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel

4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus

This is the entry point for all christians. Faith in Christ Jesus. What exactly does that mean?

The gospel is good news. Here's why. The entire world is locked down, condemned by God, because of sin. We are born into it. We are all sinners, and as such, we are all under God's wrath. We were born into a rebellion against God. All sinned, the scripture says. Universal rebellion. Universal wrath of God against sinners.

But God provided the only means to have the debt of sin removed. Jesus, Son of God, God incarnate, took the punishment, endured the wrath of God for us, and died our death, in our place.

He rose from the dead on the third day, and He offers us His righteousness to our accounts, in place of our sins. That's called substitutionary atonement. He gets our sin, we get His righteousness.

Why would I believe that? Because He rose from the dead on the third day, and He appeared alive, from the dead, to over 500 witnesses before He ascended back into heaven.

Faith is me putting all my confidence in Christ's completed work, in my place, on the cross. I believe His atonement for my sins was accomplished. That faith, that believing in and relying on His finished work alone, and resurrection, has caused me to be made alive, together with Christ.

Romans 10:9 states it succinctly. *9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; And 10:17 tells us; 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.*

I am bankrupt to do anything to help myself out of my sinful condition. I can't pay the debt. Nothing I can do of righteous acts removes any previous sin. If Jesus didn't die in my place, I'm helpless and hopelessly condemned. Bankrupt. But I believe the good news that He DID die on that cross to take my sins upon Himself. I have faith alone in His finished work of forgiving my sins.

Faith then produces hope. My spirit comes to life with Christ. We laughed the other night when Josh said his grandad called the Holy Spirit the "decoder ring". But there's truth to that idea. Without Christ, nothing in this book fits together. Nothing makes much sense. Frankly, without Christ, the book is boring. It's tedious.

But with Jesus dwelling in my heart as resident truth teacher, the book comes to life. There's a very real connection of the written word, and the Logos, the revelation of God, in His Son, Jesus. I study the book and I get more of Jesus.

I go deep into the book and my relationship with Jesus is deepened. There's a direct connection; this book and Jesus. Want more of Jesus, dive into the book.

But as I read and study and get to know my Lord more intimately, I learn that this life is just the waiting period for the bride to enter the room. We learn that in the next life, we will have Jesus as husband, brother, friend. We will rule with Him.

Paul says, now we see in a mirror dimly. Then we shall see face to face. We wait for the day when Jesus will say; Come Up Here, and the graves will open, and the dead in Christ will see His face, and those who belong to Christ who are alive on the earth will likewise, rise up to see His face. Rapture and resurrection. Life forever with Jesus. We hope for that day.

Job, the most ancient book in the Bible, had this hope. We sang it last week in a hymn at the end of our service. Listen to Job. This is the very definition of hope;

25 But I know that my Redeemer lives, and in the end He will stand upon the earth. 26 Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God..... Job 19:25,26

Our hope is in the next world. This world is perishing. We wait for the day

when we will stand with Jesus, on this earth, as He removes sin, and sinners, and Satan and sets up His righteous kingdom and reigns. That's the world we hope for. We hope for a sure future with Him.

4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel

And finally, and I got the 3 evidences a little out of order for this text but in the order of the love chapter text, faith, hope, and love,

Regeneration by the indwelling Holy Spirit is like a package deal. The Holy Spirit is the source for all of these evidences. Even faith is a gift from God according to Ephesians 2:8,9. All of these things get poured out in us, from God. Faith, hope, love.

Reborn, regenerated, new life in Christ Christians will have a new kind of love for each other, poured out in our hearts by the Spirit.

If you have the Holy Spirit in your heart, you have an automatic love connection with every other member of Christ's body. It just works that way.

Such is this truth that John, the apostle, in his epistle says if God's love for His children isn't present in you, it casts doubt on your salvation.

1 Jn. 2:9 If anyone claims to be in the light but hates his brother, he is still in the darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother remains in the light, and there is no cause of stumbling in him. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness. He does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes....

1 Jn. 3:14-15 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. The one who does not love remains in death. / Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that eternal life does

not reside in a murderer.

1 Jn. 4:20-21 If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. / And we have this commandment from Him: Whoever loves God must love his brother as well.

