

# The Grace of God in Truth

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[ 0 : 00 ] And it reads, That Noah built an altar to the Lord, and taking some of the clean animals and clean birds, he sanctified burnt offerings on it.

The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, Never again will I curse the ground because of humans. Even though every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood, never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

As long as the earth endures, seed time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, will never cease. Well, may God bless that portion of his word to our hearts in that we would understand it and rest in that, that as it is, it will never cease until, of course, the Lord returns. Well, before we come to our next Bible reading and prayers we're led into the message, we're going to listen here to this next hymn of Psalm 23.

And as you're turning there, why Colossians 1, chapter 1, and onwards, well, probably about six years ago now, we did Colossians.

[ 1 : 29 ] We did it in like four big chunks. This is a little bit more detailed so that we can focus on the meaning of the verses with a little bit more depth.

But as we come to God's word this morning, I want you to understand that Paul's letter to the Colossians is so that you, as Christians, would experience a true Christian spirituality.

There is such a thing as a biblical spirituality, not airy-fairy, but of substance. And so now hear God's word. 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 truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

[ 2 : 55 ] Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our fellow brother, 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.

Well, as we consider this beginning of Colossians and we consider especially the greeting, the greeting in many ways acts like an anchor.

And so what you're going to notice, not only in this first part of Colossians, but all the way through Colossians, is this grounding of faith, hope, and love, but also grace and peace.

So if you're ever lost reading through Colossians, you're thinking, what's actually being said here? What is the, where am I being anchored in the word of God so that I would understand?

It's in the grace and peace. It's in the faith, hope, and love. They exist as anchors to the rest of your Christian life. They will act as anchors to stop you drifting, but also to keep you where you are so that you're grounded.

[ 4 : 03 ] And so in short, the message of Colossians is a message that will do you really good as a believer. It is the truest definition of a biblical spirituality.

Sometimes we concentrate on the practical aspects of Christianity, and that's good and well. We're not saying that we shouldn't be practical as Christians. In fact, this whole service has come about because Christians are practical, because they've rolled up their sleeves and done something.

And that's true of this church for the last 40 of years. There's been no shortage of people. Well, perhaps there's been a shortage of people, but there's been no shortage of heart and motivation of those who've been around that long who says, right, I'll roll my sleeves up and be a practical Christian in the church.

And that is, that's good. That's what we want to see. Colossians, however, wants to focus on the spirituality of the Christian life. Not that it's taking anything away from practical Christian living, but it wants to focus on what is the truest definition of a biblical spirituality.

What does it mean to be a spiritual person? A Christian, yes, but a spiritual person. Now, you might have to remember, if you don't already know, that Colossians is written to a church against a backdrop of those who want to manipulate the gospel.

[ 5 : 26 ] Remember, this happened in Galatians. They wanted to manipulate the gospel so that they could get other people to do other things. Well, the same is true here in Colossians. The gospel is being manipulated so that believers are left thinking, well, there must be more over and above Christ.

There must be more outside of Christ. Though I've received Christ, I must have now to go somewhere else to get the fullness somewhere else. And what Paul's basic message is, no, if you've come to Christ, you have fullness in Christ.

Everything you need and have is you already have in Christ Jesus. Now, there is a difference, of course, between not knowing that fullness and then seeking that fullness in Christ or not knowing it and then trying to find that sort of fullness elsewhere in the world.

Paul does not want us to do that. So what he does is instead of perhaps attacking these false teachers, he just spells out the truest definition of biblical spirituality.

In other words, instead of wasting time on saying this is false and that is false and that's false, he just tells you what is true and then hopefully by implication, you would understand that if this is true, then that must be false.

[ 6 : 44 ] So the summary, at least in this beginning section, is an anchor. The grace and peace, though it is a greeting from an apostle to you, the church, anchors these believers in their faith or it's meant to.

