

Colossians 1:1-14

May 1, 1994

SGC

In your Bible please find the book of Colossians chapter ONE.
Today we begin an eight week series covering the major themes of this short letter of the Apostle Paul to the church at Colosse.

Would you also please stand in honor of God's Word as I read verses 3-14.

How would you feel, what would be your attitude if you read this letter for the first time and it was written to you and to this congregation of believers?

These are God's words to us today - His word to the Southern Gables Church.

READ the text (3-14)

These are very affirming words!

What is God's purpose in saying these things through the Apostle Paul?

Just this past week one of the men of our church called me in the middle of the day just to thank me for being his pastor and pastor of this church.

He told me how grateful he is for the teaching of the Word that goes on here and for my part in the leadership of this congregation.

My spirit responded in two ways simultaneously: I was encouraged and I was challenged.

That man and I both know that I have many shortcomings and that I have a long way to go to Christ likeness and yet I was affirmed in the reminder of what God, by his grace, has done in my life and through my work.

Not only was I affirmed but even in his words of encouragement I felt again the challenge to press on in my relationship to Jesus - not letting down, not slackening in my resolve to be like Him, not coasting in my desire to know him through his word.

That man's words were both an encouragement a very positive challenge.

In these opening words of this letter to the Colossians God does that for the church in Colosse and for the church, the people, known as Southern Gables.

While it certainly is God's prerogative to do so, notice that in these verses there is no scolding, no telling us how badly we have done in the past.

We too often think of God as only disappointed and unhappy with his people for their many failings and sins.

Has it ever occurred to you that he is pleased with his church, with this church?

I don't mean that he overlooks our individual and collective faults but that his basic posture toward us, his attitude toward us is not one of anger but of pleasure.

He knows full well how far we have to go in our Christian maturity but he also knows full well how far, by his grace, we have already come.

If you are a father or mother then I think you know something of how God feels toward you.

Especially when our children are older and have developed some competencies but even when they are younger we take great delight in watching our children perform in some church, civic or school function.

Everything they have is by grace, a gift to them.

The very life they live, the air they breath, the food and protection and effort that has developed them physically, emotionally and intellectually - all gifts to them.

And even though everything was a gift to them - nothing for which they could rightly take credit - you were nonetheless very pleased with them when they responded to that grace and worked hard and diligently.

Those first piano lessons, that first time to play in a league game, those first memorized lines in the school play - even if they didn't function with the greatest competency you were still very happy with them.

You are excited by how far they have come even if you know they have a great way to go.

Neither God nor Paul is oblivious to the shortcomings of the people of the church in Colosse, or to ours for that matter, but God comes to them and to us with a word of encouragement and a word of challenge.

Paul writes in essence, "When I pray for you I can't help but be thankful to God when I hear of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints."

Now most of you know that the word "saints" is not a reference to St Augustine, St Francis of Assisi, or St Christopher but a word referring to all who have become children of God, all who have been called and chosen by God, all who are his.

These people's lives had been profoundly changed.

According to v 7, their Pastor was visiting Paul in a prison in Rome, from where this letter was being written.

He had told Paul about the people - about the evidences of their changed lives.

I can imagine Paul listening to story after story of how the gospel had transformed people in that city - how that church had grown - how people were living out their new found faith in Jesus.

And every time he would hear another testimony his heart would express itself through his mouth in praise and thanksgiving to God.

When Paul wrote I thank God when I "hear of your faith in Christ Jesus" he did not mean only that he was thankful they trusted Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.

He's not speaking only of their becoming Christians.

He is using that expression "your faith in Christ Jesus" to describe their whole way of life.

It is not just that Jesus is the object of their faith but that the whole sphere of their lives, everything about their lives is lived in relationship to Jesus.

They operate their lives in this faith-relationship to Jesus.

It colors, it affects, it controls everything they do.

They've become Christ-followers.

And as Christ-followers they also have become Christian-lovers.

For God commends them not only for their faith in Christ but for their love for all the saints - for all God's people.

They have given their lives to caring for, teaching, encouraging, helping, loving each other and others who would become part of God's family.

Their love for each other, worked out in practical ways was evidence of the real change that had taken place in their hearts and evidence of their love for Jesus.

Paul said, when I hear these reports I thank God for you.

I believe Paul's words, God's words of affirmation, apply every bit as appropriately to this congregation - this church - this group of Christ-followers - as to the people at Colosse.

For I've not only heard but I have seen your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints.

