

THE GRACE AND THE GLORY

Colossians 1: 1-8

In recent years America has become more and more a nation of tolerance. A nation with no absolutes. A nation whose attitude is, "To each his own. If it floats your boat, launch out. I'll not criticize you if you don't criticize me". And of course we have seen a graphic example of this with the Supreme Court ruling concerning homosexual rights this week. But there has been no area where tolerance is any greater than in the area of faith. Most Americans will now tell you that if you are sincere in whatever faith you choose and if you're a good person you'll make it to Heaven for sure.

Where does that leave the church of Jesus Christ? Well, it leaves us in both a precarious and an exciting position. No longer can the church expect to be the default choice of the man on the street. And most churches and most denominations, including Southern Baptists, are feeling the painful effects of this reality. The mainline denominations have been declining for years, but for the first time in the 168 year old history of the Southern Baptist Convention, five years ago our growth peaked out and we've been in decline ever since. And we are steadily becoming a denomination of grandmas and grandpas, and by God's grace we need to wake up and realize what is happening and be willing to do whatever it takes to reach a generation of young adults for Jesus Christ.

But the good news is that John 4:35 is still true, where Jesus said that the fields are white unto harvest. There are more people in our nation than ever before who are just waiting for someone to tell them the good news about Jesus. And many will respond if God's church will only take them the message. Now,

the wrapping may have to be different in the post Christian age that we are living in, but the message must ever be the same. And that message is that Jesus Christ is unique Son of God Who died on the cross for the sins of the entire world, arose from the grave to live for evermore, and that faith alone in Him alone is the only way to eternal life in Heaven.

Now, beloved, if any church boldly proclaims this message to those around them they can be certain of much opposition. For most of our nation does not know Jesus and believes it is sheer arrogance for Christians to claim to have a corner on God's plan of salvation. And they will express their dissidence loudly and violently.

But there is another danger that the church that faithfully preaches Christ can be certain of. It can be certain of an insidious, satanic attack trying to destroy the church through doctrinal heresy, through corrupting the Word of God. For if Satan cannot destroy a church by outward means he is just as satisfied to destroy it by inward means. And may I say that many Baptist churches are filled with people who do not know why they believe what they believe and are wide open targets for the lies of the devil. One of our members told me just this week of how his brother was at one time a committed church member, but somewhere somehow he got involved with a group of loving people from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. And now he is a committed Mormon.

But Satan has no schemes that are unique, and the 21st century is not the only time in which the church has faced the attack of false doctrine. It started way back in the 1st century, soon after the church was birthed, and it blossomed to the fullest in the church at Colossae. This church was being infiltrated by those who taught what we've come to call the Colossian heresy, which denied the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ. And it was

reeking such havoc in the church that Paul wrote a letter to the Colossians from his prison cell in Rome to deal with it. And today we are going to begin a study of this wonderful letter, the book of Colossians. For I want each and every one of you to be rock solid in the truth about who Jesus is, and getting a grip on what Paul teaches in Colossians will certainly do it for you. It is only four chapters, but Colossians is chocked full of precious truth about the glories of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and about how to live a life pleasing to Him. So please get your Bibles and turn to Colossians 1:1-8.

The Colossian church was only about five years old when Paul wrote to it in the year 61 or 62, so they were still a group of young Christians. And Paul had never met them, but while in prison in Rome he had gotten word about their struggles with false teaching and had a burden to help them. But before he gets into his polemic against those teachings he gives them some great words of encouragement in the verses we've just read, and I want us to look at them closely. And the first thing that jumps out at us is the marvelous **grace of God**. Look at his greeting to them in vs. 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". It is grace and grace alone that brings peace between the sinner and God.

Now, "grace" has been defined in numerous ways. Most of us have heard the acrostic that defines grace as "God's riches at Christ's expense". Another definition by a pastor friend of mine is, "The unmerited favor of an unobligated God to undeserving sinners". I like this one: grace is "God's infinite blessings freely given to sinners deserving infinite wrath". And in vs. 6 Paul says that the Colossians had heard and knew the grace of God in truth. They heard the gospel from Paul's convert Epaphras. They had

trusted Christ, experienced the grace of God and were saved. And because they were saved, Paul calls them saints.

