

Growing In The Gospel - Colossians 1:3-8

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[0 : 00] If you're new here, or if I'm new to you, it's more than likely. Like Ralph said, my name's Alan. I'm not the normal preaching pastor here. I'm not even normally in Ireland. This is new for me.

But Johnny's on sabbatical, so I'm just here for a few months. And if you want to turn to the book of Colossians, that's where we'll be this summer. It's page 1182 in your pew Bibles there.

Page 1182. And we'll be in chapter 1, verses 3 through 8 this morning, looking at Paul's explanation of what it means to be growing in the gospel, or what it means for the gospel to be growing in us.

So Colossians 1, verses 3 through 8. I'll read, and then we'll pray, and we'll dig in here. Paul says in verse 3, he says, We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.

Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love you have for all God's people. 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 that has come to you.

[1 : 15] 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.

You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Let's pray. Father, would you be with us this morning? Would you be glorified through the proclamation of your word? Would you open our eyes that we would see, open our ears that we would hear, that we would clearly see the truth of the gospel in your scriptures?

Would we not try to change your word to fit our demands for this world? But would you change us by your Spirit? Would you conform us more and more to the image of your Son, Jesus Christ?

It's in His name we pray. Amen. Alright, we're going to step backwards a little bit this morning. So, keep your finger or a bookmark in Colossians, and then I'm going to ask you to go all the way back to Genesis 1.

[2 : 25] And if you don't know where that is, just go to the beginning of your Bible, and turn the page, and you're there. Well, you might get a table of contents. But after the table of contents comes Genesis 1. It's the very beginning of the Bible.

And Genesis chapters 1 and 2 are what we call the creation account. Okay, and if you're not familiar with this part of the Bible, it's okay. Genesis 1 is going to give you the big picture view of creation.

And then Genesis 2 is going to zoom in. I'm from Southern California, so I like movie thinking. Zoom in with the camera real close into the Garden of Eden, and you're going to see the first two human beings, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden.

And what we see in the Garden is that God gives three different commands to the first humans. Okay, the one that's the most well-known is actually the third command.

And that is, Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Okay, we probably hear that one the most. Do not eat the forbidden fruit.

[3 : 26] But that's the third command in the account of creation. The one we probably know just a little bit less, but you might have heard before, is the command of dominion.

That's the second command. That mankind, man and woman, together, they should rule over and care for planet Earth. They should, in a wise and skillful and loving way, steward all of this creation that God has given us.

Okay, He created the heavens and the earth. He created the skies and the seas and the land, and all the things that are there, the birds and the fish and the animals. And then He puts man and woman in charge, and He says, now take care of it.

Rule with wisdom and skill, and take care. He says to work the garden, and to take care of it. Work there literally means to till the land.

Anybody that has ever been in a garden knows you have to work the garden a little bit. You've got to encourage the growth. He says work the garden, and then take care of it. It means to guard it.

[4 : 33] Guard God's creation. Now that's the second command. The first command. We go just to the first half of Genesis 128.

And God simply says in His first command to human beings, He says, Be fruitful and increase in number. Be fruitful and increase in number.

Now we have to think for a moment here what's going on. Sin has not entered the world through humanity yet. Adam and Eve are without sin.

So every child they have is born sinless at this point. So every time they are fruitful and they multiply, they are increasing God's people on planet earth.

That's the original design. It was God's design and command that His people, and we looked last week at what it means to be His people, that His people should bear fruit and increase in number.

[5 : 39] That's the original design. And the problem comes in Genesis 3. The serpent comes in and he tempts Adam and Eve. And they clearly violate God's third command when they eat of the fruit of the forbidden tree.

In Christianity we refer to this as the account of the temptation in the fall. Adam and Eve, they fall. Sin enters the world through humanity. And then the Bible teaches that every human being born of man from that point forward is not increasing God's people on planet earth, but it is increasing sinful humanity.

Every one of Adam's offspring, they perpetuate the problem of sin. And so because of the fall, it is sin which is fruitful and increases on planet earth.

So God's design increased His people on planet earth. The fall results in an increase in sin instead. And then one chapter later we see the devastation that this causes when Cain and Abel, brothers, Adam and Eve's sons, Cain rises up and attacks his brother Abel and kills him.

And now think for a moment what's going on. God's people are not increasing. But because of sin, God's people are turning on each other. Sin is increasing at the cost of human life.

[7 : 14] God says to Cain, what have you done? Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. And God's first command to humanity has been not only clearly violated, but it has turned bestial.

