

Colossians 1

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[0 : 0 0] And we'll read again from verses 1 to verse 8, which is the section hopefully that we'll focus on this morning. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

Grace and peace to you from God, our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we pray for you because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints.

The faith and love that springs from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you.

All over the world, this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace and all its truth.

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.

[1 : 0 8] Let's pray for a moment. Heavenly Father, we thank you once more for your word. We thank you for the promise that you have given to us, that where your word is read, your spirit will be at work.

And we pray that he would be at work doing much for your glory this morning. In this place, in this room that we are in together, in the rooms around us, we pray for the children, Lord.

We ask that you would draw them as we pray that you would draw us. We pray for the congregations around us as well, in this community. Whatever the gospel is preached, Lord, we ask that the Holy Spirit may be active.

And Lord, that you would, in the power of the Spirit, be awakening those who are still dead in sin and have no awareness of their need of Christ. And Lord, that you would be reviving those of us who are in Christ, that we would be more zealous and more in love of the Christ who loved us and who gave himself for us.

So, hear our prayers and speak to us through your word, we pray. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. I want to start today with a question.

[2 : 3 0] Take my watch off first. Very dangerous. The clock on the wall is very much broken. So, I have no awareness of the time in front of me here. So, be encouraged that I have awareness of the time in front of me here.

I want to begin with a question. A personal question and it's a probing question and it's that question that we're sometimes asked.

Who are you? Who are you? How would you answer that question? How do you answer that question when sometimes someone will almost rudely ask you it?

Who are you? Sometimes we can be in a meeting and the person who is leading the meeting will be aware not everyone knows each other.

And so, before the meeting gets going, they'll say, well, we're just going to take a minute. We're going to go around the table and I want you to say your name, who you are, and just a wee bit about yourself.

[3 : 34] Tell us who you are. How does Paul introduce himself in this letter that we'll hopefully study over the next few weeks?

How does Paul define his identity? And that's the first point you see on the screen there. I want to consider the identity of Paul, the writer.

Identity is something I think we probably thought about less in days gone by, but we're acutely aware of it today. People give careful consideration over how they will identify and present themselves.

Some people's identity is very much wrapped up in the clothes that they wear. We can look at some people and you get an impression of who they are and what they're interested in, what makes them tick by the clothes that they wear.

Other people, it's the music that they listen to that kind of shapes them and through which they identify themselves. Some people, it's as similar as the car that they drive.

[4 : 42] It's a statement of who they are. For others, it's about how young and good-looking they can appear to be and how long they can do it for.

How successful they are in the working world and what's written on the car that they're able to give out to whoever they come into contact with. Some people, their identity is all about their people, their heritage, the place they were born, the place they were brought up in, their nationality.

Increasingly today, which wasn't a thing of the past, the identity of someone is presented and communicated through social media. So you meet someone and you think you know them.

But what you actually find in person can be very different to the identity that's presented through social media. So what is your identity?

Who are you? Well, what does Paul say? For Paul, all these things that may be so important to us in the way that we present ourselves seem to be of no consequence to Paul.

[6 : 00] How does he present himself and identify himself in Timothy? How does he regard the identity of those that he'd actually never met in Colossae?

Well, what does Paul say in verses 1 and 2? Let's listen. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother.

To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. Grace and peace to you from God, our Father. People in antiquity, they didn't sign off their letters with their name.

They signed on in their letters with their name. They immediately introduced themselves. And this was Paul's introduction. He identifies himself as an apostle of Christ.

He writes to brothers who are in Christ. My shenner, my grandfather, for those who don't know the word, he worked most of his life in Scalkey.

[7 : 11] He worked for the Cunninghams on the boats. And he was known as Archie the Engineer. I remember the first time when we lived over in Kyle's, Scalkey.

Mary went to the post office for the first time in Scalkey. And the gentleman serving her, he established fairly quickly she wasn't a tourist.

And so he started to try and figure out who she was. He didn't want to come straight out and say, who are you? But he started asking questions. And he asked a few questions. And he asked a few more.