There is such a misconception in our day about the word “saint”. When so many people think of a saint, they think of someone that has been canonized by the Catholic church and who you can pray to if you think that your prayers to Jesus aren’t getting through. Another idea of a saint is someone who lived an exemplary life, someone who never drank, swore, or gossiped, and who never missed church. I can’t tell you how many grandmothers I’ve heard about over the years who were saints.

But that is totally contrary to the biblical idea of a saint. A saint is literally a “holy one”, and according to the Bible anyone who has trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord is holy. Paul writes to the Thessalonian church in 1 Thess. 5:27, “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren”. In Heb. 3:1 the writer calls his readers “holy brethren”. And I want us to notice **two precious truths** about the holy ones at Colossae because of God’s grace. First, notice their **position**. Paul writes in vs. 2 that the Colossian Christians are “in Christ”.

Paul speaks much about believers in Jesus being “in Christ”. And beloved, there is no more precious truth in the word of God. He tells us in Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” Beloved, if you are not in Christ today you are in condemnation because of your sins. You are a heartbeat away from hell. But if you are in Christ you are a heartbeat away from Heaven, for Jesus has washed away all of your sins. You now stand before God clothed in Jesus’ righteousness, and you are spotless and precious in His eyes. Listen to Isaiah 61:10: “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness,

As a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments, And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels.”

How clean and attractive is a bride on her wedding day, with spotless white gown and sparkling jewelry? We all know there's no such thing as an ugly bride. Now, I've married a few that have come real close, but there has never been an ugly bride. And you can be sure the bride who wears the wedding dress that God has made is not ugly. She's spotless and beautiful! And likewise is her groom in his white tuxedo. And beloved, that's how God looks at you if you are “in Christ”, if you are saved. For God Himself has covered you with a robe of perfect righteousness, the righteousness of Jesus Christ His Son. And when He looks at you He does not see you in your filthy rags, but He sees Jesus. And you are under no condemnation.

So how do you come to be “in Christ”, to be clothed with His perfect righteousness? By the conviction of the Holy Spirit, God brings you to the place where you understand that you have no righteousness of your own. That you are a guilty sinner, worthy of eternal death. And that's exactly what God says about you in His Word. “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God”, and “The wages of sin is death”. And when God brings you to that pointy you must acknowledge your sin to God. Then you must agree with God that Jesus Christ was His perfect Son who paid for your sin debt on the cross and that He is the only way to God. And then you must simply trust Jesus alone to forgive your sin and give you His righteousness. No more trusting your own goodness, but trusting Christ alone. Paul said in Acts 16:31, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved”. And that is the only way to be “in Christ” and to be under no condemnation for your sin.

But this is not all of the blessing that comes with being in Christ. Look at Eph. 1: 6 for a moment. Paul says that by God's

grace we have been accepted in the Beloved. Now, the Beloved is Jesus, of course. And Paul says that God has accepted us in Jesus. But the word “accepted” is rife with meaning that we miss in the English. It is the verb form of the Greek word for grace, and it literally means, “to pursue with grace” and “to compass with favor”. Think about that! God pursues those in His Son to bless them, and God surrounds them on every side with favor. The word is used only one other time in the New Testament, when Gabriel came to Mary and said, “Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you...” (Luke 1:28). Who was more highly favored on this earth than the mother of Jesus? No one! But Paul uses the very same word for every single Christian, you and me included. For we are in Christ,

Well, just how are you and I highly favored? Paul tells us in 2 Cor. 5:17, “Therefore if any man be **in Christ**, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away, behold, all things become new”. Everything becomes new when you are in Christ. You have a new **Father**, the God of Heaven. You have a new **future**; you’re now going to Heaven. You have a new **freedom**; you are no longer a slave to sin. You have a new **family** in life, the family of God, the church. And you have a new **face**. You wear a smile and not a frown because of the joy that Jesus has put in your heart.

