

Colossians: Jesus Our All In All

Colossians 1:3-8

Colossians 1:3

(KJV) We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,
(NIV) We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

Here in this verse we find Paul in a very thankful state of mind. While Epaphras was the hands on evangelist and the one who disciplined these new Colossians believers, Paul had a deep heart investment in these believers, praying often for them as he did. These were his children in the Lord! His heart overflowed with thankfulness to God for each Colossians believer - not just what they could do for the church with their natural and supernatural giftings, but who they were in Christ. They had great value just as they were, in their new identity in Christ. God's love through Paul loved them through his prayers with sincere thankfulness.

Beloved, don't miss the awesome miracle of born-again Paul, the former murderous predator of Christians, now in a humble prayer posture, offering thanks to God for each of these new believers at Colossae. Amazing! What happened? Paul had a life-changing encounter with the living Christ:

Acts 9:1-22

Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!" "Yes, Lord," he answered. The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight." "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name." But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he

could see again. He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength. Saul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus. At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God. All those who heard him were astonished and asked, "Isn't he the man who raised havoc in Jerusalem among those who call on this name? And hasn't he come here to take them as prisoners to the chief priests?" Yet Saul grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Messiah.

So the Christian life is not just a matter of self-improvement, or behaviour modification. All those who accept Jesus by grace and His completed work on the cross as a gift of salvation, and follow Him as Lord of their lives have been completely transformed from the inside out. They now follow and obey Jesus instead of sin and self:

1John 2:6 *He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.*

*STUDY POINT: Read Galatians 5:16-26. In your own walk with Jesus, what areas do you feel the battle of flesh versus spirit the most? How will you experience more victory in these areas? How can God's Word help you to *walk as Jesus walked*?

Paul's conversion was radical, as could be said for many of our salvation stories, but the most important thing is that his conversion produced the fruit of love. Is the love of Christ now compelling us to be thankful for people? One of the greatest tragedies in the Body of Christ is the treatment of God's children as utilities to be used to keep the activities and programs in the church marching forward, while leaders neglect the basic responsibility to provide discipleship and soul care to each precious servant child.

Drawing from the Old Testament here, we see precisely what God's priorities are to be for those overseeing and shepherding His children:

Jeremiah 23:1-8

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD. And I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all countries whither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking, saith the LORD. Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that they shall no more say, The LORD liveth, which brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD liveth, which brought up and which led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all countries whither I had driven them; and they shall dwell in their own land.

Beloved, let's be careful to be thankful for people. Are we thankful for the gifts God provides for the Body of Christ through His own? Absolutely! But in Christ we are blessed, loved, and complete in His name. Hallelujah!

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Think of one or two people in your church whom you would regard as very busy, pray for them, and this week encourage and thank them for who they are in Christ.

Even though Paul didn't know the Colossians believers personally, neither had he met them, there was a bond in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit that connected each of them with Paul. As so it is with each of us and God's diverse brothers and sisters across the globe:

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

And beloved, because we are all one in Christ, let us continue to be thankful for one another in prayer. This third verse in Colossians 1 should serve as a reminder for us to love well our brethren in Christ.

Colossians 1:4

(KJV) Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,

(NIV) because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—

The report from Epaphras thrilled Paul, and warmed his heart. His church was bearing fruit by their connection to and relationship with Jesus Christ. The love they each had for one another was a vibrant witness to the unbelieving world around them, and could only have come from one source - from God, who is love:

1John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

The love so evident in the Colossians church was not the result of mere inspired imitation but the very indwelling of God through the Holy Spirit! John 15 describes this life-giving connection to God as a branch connected to a vine:

John 15:1-17

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my

love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.

It bears emphasizing at this point that today, in the year 2020, we can have the same intimate connection with God the Father - branch to Vine - and bear the same fruit of love one to another as the Colossians church. In this way, the world will see that we are His own, and that they can know Him also as a God of love:

John 13:34-35

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Woe to us, dear Christian, if when Jesus returns, He does not find faith expressing itself through love!

Luke 18:1-8

And he spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

Pray! Pray for revival in our hearts, beloved believer. Pray that our hearts do not turn cold in these desperate days:

Matthew 24:12 *And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

So, this fourth verse in Colossians should prompt us to ask: are we a fruit-bearing church? The Christian life is not one of stagnation, but of sanctification. God is always stirring in us to grow us and change us more into the likeness of His Son Jesus. The true, fruit-bearing Christian life is one of constant change and growth. Paul was excited to see the Colossians growing in their walk with Jesus.

By the way, each fruit has a name, and can grow at different rates in different seasons, depending how God is working in us:

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

Are we the fruit-bearing church that God designed to reach a lost and dying world? Pray! And note this soberly dear one: we *must* bear fruit and glorify God:

John 15:6

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: In what areas of your walk with Jesus have you seen the most fruit or improvement in the past year? The least? Why do think this is so?

