

Power of the Gospel

February 16, 2025

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Colossians 1:1-8

Session Outline

1. Introduction (Colossians 1:1-2)
2. Thankfulness (Colossians 1:3)
3. Bearing Fruit (Colossians 1:4-8)

Theological Theme

The gospel message is one of grace, peace, and hope. It is the most powerful message ever proclaimed.

Call to Action

The gospel is straight forward enough to easily understand but deep enough to explore the rest of our lives. As we meditate on the gospel and grow in understanding all it entails, we are sanctified and continue to bear fruit.



Leader Guide

Power of the Gospel

Introduction

Have you ever seen someone skip a stone along the water? Can you picture it? When you choose a stone of the right shape and size and toss it at the right angle with the right force, it skips far along the surface of the water several times before it sinks. Each time it hits the surface, it creates ripples that expand, going wider and wider as they spread in the water. When we walk in God's plan for our lives, the gospel spreads from us like the ripples from a well-skipped stone.

Today, we will kick off our study of Colossians by learning about the ripple effect the gospel had in the first century. We'll see how the disciples of the early church took the Great Commission seriously and sought the growth of the gospel message and spiritual fruit. We'll explore the power of the gospel and some of the aspects of Paul's strategic and intentional ministry that we can implement in our lives today.

- ❓ How did you learn the gospel? How have you seen the gospel grow in our community?
- ❓ In today's reading, we'll see an example of how the gospel spread to new people thanks to the ministry of early church disciples. Can you think of a modern-day example of someone going out and spreading the good news of the gospel similarly?

Session Summary


As a result of God's work through Epaphras and his serious devotion to the Great Commission, the gospel bore fruit in Colossae and produced a body of believers characterized by faith and love. Having heard of the faithfulness of the Colossian church from Epaphras, Paul wrote the letter of Colossians to encourage and educate the believers there. In today's passage, Paul greeted the Colossian believers and made the connection to Epaphras while painting an encouraging picture of how the Lord was working in the early church. We'll see the power of the gospel, the importance of prayer, and explore what can happen when we get intentional about sharing the gospel.


1. Introduction (Colossians 1:1-2)

In the opening of Colossians, we can identify the author and audience. Paul's son in ministry, Timothy, was also mentioned.

Once a great city, Colossae had dwindled to a small country village because of the success of new trade routes by the time Paul wrote his letter to the believers. Colossae is located about 120 miles east of Ephesus.¹ The Colossians had a problem with false teaching, possibly influenced by local culture and Jewish customs, and Paul sought to correct these heretical teachings through this epistle.² Scholars date this epistle as having been written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment around AD 60.³

In verse 1, Paul identified himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by God's will." With this establishment of his received authority and divine appointment, the theological contents of his letter carried more weight for his Colossian audience. Paul often strategically wrote his letters for the sake of the spread of the gospel in his ministry, and God used the letters to reach and convert many unbelievers. Paul went on to greet the saints, or Christians, in the Colossian church with his customary greeting of grace and peace.

 What does grace mean? What does peace mean?

 Why might Paul so frequently use these greetings in his writings? Why are these appropriate messages for the church in all times?

The gospel message, which Paul proclaimed so widely and thoroughly, is one of grace and peace. In a biblical context, grace can be understood as God giving us things we don't deserve. In view of the gospel, we have been saved by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8). In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Paul taught that God's grace is sufficient for us even when we are in discouraging or difficult circumstances, which the early church often experienced. John 1:14 records that the Lord is "full of grace and truth," and Hebrews 4:16 describes His throne as one of grace. Grace is an ever-present, ever-needed gift to us as believers.

Peace, likewise, is a gift from the Lord, cultivated in all believers thanks to the presence of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), and in John 16:33, He taught that we can have peace in Him despite whatever sufferings we face. Remember, the early church was rife with suffering. Jesus is our peace (Ephesians 2:14), and apart from Him we can't know peace truly or fully.

Greeting

Paul followed a standard form of salutation, thanksgiving, and prayer in the first part of the letter. It is perhaps longer than some of his other letters because Paul was not personally acquainted with the people of Colossae. The salutation carried greetings from both Paul and Timothy. Words of high commendation and thanksgiving follow for the well-being and spiritual health of the Christian community at Colossae.

These are powerful blessings in the life of the believer, and Paul wanted first-century believers continue to receive them from the Lord.

- ❓ Application: What does Paul's example teach us about how we should approach our call to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19-20)?

2. Thankfulness (Colossians 1:3)

Verse 3 contains another familiar refrain in Paul's writing: thankfulness in prayer. Paul made a similar greeting in many of his letters, including to:

- The Ephesian Church: "I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers" (Ephesians 1:16).
- The Church at Philippi: "I give thanks to my God for every remembrance of you, always praying with joy for all of you in my every prayer." (Philippians 1:2-4, author's paraphrase)
- The Thessalonians: "We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you constantly in our prayers" (1 Thessalonians 1:2).

