

Colossal Change

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[0 : 00] Well, let's pray together as we turn to God's word. Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for the power of your word in our hearts and in this world, that it bears fruit and increases.

And we ask now that we would come into and under that power. And as we do, that you would show us the smile of your face and the hope of glory and what belongs to our transformation. And we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we're in our second week in Colossians and we come to this tremendous passage, chapter 1, verses 9 to 14.

You'll find it a great help if you have a Bible in front of you because the passage has lots of surprises that are deep and terrific. It's a big passage and I have called it colossal change. I could have called it power to change, but that's already been taken. Or the word we prefer today, the word transformation, because this passage is about how God changes us and transforms us in ordinary everyday life as Christians.

[1 : 23] We hear a lot about transformation these days. In these next weeks, as the federal budget comes down, we're going to hear about transformational green economics. The global protests that have been going on for at least four years are based on a deep human desire for change and transformation.

And I think some have been successful in replacing corrupt elected officials. Has there been real change? Time will tell.

And you know, of course, there's a tidal wave of books and courses on how we change ourselves. One of the top selling of these is called *The Secret*.

Oprah Winfrey has said that the message of this book is the message that she's been trying to share with the world for 21 years. The book is written by an Australian and it's based on the so-called science of self-transformation.

And she argues that she has discovered the human laws for self-change. And she gives semi-spiritual exercises for change. And the book has sold over 30 million copies and it's been translated into 50 languages.

[2 : 39] It's very popular. More recently, Mark Manson, who is also a self-help writer, he's criticised *The Secret* and he calls it silly, superstitious drivel, a playbook for entitlement and self-absorption, which may be a little bit unkind, but then he has published two self-help books himself and they've only sold 8 million copies.

He has nine laws for life. Number three is you are not special. Number six is you are wrong about everything and so am I. And number nine is and then you die.

Now, the reason I'm talking about this is I think we could say that they are testimony. The market is testimony to the profound sense of personal dissatisfaction and the ongoing belief in the possibility of change.

And the reason why we're talking about this is because the book of Colossians is about real transformation in our lives now and forever.

The Apostle Paul writes, he's 2,000 kilometres away in Rome and the pastor Epaphras has travelled that distance to seek his advice because there's a new teaching in the church about change and transformation.

[4 : 04] And it claims to have discovered the laws of human change. And it's a mix of self-help disciplines and exercises. It's got a spiritual overlay to it.

The new teaching, we don't know a lot about it, but they've cherry-picked some of the Jewish festivals. They promise life-changing experiences to get in touch with angels. It's just that this new teaching doesn't make a lot of room for Jesus Christ.

And what the Apostle Paul does is he doesn't tear into these new teachers and show them the error of their ways. He doesn't do that. He offers this most positive, powerful picture of how real change happens for those who are in Jesus Christ.

Not by the discovery of human laws of attraction or success, but by drawing us into what God has done and what God is doing now in Jesus Christ and how those two things change us.

If you've been around Christians for a little while, you'll know the Bible has an entirely unique way of looking at how we change and how we grow and how we are transformed.

[5 : 22] It does not give us a list of do's and don'ts. It's not a thousand rules. Work hard with savage self-discipline. True change and transformation comes out of our relationship with the living, risen Jesus Christ.

from sinking our roots more deeply into him by actively and dynamically grasping and growing Jesus Christ and the knowledge of God we have in him.

Do you remember Jesus said this in the Gospel of John? Abide in me and I in you and the closeness of that relationship. If you keep abiding, you'll bear much fruit.

And this little passage, chapter 1, verses 9 to 14, is the key passage on how this works. And there are two parts of the passage that go together.

We have to hold them together. The first part is verses 9 to 12 and it's about transformation. It's about how we grow day by day through the power of God now.

[6 : 27] And the second part of the passage starts in verse 12 and goes to the end of verse 14. And this is the source. It's the basis. It's the spring of our life change now.

And it's not rules and regulations and protocols. It's about what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. And it's complete and final and finished. And the key thing that God has done for us in the past is he has transferred us from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved son. That's why Christian transformation now cannot be a list of do's and don'ts. It's about making Jesus your saviour. It's about realising this transfer and how to live in Jesus Christ.

No transformation today without transfer in the past. No transfer in the past without transformation today. And I think the best way to hold these two things together is to look at them in reverse.

So I have two points. The first point is transfer, verses 13 and 14. If you have your Bible open, in verses 13 and 14, the apostle says this, that God 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.

[7 : 59] Now, I often think the pictures and diagrams can be quite distracting. But for a passage like this, it might be helpful by the marvels of modern technology to have a little bit of a diagram.