And then he asked a few more. And then eventually he figured out who she was. And he said to her, I know who you are now. Your Archie the Engineer's granddaughter-in-law.

So he identified her by the person that they both knew. And Paul, as he identifies himself, it's not about his intellect, which was huge.

- [8 : 11] It's not about his abilities. It's not about his reputation. It's not about his education, which was unsurpassed. His identity as he understands it.
- It's not about his Roman citizenship. His identity and the identity of the Colossians that he wrote to was defined by their relationship with and to Jesus.
- They were brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul, his identity was one. He was in Christ.
- The Christ who met him on that Damascus road, remember. And who confronted him. Who knocked him on his back. As he was on a mission to kill Christians.
- Paul's identity was wrapped up in the Christ who convicted him of his sin and showed him the error of his ways. And then who saved him from his sin.
- [9 : 10] And then who sent him out as an apostle. That's where Paul's identity rested. He was in Christ. And that's his favourite phrase.
- Whether you go to Colossians or Ephesians or Corinthians or Philippians. Whichever one of Paul's letters you go to. This is the phrase that he'll use over and over and over again.
- As he speaks of himself and as he speaks to others that he recognises. He sees them as those who are in Christ. He writes to brothers who are in Christ.
- That's Paul's identity. It's not about Paul. It's about Christ. Being in Christ. And my first question to you this morning.
- As I ask myself also in preparation is. Are you in Christ? I want to cut straight to the heart of it this morning. And ask you the question.
- [10 : 21] Are you in Christ? Jesus teaches us through Paul the apostle whom he sent. That we are either in Christ.
- Or we're out of Christ. There is no middle ground. There is no safe area. Where we can sit for a while and be in a neutral state.
- We're either in Christ or out of Christ. There's no fence to sit on. Before we decide which side we're going to fall on. We're either in Christ or we're out of Christ. We're either in Christ and we're saved.
- Or we're out of Christ. And we're utterly lost. We are either in Christ and we have the sure and certain hope of heaven.
- Or we're out of Christ and we're on that road to hell. We're either in Christ and we're children of God. Or we are out of Christ.
- [11 : 27] And as Jesus puts it in John 8. We are of our father the devil. So who are you? What's your identity?
- When we were in Keswick. We met a couple. And the man was called Ken. I'd never met him before.
- None of us had. Apart from Mary's brother Neil. He popped into the congregation in Ullipo one Sunday morning. Just passing. And then they bumped into each other in Keswick. So we had a brief conversation.
- And he came back to the house we were staying. There was maybe seven or eight of us. Maybe more than that. Eleven of us were in the house. He'd only ever met Neil. And he began to speak.
- Within the first 30 seconds. He'd cut straight to this question. He turned to one of us. And he said. Are you one of us? Or are you one of them? And it was a brave question.
- [12 : 29] Because he didn't know any of us. He didn't know that the company that he was part of. Were all Christians. But he came straight out and he asked him.
- Who are you? Didn't ask us about what we did. Didn't ask us how much money we made. Didn't ask us about the clothes that we were wearing.

Didn't ask us for our Instagram identification. Or whatever social media details that we might be so interested in. He just cuts straight to it.

And he says. Are you one of us? Or are you one of them? What's your identity? That's a Paul question. Are you in Christ or are you out?

Are you saved or are you lost? Are you one of us? Or are you one of them? One of the commentators says this. Christian identity is made up of where you have come from.

[13 : 31] And where you are going. And where you are going is far more important than where you have come from. What gives me my identity? My genes? My family background?

My community? My education? My job? Obviously all these factors have a bearing, says the commentator. But what is crucial is being in Christ.

So are you in Christ? What's your identity? That's the first point. The identity of Paul.

The second point that we come to here is the opportunity for Paul. Who wrote this letter? Well, Paul makes very clear from the first verse that he writes it with his own hand.

This is from him and from Timothy in a sense who's with him. So we know who this is from. But where were they when they wrote this? What was the context from which Paul wrote?

[14 : 31] What was he doing in his life? Where was he in many senses? And the answer is Paul was in prison in Rome at this time.

