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 Feb 23, 2020

Greetings to the Church!

Colossians 1:1-2

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (vv.1-2) (NKJV)

Beloved, when Paul wrote the book of Colossians he was, sitting in a Roman prison, writing to a church he did not start, a church he had likely never even been to before, yet he wrote with great interest and earnestness.

You see, when Paul wrote this letter to the church in Colossae the church was being assailed by two separate attacks from Satan himself. Attacked by two separate heresies.

First, the church was being attacked by the Judaizers. There were some who taught that Christ was all well and good, but in order to be fully saved, we must embrace Christ’s work and all his teachings, but also practice the Old Covenant laws. The Judaizers taught that Christ was not enough, and one needed circumcision, the festival days, the dietary laws in order to be *fully* saved.

The second heresy was the heresy of philosophy. Which, like the Judaizers, taught that one must trust in Christ, but that there must also be another revelation outside of Christ. Such as visions and divine secrets, angel worship (2:18); and asceticism (2:20-23).

What was being taught in the Colossian church could be likened to “you know that nagging sin that you strive so hard against but make no headway in? Faith in Christ is good, but it is not enough to free you from your sins” we can imagine them saying. Or, “Christ is a great start, but he is not enough for a complete salvation.” Or, “Christ gets you saved, but he will not give you fullness of knowledge, holiness, power, or joy.” Friends, this is serious heresy. For at its heart, this seeks to take our eyes off Christ and to treat him as if he is not a complete Saviour.

Brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ, set before our eyes is one of the most profound treatments of the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ. And we might say that the church today is in as much need of this message now as it was then.

One of Satan’s most effective tools for his wicked work is to take our eyes off Christ and to focus them on worldly things such as philosophy and traditions.

- So what are we to do when philosophy comes knocking on the church door?
- What are we to do when our Bible instructors teach out of the philosophy books instead of the Bible?
- Or when someone mixes in the opinions of men with the commandments of God?

The design of this whole Epistle is that (Lesson) **all hope of human salvation is to be kept in Christ alone**; therefore we must rest our faith entirely on the work of Christ, and live according to the gospel of Christ.

You do not need the Mosaic ceremonies. You do not need humanistic philosophy. What the church needs is Christ. And that’s what Paul is seeking to set before the eyes of the Colossian church and even our eyes today, that Christ is sufficient for you.

Our headings are:

1. The Will of God to the Church (v.1).
2. The Grace of God to the Church (v.2).

Point 1: The Will of God to the Church (v.1).

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother” (v.1).

It is by the will of God that he appoints officers to the church (Eph. 4), who are given to reveal the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ.

1.1 - Apostle

“Paul an Apostle” Paul, as we mentioned has likely never been to church in Colossae though he ministered extensively in the nearby city of Ephesus for two years, yet he feels compelled to write this letter after being informed of the issues in the church.

Why would Paul do this? In our culture and day if I found out about an error in the church up the street and wrote a letter to help them with their problems it would likely be received with offense. Why did Paul feel compelled to write this letter? Well he tells us in verse 1, he is a *“apostle”*.

But what is an apostle? The other day I was on Facebook and saw that two women were coming to Toronto and they were going to lead a seminar and they are both apostles... Now the term apostle only belongs to those who are truly apostles, what is it that makes someone an apostle?

First, those who are apostles are those who have had a direct call from God to preach the gospel. A great example of this is in Luke 6:13, *“And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:”* (NKJV) They had received a direct command from God to preach as his ambassadors.

Second, those who are apostles are those who have received an infallible knowledge of doctrine by the immediate inspiration of the Holy Ghost. In other words, they received direct revelation from God and wrote and spoke not their own words, but God's Word. Now this does not mean the apostles never erred, Peter himself was a Judaizer for a time. But that the Lord worked organically through the man to preach and write the infallible word of God.

Third, those who are called apostles received authority that was not restricted to one place or one church, they received authority to preach to the whole world. They had no one parish, the world was their parish.

What we see in verse 1 is that Paul says he meets this criteria. Now in verse 1 Paul calls himself an apostle. Well we know that God directly called him to preach and gave him authority over the whole world. *"But the Lord said to him (Ananias), "Go, for he (Paul) is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children[c] of Israel."* (Acts 9:15) (NKJV). God directly called Paul to preach to the whole world. We also know that Paul wrote scripture by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Galatians 1:11-12 says, *"But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ"* (NKJV). Paul by all accounts was an apostle.