So this is what the passage looks like in verses 13 and 14. Paul says there are two realms. One is the rule, the domain, the dominion, the tyranny of darkness.

Later, he calls it our old humanity. It's a place opposed to God, marked by hostility. It's life before we meet Jesus Christ, where we suppress the truth that we know about God.

We exchange the truth of God for a lie and we worship ourselves instead of God. It's the realm of selfishness and violence and hostility and futility.

It's the domain of darkness. And the other realm is the kingdom of God's beloved son, the kingdom of God. We enter by repentance and faith, and it's a kingdom of compassion.

[9 : 07] It's a kingdom of kindness and hope and love. It's eternal, and it's marked by being holy, blameless and above reproach. And here is the point of verse 13, that if you trust Jesus Christ, you've been delivered from the domain of darkness and you have been transferred to the other.

This is what God has done for us in the cross of Jesus Christ. This is what he has done in the past for us through Christ. And the transfer is a change that's so massive, so colossal, it is the biggest change possible.

It's not just a temporary job transfer to another country. It's not just a change of location.

It's not even being released from prison and to become a free person. It's a change in me, in my identity. I am not the same person moving to a different country.

So that is why, if you see on that diagram, all true life change, all true spiritual transformation arises from this transfer.

[10 : 21] It doesn't come by trying to discover the human laws of transformation. It comes from dying with Christ, being made alive in Christ, and now walking in newness of life.

You know, this whole word transfer, in the old English versions, it was translated by the word translate. We have been translated from one kingdom to another.

And you know, when you translate a sentence from one language into another, you have to take it apart and reconstitute it. It's like a, it's like when you receive a new heart, a transplant pulled out of one body and into another.

It's entirely radical. This is the transfer that God has done for us in Christ. And that brings us, secondly, okay, then what does transformation look like? Verses one, verses nine to 12.

So if you could take the screen off and come back to church. Thank you. So verses nine to 12, you'll notice this is a prayer, which I think is absolutely brilliant.

[11 : 30] Because transformation comes from God. The place we go for transformation is God. And so it's very natural that Paul should pray. And it's an absolutely beautiful prayer.

And if I was in prison writing to you as a church, I think my first lines would be, please pray that I would get out of prison and please send me a very good lawyer.

And if you can't do that, send me a care package. No, the apostle doesn't do that. He prays for their transformation. And it looks a bit complicated, but it's actually quite simple.

There's one major prayer for transformation and change. And then there are four consequences.

And the main request comes in verse nine, the beginning of verse 10.

And it's a two-sided coin. Paul prays that they would be filled so as to walk. They would be filled so that they could live in a particular way.

[12 : 31] That is, he's trying to connect them with God so that God would so increase and fill them, it would have a practical expression in everyday life. So let's look at the first side of that.

Verse nine. And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that, here it comes, you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Now I know that's a bit of a mouthful, but it's a very basic request. Paul is praying for the Colossians for a basic, for a particular kind of filling from God.

To be filled with the knowledge of his will is not about guidance. It's not a prayer for direction, like should I send my children to school or not? Should I buy Honda or Toyota?

Should I have Black and Decker or DeWalt? The will of God is the pleasure, his desire, which he has revealed in Jesus Christ.

[13 : 31] I think when we come to this word will, we sometimes think it's a cold, hard timeline spreadsheet, a rigid, inflexible iron rod and invisible scheme.

It's not. It's the heart of God. It's the pleasure of God. It's the big plan of God that he's done in Jesus Christ. He's speaking about the transfer that happened in the cross.

The great salvation that's come into this world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The new creation by reconciliation in his blood. That's God's will and pleasure. And the prayer is that we would be filled with the knowledge of that.

And even here, the word knowledge is not the usual word. It's not intellectual. It's personal, experiential, to truly understand and personally experience this. Paul is praying that the Colossians would be filled with knowing Jesus, filled up with knowing God's great love and grace to them in the gospel, a growing and deepening appreciation and grasp of being reconciled and redeemed to God.

That's one side of the main request, but there is a flip side that goes with it. Verse 10, so filled with the knowledge of God's will, it's not an end in itself, so that, verse 10, you might walk, live, in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.

[14 : 56] So being filled with the knowledge of God's will has this in mind, practical, daily, ordinary Christian consistency.

No theology without application. Behaviour and belief go together. This is not for the spiritual elite. Paul is praying that every believer in Colossae would be transformed in this way.

And the life that he describes is living to please Jesus Christ. This is so helpful for those of us who grew up in homes or churches which emphasised obedience.

You know, obedience is important, but it's a different thing from pleasing Christ. It's not do's and don'ts. It's the freedom of seeking to please the person.

So if I'm a student, in my studies, I'm trying to please Jesus. If I'm married, in my marriage, I'm trying to please Jesus. If I'm single, in my singleness, I'm trying to please Jesus.