Paul was not enjoying the high life of being a popular preacher who went from conference to conference and drew crowds and huge applause.

Paul drew huge crowds. But the crowds that gathered to surround Paul were crowds that didn't open their Bibles and nod their heads with approval. They're crowds that picked up stones in order to throw at him, in order to kill him.

And that was his experience. The crowds that gathered around Paul tried to kill him. And the authorities who tried to get to Paul did everything they could to shut him up.

But he wouldn't be shut up. He wouldn't stop preaching. And so he was taken and he was thrown into prison in Rome. And many would have seen that as the end of ministry.

[15 : 38] And what can you do in prison? Many would have seen that as the full stop. But for Paul, it's just a comma. But Paul, even though he was in prison, this was another opportunity.

This was just a different shape of ministry. Jesus had sent him out as an apostle. What it means, the word apostle, simply means sent one. Jesus had sent Paul out with the gospel message.

And Paul was determined in God's strength to be obedient. And he had persevered in that. Even though everyone did everything they could to try and close him down.

He could not, he would not be closed down. And now as he's in chains in prison, Paul, although he knows he cannot speak directly to the crowds anymore.

Although he knows that he cannot go with the freedom to be in Colossae. He knows that he can speak to them. And he can speak to them not with his voice, but with a pen.

[16 : 53] And so Paul, he writes. Whilst he's doing the time. He writes letters to the Ephesians.

And to the Philippians. He writes that personal letter to Philemon. He writes to them. And verse 3 makes clear.

Not only does he write to them directly, but he prays for them. Well, he can't speak to them. He can speak to God about them.

And he does that. And because Paul is obedient to God's call and writes these letters, they were able to hear from God through him. And we still are able to hear God today through Paul.

- So what for others may have seen to be a dead end for Paul, he saw it as an opportunity.
- [17 : 54] He had been sent out by Jesus. And he continued to bring that message out through whichever medium he could grasp.
- What's this got to do with us? So many thousands of years later, in such a different context.
- Well, if you are in Christ this morning, if you're a Christian, you have a great commission. You and I have been sent out into this world by Jesus.
- And we have been sent out with good news about Jesus. That he lived for us. That sinless, righteous, perfect life. That he died for us.
- That death that we deserve because of our sin. That he rose from the dead. Death could not hold him. Satan could not crush him. He rose.
- [18 : 56] He ascended to heaven. And he reigns at this time. And one day soon, he's coming back. And he will take all who are in Christ to be with him eternally.
- And he will put all who are out of Christ away for him. Eternally. That's the message that we have been given. To receive, to believe, and then to share.
- So, are we being obedient to the call that God has placed upon us? Are we praying? Did you and I pray this morning for opportunities in this day to speak to people about Jesus?
- Not about church. But about Jesus. And when God gives us these opportunities in the shop and in the sports centre.
- And as we're walking along the street. And we're on a telephone. And when we're involved in some social media chat. When we get these opportunities. Do we take them? Do we recognise them?
- [20 : 11] You know, the reality is. Sometimes the greatest opportunities that we are given. We're actually slowest to recognise. I speak for myself.
- Because sometimes they come at times and through circumstances we wouldn't have chosen. Paul actually would be far more effective as a preacher in prison.
- Amazingly. Than he would be out in the open. Because out in the open he could only speak to one little group like this. At one time. These letters that he had time now to write.
- They were going from person to person to person to person. And they're still moving. Who would have thought it? And yet that's God's design.
- That is God's will for Paul. And he recognises it. He wouldn't have chosen this. But God put it upon him.
- [21 : 17] And he saw the opportunity. The commentator Brady and McCoy. They asked this question.
- Are you in circumstances that you would not choose for yourself? What is your prison? Is it illness? Heartbreak? Redundancy?
- Bereavement? The onset of old age? Whatever your prison is. God can use it for his purposes. Just as he did for Paul.
- From prison. Paul was able to write this letter. And has blessed countless generations of believers. And God can use your prison.
- For his glory too. This was an opportunity for Paul. And sometimes our greatest opportunities come through our hardest times.
- [22 : 18] The identity of Paul. The opportunity for Paul. And the third point. The final point. Today is the authenticity of the church. That's the church to which Paul was writing.