Paul understands that he is what he is by the will of God and for no other reason and therefore by implication, you are what you are by the will of God. The reason you are saved, the reason that your sins are forgiven, the reason you sit there absolutely perfect today, you cannot be any more perfect than what you are right now in Christ Jesus.

You just cannot be. And the only reason why that is true is because of the will of God. So Paul is saying, look, I am what I am by the will of God and you are what you are by the will of God.

Now that doesn't mean that there's not room for improvement in our earthly life, but what it means is in the presence of God, as God sees us, he sees us as he sees his son because we're hidden in Christ.

We have that perfection about us. And so what he does is though he knows this is true and though he hopes they know that is true, he does make a distinction between saints and faithful brothers.

[ 8 : 01 ] I mean, why not just say saints? Why does he say to the saints and faithful brothers? But because he understands that in the church there are false teachers.

And so what he's doing, he's elevating, he's highlighting the faithful over and against the unfaithful, but not by mentioning the unfaithful, just by mentioning the faithful to the saints and the faithful brethren.

And this is because it is possible to be a believer and still be caught up in a false teaching. You can be a genuine Christian and still be led astray by something that isn't true, not that he wants that to happen to any of us.

And so Paul then moves into a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, verse 3. He explains how they have come to faith through the gospel, verse 4, and that they have been given a hope, verse 5. This hope, as you'll begin to see, is the key turning point because when people are dissatisfied with hope, it is then that they go looking for more in the world.

[ 9 : 08 ] And you'll get to see that in a moment. The gospel they learn from Epaphras. Paul has never been to this church. There's no indication that they've ever seen him or he has seen them.

Though it's clear that they understand he's an apostle. There's no doubt that Epaphras would have spoken about Paul, seeing that this letter has been delivered from Paul to them through Epaphras. And so how does it begin? Well, it begins like this. A letter, like a sermon, on two basic levels, has a sender and a receiver. And this is important, especially when you come to consider grace.

So let me try and explain it if I can. When you have a sender and you have a receiver, you have two parties looking at the same message. One is sending it, one has written the message, and the other

people are receiving it.

And so the church here doesn't have this preached to them like you are today. They have a written ministry. They have to read it for themselves. Someone may have read it out, but it also could have been the case that the letter was passed around and read by those who are there.

[10:18] So he begins by stating that he is what he is by the will of God. And by implications, you are what you are by the will of God. And may grace and peace from God be with you.

Why is that important? Why mention will and grace and peace? And now keep in mind that with a letter, you have two sides. You have reader and you have writer. You have sender and receiver. Now, before Paul was Paul, he was Saul. And as Saul pre-converted Paul, not a Christian, he persecuted the church.

This means that either at his hand or at the orders of Paul, Christians were persecuted and, of course, were killed. And we know that just by looking at Christian history, many, many Christians died for their faith for no other reason than the fact that they were saying that Jesus is Lord.

And by implication, they were saying Caesar is not. The moment you say Jesus is Lord, you're saying Caesar isn't. And, of course, Paul is persecuting the church.

[11:31] These Christians are not sticking to the Hebrew Scriptures as he understands it. And then, of course, he is converted. Now, we know that he persecuted Christians because if you ever read Acts and you get to Acts chapter 7 and the stoning of Stephen, which is just an awful chapter.

It's a brilliant chapter to understand what's happening. It's an awful chapter to see a man stoned to death. And, of course, you know how stoning happens, that they would throw hand-sized stones and then eventually lift one big stone and just drop it on them so that it would be the final blow.

And it says in Acts chapter 7, if you read it carefully, that as those who were there stoning Stephen and the witnesses, they took their coats off and laid it at the feet of Saul.

So there he was, present in the early church, at the stoning of Stephen. And now we have Saul becoming Paul by the will of God, who's become an apostle, and the grace of God has transformed his life.

He's seen Christ and he's been taught the gospel. And suddenly, the person that was no longer is. He is a converted believer. And we look at that and go, look at how great God's grace is.

[12:47] And there's no doubt about that that is truly graceful of God to transform a person like that. But now I just want to look at it from the other side.