And as for the physical circumstances that don’t change, they still become new. You may have the same old job, but now you have a new attitude on the job. You go to work for the glory of God and God gives you a new zeal to do your best. You have the same old mean husband, but God gives you a new love and respect for him and strength to live with him for the good of your home. Friend, when you are in Jesus you are engulfed in such love and peace and power that not one thing about your life goes

untouched for the better. Oh, praise God for His grace that has placed us in Christ!

But the Colossians showed God's grace in another way. Not only in their **position**, but also in their **priority**. Look at v. 2 again. Paul addresses them as saints and faithful brethren. They were all faithful to their calling to live out their faith. Beloved, I could never say enough to you about the importance of faithfulness in the Christian life. There are many God-given qualities that bring glory to God in a believer's life. Love is the starting place. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love one toward another" (Jn. 13:35). And what about faith? Jesus said that if we abide in Him that we may ask whatever we wish and God will answer, and that He is glorified (John 15: 7-8). Paul writes that when we give to the work of the Lord we glorify God (2 Cor. 9:13). Loving, trusting, giving – all of these actions bring great glory to God when we practice them.

But what if we begin to really love our brothers and sisters in Christ, love them with a passion for three months, and then drop out of sight for the next two? What if we bombard God's throne with mountain-moving prayer for the three months and then take a prayer sabbatical for the next two? And what if we began to faithfully give to the Lord as He has commanded for three months, and then fell back to robbing Him of what is rightfully His? And the robbing part is straight from the book of Malachi.

But do you see, beloved, how important faithfulness is? Is faithfulness important in a marriage? What a senseless question! But I'm not just talking about fidelity in marriage. I'm talking about faithfulness to do the little things day by day. I have three basic responsibilities in my home. Well, four in the summertime. In the summertime it's my job to mow the grass and keep the bushes trimmed. All year round it's my job to take out the trash, empty the dishwasher, and kill the roaches. And it's important to Janice that

I'm faithful to my jobs. If I miss taking out the trash or emptying the dishwasher she is disappointed in me. If I miss a roach threatens to leave me.

Beloved, please listen carefully. Please listen with your voice recorder turned on. Who is it that has the most influence in this world? It is the Cal Ripkens and Chipper Joneses and the Bear Bryants, it's the Nelson Mandelas, it's the Billy Grahams and the George Beverly Sheas. But it is also countless saints like some of your mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers, who raised the their families to fear God and who were pillars of their churches for years and years. And if you want to make an impact for Jesus Christ in this world, you must be faithful like they were faithful. So what if you don't feel well on Sunday morning. Would you go to work on Monday? Then be faithful on Sunday! So what if you are tired of praying with little visible results? Pray without ceasing! Jesus said, "Be faithful unto death and I will give you a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

And here's the good part. Right now the Holy Spirit is praying for you to be faithful. Yes, He is. Romans 8:27 says that the Spirit makes intercession for us according to the will of God, and without a doubt God wants you to be faithful. The Holy Spirit is praying for you, and who is it that's living inside of you? It is God the Son, Jesus Christ. And Paul says that He is working in you right now to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). And what is that pleasure? That you be faithful. Oh, beloved, God's grace has supplied our every need in order that you be faithful. And by that same grace let us lay hold of His supply and be faithful, just as the Colossians were faithful.

So we've seen that the grace of God placed the Colossians in Christ and it enabled them to be faithful to Christ. But Paul not only shares about the **grace of God**, but he also speaks to them of the **glories of the gospel**. Most of us know that the word

“gospel” means “good news”. It is the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, rose again. And Paul gives the Colossians three reasons that gospel is such good news. It is good news first of all because it is **the truth**. Look at vs. 5.

In my Sunday School class this morning we learned that there are 19 major religions in the world, and 18 of them are false. They are counterfeit, their followers are deceived, and they will not inherit eternal life. But thank God we have the truth about eternity in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Speaking of himself, John writes in John 21:24, “This is the disciple who testifies of these things, and wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true”. The gospel is true.

The gospel is universal (vs. 6).

The gospel is productive (vs. 6a)