Over the last nearly 16 years I have come to know hundreds of you and I know how your lives revolve now around the Lord Jesus.

You make decisions about work, about home, about relationships, about schooling, about money - based on what Jesus wants of you.

Your lives are operating in the sphere of faith in Christ Jesus.

And I have witnessed time and time again and year after year as you have sacrificially given yourselves to serve each other and others.

I've seen you respond to the people of India with your money gifts so that they could hear the good news of Jesus.

I know of over 20 men and women of our church who are now preparing to go to other countries and people groups around the world to tell the good news of God's forgiveness through Christ.

These men and women are leaving financially rewarding positions or possibilities to spend their time and money preparing to go.

Foregoing the comforts that most of us take for granted, many of these will spend the rest of their lives making Christ known in some foreign place.

Why? Because of their love for the people of God and those who will become the people of God.

I know something of the love for others that motivates Tom Bayless, Peter Engle, Dwight Storm and others as they establish evangelistic home Bible studies - caring enough for the people in their neighborhoods to actively pray for and pursue them with the good news of Jesus' love and forgiveness.

I know Pat Laube as with tears she describes her desire to see the children of this church have Sunday School teachers who will love them and teach them.

Her heart and the hearts of many others are moved with compassion toward those children - your children.

I know many busy people who carve valuable time out of each day to pray for you and for me - people who love you, the people of God.

I know Chuck Kiker who for the last five or more years has invested himself in the lives of several men of this church - meeting with them, praying for them, teaching them and learning from them. His love for them is evident.

I know Michael Murphy, Dan McCutchan, Kristin Hartzell and others who have met at 5:00 A.M. one day a week for many months as they have cared about highschool students.

I know there are many who are giving their money to the work of the Lord.

People who are giving so much that it impacts their ability to purchase larger or nicer homes and furnishings, newer cars, longer or more

desirable vacations or a host of other things because they love the Lord, his people and those who will become his people.

They give sacrificially as evidence of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints.

Time doesn't permit me to name hundreds of others - people who love the people of this church and the larger people of God and are giving themselves as evidence of that love.

Oh, how I thank God for this church, this congregation of believers. Not a week goes by that I don't get first-hand information about your faith in Jesus Christ and your love for all the saints.

And why do you act so faithfully and so lovingly?

God in his Word says your faith and love spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven - that you have already heard about in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you.

In the gospel (good news) you heard things that changed your whole perspective on life. v6 this gospel is bearing fruit and growing all over the world just as it has been doing among you since when?

Since you heard the gospel and understood God's grace in all its truth.

What truth did you understand?

You understood that this life is not all there is.

You understood that there is a God who is sovereign in this life and the next.

You understood that your sins have separated you from God and would keep you separated forever if they were not dealt with.

You understood that God the Son, Jesus, came to earth to die - taking the penalty for your sins on himself so that God's correct judgment against your sins would be satisfied - justice served. Jesus died in your place.

You understood that repenting of your sin, repenting of going it on your own and that by trusting in Jesus you would be granted forgiveness and his spiritual life.

You understood that true life in this world and the next is lived in relationship to Jesus, who is God.

You understood that Jesus was coming back to this earth again.

You understood that when he does he will set all wrongs right, all injustices will be corrected, Obedience to him, though costly now would be fully vindicated.

You understood that it is worth it to sacrifice now for the glory that lies ahead.

You so firmly believe Jesus is coming again that it is altering the very way you live your life.

You march to a very different drummer than those who do not believe.

It is this confidence, in who Jesus is and the truth of his coming again that calls you to a life of faithfulness to Jesus and love for others.

In effect, Paul writes that you are not foolish for your assessment of the situation. The commitment you have made to Christ is wise.

For all over the world this good news is bearing that kind of fruit and growing and increasing.

By the time the Apostle Paul wrote this letter he had seen the church grow from a handful of people to over 250,000 Bible-believing, Christ-following Christians all over the middle east and southern Europe out of a total world population of only approximately 175 million people.

But as phenomenal as that growth was it still represented only 1/10 of 1% of the people of the world.

Today Bible believing, Christ-following Christians make up over 10% of the world's population. Around the world there are over 540,000,000 Christ-followers today.

It is especially encouraging to listen to the reports coming in from all over the world as to what God is doing.

Through the evangelism and church planting efforts of which we are a part in India there have been over 100,000 confirmed conversions to Christ in just the past five years.

