

The Book of Colossians

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Thank you also to my family at New Life Wesleyan Church for giving me the freedom to grow as a leader and as a follower of Christ.

Most importantly, I want to thank and praise God!

About This Book

People sometimes ask why I would take the time to write a book. The answer is twofold. First, it's an opportunity to speak with my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren about this wonderful gospel that I have had the honor of working for all of my life. I want them to see the joy and power of living a life guided and protected by God's Word, God's Spirit, and God's commands. In doing so, I hope to establish many generations of my family in the wonderful grace of our Lord. So I write as a father.

I also write as a pastor. New Life Wesleyan Church has become a rather large body of believers meeting in multiple services and multiple locations across multiple states. While this is a huge reason to praise God and more of a blessing than any of us who work here could ever have hoped for, it creates its own set of challenges. It has become impossible for me to sit down individually with folks in the church like I once did and have deeper conversations about the power of God's Word and how it can be applied in their lives. And so, this is the reason for a series of books called *Coffee with the Pastor*.

While I am neither a theologian nor a scholar, as a pastor, it is my job to help people read and better understand the Word of God. His Word is powerful and life changing. If you read and understand it, you can see the God of heaven through the blood of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit—and that will change your life. Therefore, the goal of this series of books is not theological, but a practical application of life-changing, biblical truth. That is the purpose of my ministry and the ultimate goal of my life.

So, grab a cup of coffee, open up your Bible, and let us think about what God can do in your life.

Introduction

Freedom and holiness—these are the overarching themes of Colossians. As the apostle Paul wrote to the believers in Colossae, he did so realizing they were facing two massive forces that threatened both the long-term stability and viability of their faith.

On the one hand, Jewish legalism was an ever-lingering presence. These Judaizers insisted that the Gentiles who converted to Christianity adhere to Old Testament laws of lifestyle. They demanded that every non-Israelite functionally become an Israelite in order to be a Christian. To those who were confused, challenged, or discouraged by this teaching, the apostle wrote clearly: “Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ‘Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!’?” (Col. 2:20–21). To those who were struggling with the rules of this world, the apostle presented freedom.

Other philosophical and religious forces of the day were unconcerned with righteous living and, in fact, very comfortable

with blatant sinfulness and immorality. To them, the apostle wrote just as clearly: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5). To those who were trapped in lifestyle choices that were damaging to their faith, relationships, and health, the apostle clearly pressed forward the very real possibility of holiness:



Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

—Colossians 3:12–14

So here in Colossians, the apostle Paul once again demonstrated to us the intricate, often difficult, and yet Spirit-empowered art of balance. Since Christ set you free, be free! Since Christ is holy, be holy! Colossians shows us that both are possible.



COLOSSIANS 1



To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

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.

—Colossians 1:2–4

Grace and peace. It always starts there.

Grace for the forgiveness of our sins brings peace as we finally live in the presence and wholeness of our God, our Creator, our Father, our Savior, our Sustainer.

Grace and peace. It always starts there. But it doesn't end there.

Far too often, Christians accept the grace and forgiveness of God through Jesus, and then they simply sit down and wait. They wait for Jesus to return, for the Holy Spirit to do something, or for God to take them all home in a rapture event. They just find grace and sit down. It seems to me that this is not what God intended when he sent his Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for us.

When the Holy Spirit came and filled us as God's chosen people, he did not do so in order to help us sit more comfortably. There is much for us to do. There is much for us to change. There is much to do and change within us. There is much to do and change within our culture. We should not simply get saved and sit. We should find salvation and get to work!

In this letter written by the apostle Paul to the church in a town called Colossae, he began by commending them for their "faith in Christ Jesus" and "love . . . for all God's people" (v. 4). These two attributes are central to a proper reaction to grace and peace. Many would simply choose to get saved and then settle in, but that just isn't enough. Jesus warned about such thinking when he gave the parable about a foolish, rich man (see Luke 12:16–21). It seems that this man had been greatly blessed with a bumper crop (God had shown great grace). He therefore did not need to worry about providing for himself or his family; they had plenty (God had given peace). His reaction was the problem. "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry'''" (Luke 12:18–19). This is the way many Christians seem to react upon finding grace and peace: "I have found grace that forgives my sins. I have found peace knowing that my eternity is all stored up and reserved for me in heaven. So I'll say to myself, 'You have eternal hope and reward; take it easy, pray, hang out at church, and be happy!'"

The problem here is we forget Jesus' reaction to this man: "But God said to him, 'You fool! [When God calls you a fool, it's getting serious!] This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?'" (Luke 12:20). When we take the approach of this foolish, rich man in our lives, we risk getting the same reaction from God: "You foolish Christian! You have no idea how long you have on this earth! When you are gone, where will your peace be and what good will it be to those you did not tell?"

When we get saved and settle in for a long, slow, comfortable slide into the arms of our waiting Savior, we fail to change. We are actually repeating the same sinful patterns we had before. We have just spiritualized them. We are living for ourselves and resting on our salvation. Essentially, we are refusing to show concern or offer help to the world around us. We are refusing to be renewed, redeemed, or remade in the image of the One who left the throne of heaven to suffer and die for us. He did not give his life so that we could just sit and rest. He wants us to be changed and remade. In turn, we can lead others to him, which will ultimately change and remake the culture around us.

The Holy Spirit lives in us so that we might truly learn to have a life-changing faith in Christ Jesus and culture-changing love for God's people. Instead, we tend to remain committed to our own carnal, selfish comforts. We will love God's people as long as they don't try to change our style of music or change our building. We will love them as long as they don't bring

“those” people in and ruin our quiet atmosphere. We will love them as long as they don’t cause us to feel uncomfortable because “those” people are not like us. We will be committed to changing the world as long as we don’t have to do anything uncomfortable or difficult. Just have the world become like us. Have them find their own way in and they can have the same grace and peace we have.