The church. In Colossae. In the past. When. You. Were given a pound note. Used to work in the petrol station.

Just like the petrol station around the corner. And sometimes you would. Have people who would come in. And they would be. They would just look a bit dodgy. And there was a wee while in the sky. Where there was dodgy pound notes doing the rounds.

Authentic. If you wanted to. To see if a pound note was. Authentic. Or inauthentic. You would. Used to see people. At the cashier desk. And they would. They would turn around. And they would. Go out the window.

And they would. Hold up the note. And if it had the mark. Down the centre. If it had. That stripped through it. That was one of the marks of. Authenticity. And they would accept it. And if it wasn't there.

[23 : 16] It would get thrown back. As inauthentic. Now. At this point in time. I deliberately haven't gone into much history. And context.

Because we'll. Just deal with this. As we're going through the letter. But. At this time. In Colossae. There were. Questions of authenticity. Over. Over the church. Epaphras.

Who had. Planted this church. Who had taken the gospel message. To Colossae. He. Was becoming anxious. Because of. Some of the things. That he was seeing. And hearing.

Within the church. And so. Epaphras. Made this journey. Of about. Probably about. 1300 miles. To Rome. Because he wanted to. Speak to Paul.

Likely. Epaphras. Became a Christian. Through the message. Paul preached. When he was in Ephesus. And so. Epaphras. He goes to see. Paul in prison. He shares some of his concerns.

[24 : 09] About what. Was going on in the church. And then. Paul's. Writing. Here. This letter. In response. To some of the. The concerns. And Paul. In writing. He outlines some of the marks.

Of the authentic. Christian church. And the good news. For the church. In Colossae. Is that. As he hears of them. He sees. These marks. Of authenticity.

And so. He writes. In the first instance. To encourage them. There were concerns. And he would get to these concerns. But. In the first instance. From the get go. Paul wants to encourage them.

To. To. To reassure them. And to. Express his. Appreciation of them. So. He says in verse 3. We always thank God. The father of our Lord Jesus Christ. When we pray for you.

He appreciates them. He wants them. To be. Encouraged. Those who are God's people. Reading this week. About. The Scottish preacher.

[25 : 10] Alexander White. He was known. As an appreciator. One of the commentators. Warren Weerspey. Says. Of White. He loved to write postcards.

To people. Thanking them. For some kindness. Or blessing. They had brought. To his life. His messages. Often brought. A touch of encouragement. To a heart. Just when. It was needed most.

Appreciation. Says Weerspey. Is a great medicine. For the soul. It is. Isn't it? A word of. Appreciation.

A word. Of encouragement. It is like a tonic. Like medicine. For the soul. So. Let's be. Encouraged.

Here. By. The example. Of Paul. And the. Witness. Of Alexander White. From days gone by. To. To be an appreciator. To be an encourager.

[26 : 09] It is a very practical thing. Why not take five minutes today. You know. We are forever. We are forever. We are forever. Responding to things. On our devices. Why not take.

Five minutes. Of the. Hour. That you might spend. Looking at a screen today. And just write a note. Or a text. Or. Pick up a pen. Write something. To someone.

Simply to encourage them. Paul. Encouraged. The Colossians. As he hears. Of them. They were an encouragement. To him.

Because. He could see. How the gospel. Was progressing. And he could see. The authentic marks. Of Christ's church. In them. So what. Were these marks. Well. Need to. Draw us to conclusion.

Three marks. Is all we have time for. Faith. Hope. And love. They had faith. In Jesus.

[27 : 08] They had. Love. For each other. For the saints. And they had. The hope. Of heaven. And Paul.

Gives thanks. For what he hears. About them. Faith in Jesus. First of all. Verse three. 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. Now the problem. In Colossae. And we'll. We'll come on to this. As we go through this. Was that. There were those.