And that is just one effort in that populous country.

We listen with awe to the stories and statistics coming out of China where the church has grown at almost unbelievable rates during the height of Communist oppression of that same church.

As Paul said it then and it is still true today - "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing just as it has been doing among you."

Oh, how I wish I had the time and the memory to relate to you all the stories I have heard in just the past six weeks of men and women who have, in this city, understood God's grace in all its truth and have placed their faith in Jesus.

God is at work in and through your lives. I thank Him and praise Him for that.

The week before last I had lunch with a young man formerly of our church. Eight years ago this young man was in high school and was one of the last you would expect to follow Christ.

He was heavily involved in drugs, alcohol, immorality, and other illegal activities. He was self-destructing at 16 and 17 years of age.

Then God confronted him head on - and graciously forgave his sins and turned him around.

In the early days of his conversion, many of us wondered whether it was real or not - there was so much to change.

But what God had started, God was continuing.

Slowly but surely the change of heart began to evidence itself in a change of life.

When he handed me his card week before last, I couldn't help but say, "I always thank God when I think of you.

That hell-bent teenager is now Rev. Frank Scardina.

Is the gospel bearing fruit and growing? Absolutely!

Through the Apostle Paul, God was expressing his pleasure in the Christ-followers in Colosse.

And by those same words, He expresses his pleasure in you.

Does that mean we've arrived? Of course not.

Not only does God through Paul affirm those believers but he challenges them.

Listen to what he says next: "For this reason since the day we first heard about you we have not stopped praying for you."

For what reason?

When we heard about the evidences of the genuineness of your faith and love.

Knowing that they truly do belong to God, that they are genuine Christ-followers, Paul and the others begin to pray for them all the more.

For God, through Paul, not only affirms them for the real change that has taken place but now gives them a vision of what they can yet become.

What Paul prays for those Colossian Christians is precisely what God wants to bring about in our lives.

What a prayer, what a request to make for another to almighty God.
If you love someone this is what you will pray for them every day.

In closing watch the text from verse 9 on as I paraphrase and amplify this prayer for you.

God, I pray, that you will fill this congregation and each member of it with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

I ask you God to give them such a love for the Scriptures, in which your will is so clearly expressed, that they would be guided by your word and your Spirit to apply that knowledge in just the right way in every situation of life.

Give them a clear vision of what needs to be done each day - how they can live out your will in each relationship, each activity and each thought.

God grant them a ruling sense of your presence in their lives.

And God may they seek your will in your word because they desire to live a life worthy of Jesus and to please him in every way.

Grant them each morning a craving, a longing to be faithful to you.

Give them a desire to look to you in every activity of their day searching for the ways they may please you because they love you.

Oh, God help them to realize that living according to your will in every part of their day, will bring you honor and them joy.

Father, help them today to consciously, actively look for ways to express their love and your love to others - bearing fruit in every good work.

And through it all may they grow in their understanding of who you are, and may their relationship with you, Lord Jesus, become dearer and closer each day.

And, God, as they face tough times, illness, opposition, betrayal, loss, financial hardships, or what ever other adversity may come their way (and come they will) - God grant them endurance in the face of those things and patience with those who inflict it upon them.

Grant them, Father, such a memory of your grace in bringing them out of darkness into the light of a relationship with you, that they will joyfully give you thanks for the results of every situation of life knowing that you love them.

When we hear the words of this prayer and know they are God's words and will for us, we're challenged.

We believe that all history, past, present and future, culminates in Jesus.

We believe he is God and that he is coming again.

We believe that following him, living according to his will in every part of our lives is what real life is about.

We believe that growing in our knowledge of him and living a life consistent with his character, pleasing him in every way is what will truly matter a year from today, 20 years from today and 100 years from today.

His will for us has become our will for us - because we are Christ-followers.

That's the life we want to live.

Bow with me in prayer please.

God, when we see in the life of Jesus and on the pages of Scripture what you want us to be, we see how far short of that we fall.

But thank you for being a Father who does not beat us, berate us, belittle us, and discourage us but One who lifts us up - affirms, encourages us and challenges us to press on.

And now, in these next few minutes, God, we want to worship you.

We want to thank you for your grace that has begun and continues our relationship to you.

You rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of your Son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Once we were alienated from you and were enemies in our minds because of our behavior.

But now you, Father, have reconciled us to yourself by Christ's physical body through his death on the cross on our behalf so that we are forgiven, and can be presented to you, holy in your sight.