[15 : 59] As Stephan said, if I'm a teacher, in my teaching, I try and do that. In my finances, in my hopes, in my dreams, in my disposable time. This is the request. That we would be filled to walk.

That since we've been transferred to the kingdom of Christ, we now know the smile of God. And the Christian life is growing deeper in the appreciation of the pleasure in God in saving us so that we would live a life that would bring him pleasure now.

That's the main prayer. That we'd be so filled with a growing understanding and appreciation of his pleasure that we would try and bring him pleasure in all our decisions. And that's what we ought to pray for each other.

I please pray that for me. And if that's the main request, the natural question is, well, what does it look like to please God? And Paul fills that up with four other requests.

They're four marks of a life that is pleasing to him. And they are these, the end of verse 10 through to verse 12. The four are, bearing fruit in every good work, number one.

[17 : 11] Number two, increasing in the knowledge of God. Number three, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy. Number four, giving thanks to the Father.

Let me just talk about those quickly. Fruit in every good work, it comes out of a sense of being filled with the knowledge of God's joy and love.

It's the living dynamic abiding in Jesus. I loved it in the interview when Stephan said, he's not sure exactly how he is going to affect people by seeking Christ in his daily life.

And that's right. It's fruit. It's the fruit of God in us as we seek to please him. And as we seek to bear fruit in every good work, secondly, we increase, we grow in understanding and communion with God himself.

That's the second part of it. That is, we don't come to know God just in the study or in the contemplative silence. It's in doing good works we get to know God better.

[18 : 17] Thirdly, he provides his own strength to us, the heaviness of his glory and his might. Why? So that we might have endurance endurance and patience, endurance in difficult circumstances, patience with difficult people and joy.

You know, if you want to see the power of God at work, look at people persevering, enduring and being patient with joy. It's a complete miracle that we endure in the Christian faith.

faith. And I think it's a great COVID prayer for each of us that God would strengthen us to endure with patience and that we'd have some cheerfulness about us as we do it.

Fourthly and finally, thanksgiving. Thankfulness to God. It's a signal of real spiritual connection with Christ. Paul doesn't throw it in there, oh yeah, I'll throw in thankfulness.

It's always good to throw a bit of thanks. No, no, it's an expression that we've come to understand deeply and profoundly that what we have has come as a gift, not out of something we deserve.

[19 : 23] It's the reality of grace that always shows itself in thanks. So here are four marks of a life that pleases God. Four things that we are to pray for each other.

For bearing fruit, for increasing in the knowledge of God, for thankfulness and for strength. And in our next family gathering to pray for each other, we're going to use these four requests.

And if you want to remember them, they spell out bits, B-I-T-S, if you just rearrange the last two.

Bearing fruit, increasing in the knowledge of God, thankfulness and strength.

Well, I commend the passage to you. And I want to finish by making a couple of comments on prayer. I'm very conscious that it's always difficult to talk about this, not just because it's so intimate and important, but it's so easy to feel guilty about our prayers.

None of us prays as deeply or as widely or as faithfully as we should. Our prayers are clumsy and sporadic and messy.

[20 : 34] It's almost as though God has given us this gift of prayer to show us how much we can't live without him and how deeply we depend on him. Colossians has a great deal of help to us in this area of prayer for two reasons.

One, Paul doesn't pretend it's easy or effortless. If you go to chapter four, the apostle commends pastor Epaphras, who's traveled from Colossae to Rome to visit Paul in prison.

Listen to how he describes Epaphras in chapter four, verse 12. He says, Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in prayers, that you may stand fully mature, fully assured in all the will of God.

Paul doesn't tell us how gifted Epaphras was, what a big personality he had, but the measure of the man that he was always struggling in prayer on your behalf.

Literally, he agonizes. That's what the word is. In prayer, on behalf of his beloved Colossians.

Makes sense, doesn't it? You know, if the Colossians belong to God and are in God's hands, it's only God who can fill them with the knowledge of his will.

[21 : 56] It's only God himself who can daily strengthen them to endure and to stand firm and to assure them in all his will. And the second reason Colossians is so helpful to us in prayer is that this agonizing in prayer is not just for Christian leaders, for people who are paid to do ministry.

It's for everyone in the congregation. If you just slip back to chapter 4, verse 2, Paul says, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

It's a plural command to the entire congregation at Colossae. And the great thing about prayer which should encourage us is that it works at both ends.

It works on me as I pray. It works on you as I pray for you. And this transformation that comes into the core of our lives, it happens as we pray for other believers.

And the transformation comes into their lives as we pray as well. And for all these things, we say, glory be to God on high.

[23 : 09] So.