So I want you to imagine a woman in the church who was married for five years and her husband was a Christian and he died at the hands of Paul. How do you think this woman sat in the church receiving this letter, how is she to respond to the message of the man who killed her husband?

I'm not saying for a moment that that happened. What I'm saying, that it is entirely possible that it could have happened. And I'm saying it so that you would understand that we can illustrate grace and grace has to be illustrated and understood from both sides.

It's not just about the transformation of Paul in conversion, but it has to be perhaps the transformation of a woman who's lost her husband at the hand of Paul who used to be Saul, a persecutor of the church.

You would have to receive this letter of grace and peace. Now, how does that grace, seeing that you're already a Christian, work in you? How does that happen?

[14:00] And so suddenly you begin to realize that it may not be the case here in Colossians, but this could have been a real scenario that we know nothing about. Now, whether it is or it isn't, it doesn't matter.

But the point is made that the grace of God isn't just seen in conversion, it's also to be seen in how we respond to someone writing to us in the gospel of grace and peace.

And so what we're to understand is that this grace and peace is not a greeting as a way of just opening the letter. They're anchor points. They are biblical, theological anchor points teaching you how to respond.

They don't just teach us that this is what God gives us to transform us. But now this grace and peace anchors how I am to respond to a letter written by a man who used to kill Christians.

And so he opens, I am now an apostle by the will of God, grace and peace. In other words, I'm not that man anymore because of these reasons.

[15:09] Now, grace means this, that God has given you something that you do not deserve.

That's what it means. And peace is the result, what you have because God has given you grace.

That's what Paul is saying when he says grace and peace. You have received something you don't deserve and look at what you have as a result of that grace. You have peace with God and therefore you have peace with anyone who belongs to God.

That's the importance of this greeting. It anchors everything that is about to come afterwards. And so the peace that is meant to exist and hopefully will exist between reader and writer, between sender and receiver, is a grace that is common now because all of this only exists in Christ Jesus. So let me just pause and ask a very personal question. You know, we're all friends, hopefully, and it's this. Do you understand that you are undeserving of everything you have received?

Do you think of yourself more highly than you thought? I'm not coming to church today because of this, that, or the other. Or I will go to church today because of this, that, or the other.

[16:32] The truth is, is that grace is a constant reminder we don't deserve any of it. Not one little bit. And yet we have all of it because the grace is to draw our attention to God.

And that's what Paul is saying here. Do you live in the conscious affirmation that you're not deserving of what you have received?

And yet the grace is never given to remind you that you don't deserve. God's not saying, I'm giving you grace just to remind you how bad you are. It doesn't work like that.

Grace, the message of grace works very similar to the message of forgiveness. When one person says to another person, I forgive you, the other person automatically understands I must have done something wrong.

Though the person saying I forgive you is not reminding them that they have done something wrong, by the very fact that they are saying I forgive you, the other person can't help but be reminded that they have done something wrong.

[17:40] And so when we receive God's grace and peace and forgiveness, that reminder comes with it, but it comes with it in the context of grace. So though I am reminded I've done something wrong, I am told at exactly the same time, I'm forgiven.

That though I am reminded I'm undeserving, at the same time, I'm told I'm given everything. So however bad I'm feeling in one moment, I am reminded in the exact same moment that the God who is not telling me you don't deserve anything, but who's saying I give you my grace, is saying, this is all for you.

But of course, a proper appreciation of grace only is fully appreciated if it's received as a person who accepts that they're undeserving of it.

Grace is never grace if you think you're owed it. Grace is never grace if you think somehow God owes it to you. It would nullify the very meaning and importance of the grace that God has given you.

And this is why he goes on to say that you have received the grace of God in truth. Not just that you have received the grace of God, but that you have received this grace of God in truth.

[18:54] Just there at the end of verse 5. And then he goes straight into the fact that they have received this hope that is laid up for them in heaven.