The apostles were given by God to the church for the laying of the foundation of the church. They were not given for all time, they were given for the beginning of the work of laying the foundation of the church. (The church) *"having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone"* (Eph 2:20). Now, I am no builder but the last I checked once the foundation was laid you don't lay another foundation on top of the drywall...

The office of apostles ceased with the death of the last Apostle, likely John. Now the only offices that remain are deacon, elder, and pastor. But Paul was an apostle, a gift to the church, to make them mature in Christ.

1.2 - By the Will of God

Now Paul did not choose himself to be an apostle, the church did not choose him to be an apostle, but he was chosen to be an apostle *by the will of God* (v.1).

What is remarkable about the first sentence of this letter is that in Paul's apostleship by the will of God we are taught not to receive Paul's letter as Paul's take "on the Christian faith", but we are to receive it as from the word of Christ himself. We are to read the book of Colossians as if God himself were speaking.

This should be a great comfort for all of the godly. For in Paul's opening sentence to a church that is tempted to look to other means for their hope, it is asserted that the means that God has provided for the salvation of souls is the gospel.

Application:

1.

Allow me to apply this to your lives, though the gospel is preached by weak, defiled, and sinful men (like Paul, like myself, or any preacher), and the preaching of the gospel may seem insignificant as the means of salvation, yet it is the will of God that through it he may draw men and women to himself. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God"* (NKJV). Paul in one sentence cuts to the heart of the matter at hand, salvation is of the Lord.

Therefore there is no need to expect an angel from heaven, or extraordinary visions, or divine revelations that will lead you to saving faith. We only have to harken to the apostolic doctrine of Christ and him crucified, for it alone is the power of God unto salvation.

2.

This also displays to us the wonderful love of God towards his church in his sending of apostles to her. In Ephesians 4 where Paul outlines the offices of the early church age he tells us that God sent apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors, *"for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;* (vv.12-13) (NKJV). God gives the church offices to mature us in Christ. These men are given to us to point us outside of ourselves, not to the world, not to humanism, but to our perfect Saviour.

Brothers and sisters, does this truth not still apply today? Our pastors, elders, and deacons are given to us to point us to the Almighty Saviour. We don't elect deacons and elders by the knowledge of the natural law, or based on their personalities, or whether they are able to get people in the door. The most important part of these offices, when we call someone to serve as a pastor, elder, or deacon is do they point us to the Lord Jesus Christ? Do they take our eyes off of the things of this world? In order to direct us back to Jesus and his Word.

Paul was one of these officers, that was appointed by the will of God, that the church might hear of the glorious person of Christ and his sufficiency and supremacy.

Point 2: The Grace of God to the Church (v.2).

"To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (v.2).

Though the church is assaulted by many deadly heresies notice how Paul refers to those in Christ; “*saints, faithful, brethren*” Please take special notice of the author of those attributes in verse 2, “*To God’s holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers in Christ.*” They are *holy in Christ*; they are *faithful in Christ*; and they are *brethren in Christ*.

The believers in Colossae may be called these things not because of the work of their own hands, or by the purity of their bodies or churches, but because they are in Christ. In union with him by faith alone.

I would like to mention this morning that God’s church will never die. Jesus said, “*I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.* (Matt. 16:18). Yet, many denominations and churches will fall away from true religion. This is what happened to many of the churches that Paul wrote his letters to, including the Colossian church. Yet Paul writes his letter to the believers in the wayward church and says they are “*holy, faithful, brothers*”. Not by virtue of the church, not by virtue of their own hands, but by the virtue of Christ.

2.1 - Holy in Christ

The heresies that Paul was facing in this letter very much had to do with people who were teaching that there is something else needed outside of Christ in order to attain salvation and holiness.

Paul contradicts the heresy of the Judaizers and philosophers and says that Christians are holy because of Christ. The word “holy” (NIV) or “saints” (KJV) is the translation from the Greek term “holy ones”.

Now this doesn’t mean we are spotless Christians or the best of Christians, by using the word *holy* he simply means Christians. It means people whom God has called out of the world and set part for his own use.

Someone becomes set apart for God’s own use when we enter into a covenant with God through baptism, he receives us into his protection; we acknowledge him as Lord, and renounces all other lords. Satan, the world, and our flesh.

