

# Colossians 1:1-14

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning. My name is Dave. For those of you who haven't met, I'm one of Shirline's elders or pastors. I'm really excited today to enter into a new sermon series in the book of Colossians. I invite you to turn with me to Colossians chapter one. If you don't have a Bible, we have them. Now you do. We have them on the back table. They're already bookmarked today's passage, and that's for you if you don't already have one.

As we enter into a new series, it's often a good point to stop and ask, like, what's the big idea? What are we here for? And sometimes I think that when we get into the Bible, we kind of put on spiritual glasses and we've taken off maybe our practical glasses.

Have you ever heard the saying, Christians are too heavenly minded to be any earthly good? I mean, we spend a lot of time talking about, thinking about, as one hymn puts it, the immortal, invisible, God only wise, in light, inaccessible, hid from our eyes.

Our faith is in something that we cannot see today. The tomb is empty, right? We invest our attention, as Christians, as the church, to the great hereafter, right? So often.

To the extent that many of our hymns are focused on that, right? Some glad morning, when this life is over, I'll fly away. To a home on God's celestial shore, I'll fly away.

[ 1 : 49 ] If our thoughts are elsewhere, if our hearts are elsewhere, if we are citizens of another country, what good are we here?

Is Christianity practical? Does it have any impact on our lives? Or are we walking through this life with our minds sort of adrift and unmoored from this world?

Do we as Christians collectively have our heads kind of stuck in the clouds? Are we too heavenly-minded to be any earthly good?

Well, today, as we turn to Colossians, I think the Apostle Paul is going to tell us that unless we are heavenly-minded, we'll be no different than our neighbors.

We won't be salt and light in the world. And it's only by being heavenly-minded that we can be that salt and light, be any earthly good. So let's open up to Colossians chapter 1.

[ 2 : 48 ] We're going to read the first 14 verses together. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you as indeed in the whole world that is bearing fruit and increasing, as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, may you be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[ 4 : 33 ] Let's pray. Father, will you set our eyes firmly on your Son?

Lord, will you cement the hope that he has secured for us into our hearts, and from that hope will you build our faith in him and fan into flame love for your church, so that we are changed, so that we are different, so that we are earthly good in a unique, Christ-like way that the world cannot ignore. We pray that in his name and for his name's sake. Amen. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Sometimes we gloss right over the introduction of a letter, right? We know who it's from. Let's get to the meat, right? Well, introductions matter. It matters who is writing. Paul is an apostle commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to shepherd the church.

And what's more, Paul's circumstances, we don't see them yet in chapter 1, but when we get to chapter 4, we will find out that he is in prison when he writes this letter.

[ 6 : 00 ] Now, if you were in prison, he's in prison specifically for being an apostle, not for some crime he committed. If you were in prison, knowing that your life was on the line, he's probably, this is probably his imprisonment in Rome, it's probably the one that ends his life.

If you knew that your life was in jeopardy, knowing that any day a sword might pass between your head and your shoulders, that's how he dies.

Knowing that, you had the opportunity to write a letter to a group of people who were kind of in your corner, right? That's the church here. They're in his corner. What kind of letter would you write?

What would you say? I know what my letter would look like. Can you hire me a lawyer? Can you flood your senator's phone with calls and his inbox with emails and his mailbox with snail mail, right?

Will you start a petition for me in a crowdfunding campaign? Get me out of here, right? The threat of imminent disaster makes us think in really practical terms, really concrete terms.

[ 7 : 22 ] And that's actually kind of what the whole too heavenly minded to be any earthly good criticism is all about. Christians, they say, don't have a practical value because they're not thinking in practical terms.

We would be writing in Paul's place, you know, the letters that say, get me out of here. And so it's surprising when Paul's letter here isn't about that. He doesn't even mention the fact that he's in prison until the very end, and he's not even asking them to get him out.

He's just telling them how great the gospel is, better than freedom. He doesn't write about himself, hardly at all. He writes about Jesus. He writes about the church.

He writes about hope and love and faith and how they make a difference, really make a difference in our lives. Where we would write, get me out, he writes words of encouragement.

And in fact, this passage is a prayer if we were praying, we would probably be praying, get me out. But his is a prayer of thanks.

[ 8 : 32 ] Verse three, we always thank God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we prayed for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing, as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the spirit. Paul begins by saying, we thank God for you.

And he's not buttering them up, you know, getting them like, okay, if you can get me this money, you know, you guys are great, also I need a ton of money, can you get me out of here, right?

That's not what he's doing. He's not buttering them up to make sure they help him, he's trying to help them with a message of encouragement. How cool is that?