It has turned humans against each other. I want you to imagine with me, if you would, for a moment, Adam and Eve's shame, their disappointment, their utter despair as they watch even their own children turn on each other and kill each other, as they watch the effects of the fall play out in a way that God's people are not increasing, but sin is increasing at the cost of human life.

And then I want you to consider with me their shock and their joy if they could hear Paul's words in Colossians 1.6.

If they could hear somehow thousands of years later, Paul say, the Gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world.

You see, what once looked like a long lost hope for Adam and Eve had by Paul's day somehow become a reality. And that is that the Gospel was bearing fruit and increasing the number of God's people on planet Earth.

[8 : 47] And last week we saw that Colossae, who Paul and Timothy are writing to, is just this little, unimpressive town at the edge of the Roman Empire who really would have no reason to think that anything good would ever bear fruit and increase to the point that they would receive it.

But Paul asserts this foundational truth that somehow, in his day, the Gospel is fulfilling God's original creation design for humanity.

Somehow, some way, from Adam and Eve to Paul, the Gospel is fulfilling God's original design for humanity.

God is still increasing his people on planet Earth against all odds, against everything that it looked like was wrong in Genesis 3 and in Genesis 4, somehow God's made it right by Paul's day.

And so we naturally would ask, well, how is that possible? How has God flipped the script on sin? And what Paul's assuming here, in a way, is that the church of Colossae realizes that it's possible because God is increasing his people through faith.

[10 : 11] See, it's not possible that two, even Christian human beings have a child and that person is born as a child of God. Jesus makes it very clear in John 3 when he's talking to Nicodemus, it's not by birth of the flesh, it's not by will of man that someone enters the kingdom of God, but it's by being born again, born from above, born of faith.

Paul says, God's people are now a people of faith. And they're bearing fruit and increasing, not naturally, but supernaturally, born from above.

And what Paul's going to do in this passage now is he's going to talk about three things. He's going to say faith comes from hearing. And then he's going to explain that faith leads to loving and loving leads to serving.

And what we'll see is that as those three work together, all of that brings about more hearing, more faith, more loving, more serving, and the gospel increases God's people on planet earth just like he designed from the beginning.

So first of all, faith comes from hearing. Colossians 1, we'll read through verses 3-6 again, and take note of faith and hearing.

[11 : 34] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, verse 3, Paul says, when we pray for you. But why is Paul thanking God when he prays for them? Because we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all God's people.

The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven, about which you have heard in the true message of the gospel 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.

Faith comes by hearing. God's people increase by having faith in hearing in what they hear in the message of the gospel.

So the true message of the gospel came to the people in Colossae. The people heard the true message of the gospel. The true message was about the hope stored up for them in heaven.

[12 : 40] I think we sang it in the second or third song. The hope stored up for us in heaven, namely being Jesus Christ. And that this message led to faith in Jesus. So a few things to note.

The word gospel, it just simply means good news. Literally good news to humanity. We have bad news in Genesis 3 and 4. We need some good news at that point.

And by Paul's day we have good news. That's all that means. Good news to humanity. So you can understand Paul to be saying the Colossians heard the true message of the good news that had come to them.

They probably didn't get a whole lot of good news in Colossae. So they probably took note. Good news has come to humanity. And then secondly, the essence of this good news is that there is hope beyond what this life here on earth has to offer.

Namely, that there is something greater beyond this life. And now, if you're a Christian or if you're not a Christian, we have to just be honest with each other, there's not a ton to hope for here on planet earth.

[13 : 41] There's some good stuff. By God's grace, the common grace he's given us, there are some good things on planet earth. But if we really think about what we're hoping for in this life on this earth, the list probably gets pretty short pretty quickly.

I'm struck being in Ireland that we walk past ruins. We don't have ruins in the United States. We're just a couple hundred years old. But we walk past ruins, we drive past and we visit them, and we call them ruins.

Do you guys call them ruins too? Is that just, it's not just an American thing, we call them ruins. But think, those ruins were somebody's dreams come true once upon a time.

Those ruins, we were at the Rock of Castle, the castle in Care, Care Castle. And we take a tour and we just take pictures and we say, oh, that's really nice, these old rocks.

This was somebody's mansion once. I hope their hope wasn't in that rock. Not that rock. There's a man named King Solomon in Scripture.

[14 : 55] He has it all. He's the third king of Israel. He is the wisest king. He has all wisdom. He is unbelievably wealthy.

The wealth of which you and I will, if we're honest with each other, we will never have the kind of money King Solomon had. He owns cities. I hope to own a house.

