

## Colossians: Jesus Our Confidence

### Colossians 1:1-14

**The Big Idea.** Growing in the Christian life is about understanding and relying on what God has done for us in Christ.

#### Summary.

Colossae was in what is now southwest Turkey, not far from Laodicea and near the great Ephesus road. Paul writes this letter from his prison in Rome to a church that he has never visited, but about which he has heard fantastic reports from their leader and founder, Epaphras. He writes the letter both to encourage the church and to alert them to dangers of false teachers (some of whom have sought to infiltrate the church).

They had started well in their Christian walk—they clearly understood the relationship between Christian faith, love and hope (**1:4-5**) and this provided them with a firm foundation for their lives in Christ. The important thing is that they continue to understand and trust in Christ's victory at the cross (**1:12-14**), which will then impact their daily living. This is why Paul is so keen to pray for them and write this letter.

**Talk about:** What things do you give thanks to God and/or pray about the most? Use the space below to write down some items.

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In his opening paragraphs, Paul tells the Colossians what is filling his prayers; and even though he has never met them, it is the Colossians themselves!

#### Investigate: Read Colossians 1:1-8

Having heard news of the Colossians from their friend Epaphras (**v.7, 8**), Paul is greatly encouraged because all the signs point to their walk with Jesus being genuine.

- There are several pieces of evidence of the Colossians' conversion. Paul had heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and the love that they had for all saints (**v. 4**). They had heard and received the truth of the gospel and it was bringing forth fruit in them. Also, Epaphras had declared unto Paul their love in the Spirit.

- Note: “Saints” in the Bible are those in Christ and not those who have reached a higher grade of discipleship.
- Hope can motivate faith and love in several ways. First, Christian hope marks the gospel out as unique—for it brings total confidence in an eternal future, simply because of what Christ has achieved on our behalf. We contribute nothing, but we receive what Christ has done by faith. When we consider this future, we realize that it is through God’s mercy and grace, and we recognize we have no option but to trust Him. We also have freedom to love others because we don’t have the burden of trying to earn God’s approval.
- The New Testament describes conversion to Christ in various ways. Strangely, Paul talks about the gospel (like a living thing—a seed growing and bearing fruit) as the most important thing.
- This change, conversion, is more than a matter of intellectual understanding. Here, for the Colossians, others are talking about love being shown to others (v. 4) and fruit being shown (v. 6). What we believe should show up in our behavior.
  - There is an intellectual element to conversion. But it can never stop there—for it leads to “love in the Spirit” (v. 8) which is evidence of a changed life.

### Read Colossians 1:9-11.

Paul’s prayer moves naturally from thanking God to asking God, because he recognizes that Epaphras’ news is just the start. What matter now is how these Colossian Christian grow to maturity. We sometimes find it difficult to pray for people that we have never met. Paul has no such trouble, and his prayer takes us to the heart of what is most important in the Christian life.

- In **verse 9**, Paul specifically prays that the Colossians be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This comes through the gospel.
- These things are important because the false teachers in Colossae were undermining the complete work of Christ (as we will soon see). It was essential for Paul to root these believers in the gospel. Firm convictions were needed if

they were to bear fruit and grow (**v. 10**), and especially endure (**v. 11**). Note that this is not philosophical knowledge—it is about a relationship with God.

- Throughout the Bible, there is a clear link between doctrine and ethics, between what we think and how we behave. Wrong thinking invariably leads to wrong living. This is all the more true when it comes to our understanding of the character of God.

### **Read Colossians 1:12-14.**

It's crucial to recognize that Paul is not expecting the Colossians to “turn over a new leaf” in their lives, as if they could suddenly decide to be good. The spiritual growth he prays for comes from a deeper appreciation of what God has already done for and in them.

- Note the tense of these verses (past, present or future). List the things that He has done—made us to be meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints of light; delivered us from the power of darkness; translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son; and we have redemption and forgiveness of sin. It is all through Christ and his blood.
- As Christians we can have confidence when faced with the challenge to endure with patience and joy (**v. 11**) by remembering what God has already done through Christ. We also can be assured that Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever more (**Hebrews 13:8**).

### **Explore More. Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10.**

#### **Apply:**

- The challenges from this passage for our priorities in prayer are 1) to pray for more than physical and material needs but spiritual needs, and 2) to pray for others.
- Discipleship has a cost. To be a faithful follower of Christ, it costs us not only endurance in tough circumstances, but also daily finding strength and joy in Christ rather than avoiding suffering and difficulty.

- The gospel bore fruit in the Colossians' lives when they heard and understood the grace of God, and showed love in the Spirit. We can support gospel growth by:
  - Teaching the gospel ourselves.
  - Supporting preachers like Epaphras
  - Praying for gospel growth and fruit in the lives of others
  - Demonstrating the fruit of the gospel in our lives (i.e., love, holiness, joy etc.)

**Pray:**

Thank God for:

- The gospel of grace, which gives spiritual failures confidence to live for God.
- Those you know who live a life of faith, love and hope.
- The fact that the gospel is still bearing fruit all over the world (and thank Him for specific places you are familiar with).

Ask God:

- To deepen your knowledge of God's will so that you might live to please God.
- To bring others to hear and understand God's grace.
- To help you endure by His strengthening power.

**Homework:** Jesus Our Lord. Read **Colossians 1:15-23**