Not outside the church. But inside the church. And they were saying. Well. Faith not. Need not be. Exclusively. In Christ. Colossae.

As a city. It was. It was very pluralistic. It was quite a. Cosmopolitan place. There were many gods. There were many influences. And there was an agenda. That had. Had been.

[28 : 03] On the outside. That now was on the inside. It was an agenda. To import. Some of these. Other gods. Into. Into the church. Of Christ. And to set them. Alongside Jesus.

And just to. To bring a bit of. Multi-faith. Into their church. Experience. Let's. Let's not get. Too focused. On Christ. Some are saying. There are so many. Other deities.

Out there. Let's not get. Too hung up. On. On the cross. That you keep. Talking about. Surely there's. Other ways. To be saved. And Paul. Is encouraged. To hear. That the saints. In Colossae.

Although they were. Coming under that. Pressure. They were. Withstanding it. They were. Having none of it. They would not. Give in. To the pressure. To look to the right. Or to the left. They fixed their eyes.

Upon Jesus. Their faith. Was in Christ. Alone. Now today. We live in. The same kind of culture. We live in.

[28 : 57] A culture. Where. There are the same. Pressures. In the world. And we know. And we see. That these. Same pressures.

They. Creep. Into the church. As long as you have. Faith people. Same. As long as you. Believe.

What you believe. Let's not get. Too hung up on that. But as long as you have. Something that. That settles you. Inside. That you. You're happy with. As long as you. Have faith. That's what's important.

But that's not. What's important. Everyone has. Faith. Some people's. Faith. Is simply. In themselves.

And their position. Of having no faith. Faith. Faith. In itself. Is not enough.

[29 : 53] Saving faith. Must be in Jesus. Spurgeon. Emphasize. The importance. Of this. By. By telling a story.

He tells a story. About. Two men. Who. Were caught. In. The rapids. On a boat. And. They were being swept.

Downstream. At high speed. And there was a crushing. Waterfall. Just. A little further. Downstream. And. Two men. At the. Side of the. The bank. Saw the danger.

That these. Men were in. They shouted. To them. From the side. And they threw a rope. To these men. In the boat. To try and save them. One of the men.

Grasped the rope. He hung on to it. And he was pulled. By. The men in the bank. To the safety of the shore. The other man in the boat. As he. Was being swept.

[30 : 48] Down the stream. He saw the rope. But he also saw. A big substantial log. And he thought. That looks steadier. He grabbed hold of that. And he was never seen again.

Swept downstream. And lost. Both. Men. Said. Spursion. They had. Faith. They had faith. In the object.

That they grasped. But only one of the men. Was saved. By the object. That they grasped. Saving faith.

Is in Jesus. No other name. No other religion. No other philosophy. No other way.

Only Christ. Can save. Only Christ. Only Christ. Can take. Our sin away. Through what he has done. On the cross. Only Christ.

[31 : 45] Can give us. The assurance. Of being taken. To the father. And given. Eternal life. And the Colossians. And the Colossians. Their faith. Was in Jesus. And that.

Encouraged Paul. Because they knew. They knew. They were safe. Their faith. Was in Jesus. And the question. For us is. Where is your faith.

This morning. Is your faith. In Christ. Christ. Have you asked him. To forgive your sin. Have you asked him. To come into your life. Have you asked him.

To save you. Are you part. Of the church. Of Christ. We can sit. In these chairs. Or we can sit. In pews. In any.

Part of the world. Unless. We have put. Our faith. In Christ. We are lost. To have you.

[32 : 38] Put your faith. In Christ. They have faith. In Jesus. They have love. For all. The saints. We always thank God. Verse 3. Our father. 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. The saints. In Keswick.

Where we were. On holiday. For one of the weeks. There's a big banner. Across the. The opening. Entrance. And. It's the same banner. That's been there. For the 143 years. That Keswick. Has.

Been going for. I'm sure. It's a different banner. But it's the same verse. And what it says. Across the top. Is. All one. In. Christ. Jesus. And that was the banner.

On the. Thence. Outside of the church. In Colossae. All one. In Christ. Jesus. There were no cliques. In this church. Like a.