Do you see a pattern here. If you have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, if you are regenerated from death to life, if you have been born again, love for the saints is automatic. It is part of the evidence of true saving faith.

Love, like faith and hope, is a distinctive that sets christians apart from the world that we live in. Real christians have a unique love for each other that will draw the world in.

The world's loves are bankrupt. Christian love is a visual evidence that draws the world in for a closer look. It was that love that opened my own heart to receive the gospel, 55 years ago. I simply said, whatever it is that these folks have, I want it at any cost.

A distinct real selfless love draws the world to the Christ who gives us that love. It is a fishnet that draws and catches men.

And now Paul wants to speak of the gospel that has wrought this faithful church totally apart from him. This would have been exciting for Paul. This is how it's supposed to work! The gospel apart from Paul or any apostle is where the power for reproduction dwells.

5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and multiplying, just as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 who also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

Here Paul connects the evidence, faith, hope, love, to the hearing of the gospel. Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. And Paul says the gospel is already bearing fruit in all the world.

Imagine, in a few short years, it is perhaps mid 60's, so just 30 years after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and already, Paul claims the gospel message is taking it's life giving power to "all the world".

It's like the apostles were the jump starters but once it's running the church, through the pure simple gospel, is self propelled. Pinch yourselves, here we are, 2,000 years later. The power is in the gospel message.

We are just the privy pots that hold the gospel. The gospel itself is the treasure that causes new life wherever it is spoken. The power of regeneration and reproduction is in the gospel itself.

That's why Paul will spend the rest of his life writing apologetics, arguments that clarify and protect the once for all delivered to the saints faith. The complete correct gospel is full of power. Add to it or subtract from it and it becomes impotent.

Since the power of regeneration of the church dwells in the gospel message, the gospel is the yeast in the dough, the life giving element, we must work hard to protect that message.

Jude says fight to keep it pure. *Earnestly contend for the once for all delivered to the saints faith.* Jude 3

Paul told Timothy; 1 Timothy 6:20

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid irreverent, empty chatter and the opposing arguments of so-called "knowledge,"

2 Timothy 1:13,14, Paul says;

13 Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching you have heard from me, with

the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 14 Guard the treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.

Satan wants to kill our gospel. Add works. Subtract Lordship. He's been trying to drain the power out of the gospel for 2,000 years.

Each generation of true christians is charged with guarding the treasure, and delivering it with full power in it's simple purity, to the next generation.

The gospel is like a sour dough bread starter. In theory, you could pass that starter down to the next person and the next person and the next person and 2,000 years later, it would produce the same loaf of bread.

We are like relay runners in a race and the gospel is the baton. We need to protect the treasure in it's full simplicity and power and pass it on to the next runner in the race. We are charged with Timothy to do that.

*5b **the gospel** 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and multiplying, just as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 who also informed us of your love in the Spirit.*

Here, Paul gives his approval of the gospel these folks received, without him there, as faithful.

Paul lets these folks know, they got the real thing. They received the gospel from a faithful slave, intact, with full power. It's like Paul's stamp of approval.

Remember, at this point, the New Testament canon is not complete. So it's an important note of full approval. Epaphros brought you the good stuff. Full power. True gospel with Paul's approval.

And it produced in them real evidence. Grace. Peace. Faith. Hope. Love. Those are evidences that only the true gospel can reproduce with it's power to bring a life connection to the God of the universes.

We have the written word now. Paul's no longer with us to approve that we got the real deal. We have it written down in this book.

*I Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I proclaimed as good news to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I proclaimed to you as good news, unless you believed for nothing. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that **Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,** 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that, He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.*

Beloved, that's the same gospel that Epaphros heard, believed, and then took to his people at Colossae, who also believed, and a church was born, completely apart from Paul, that produces all the evidences of real spiritual life together with Christ.

Epaphros, took some starter from Paul's loaf of sourdough bread, and brought it to Colossae, and put it in some dough there, and like magic, the same loaf of bread as Paul had, was made without Paul, at Colossae.

Jesus said; “*The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three sata of flour until it was all leavened.*” Mt. 13:33b

Beloved, we have the same bread starter. It's 2000 years old. We are tasked to simply keep it uncorrupted, and go put it in some dough, then wait for the magic to happen, with no further action from us required.

Our world needs the good news more than ever.