These verses give us insight into Paul's prayer life: It was active, full of thankfulness, and clearly an important hallmark of his ministry. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, he taught to "pray constantly," and in Romans, he wrote to "be persistent in prayer" (Romans 12:12). He even asked for prayer himself in Ephesians 6:19-20. Paul knew he—and all other believers—needed prayer. Paul, who never actually met the Colossian congregation in person, had been praying for the church at Colossae and thanking God for them.


- ❓ Why do you think Paul included this note of his thankful prayer so early and often in his letters?
- ❓ Considering Paul never met the Colossians, why do you think he thought it was important to pray for them?

Prayer has become a neglected discipline in our culture, but Paul's teachings tell us that it was clearly a high priority for him. Jesus also modeled prayer as a way of life, as He regularly made time to be alone with God in prayer during His earthly ministry and taught us to pray without giving up (Luke 5:16; 18:1).


Scripture generally places a high emphasis on the importance of prayer, and we see that modeled throughout the Bible by people like Moses, Hannah, David, Daniel, and the apostles.

- ❓ Application: What can we learn and apply from Paul's approach to prayer?

3. Bearing Fruit (Colossians 1:4-8)

-  What do you think Paul meant when he said the gospel is “bearing fruit” and “growing”? What does this look like today?

This passage paints a picture of the spread of the gospel in the early church. Paul often wrote to churches he personally planted. In this case, he noted that the Colossian church heard the gospel from Epaphras rather than Paul himself. Paul called Epaphras “a fellow servant” and “faithful minister of Christ” (v. 7). To receive such accolades from Paul was a high endorsement.

-  What does Epaphras's example teach us about how we could share the gospel with others? Why is it important to utilize support from others in this goal?

In connection to the spread of the gospel in Colossae, Paul wrote a letter that has helped teach generations upon generations of believers what it means to follow Jesus. The Lord worked so mightily through the gospel spreading to this small town. Even when human minds label something as unworthy of our attention, God can work for His glory and good.

Epaphras's evangelism also produced a body of believers who Paul characterized by their faith and love (v. 4). We know these characteristics to be a true mark of knowing and following Jesus because these are fruits of the Holy Spirit working in our lives (Galatians 5:22-23). They also exemplify Jesus's teaching from John 13:35: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” The Colossians had received the true gospel, and the Lord was evident and working.

We mentioned earlier that the gospel is one of grace and peace, and Paul wrote in verse 6 that as we learn and grow in the gospel, we come to appreciate God's grace toward us more deeply. In verse 5, Paul taught that when we accept and follow the gospel message, we have a certain hope in heaven. As he taught elsewhere, Jesus is our hope (1 Timothy 1:1). This was an especially precious promise for the early church, who endured much persecution.

As demonstrated by Epaphras's faithful service to the Colossae population, Paul wrote that the gospel was “bearing fruit and growing all over the world” (v. 6). In John 15, Jesus taught that those in true relationship with Him would produce fruit (John 15:1-4).

We get to see what this looks like when we read the New Testament. We have a great example in the way that the Lord worked through Epaphras for the sake of the Colossians. Paul's letter tells us that the truth of the

gospel was spreading. God was working in powerful ways through His servants like Paul, Timothy, and Epaphras. He continues to work through His church in this way today.



Application: What does this teach us about the possible impact we can have when we act as faithful ministers for Jesus as we spread the gospel?

Conclusion

The gospel message is one of grace and peace. The gift of salvation we receive is through God's grace, a gift He gives us even when we don't deserve it and could never earn it. We naturally tap into the calm assurance of the Holy Spirit's peace when we deepen our understanding of the gospel and Scripture. We grow in our relationship with the Lord over time—a life-long process called sanctification that every believer experiences. So, what does this mean for us in 2025? Like the apostle Paul before us, we should understand and appreciate what powerful gifts grace and peace are and desire these continued blessings from the Lord for others—even those who are strangers to us.

Prayer and its importance are modeled throughout the pages of Scripture. Jesus prioritized extensive and frequent quiet time to pray. Paul, ever a faithful servant of the Lord, followed His example. He wrote of his dedication to prayer for the body of believers regularly in his epistles, teaching us to pray continuously. In the case of the Colossian church, Paul even dedicated time to pray and thank the Lord for this body of believers he had never met. The spiritual discipline of prayer is one that we often see fall by the wayside in our practices, but this should always be a priority in our walk with the Lord. When we adopt a dedicated attitude toward the practice of prayer, we mold our lives to look more like Jesus's, thus deepening our relationship with Him.

Jesus taught that He is the true vine, and we are the branches, bearing fruit through relationship with Him. The record of the early church that we see in the New Testament provides a great example of what it looks like to bear fruit. Paul wrote in Colossians that the gospel bore fruit and grew all over, as the Lord intended through His command of the Great Commission. In the case of the Colossian church, the Lord worked through Epaphras to share the gospel with the people of Colossae and eventually bring about the writing of the letter of Colossians that is still shaping disciples of Jesus today. Today's text in Colossians shows us the power of the gospel, and invites us to consider how our family, friends, and community might be blessed if we were to share similarly. When we share the love and truth of Jesus with those in our lives, God starts a ripple effect for the gospel for His glory.