Now, that doesn't mean that Paul has his head stuck in the clouds. Remember, he's got death on his mind. It's imminent. He knows that. And so he's thinking practically. And what is most practical to him in this moment is encouraging the flock.

[ 9 : 57 ] And if we carefully consider his words, we'll see that he's praying for here something that's really, really practical. Look at verse four. We heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints.

Now, at first glance, that doesn't look super practical, right? But those words carry a lot of weight. They lay down tracks so you can drive a freight train over them.

A lot of Christian life can be lived through those. Faith in Christ Jesus might seem a little bit abstract to us right now and that'll get legs in the second half of this passage. But love, that's practical. The love that you have for all the saints, that's deep. It's practical because love is practical. When Paul, or any other biblical writer, for that matter, talks about love, he's not just filling his letter with fluff.

love. In a biblical worldview, when the Bible talks about love, it's not just fond feelings or warm sentiment.

[ 11 : 10 ] When a biblical writer says love, they have action in mind. Psalm 32, he has wonderfully shown, not told, shown his steadfast love to me.

John 3, 16. God so loved the world, loved the world, that he gave his only son, so that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Love in the biblical worldview is the difference between simply speaking out against the evils of abortion on social media, which we should do, but between that and pairing our words with serving Karnat as a church, for example.

It's a difference between telling your wife that you love her, which, husbands, you should do that, but adding to that, you know, taking the kids for the afternoon or whatever that looks like to serve her, right?

That's what love is. In a biblical worldview, it's not just sentiment and feeling. It's love brought to life. And with that in the back of his mind, when Paul says he's thankful for their love for all the saints, he's not just talking about fond feelings.

[ 12 : 27 ] He's talking about an active love, a love that reaches out, that encourages, that's what this letter is, an encouragement, that serves. In Ephesians chapter 4, the apostle Paul, the same Paul, said, when each part of the body, the church body, is working properly, that makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

So Christian love is absolutely practical. So if our love, if our love isn't practical, is it Christian? are we living out of Christian love or are we, you know, capitulating to the culture? Living as the world lands.

Well, here's how to build practical love. Paul shows us the way. He continues in verse 5 and it says, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Now, what's that because doing there?

Verses 4 to 5 work together. We have heard, one, of your faith and, two, the love you have because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. What Paul is saying here is that our faith and love, which are practical, come from somewhere.

[ 13 : 57 ] They come from our Christian hope. And in fact, if you're reading the New International version, the translators have gone way out of their way to show that relationship. Here's how it reads there. Verse 4 ends, we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all the saints.

And then they go on and repeat it just to make sure that we understand the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven. Christian faith and Christian love spring out of Christian hope.

And that means our faith in Christ, if we are resting it in the right place, won't rise and fall with our circumstances. If our hope is laid up in heaven, good days and bad days won't put our faith on a roller coaster.

If today is going great, praise God. We have a better hope in heaven still. If today is going awful, praise God. We have a better hope laid up for us in heaven.

That's what verse 5 is all about. Christian faith is anchored in hope and so is our love. That means that our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, if we have it anchored in the right place, won't rise and fall with their behavior towards us.

[ 15 : 21 ] If our hope is laid up in heaven, whether people treat us honorably or dishonorably, with friendliness or enmity, we can still walk forward in love because our love depends on only one person, Jesus Christ, whose love for us is secure forever.

So if your spouse is treating you well, you can turn to them in love. Not because they're, not because they're being nice to you, but because we have a love stored up for us in heaven and we are not depending on them to fill us up.

And if your boss is being a tyrant on the other end of the spectrum, you can still turn and love that person because we have a love stored up for us in heaven and we aren't depending on that person

to make us or break us.

Friends, we have a secure hope in heaven and so our faith and our love can remain unshaken. It's only when we put our, our hope in other things, how today is going or how someone is treating us that our steadfastness in faith or that our love is going to falter.

If your anchor is in heaven, you can risk anything in this life. Now we've talked a lot about hope.

[16:53] The anchor for our souls stored up for us in heaven. And we said if your anchor is in heaven, you can risk anything in this life.

But we haven't really defined it, have we? We haven't said exactly what is this hope. So what does he mean when he says the hope stored up for us in heaven?

See, if I were in prison like Paul, I'm pretty sure that the most pressing thing that I would be hoping for is release, freedom. But that's not the hope that he's pointing us towards, is it?

He doesn't mention that at all. And in fact, if you think about it, it can't really be any earthly thing.

The Colossian Christians aren't imprisoned like he is, so their needs are different. Their earthly hopes will always be different because all of our earthly needs are as varied as our lives are.

And so any set of earthly needs is kind of situation-specific. So might the hope, our Christian hope, that is stored up for us in heaven be our resurrection from the dead?