He owns cities. He has navies at his command. Armies at his command. orchards.

Everything you can ever hope for here on planet earth, King Solomon has it. And then at the end in Ecclesiastes 1, he just writes, meaningless, meaningless.

Utterly meaningless. Everything is meaningless. And that phrase is bad news if our only hope is here on planet earth.

[16 : 06] See, Solomon, he realizes he's going to die. The navies will sail at somebody else's command. The armies will march to somebody else's orders.

His money will go to his kids, which he's looking at. the cities will appoint new rulers. The people will get a new king. And he'll be gone.

He says, it's bad news. It's bad news. That's why the gospel is good news that there is hope beyond this life.

There's hope beyond the here and now. And the good news about this hope is that it's true. It's not fake news, as we would say in the States.

It's true news in Jesus Christ. It's the true message of the gospel. As one author notes, that the truth of the gospel is the key that unlocks the mind from slavery to idols, which we'll see in a few weeks.

[17 : 16] It's the light that dispels the darkness of errant thinking. It's the power that liberates and delivers us from the domain of darkness, as Paul said in Colossians 1.13, to the kingdom of the beloved son.

The gospel is the true message of the true hope we have in heaven, namely Jesus Christ. Christ really lived.

He really died. He really rose again. He really ascended to heaven. And that's really where our hope is. God is the truth.

And our faith in him comes by hearing. The people in Colossians say they heard the good news of the hope that was stored up for them in heaven, the truth of Jesus Christ.

Let me just pause here for a moment and ask you, if you're not a Christian, if this is newer to you, I'll just throw it out there. Does this make sense to you? If it makes sense, great.

[18 : 17] If it doesn't make sense, I'll be in the back afterwards, come see me and ask me any questions you have. I'll talk with you, one of the elders will talk with you. It is eternally important to us that this makes sense to you.

And I know we just went fast and in less than 20 minutes we covered the majority of scripture. So I'm sure you have questions. So it doesn't make sense, come and ask. If it does make sense, if what we just covered so far makes perfect sense to let me just be very pointed because I can do that.

I'm the visiting preacher and just ask you, where's your hope? Where is your hope? Where was it this week? Where has it been so far this year?

Is it in a promotion? Is it in an item? Is it in a thing that moth or rust are going to destroy? Is it in your children? Don't put that burden on them.

Where is your hope? Is your hope truly in Jesus Christ in heaven? It's one thing to say it.

[19 : 22] It's one thing to just kind of, yeah, I hope in Jesus. It's a whole other thing to truly have your hope in Jesus. And then if you would say, yeah, pastor, absolutely, my hope is in Jesus.

Amen. Praise God. Are you telling other people about it? Are you telling other people about the hope you have stored up for you in heaven? Because to have good news, to have good news about something to be hopeful for and to not share it with somebody would be utterly despicable.

It'd be a tragedy. It'd be heartbreaking to find out somebody had good news that you, you could put your hope in and they didn't share it with you.

we have to love people by sharing the good news of the gospel. So faith comes by hearing, but doesn't stop there.

Paul says it leads to loving. Look at Colossians 1 with me again. Faith comes by hearing and now it's going to lead to loving. Verse 4, Paul says we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people.

[20 : 39] And we just pause there and say we've heard this before, haven't we? God's people. Yeah, we heard in verse 2, that's who he's writing to, God's people in Colossae, same phrase. We heard the love you have for all God's people, the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven.

The faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven. Faith comes by hearing, faith leads to loving. Okay? Now here's the deal with love.

I use this word all the time and I don't really mean it the same way Paul means it and you probably do the same. I'll give you an example. I love Irish ice cream. I absolutely if this were, you know, if I could just admit stuff, I love Irish ice.

It's incredible. We don't have obviously Irish ice cream in America. Okay? It doesn't taste the same. You should, part of me just want you to go to America to taste how terrible the ice cream is there and then you will say I love Irish ice cream.

Here's the thing. I also say I love my kids. Right? I mean, today's Father's Day. They were so sweet. They wrote me a little card and I say I love my kids. Now, I don't mean to say that I love Irish ice cream in the same way I love my kids.

[21 : 49] Right? And I hope they know that because they hear me say I love you and they hear me say I love ice cream. But if the two came down to it, I would clearly choose my children over Irish ice cream.

Right? Why are you laughing? I would clearly choose my children over Irish ice cream. But we use that word and that's okay. We don't have any ill intents. Right? We say all kinds of things.