2.2 - Faithful In Christ

The word faithful here is the same word used in verse 7 to describe the *faithful* ministry of Epaphras to the Colossian church. Epaphras was the founding pastor and friend of the apostle Paul and he proved himself faithful before Paul and God by his character in pastoring the church.

Now Paul calls the believers in the Colossian church by the same title and thereby indicates that he thought his readers were Christians of proven character.

2.3 - Brethren in Christ

By Paul using the word *brothers* he refers to the divine doctrine of adoption. We are called the brethren because in Christ we all have one and the same heavenly Father. For by regeneration and faith we are adopted as the children of God himself and become the brethren of one another. Listen to what John says in the prologue of his gospel. “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name:* (Jn. 1:12) (NKJV).

We are all grafted into Christ, by faith, and quickened by the same Spirit. As natural children come from the same set of parents so we too are brethren spiritually who have received our spiritual life and spiritual origin in our heavenly Father.

2.4 - in Christ

Now the most important words to notice here is the clause upon which this whole sentence hangs, *in Christ*. Paul showers kind words upon them “*holy, faithful, brothers*” and now he shows how they have attained these endowments, and that is from the author and giver of them all, *Jesus Christ*.

First, as to our holiness: we are rightly called saints in Christ Jesus, only by the Spirit of God, only by virtue of his blood are we cleansed from our sins, and sanctified. We are called saints *in Christ* because in saving faith his righteousness and perfect holiness is imputed (given) to us and our sins laid upon him.

What of our future sins? Are we made holy simply to be defiled again next time we sin? No! Christ in the double imputation takes our sins past, present, and future. And gives us his eternal righteousness.

Second, we are called faithful in Christ Jesus. Because true faith always looks to Christ Jesus, and acknowledges him as the only mediator and Saviour of our souls.

Third, we are called brethren because Christ is our elder brother who opens the way for adoption for us. And he alone is the teacher of our faith and religion.

Hence we learn that there is no holiness, faith, or brotherhood, or any assemblance of salvation unless it be grounded in the grace of Christ. Many faiths have a rule of holiness, a faith, a brotherhood; but they have all these apart from Christ. They will be fruitless and only lead to destruction, without the perfect Saviour.

So how does one become holy, faithful, and a brethren in the Lord? “*Grace and peace to you from God our Father*”

Very quickly let us just notice the word grace. *Grace* is the undeserved favour of God, to those who merit his wrath and condemnation. We are all sinners, *all have fallen short of the glory of God*, Paul said. We all deserved to see the weight of God’s wrath

and anger against sin, but God in his grace sent his Son into the world to live and die in the place of sinners. And through Christ's death on the cross he brought *peace* between *God our Father* and sinners who trust in him.

By Christ's death sinners are fully reconciled to God. Not a quarter reconciled with God, not half reconciled with God, but fully reconciled through Christ. It is by grace we are saved. It is through his grace that we have peace with God Almighty. To suggest that there is anything less than full salvation in Christ, or that we need to pray to saints, or that there is another Apostle such as the Pope, to suggest with need philosophy and tradition, is to suggest that we must compensate for where Christ lacks. Therefore Christ, is not a perfect Saviour. But Paul, in two verses proves that Christ is the perfect Saviour and the Apostolic doctrine that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone is God's gift to ruined sinners.

Conclusion:

The concluding question that you will be left with is this; are you at peace with God through Christ's grace? I promise you if you look to the praying of saints to top off your faith, to philosophy to fill your church, or tradition to carry you to heaven you will be sorely disappointed for God is angry with these sins. The only way that brings peace between God and man is through the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ who is a complete Saviour. He offers whole salvation. Top to bottom. Beginning to end. *"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it"* (Phil. 1:6). He is fully able to save. From every sin, shortcoming, from every wicked thought and deed, he can save you from them all. Have you trusted in Christ? That is the question.

Application:

1. Maybe you are a mature Christian and you can by grace say I have fully trusted in Christ, the application is simple. Now never take your eyes off him. When someone comes and preaches another gospel of Christ and works. Christ and philosophy. Christ and... Even if an angel preached these things to you... let them be accursed. Run to Jesus, pursue him with all the strength of your body, and never take your eyes off him.
2. Let us never be so discouraged by Satan's attacks that we forget that Christ is ruling and reigning on the throne in heaven right now. He shall never be moved, and he will build his church. Though we may be discouraged by sometimes what happens in our denomination and even our own congregations, we never need to lose heart knowing that Christ will build his church. And if we are in him he will one day take us to be with him in his church triumphant.