[18:05] That's right. You know, verse 5 says the hope that is laid up for you in heaven. But if you think about it really carefully, verse 5 says the hope that is laid up for you in heaven.

It's the place that stores our hope, but heaven is not the hope itself. It's simply where the hope resides. Verse 12, today, we haven't gotten there quite yet, gives us some hint, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

But what inheritance is that? What are believers hoping for? What are we living for? An inheritance of riches? In my Father's house there are many rooms, many mansions.

An inheritance of comfort? He will wipe every tear from their eye. An inheritance of what, exactly? In two weeks' time, you can mark it on your calendars.

Matt is going to lead us through Paul's words at the end of this chapter. And it's in that passage that Paul must clearly reveal our great hope. He uses hope again in verse 27.

[19:26] And this is the hope that sends blood pumping into our faith and love. Verse 4, the hope that makes us willing and makes us strong to practically live renewed lives, Christian lives in the world.

And that hope is nothing less than Jesus Christ himself. Not just that Jesus will win the day. That's true, but that's an external hope. And not just that Jesus Christ will show grace to sinners like you and me who have repented and believed in his name.

That's true, but it's not even the greatest hope. No, our hope in Jesus is better than that. Colossians 1:27, to them, God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this majesty, which is, this mystery, excuse me, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Christ in you, the hope of glory. So no wonder our hope gives life to our faith and our love. Our hope is bigger than an event.

Our hope is bigger than a principle or more beautiful than a promise even. Our hope has a name and his name is Jesus. Our hope is himself the resurrection and the life.

[20:54] So no wonder he gives life to our faith and to our love. Our hope has a future because he's conquered the grave. In him is life and that life is the light of man.

Christ in us. Christ in you. That is the hope of glory. If our hope is the risen Jesus living in us, of course our hope enlivens our faith and puts fire in our love.

He is the light. He is the bright burning fire. Too heavenly minded to be any earthly good? If you aren't heavenly minded, you won't be transformed like this.

You'll be no different than the neighbor who doesn't know Christ. Christ. So, that is what Paul is thankful for.

And in verse 9 he turns his attention from thanksgiving. If you look to a request. Verse 9 says, And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

[22:17] Wait a minute. Filled with knowledge? Isn't that theoretical again? Right? Is that, I thought Paul was on death row.

I thought we were talking about practical things. Isn't he in practical mode here? Shouldn't he be? Well, he is. Yes, he is.

Look closely with me. What does Paul pray for? What does he want? He doesn't want God to tell us about his will.

He doesn't want God to give us guidelines to follow his will. He doesn't want God to simply lay out the plan. Hey, just so you know, here's my will.

He asks for God to fill us up. To fill us up in our minds and in our hearts, in our thoughts and in our affections, in our waking and in our sleeping, in our plans and in our desires.

[ 23 : 20 ] He asks God to fill us up with an understanding of his will, not so that we'll say, yeah, I know what God wants, but so that we'll say, I am filled with his will.

I want what he wants. How is that practical? Well, he finishes the thought in verse 10. So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

that's practical. You want a practical faith? Do you want a spiritual life that touches everything you do, every good work and tends to make it good?

Do you want a strengthened Christian walk? Do you want patience, endurance, and joy for the task? It's all there. And so that's why Paul is asking verse 9, that we would be filled with the understanding of his will so that we might live out of it.

Verse 10, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Being heavenly minded is the only way to be any earthly good.

[ 24 : 58 ] And Paul doesn't leave the how to this mystery, right? He could just leave it there and then you guys fill in the blanks.

Like really, how do we get filled with the knowledge of God's will so that our lives might be transformed like this? How does that happen? He doesn't leave it a mystery.

Verse 9, he says, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will. How? In all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Where do those things come from? And, how do we get, as he says, all of it? First, Paul does not say, fill yourselves.

He says, I'm asking God to fill you. this is not something we can do on our own. We must be receptive to it, but we can't do it ourselves.

[ 26 : 06 ] All spiritual wisdom and understanding comes from God since he alone reveals his own mind. God reveals himself and transforms his people in practical ways.

how? Actually, that's what the entire book of Colossians is about. That's what we're going to be delving into, is God showing himself to us.

Next week, we are going to see maybe the clearest picture of who our Lord is in himself. we're going to see so much for practical life throughout this book.

Paul's going to spend time helping us correct our thinking because chapter 3 verse 10 we have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

If we learn to know him knowledge of our creator that's how we go about the process. Putting off the old, putting on the new, being recreated more and more into the likeness of the resurrected son.