I love this. I love that. We use the word and we mean different things. That's just how language works. That's okay. But we want to pause here and say what does Paul mean? What does Paul mean when he says that they have a love for each other?

And thankfully Paul defines love in the way that he's using it in scripture in a letter to another church called 1 Corinthians. And there he writes this incredible definition of biblical love.

Okay? Love he says is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud.

[22 : 54] Love does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth that always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

This is Paul's definition of love. And so if we take that definition and we bring that into Colossae, I think we can start to see why he always thanks God for the people in Colossae when he thinks of their faith and the love that has sprung from their hope in heaven.

Because he's saying when I think of the church in Colossae, I think of a people that are patient with each other. A church that is kind with each other. A church that is humble and not proud of one position over another.

He says I'm seeing and hearing about a church that is gentle, that is forgiving each other, that rejoices in truth. A church that protects each other, that trusts in God, that hopes for heaven and perseveres through hardship together.

And when Paul defines their love as a church for each other in that way, that is absolutely something to thank God for. And that's what he's doing.

[24 : 11] He's saying the church in Colossae loves each other. They heard the gospel and the hearing turned to faith and the faith has turned to love and this church loves each other in a way that all of us would want to be a part of this church.

And notice it's not some private or secret or hidden love that they have. It's very visible. It's visible to the point that others have seen it.

And they're telling each other, they're telling other people about the love that this group of God's people has for each other right here in Colossae. And so I'll just pause here again and I'll ask you, how are we doing at loving others in this church?

Would people characterize Caragalline Baptist Church as a church that is patient, kind, humble, selfless, gentle, forgiving, rejoicing in truth?

Well, they say, you've got to go to Caragalline Baptist Church because they protect each other, they trust in God, they point each other to the hope that they have in Jesus, in heaven, and they persevere through hardship together.

[25 : 25] Because that's what a biblical church looks like. If we can look at this church and we can say, absolutely, that's this church, praise God. Praise God for what he's doing through his spirit in this group, just like in Colossae.

If not, then we say, well, what do we do? Well, it's simple, the Bible is clear. We take a step back and we fix our eyes on the hope we have in heaven, we proclaim the gospel to each other, we dig into God's word together, we get into scripture, we speak truth to each other, we proclaim the gospel to each other, we sing songs of the gospel like we're doing, we hear the truth proclaimed from scripture, and we huddle up together, and we dive back into the gospel together, and that gospel produces love through us.

It bears fruit and increases in us. So if we look around at our life at all, or at the church's life, and we say, man, we should be a more loving church, what's the solution?

Paul says the gospel is the solution. Get into the gospel. It will fuel our love for each other. And then what Paul says is, if faith comes by hearing, and if faith leads to loving, well, it's just a logical conclusion here, loving leads to serving.

Now here's the temptation. We're tempted to swap the order. We're human. We're tempted to try it on our own and say, here's what I'll do. In order to be a faithful Christian, I'll start serving, and if I serve everybody long enough, I'll really start loving them.

[26 : 58] And anybody that's ever served next to somebody for too long knows that's not going to work. But we think I'll serve long enough, then I'll start loving them, and if I start loving other Christians, then I'll believe in God. And that's tempting, but it's absolutely backward.

Remember, faith comes by hearing. Faith leads to loving. Loving leads to serving. Paul says in verse 4, he says that him, Paul and Timothy, they heard of the faith in Christ Jesus and the love that they had for all God's people.

Well, how did they hear about this? How did Paul and Timothy hear about what's going on in the church in Colossae? Well, he tells them in verse 7. You, the church in Colossae, you learned it from Epaphras.

Epaphras was trained by Paul. You can see in chapter 4, I think verse 7, he was taught the gospel by Paul. He came to Colossae. He preaches the gospel there. And then what Paul says is he's a fellow servant, verse 7, and a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf.

He told us of your love in the Spirit. Now, Paul uses two key words there. He is, Epaphras is a servant. Literally, word is slave.

[28 : 11] Someone who's in total obedience to a master. Paul says, Epaphras is in total obedience to Christ Jesus for the church in Colossae.

And then he says, furthermore, he is a minister. Epaphras is someone who attends to the needs of another. In this case, Epaphras is someone who attends to the needs of others by delivering the good news of the hope that is to be had in Jesus.

He has served and ministered. He heard the gospel. He then went and served them. He proclaimed the gospel. And then they, through the gospel, start to love each other.

They love each other visibly by serving each other. And all this starts with just one person hearing and proclaiming the gospel. Right? Epaphras is to the church in Colossae what Johnny is to the church here in Caragalline.