And what that means is this. Whatever happens down here to you, whatever you do or don't do or whatever happens to you, not as a result of you doing or not doing anything, can never alter what you will have in the future.

There is nothing that can happen to you down here that will give you a negative balance when you get in glory. Never. What you have in the future ahead of you cannot be altered by what you go through down here.

and that's the very encouragement that comes with hope. But there is a distinction here and this is really important and so if you've not, hopefully you have been paying attention but I would really like you to pay attention at this point that there's a very important distinction between how faith enables and the object of faith.

So let me explain in verses 4 and 5. If you were to say to someone or rather someone was to say to you, tell me about your faith and you go, well I believe in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[20:17] I would want to go, well, just stop right there. I didn't ask you to tell me about the object of your faith. I asked you to tell me about your faith. And so Paul very gently is making a distinction between the object of your faith which is very importantly the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ Christ.

But the moment I asked you to tell me about your faith, not about what your faith is in, about what your faith is. And so the distinction that Paul makes here which is an important one for Christians to understand is that if you only think about the object of your faith, namely Jesus, though that's incredibly important, then you will miss the very fact of what your faith is.

So when I ask you to explain what is your faith and you start speaking about the object of your faith, you still not grasp what faith is. You're speaking about what your faith is in but not necessarily about what your faith, what, so it says in Ephesians that God has given us grace and faith and we're being asked to explain what that faith is.

So what is that faith? Well of course it's the fruit of grace. Faith enables me to live my life following Jesus and not the world.

That's what faith is. Faith enables me to repent of my sins and believe in Jesus Christ, the object of my faith. Faith enables me to follow Jesus and to live in fellowship with other believers.

[ 21 : 54 ] And so Paul very carefully wants to lay home gently but spiritually and forcefully the very definition of true faith which is the object of your faith is Jesus but the very faith that you have been given by Jesus, the very gift of faith enables you to follow him, enables your life to bear fruit, enables you to live in faith, hope and love, enables you to listen to the message of God, enables you to have fellowship with one another, love one another in the spirit.

That's what the faith of God is enabling you to do. So this is the faith that you have.

Now another thing to notice here of course is the definition of the hope. And this is because the Christians have been caught up in this idea that there is a spirituality to be experienced outside of Jesus Christ and what Paul is having to remind them of is the very simple truth that a personal knowledge of Jesus Christ is the very definition of a true experience.

The fact that you come to know Jesus, that you know him, that you know him as savior, that you know him as the trying God of scripture, that you know him as one who has given you these gifts, the one who has made you right, the one who has laid up for you, a glorious inheritance and the fact that you know that is part of that Christian genuine experience.

It's not sort of a byproduct, an afterthought of God. No, it's the very thing that God has actually given you to enjoy. Remember how Jesus defined eternal life.

[ 23 : 42 ] He says in his prayer in John 17, eternal life is to know God and to know the son of God. That's the very definition of eternal life. How do I know I'm saved? I know God. And of course, that knowing is not simply a knowledge, a knowledge of, though that's true.

It is that deep experience that I am with God in the spirit. Now, as Paul moves through this letter and the beginning of, beginning with this idea of thankfulness, and he's stating just how faithful Epaphras has been to the church in declaring the true message of the gospel.

And of course, this is necessary because it's over and against the false teachers that are present saying there's other stuff elsewhere out there in the world.

And so he's qualifying as much as he can, at least in this first section, what a genuine Christian experience looks like. In essentially, grace and peace, faith, hope, and love.

And of course, within that, the knowledge of God. Now, Paul understands that there are a couple of ways that believers can look for more and why they look for more.

[ 24 : 56 ] The reason why Christians, though saved perhaps a few years or many years, begin to look elsewhere to get a sense of fulfillment is because that they're not looking for more of the spirit, though they may term it that way, and they're not looking for more freedom, though they may think that that is what they're doing, and I'm looking for more fullness or more spiritual power or more to happen in the church than what's actually happening.

All of these here are misguided applications because they have become dissatisfied with hope. Think about what hope is meant to do.