[ 27 : 19 ] In fact, Paul's going to begin chapter 3 with these words. Seek the things that are above. Be heavenly minded. Seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things that are above. as I said, next week he's going to take a deep dive into how God has revealed himself to us.

What his will is. He's going to give us a glimpse, a preview of that in today's closing verses. Verses 13 and 14. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Do you know what God's will is? At its heart, God wants to bring glory and joy to his own heart by delivering us from the domain of darkness and the penalty of sin and death and hell that we have earned for ourselves by redeeming us.

by nailing our sins to the cross of Christ so that we might become his righteousness as Christ took our sin and made an end of it at his cross.

[ 28 : 52 ] That's his will. So if you've never had your sins forgiven, if you've never been redeemed, if you have not been joined to Christ so that you can say, my sins are gone because he took them

to his cross and extinguished them there by taking the full fury of his own wrath against injustice.

And friends, that's what you need today. That is God's will for you today. You've never had your sins forgiven. If you've never been redeemed, today is the day. How do you get that grace?

How do we enter this kingdom? Verse 13. How do we get qualified? Verse 12. To share in the inheritance of the saints? How do we get the great mystery? Verse 27.

Christ in us. The hope of glory. And make no mistake, that thought in us, in Christ, with Christ, that is going to be a major theme throughout this book.

How do we get, how do we receive that grace? This is how Paul describes that process in chapter 2, starting in verse 11.

[ 30 : 12 ] In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith, in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead, and you who were dead in your trespasses, and the uncircumcision of your flesh, and if you have not been reconciled to Christ, friends, that is where you are right now.

God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Friends, if you repent of your sins, and believe in Christ that he did that on your behalf, you will be saved. You will be reconciled to this God, and he will qualify you for the inheritance of the saints in light, and you will have the hope of glory, Christ in you.

And for those of us who've already been made new in Christ, what is there for us here? what is his will for us practically?

Yes, we are going to attend to his word so that he will fill us up with the knowledge of himself, the knowledge of his will, so that we might be transformed and walk in a manner worthy of our calling.

[ 31 : 40 ] What can we do today with this passage? I want to suggest that we look not only at what Paul says, because it's beautiful, but then ask ourselves, what is he doing by saying these things?

He's trying to accomplish something with this letter. He's trying to do something with it. These words have a purpose. He's not just writing down pretty language for us to remember.

You see, Paul's prayer here is actually an example of how to live out the transformed life of Christian love. See, in order to pray this prayer, he had to look, I mean, really look, at his brothers and sisters and see something commendable in them so that verse 3, he could say, I'm thankful for you.

And then he had to have a heart that was for them so that verse 9, he could say, I'm asking for this great thing for you. And then he had to put pen to paper and let them know.

this is a ministry of encouragement. And that is one very practical outpouring of Christian love.

[ 33 : 04 ] If the church could look like that, what would that do? If we could be people who are encouraging like that, we hear that phrase, too heavenly minded to be any earthly good, we'd hear that a lot less, I think.

So, take a moment right now. Right this minute. Pick someone. Pick two people.

If you're married, you've got to pick your spouse. This is your assignment. You don't have an excuse. And then pick someone else. Someone in your family, someone in the church, someone maybe who doesn't know the Lord yet.

And really look at them. what should you be affirming in them to encourage them? Let's follow Paul's example of Christian love here.

What might you do this week to encourage someone? So look for things to point out in your spouse, in someone in your family, a friend here at church, in your workplace.

[ 34 : 12 ] place. And then pray a prayer of thanksgiving for that. And then look for them and say, this is the thing I really want for that person.

And I hope it would be like Paul, something really deep. Not just that they have a nice day, but that they have Christ in their day.

that he would transform their trials. As we'll see in the end of chapter one, oh, he transforms our trials.

Pray for that as well. And then Christian love's demands that we encourage one another. So let them know. That is your assignment, everybody. We are to be following the example of the apostle, in showing Christian love, this transformed life, this life that is filled, not just knowledgeable about, but filled in an understanding of God and his will.

This is what the church looks like. This is what the redeemed life looks like. And we know that Paul's prayer for us will be heard. And we know that our prayer for us and our church family will be heard because he is praying to the very same father, the same father who received Christ's prayer for us in the garden, John 17, when he was on his way to redeem us by forgiving our sins and his cross.

[ 35 : 51 ] Friends, let's pray. Let's pray. Lord, again, will you set our eyes firmly on your son so that you might cement the hope that he has secured for us in our hearts?

And from that hope, will you build our faith in him and fan into flame a love for your church so that we are changed, so that we are different, so that we are earthly good in a unique and Christ-like way that the world cannot ignore.

We pray that in the matchless name of Jesus Christ our King. Amen. Amen.