

A Life that Pleases Christ

Colossians 1:1-14

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Are you a “pleaser”? I struggle with wanting to please people. Of course we all know you can’t please everyone, but I want to please as many as I can; and it is wrong. It hurts my heart when someone leaves the church so I want to do something to please them, but usually I can’t satisfy them, and most of the time I should not be trying to please them anyway.

It’s hard to please even one person. How many of you have hit a point of frustration in trying to please your spouse or a boss or a teacher? Now let’s give ourselves some slack here. Some of that frustration is likely the other person’s fault. Except of course it is never my wife’s fault!

The truth is, there is only one person you really need to please, and you really do need to please Him. We should not be people-pleasers but Christ-pleasers. And yet, how do you please Him? What pleases Christ? Our passage today answers that question and tells us how to do what pleases Christ.

Today we are starting our much-anticipated series: Experiencing Christ, a journey through Colossians. Most of us have signed up to join Life Groups, small groups that will discuss how the sermons apply to daily life, going deeper. If you have not joined a Life Group, this is the last week. Fill out the green connection form; go to a kiosk in Main Street right after the service. They are starting up this week. My Life Group meets tonight and I can’t wait to be there.

Right now I want to commission all of our Life Group leaders for this Fall. If you are leading or helping lead a Life Group, will you please stand in all our venues: traditions, Live, Revolution and Video Café.

PRAYER of commissioning

Remember, as part of the Experiencing Christ journey, we have written a personal Bible study on Colossians for you. It facilitates a daily study time Colossians for about 15 minutes. Pick one up in Main Street.

Open your Bibles to Colossians. As a city, Colossae was a minor town. It is located on the Lycus river in modern day Turkey about 110 miles east of Ephesus and was overshadowed by its rich neighbors Laodicea and Hierapolis [MAP]. Paul wrote to the Colossians from prison to help them grasp ever more firmly who Christ is. Colossians will show you the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ as the fullness of God. It will fortify your spiritual confidence in Christ. Let's start at the beginning. In all venues please stand for the reading of God's Word.

Chapter one, verses 1 to 14.

"Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. 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 spring 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 in 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. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

What a rich start. These fourteen verses fall into three sections: an introduction, a thanks and a prayer. Paul introduces himself and his recipients. His introduction led me ask how we introduce ourselves.

Introduce yourself – what's on your card?

In the ancient world introductions to letters had a function similar to that of business cards in today's professional world. Business cards make introductions and help to establish relationships.

Picture Paul's business card: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God. [SLIDE] Though we are not apostles in the technical sense that Paul was, we are sent by God as His messengers. Fundamentally Paul identifies himself with Christ Jesus. Those two words, that name, signal the heart of Colossians. It is about Christ Jesus.

In the introduction Paul includes Timothy, his brother. Paul never worked alone, but always on a team, a team he saw as family. That's the way I see our church. We are all on God's team which is His family. We are brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul and Timothy write to people they identify as holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse. As you learned in the Bible Study we have provided, the word "holy" means "dedicated". Picture their business cards: "dedicated to Christ in Colosse." Notice the dual citizenship Where are the believers? They are both in Christ – their spiritual location and in Colosse, their physical location, where they live out their identity as Christ-followers. Today, where are you? How would Paul write to you? "Holy and faithful brothers and sisters of McKinney Fellowship in Christ in Collin County."

Being in Christ gives us our most central identity above job (what do you do?), hobby, race, nationality and gender. The radical gospel sweeps away such divisions in Christ so that He is our primary identity. In addition to your current business cards, if you made an identity card for yourself, call it a passion card, what would it say? Sometime, you might want to make one.

Paul, the apostle of Christ, blesses the brothers in Christ with grace and peace. Grace expresses God's amazing generosity to us. Peace, a rich, ancient Jewish greeting from the Hebrew *Shalom*, communicates not just inner personal peace but fullness of well-being and prosperity for the whole community.

From his introduction, Paul moves to thanks. He models a great way to start a conversation; appreciate the other person or people first. In this case Paul is thanking God for what He has done in the lives of the Colossians by the power of the Gospel.

Give Thanks to God

Notice his thanksgiving is in the form of prayer. Paul does not pray haphazardly or only when the mood strikes him, but says he “always” prays which probably means he keeps regular hours of prayer. He is faithful to intercede for the Colossians. We should faithfully pray for each other in our Life Groups.

For what does Paul thank God? He thanks God for two main realities.

First Paul thanks God

For the God-enabled triad of virtues: Faith, love and hope

Most of Paul’s letters mention these three virtues. Faith, love and hope are vital measures of Christian maturity for any person or church. Faith in Christ Jesus is the starting place. We cannot please Christ without believing in Him. Faith is a whole-person response to God based on truth choosing to trust in Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ is embodied in love for others. Faith in God always shows itself in love for others. Love is faith made visible. Notice the love is for all the saints; it is not restricted to those with whom one has a natural affinity. It is a beautiful thing when you see in the Church love for all the saints—not just for some, not just for the lovable, but all. This is what made the early church so amazing and so enticing. Barbarian, Roman citizen, slave and free, male and female, Jew and Greek, learned and unschooled joined hands and sat down at one table. (From Pp 18)

Unlike in some other letters where the order of the virtues is faith, hope and love, in Colossians Paul ends with hope. In fact he sees faith and love stemming from our hope stored up in heaven. Here by “hope” he is not referring to a subjective feeling, but to our objective reality; “hope” stands for the thing hoped for. Hope is the future blessings of our salvation. When we grasp the firm reality of the riches stored up for us in heaven we are motivated to faith and love. Future hope confirms and strengthens faith and love in the present.