It's not to remind you that you have something to look forward to in the future. the hope that you are being guided into here is to tell you how to behave in the here and now in the same way that the grace and peace is and the faith and the hope and the love is.

Well, what is hope saying? Well, it's saying God is saying to you in hope, you don't have everything yet. So the yearning that you have for fullness, the yearning that you have for more is something that you're not going to get until that hope is finally fulfilled in the glory to come.

So it is true that you're looking for all these things but what you're looking for is not actually going to be found because it would misapply the definition of God, the reason why God has given us hope.

[ 26 : 28 ] God has given us hope as a way of guarding our heart for expecting to have now what we can only have in the future. And yet, one of the reasons why Christians can sort of move away from pursuing the fullness in Christ and then seek to pursue it in the world is not because they don't understand the gospel.

No, they fully understand Jesus Christ's death and resurrection but it's because they're misapplying the hope that they have received. In other words, the full gravity of hope has not yet weighed down on their heart telling them day after day after day you don't have everything yet.

There is more to come and it guards the heart from an over-realized eschatology which is just another way of saying that God is reminding Christians that followers of Jesus Christ are not to expect to have now that which they can only have in the future.

It's coming and you will have it but you will wait for it in hope or rather you are to wait for it in hope. Well here's the thankfulness and exhortation as we close.

If we like Paul were to emulate this kind of prayer for each other and give thanks for each other as Paul gives thanks for each the church here if we're going to do that towards each other here then there are certain anchors that need to be present grace peace faith hope and love they will anchor you and they will give content to your prayer they will give content to your prayer you will know that when you think of a face and think of their name what to pray for and it will be deeper than just superficial well-being though I'm not saying that we shouldn't pray for people's well-being we should but what I'm saying is that there's a depth to this prayer that goes beyond the hospital that goes beyond you know someone at home who's poorly it goes way beyond that it's a deep act of praise to God for that these people who are so undeserving of everything have received everything in Christ Jesus that's the depth of his thanksgiving and prayer to God and so never overlook please the importance of how these grace gifts of God work within your life that grace and peace is not a greeting it's something true about you that faith hope and love is not an airy fairy thing that we can put on a Christmas card or a birthday card to someone though it's great to be reminded of that they have deep biblical spiritual meaning they anchor believers so that they don't disappear in the world and go wandering it has great great meaning and so Paul's thanksgiving here is it's more than gratitude it's an act of praise

[ 29 : 39 ] Paul is saying I am thankful but more than that but more than just being thankful I recognize that we have all of this because you have done it God everything we have we have because you have given it to us and so the very nature of that thankfulness keeps the focus on that act of grace that here I am an undeserving man who used to kill Christians and now I have all of this for what reason because I receive the grace of God in truth Jesus Christ the gospel here's the exhortation we have an opportunity this morning to go from here and remember that we have been given something that we don't deserve and what we have been given will never be taken away from us and what we have been given we don't have everything yet there is more to come this message is for men women boys and girls and men and women boys and girls will enter in to the grace of God throughout their lives and that grace of God will bear fruit within them and this way we will understand that we won't reduce the grace simply to a

Christian conversion but we will understand that God's grace is a gift to an undeserving people throughout their entire life down here and of course the life to come in short the church is God's grace made visible the church the people of God is what God's grace looks like in the flesh the church is what faith hope and love look like in the flesh so we take it from the word and now it is in the lives of God's people and we say well what does it look like it looks like this this is what it looks like and so as we sit here and as we leave here I want you to be reminded of this thing that you are met with the message of God God's word is for you today as it was for them that you are his people that you're a people who have received God's grace in truth and that grace receive that in that grace you have faith hope and love and though within that grace we appreciate we're not deserving of it

God is never reminding us of it but we begin to appreciate exactly what we have received when we exactly understand our condition before God so may the Lord bless you and keep you may you know his grace and his peace and may you know faith hope and love amongst each other amen and now that is where he akan