[33 : 38] A magnet. God. Had drawn them. To himself. And God. Was drawing. Them. To each other. Because they were all. In Christ. And. That's the thing. That was noticed.

In the first century. That's what. Marked out the church. In the first century. What. The historians say. That the world said. About the church. Was. See how they love each other. It's one of the marks.

Of the church. If you have faith. In Christ. You will have love. For the saints. You will sometimes. Quarrel with them. You will sometimes. Struggle with them. But you will still love them. It's the mark.

Of the authentic. Christian church. That we will. Love each other. And it's not a sentimental. Slushy love. Where we're. All hugs and kisses. At the door. Thankfully. But this is a sacrificial.

Serving love. Where we look out. For each other. We care for each other. We pray for each other. And the unity.

[34 : 40] That they had. That was so. Tight. Was a. A unity. That's not divorced. From the truth of the gospel. But it was. Cemented. In the truth of the gospel. It's anchored. To biblical truth. It's not that they said. Let's put the bible aside. And just be friends together. No. They said. The bible must be central. Christ must be central. Because. He's the one. That gives us the love.

And the unity. That. We need to have. Faith in Jesus. Love for all the saints. Finally.

Hope. Of. Heaven. 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 the saints. The faith. And love. That springs. From the hope. That is stored up. For you. In heaven.

[35 : 37] And that's the last thing. That's the final mark here. That we have time. To look at. If we are. In Christ. We have the hope.

Of heaven. If we are in Christ. We don't just live. For the here and now. We know.

As Hebrews 13. 14. Says. That we have no. Continuing city here. But we seek one. To come. We have the hope.

Of that celestial city. As. John Bunyan. Put it. We have. A hope. Which transforms. The way.

You look at life. And we have a hope. That transforms. The way. That we look at death. I'll finish with this.

[36 : 33] Today. We're conscious. Of Francie. Not being here. For those who are not. In the fellowship. Um. We're visiting here today. Uh.

Francine was one of our. Our number. And uh. She. Died there about a week and a half ago. And I can still see her. She would sit over there. And she would smile.

Uh. With such warmth. And she was so responsive. To the gospel message. Uh. She was so encouraging. At the door. And in our home. And uh.

We'll miss her. We'll miss her warm smile. We'll miss her obvious love. For all the saints. She has passed now.

From time. Into eternity. And we. Feel that sense of loss. As we grieve. As a fellowship.

[37 : 28] But we grieve. As people. As those who have no hope. We grieve.

As those. Who have. Eternal hope. Because. We could see. And we could hear. So often. From her. That her faith. Was in. Jesus. when Mary and I heard actually about Francine's passing we were in the tent in Keswick 3,000 people there all singing and as the text came through and Mary passed it to me the verse of the hymn that we were singing goes like this when I stand in glory I will see his face and there I'll serve my king forever in that holy place thank you oh my father for sending us your son and leaving your spirit till the work on earth is done that's the Christian hope and it's sure and it's certain because it's in Christ are you in Christ is this your hope let's pray heavenly father we thank you for your word to us which is as relevant to our lives and our culture and our church fellowship as it was to the church in Colossae so many years ago we pray that you would have been speaking to us and that you would continue to speak to us as we go from here we pray Lord that as we go from this building we would go knowing and assured of the fact that we are in Christ we pray that there would be no one who would walk out of this place today knowing that they have not yet asked for forgiveness of sin knowing that they have not yet asked for that grace of Jesus we pray that there would be no one going from here today who would not yet have peace with God and the assurance of eternal life we thank you that everything that was needed to to pay the price for this to be done for us has been done by Christ and we thank you that the offer of the gospel goes out this morning as your word is read so we pray that you would draw us and that we would respond by putting our faith in Jesus and we ask these things in Jesus name

Amen we'll sing to conclude and we'll sing Mission Praise 673 the hymn that I just quoted 673 there is a Redeemer Jesus God's own Son precious Lamb of God Messiah Holy One thank you oh my Father for giving us your Son and leaving your Spirit till the work on earth is done