If any other follower of Christ should ask us to do or sacrifice something that is difficult to do or let go, it’s on!

That is not what God has called us to; we are called to live by faith and love that exudes from the hope we have in heaven and about what we already know about the gospel of truth (see Col. 1:5). That call demands that we “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19); we become “witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8); we offer our “bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1); and we rid ourselves “of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind” (1 Peter 2:1). The list could go on and on! The grace and peace we find in Christ must never be used as an excuse to just sit and settle. It must be used as a springboard and encouragement to go and serve.

It is true: heaven awaits us.

How many will we take with us on the 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. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

—Colossians 1:6–9

I would like for us to take a look at three things in this passage.

Feed the Movement

The gospel, or good news of Jesus Christ, has been expanding and reaching people since the day it was first preached by Peter in Acts, chapter two, on the day of Pentecost. We should keep in mind that the apostle Paul was likely in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. While he was not a believer at the time, he undoubtedly saw the powerful display of the Holy Spirit.

(Paul converted to Christianity in Acts, chapter nine, after a life-altering encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus.) He experienced the virtually overwhelming reaction of the people as they flocked into the ranks of this new religion. Paul, or Saul as he was known prior to his conversion, would have been alarmed that so many were led into following this Jesus person whom he saw as a fake.

Then Saul met Jesus . . . and that changed everything.

That really is the secret of the gospel: Jesus changes everything. The good news is that, in Jesus, we can find forgiveness for everything we have ever done wrong. There is no depth of sin from which Jesus will not forgive and deliver. Then there is the work of the Holy Spirit. While Jesus offers us forgiveness, the Holy Spirit offers us power. Jesus forgives us of sin and the Holy Spirit empowers us against returning to sin. These two, forgiveness and power to change, work together to bring hope that the world simply cannot offer. The world offers only conditional surrender to sin. They offer methods and philosophies designed to either excuse sin or manage sin.

“Don’t drink too much.”

“A little lie is not so bad.”

“Everyone else is doing it, so go ahead and have some fun.”

“What does it matter whether you marry your partner or not, as long as you love each other?”

Jesus and the Holy Spirit actually offer forgiveness and freedom from sin. Everyone needs to hear this truth! The words of the apostle written 2,000 years ago are still true today: “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” (v. 6).

Our work, our calling, our command from God is to feed this movement of the gospel of peace and freedom. Everyone needs this. You cannot find a single person in the world who does not need forgiveness for something or freedom from something. Jesus offers both! We must be about the business of feeding the movement and growth of the good news of Jesus Christ!

Connect the Faithful

We find another truth at work here in verses 7 and 8. We should constantly be about the work of Epaphras, not only spreading the good news of Jesus’ forgiveness and the Holy Spirit’s power but also connecting believers together. Far too often, we think we are in this fight alone.

“I am the only Christian at my workplace.”

“My church is the only believing church around.”

“Our family is the only Christian household in our neighborhood.”

These statements are rarely true. The truth is that God has his people everywhere. Even in countries where Christianity is illegal, Christians work, live, and secretly worship the God of heaven. They may be under threat, but they are there. If

Christians exist in the most dangerous places on the planet, they are certainly at your workplace, in your neighborhood, and in other churches. Believing we are the only true Christians left is a thought based either in ignorance or arrogance. Ignorance can only be dealt with through information—learning, and telling the stories of those who follow Christ around the globe. Arrogance can only be dealt with through repentance. If you are somehow convinced that you, your group, or your church are the only true believers in your community, city, or town, then may I be direct with you?

You are being a jerk!

To dismiss every other group or church in your area that calls on the name of Christ is just wrong. Other churches may not worship the same way we do or even carry the same doctrines. If they are preaching the Word of God and doing all they can to bring people to the saving grace of the blood of Jesus, quit fighting the family. Those who lead others to the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus are our family. They are not the enemy. Trust me, we have enough real enemies without fighting each other! I heard an old evangelist once say, “If I walk into town and find an old, mangy, half-dead dog in the middle of the road, but that dog is barking the name of Jesus, I’ll support him!” I tend to agree. We need to put far less effort in fighting each other and far more effort in connecting those who are barking the name of Jesus.

Pray for the Saints

Once we have identified those who are working to claim the name of Jesus, we should pray for them constantly. The apostle Paul often repeated this thought in different words throughout his letters: “We have not stopped praying for you.” Those who follow Christ will face difficulty. The enemy of God and our souls, the devil, will not leave us alone. He is intent on destroying the work of Christ, and the only way we can wage war on him is through prayer.

When we see others doing all they know to serve and live for Christ, we should pray for them constantly. We should pray without stopping and without excuses.

I have often spent hours inside of the church I pastor walking around the sanctuary. Many of those who attend regularly tend to sit in the same general area each week. I see them. Even when I don't get to speak to them, I see them. When I am walking the sanctuary, I will, at times, intentionally look around the room. As I look at that area where they sit, I will pray for them. I will ask God to empower them, embolden them, protect them, encourage them, and use them. I have done this all throughout my ministry. While it has become more difficult and less effective as the church has grown and as we hold many services now, I still try from time to time. The point is that whatever it takes, however you can, remember to get it done, and as often as you possibly can, pray for the saints. Pray for the pastors. Pray for the believers. Pray . . . and do not stop praying!