He heard the gospel. And then he has been a faithful servant and minister to this church in this city, in this country, I think around the world, Johnny has, just like Epaphras was.

[29 : 18] And it just starts with hearing the gospel. Somebody told this pastor, Johnny, your pastor, somebody told him the gospel. And he heard it and he believed.

And then he loved in such a way that he served by proclaiming the gospel. And what happens is when someone faithfully loves and serves and ministers to others, they too become faithful believers.

Think about that word Paul just used here. Epaphras is a faithful servant and minister. And what do we see last week?

In Colossae there were faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. The gospel is producing fruit. The gospel is increasing and growing the number of God's people.

faithful. I have no doubt that many of you have been immensely blessed as Johnny, like Epaphras, has dedicated his life to serving, to loving, to shepherding, to ministering, many of you through all the ups and downs of life.

[30 : 33] He's given his heart and soul into this little church, lovingly, joyfully. And praise God that he's got some time to rest and re-energize and recharge and you're going to have a whole new Johnny when he comes back.

I guarantee you he'll be fired up and ready to go. And God works through men like Johnny. And he works through men like Epaphras.

And you know what's amazing is he works through men and women from Colossae to Keragoline, from 65 AD to 2019.

And we have this incredible privilege of joining God in fulfilling his original design for humanity.

We too can proclaim the gospel to each other. We too can be faithful brothers and sisters who love each other.

[31 : 40] Not like we love Irish ice cream, but how Paul defines love. And we can love that way too. We too can serve each other, not so that we'll be loved by God, not so that we can try to love each other, but because we love each other.

Why do we love each other? Because God first loved us. How do we know God first loved us? Because he sent his son. He sent his son to be our savior.

And his son lived the life we couldn't live. He died the death we should have died. He rose again. He ascended to heaven. And our hope is in him in heaven, not here on earth.

In closing, I'll just remind you that every Christian, everybody who calls himself a Christian, everybody who says, I have faith in the good news of Jesus Christ, they heard it from somebody else first.

I know I did. And I guarantee you, if you sit down this evening and you just think through, how did I ever learn about Jesus? You heard it probably. You heard it. Because someone else spoke it.

[32 : 53] Someone else spoke the truth of the gospel. You heard it. That hearing led to faith. And so we are also evidence of the fact that God is, through the gospel, fulfilling his original design for humanity.

And we don't have to be clever or creative or think of unique ways in which to share the gospel. We can simply just tell people the truth of what God created the world to be, what happened in Genesis 3 and 4, and what we are witnesses of today.

There's a guy that, in the church I pastored back in the States, his name was Rick. And he was a hardworking guy. He was an auto mechanic.

Worked his job. Loved the Lord. Loved his family. And told me, I really want to serve in God's kingdom. As he learned the story of God, as he saw God's redemptive plan unfolding, he said, how in the world, though, could I ever serve in God's kingdom?

And it's interesting, because all I said is, Rick, can you speak? And obviously he could. He said, yeah, I can speak. I said, okay. Well, can you tell people about God?

[34 : 13] Can you just tell them the story of God? Well, not perfectly, but can you read Scripture with them? Well, yeah, I can read Scripture with them. Rick ended up becoming the overseer of our missions group at church, because he learned he could go anywhere in the world, and he could sit with someone, and even if he didn't speak their language, he could point to Scripture and be with them as they read the story of God, as they saw and heard the good news of Jesus Christ.

Let's join God in his mission. Let's enjoy the role that we have, the place that we are in history, where we get to be a part not of increasing sin here on planet Earth, but we get to be a part of God fulfilling his design right here on this Earth, increasing his people through his gospel, which we have the joy of proclaiming to each other.

Amen? Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for your gospel. God, even a short glimpse into Genesis 1-4 just reminds us of how amazing you created everything and how far we had fallen.

Thank you for the hope we have in heaven. thank you for the hope we have in Jesus Christ. Thank you for sending people into our lives to speak the gospel into our lives.

Thank you for putting us in a church where we can speak the gospel to each other, we can love each other, we can serve each other, because we are a family that you've created through your spirit, by your word.

[36 : 02] Thank you that we get to be a part of you fulfilling your design for creation, that we get to be a part of the increasing number of your people here in Caroline, in Cork, in Ireland, and beyond.

Thank you that this doesn't depend upon us, God, but this is your word going out by your spirit for your glory. Amen. If you'd stand with me, we're going to close out with one song, All Creatures of Our God and King.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Aši Thank you.

[37 : 26] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[39 : 56] Thank you.

Thank you.