Colossians 1:5

(KJV) For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

(NIV) the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel

It all began here, with the Gospel:

1Corinthians 15:1-4

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

The Word of God was unleashed by Epaphras to the Colossians believers, accomplishing that which God intended, effective as it was to transform their lives:

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

This is no ordinary word. It transforms:

Romans 12:2

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

The Colossians believers were on fire for the Lord because of this hope heard and truth believed on in the Gospel they heard. Hallelujah! It is this powerful future hope that gets us up in the morning, that empowers us to persevere through many trials and temptations:

James 1:12

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

What joy as we meditate on the truth of what glory lay ahead in heaven for every true follower of Jesus:

1Corinthians 2:9

But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

We have the resurrection life in us today to give us a future hope in heaven. Colossians 3 describes how, while our future hope is right now hidden with Christ in God, one day we will appear with Him in glory, fulfilling this hope:

Colossians 3:1-4

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.

This hope laid up for the Colossian Church - and which was manifest in the Gospel - energized them to get up in the morning with a sense of purpose and direction and clarity. So it is with us each day. This is why it is so important to meditate on God's glorious promises, so that we don't forget and fall short of all that God has prepared for us each day.

We walk step by step and we live day by day, in intimate connection with Father God, who has given us HOPE through the Gospel:

HOPE that yesterday, with all of its troubles, was not in vain, for God is refining us like gold. (1 Peter 1:7)

HOPE that today we will be a blessing to those who need it, and help turn wayward hearts to salvation. (Matthew 5:16)

HOPE that in the future we have a glorious home in heaven prepared for us, and for those who have become Christians through our surrendered lives. (1 Corinthians 2:9)

*STUDY POINT: Study out the above three applications of HOPE - past, present, and future. Find more Scriptures in Old and New Testament that would be worth remembering the next time you need extra hope.

Colossians 1:6

(KJV) Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

(NIV) that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace.

Let's juxtapose some of these phrases here:

Since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

So, the Colossian believers, and indeed all people, need first to *hear* the Gospel in order to understand that it is by grace only they can be saved, not by adding or subtracting anything from the Gospel, or obtaining secret knowledge from false teachers. Then, as now, there were many false prophets and teachers seeking to deceive new believers. Remember, it was a subtle undermining of God's Word that cast doubt and deceived Eve in the Garden:

Genesis 3:1-6 *Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.*

Evil provocation and subtle lies are the Evil One's primary playmates, and have effectively destroyed many once Christ-centred churches and lives. Also, be aware dear Christian that Satan does not want lost people to hear the pure, unchanging Word of God. But he can do little against a force of surrender lives with the full armour of God on, covered in prayer, and skillfully wielding God's Word:

Ephesians 6:10-20

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Isaiah was a man presented before God, humbled before God, purified by God. But there was yet one thing missing before God could send out this prophet:

Isaiah 6:8-10

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but

understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Ah, there it is! Surrender! Isaiah had to surrender his will to God's will.

So, let me encourage you to get up each morning, acknowledge God, let Him cleanse you, strengthen you, equip you with His Armour. Then offer yourself a living sacrifice, for Him to send and be an ambassador of reconciliation and communicator of the Gospel.

Romans 12:1

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

While you are out there in your neighbourhood, workplace, classroom, or community sowing seed for the Gospel, keep in mind that your obedience is an act of love to Jesus, and He will take care of the harvest:

Matthew 13:3-9

And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

For the Colossian Church, God's Word was bearing fruit. Their seed distribution was an act of obedience. The fruit bearing was an act of God:

1Corinthians 3:7

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

Consider this phrase again: *and knew the grace of God in truth:* (Colossians 1:6b) Keep in mind, when you are hearing a teaching for the first time, that falsehood has no grace. It is dogmatic with no explanation why, it is controlling, manipulative, and cruelly deceptive. God's Truth is founded in grace for it is by grace that we are saved. (Ephesians 2:8) While God's Word brings conviction on a sinning soul, it's purpose is always reconciliation and restoration, never deception or destruction.

Colossians 1:7

(KJV) As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

(NIV) You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf,

Faithful ministers have never been in abundance - not in Paul's time, and not now. So how refreshing that, because Epaphras faithfully taught, preached, disciplined and loved the Colossian believers, Paul could refer to him as a *faithful minister*. Can you imagine how proud Paul was of Epaphras and his faithfulness, and the resulting abundant fruit of his ministry. Wow!

*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Recall a faithful minister in your own life. What characteristics and qualities in this person instilled your trust of them?

Colossians 1:8

(KJV) Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

(NIV) and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Oh beloved, the joy, the praise, the thankfulness that must have poured out of Paul as he heard from Epaphras how the Colossian believers loved Jesus and loved one another with a sincere love, bearing much fruit for the Gospel!

Pray that your church, that my church, would do the same.

- Reverend Darren McClelland