

Colossians 1:1-8 – What is the gospel?

GIVE ME JESUS

Colossae – a small church in what is now modern-day Turkey, located around 80 miles inland of Ephesus – a small town in the shadow of its nearby neighbours Laodicea and Hierapolis.

It is believed that the church was born out of Paul's 2-year teaching ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:10) when two visitors from Colossae came to believe – Epaphras mentioned here in this letter and Philemon.

A new church was started in Colossae, though Paul didn't visit himself.

Now he is writing to the church from prison – sending the message through his emissary Epaphras – who was from Colossae and who preached the gospel to them.

The central message of Colossians is the absolute supremacy and sufficiency of Jesus who is head over the church and of all creation.

The title of our series is: "Give me Jesus".

The material applies strongly to us. It answers the question of what the gospel is, and what we need to do or be to be saved.

What is the gospel?

What does genuine Christianity look like?

What is the real deal? What does it mean to be a Christian?

On holiday – market sellers – "I sell you genuine fake/I give you Asda price!"

What is the gospel?

This is particularly important as Paul writes to the Christian church in Colossae because there is considerable debate around what the genuine gospel is – what being a Christ-follower looks like – and if Jesus is enough.

In his opening, Paul references two things:

Grace.

Truth.

5-6: “the **true** message of the gospel that has come to you.”

5: “the **word of (the) truth**, the gospel”

6: “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**.”

(understood **God’s grace in all its truth**)

The gospel marries both of these perfectly.

The truth of our condition and our situation without God – the free gift of salvation – not earned or deserved by us in any way – provided through Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross.

Grace as undeserved favour

Paul summed it up this way as he wrote to the church in Ephesus:

“**God saved you by his grace when you believed**. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.” (Ephesians 2:8-9 NLT)

The gospel is about grace – it is a free gift – you don't deserve it, you can't earn it - Jesus paid for it.

Romans 3:23-24 “For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.”

Grace as power for living

2 Cor. 12:9 “Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.”

And it is also about truth – it is true – it is the word of truth.

This is what John says about Jesus:

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of **grace** and **truth.**” (John 1:14)

We need to be grace people and truth people. Not half grace and half truth. Not all grace on Mondays and all truth on Tuesdays. All grace and all truth all the time.

Kevin DeYoung:

“Jesus was **all grace.** He welcomed sinners and tax collectors and ate with them. He had compassion on the crowds when they were hungry and far from home. He welcomed the little children to come and sit on his lap-gentler and kinder than any

department store Santa. He healed the lepers, the lame, and the blind. He saved the criminal on the cross, who, in his dying breath, confessed that the dying man next to him was truly the Son of God.

And Jesus was **all truth**. He condemned many of the religious leaders of his day for being liars and hypocrites. He talked about hell more than he talked about heaven. He called all his those who would be his disciples to take up their cross daily and follow him. He prophesied judgment on Jerusalem for their unrepentant hearts. He obeyed the law, set standards, and demanded everything from his followers, even their very lives.”

Jesus came from the Father **full of grace and truth**. All grace, all truth, all the time.

This is the gospel that you have received, writes Paul to the Colossians – Epaphras brought it to you – and it is the real deal, whatever others say.

What is the effect of the gospel? What does it do?

6: It bears fruit and it grows

6: It does this locally, personally, individually, and it does it nationally, internationally, globally.

Pew Research Centre: The world's Christian population is expected to grow from 2.2 billion in 2010 to 2.9 billion in 2050.³⁹ Nearly one-in-three people worldwide (31%) are expected to be Christian at mid-century

Alpha. Testimonies. Baptisms. Spread and growth of Christianity around the world.

5: It gives us hope and a future (stored up in heaven)

A future hope, a certainty, a confidence.

Word of truth (gospel) -> heard it -> it came to you -> gives you hope

5: This hope in turn results in **faith** and **love**

The genuine gospel, genuine Christianity will always be evidenced by **faith/belief** and by **love**.

These are indicators, proof, signs, evidence of the gospel at work.

There is fruit. (Galatians 5 – fruit of the Spirit)

There are lots of other claims to spirituality – esoteric experiences – mysteries – some of these were being peddled in Colossae as they are today...

Paul lists some of these when he writes to the church in Corinth and he chisels away at the excesses and the things that people claim are important indicators of spirituality or religion and gets back to the core.

He writes that you can have:

- great oratory and words – “speaking in the tongues of men and angels”
- great knowledge and intellect and insight “prophecy, fathoming mysteries, knowledge”
- great generosity and good deeds “giving all I possess to the poor”
- great asceticism and self-discipline “surrender my body to the flames”

But all of these do not prove genuine faith/belief/experience of Jesus.

After all of this – writes Paul – **these three remain – faith, hope and love – but the greatest of these is love!**

Faith, hope and especially love are great indicators of receiving the genuine gospel/Christianity. Paul sees it in these Colossians:

3-5: “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 because we have heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of the **love you have for all God’s people**— 5 the **faith and love that spring from the hope** stored up for you in heaven”

7-8: “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.**”

We pray for you and we thank God for you because we see this in you!

This is what Jesus spoke about, as quoted in John

John 13:35

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, **if you ...**

What is the proof of being a follower of Jesus? What is the evidence – the fruit of the real gospel?

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you ...

- go to church on Sunday regularly
- pray and fast regularly
- do lots of good deeds
- try harder

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you ...
love one another.”

1 John 3:14 “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other.”

1 John 3:23 “And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.”

Paul sees it in the Colossians...if you are doubting your faith, and you are doubting our gospel, and you are doubting Epaphras who preached it to you ...

Look at your **faith** and your **love** for the saints and in the Spirit – springing from the **hope** of heaven that is in you!

“If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

How do we receive this gospel?

6: the gospel came to them

It produced fruit and grew in them from the day they heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth

7: They learned it from Epaphras, a faithful minister

They heard it. They learned it. They understood it. It came to them. Faith resulted, and love, and hope.

Romans 10:17

“**faith** comes from **hearing** the message, and the message is heard through the **word** about Christ.”

It came to them ->they heard it->they understood it->hope came into their hearts->faith and love resulted

Romans 10:14

“How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they **believe** in the one of whom they have not

heard? And how can they **hear** without someone **preaching** to them?"

Acts 19:10

Paul spent 2 years in Ephesus teaching them and sharing the good news about Jesus.

"This went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia **heard the word of the Lord.**"

ALPHA video

How will you respond and will you tell others?

Grace and truth

Hebrews 4:16 "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and **we will find grace to help us when we need it most.**"

"The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."

— Numbers 6:24-26, NIV

Faith

Hope

Love

Give me Jesus

Community group questions and discussion points:

(Don't feel obliged to work through all of these – feel free to focus on one or two key aspects of discussion and application.)

1. What are the two aspects or identifiers of the gospel that Paul identifies in verses 5 and 6?
2. What is grace and how does it apply to our life? See for example Ephesians 2:8-9 and Romans 3:23-24 and 2 Corinthians 12:9.
3. The gospel is grace AND truth. How did/does Jesus bring these two things together? (See John 1:14)
4. What is the effect of the gospel? What does it do in people's lives? (See verses 5 – 6)
5. What are the three things or characteristics that Paul identifies in the Colossian believers that show that they have received the gospel?
6. What does Jesus identify as a true characteristic of his followers? (See John 13:35 and 1 John 3:14 and 1 John 3:23).
7. How does faith come into our life? How can we grow in faith? (See Romans 10:17)
8. What is our responsibility in telling others about the gospel (see Romans 10:14)
9. Read Hebrews 4:16 together – where do you need the grace and mercy of God in your life? Pray for one another in these areas.