- ❓ What are some small steps you can take this week to put more of a focus on prayer in your life?
- ❓ How do you think God wants to use you to “bear fruit” for the gospel in our community? How can we minister together with this goal?
- ❓ Who is God calling you to share the gospel with this week? How will you respond?

Prayer of Response

Close in prayer thanking God for the power of the gospel and His purpose to make the gospel known throughout the world.

Memory Verse

You have already heard about this hope in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. It is bearing fruit and growing all over the world, just as it has among you since the day you heard it and came to truly appreciate God's grace. —Colossians 1:5b-6

Additional Resources

- *The Letter to the Colossians and to Philemon* by Douglas Moo
- *Be Complete* by Warren Wiersbe
- *Philippians, Colossians, & Philemon* by Richard Melick

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Colossians

Purpose

Paul wrote to counter the “Colossian heresy” that he considered an affront to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The false teaching is identified as a “philosophy” (2:8), presumably drawn from some Hellenistic traditions as indicated by the references to “his fullness” (1:19); the “elements of the world” (Gk *stoicheia*, 2:8, 20); “wisdom” (2:3, 23); and “self-made religion” (2:23). In addition, the false teaching contained Jewish elements such as circumcision (2:11; 3:11); “human tradition” (2:8); Sabbath observance, food regulations, festival participation (2:16); the “worship of angels” together with “access to a visionary realm” (2:18); and harsh human regulations (2:21–23). Paul addressed this syncretistic philosophy by setting forth a proper understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ and by noting appropriate implications for Christian conduct.

Author

The Apostle Paul is identified as the author of Colossians (1:1; 4:18). The church fathers unreservedly endorsed Pauline authorship (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 3.14.1; Tertullian, *De Praescr. Haer.*, 7; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.*, 1.1; cp. Justin, *Dialogue*, 85.2; 138.2). A close reading of Colossians reveals a considerable number of lexical, grammatical, and theological similarities with the other Pauline writings (1:9, 26; 2:11–14, 16, 20–21; 3:1, 3, 5–17). Also favoring the authenticity of Colossians as a letter of Paul is its close connection with Philemon, an epistle widely regarded as Pauline.

Setting

During his ministry in Ephesus (Ac 19:10), Paul sent Epaphras to spread the gospel in the Lycus Valley. Epaphras subsequently established the church at Colossae (1:7; 4:12–13). The city’s population consisted mostly of Phrygians and Greeks, but it also included a significant number of Jews. The church, likewise, was mostly composed of Gentiles (1:21, 27; 2:13), but it also had Jewish members (2:11, 16, 18, 21; 3:11). When Epaphras (Phm 23) informed Paul of certain heretical teachings that had spread there, Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians as a theological antidote.

Special Features

Paul’s letter to the church at Colossae is one of the prison letters (along with Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). Paul’s desire with this letter was to correct the false teachings that were cropping up in the church. In doing so, Paul presented a clear picture of Jesus Christ as supreme Lord of the universe, head of the church, and the only one through whom forgiveness is possible.

Extended Commentary

Colossians 1:1-8

1:1 Paul followed the customary format for epistolary greetings by introducing himself as the author and by identifying himself as an apostle belonging to Christ Jesus by God's will.

1:2 Faithful should probably be understood as "believing." They are believers.

1:3–8 Paul offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the Colossian believers. In the original Greek, the prayer consists of a single sentence modifying the phrase, "we always thank God" (v. 3).

1:3 Paul's use of we probably included Timothy (v. 1) and possibly others (4:7–14). Paul expressed the frequency of his thanksgiving with the adverb always.

1:4 The reason for Paul's thanksgiving is rooted in reports he had heard about the Colossians' faith in Christ Jesus and love ... for all the saints, which are the hallmarks of genuine Christianity.

1:5–6 The basis of the Colossian believers' faith and love is that they had a hope reserved for them in heaven. The triad of faith, love, and hope is a familiar Pauline formula (Rm 5:1–5; Gl 5:5–6; Eph 1:15; 4:2–5; 1Th 1:3; 2Th 1:3; Phm 5). This hope was the result of having heard and received the word of truth or more specifically, the gospel. Paul emphasized the power and effectiveness of the gospel by tracking its expansion, twice mentioning how the Colossians accepted the truth of the gospel.

1:7–8 Paul did not start the church at Colossae and had not yet visited there, so it was through Epaphras that he had learned of their condition. He endorsed Epaphras as a beloved fellow servant and a faithful minister (cp. 2:1; 4:12–13; Phm 23).⁴

References

1. Clinton E. Arnold, "Plans Underway to Excavate Colossae," Biola University: The Good Book Blog, February 03, 2022, <https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2022/plans-underway-to-excavate-colossae>.
2. Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Colossians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1891.
3. Köstenberger, 1892.
4. Köstenberger, 1894.