Look at verse 5. That hope stored up in heaven came from the word of truth, the Gospel, that came to the Colossians and has come to us. This thought leads Paul to the second item for which he gives thanks,

For the Gospel’s transforming power: Globally, locally and personally

The gospel is word of truth opposed to the false teaching going around Colosse. Paul personifies the gospel as a force at work in the world bearing fruit among those who receive it. Its truth is confirmed in its world-wide impact. Today we know that the Gospel has and is bearing fruit on every continent among every kind of people through every century. Its universal effectiveness demonstrates its truth. Not only is it proving powerful around the world, but locally right in Colosse it is changing lives since the day they heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth.

You cannot please Christ without personally understanding the transforming power of the gospel in all its truth. Comedian Bob Hope expressed the general American mindset with this crack: "I do benefits for all religions—I'd hate to blow the hereafter on a technicality." Essentially many today say, "My truth is just as good as your truth if it works for me." Pp. 56 And yet that is not so. A friend of mine has a diesel truck. His wife filled the tank with gasoline. Her intentions were good, but it did not work. Truth by definition is narrow. Jesus Christ is the way and the truth for all people. Anyone who believes in Him is saved. That is the true Gospel message. If you put something other than Jesus in your heart, it will not work. If you want to please Christ, you must personally trust in Him alone to save you.

Paul mentions one person who brought the truth of the Gospel to the Colossians. This is the only thanksgiving section in Paul's letters that mentions the name of a person. Epaphras is quite a guy. We will learn more about him later. As a native of Colosse he is the one from whom they learned about God's gracious gospel. Notice how Paul identifies Epaphras. What's on his card? "Our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf." Could that go on your card? "fellow servant, faithful minister of Christ."

Before he moves from his thanks to his prayer, Paul mentions one last important point: Epaphras told us of your love in the Spirit. Love is the essence of pleasing Christ and it can only come from the power of the Spirit.

Paul's prayer that starts in verse 9 repeats several themes, words and phrases from his thanks in verses three to eight showing the unity of this section. To please Christ we must pray.

Pray

Again Paul mentions his continual prayer. He has not stopped praying for them. We don't know whether Paul followed the Jewish practice of prayer three times a day or perhaps used his hours of travel time to pray. His prayer was not sporadic, but faithful. His teaching to the Colossians comes in the context of prayer. Paul's ministry is not his idea. It is part of God's plan. Prayer brings the assurance that his ministry is being used within God's overall plan, and consequently his confidence which, outside this context, could sound like arrogance, is a confidence of God-directed effort.

A vital component of our church is our prayer for each other. We will only move forward for God on our knees. We are only going to please Christ if we are praying for ourselves and for each other. We started this church on prayer and we will only move forward in prayer. I urge you to pray faithfully in your Life Groups. Use Paul's prayer as a model. We have other avenues for prayer listed on the back of your sermon outline. I encourage you to take part in what you can.

Today I specifically call you to pray faithfully for me and the other elders as we consider our direction for the next ten years. Next March we will celebrate our 10th anniversary. What does God have for us in the next 10 years? What faith-steps is He leading us to take and when?

Notice the content of Paul's prayer. I find it strikingly different from many of our prayers. First he started his prayer with thanksgiving which many of us don't do as often as we should. But look at the request he makes. He does not ask for physical health, financial assistance or good grades. Not that we should not pray for those; we should, but could we have missed even more significant requests if we really want to please Christ?

Look at Paul's request in verses 9-10: *asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.* In short his request is

Request: to know His truth so you can please Him

Too often we wait to pray for each other until there is a problem. But what about this prayer that we all need all the time? Have you prayed for yourself or for a friend to be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual

wisdom and understanding so they will live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way?

The concept of “fullness” runs through Colossians. Look for it in your reading. In this first occurrence, we are to pray to be filled with the knowledge of His will which refers not to God’s hidden sovereign will, but to His revealed will which is the truth of the Word of God. The “knowledge of His will” is understanding God’s truth in its fullness; at the deepest level it is to know God Himself. Right knowledge leads to right behavior. Pp 46

We need to know how to live out God’s truth in our daily lives. That’s where spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding come to play. The Spirit of God opens our eyes with spiritual wisdom to see how to follow God’s truth in daily life. The Spirit helps us develop the mind of Christ as we study His Word.

You cannot please Christ without understanding God’s will which you discover in God’s Word. You find spiritual wisdom by prayerfully studying God’s Word. That’s why the personal Bible study on Colossians and the Life Group studies are so important. Digging into God’s Word on your own and with others is how you will know God’s will through spiritual wisdom and understanding, then you can live a life that pleases Christ.

There is no conceivable way for anyone to reach verse 10 except through verse 9. Pp 38. You cannot live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way without knowing His will. To live worthy of the Lord is another way of saying to please Him in every way. In a sense this prayer request is the essence of life. At the end of the day, we should live to please Christ. Period. He is the only One we really need to please, and we really do need to please Him.

What does it look like to please Christ? What is pleasing to Him? Paul gives us four characteristics of “a life that is worthy of the Lord and that seeks to please him in everything” He uses four Greek participles to give us the result of aiming to please Christ.

Result: **so you will increasingly . . .**

If we are pleasing Christ we will be increasing in four areas: action, knowledge, power and gratitude. First, we will be bearing fruit in every good work. We will increasingly

Do good works

Christianity should be visible. True faith evidences itself in good works. An abundant harvest of good fruit reveals that a fruit tree is healthy. An abundant harvest of good works reveals the spiritual health of a Christian. An aspect of pleasing Christ is action, doing good works. And the more we serve Him the more we will know Him which is the second characteristic of pleasing Christ. If we are pleasing Christ we will increasingly

Deepen in knowing God

This knowledge is more than factual. It is personal and experiential. To please Christ you must know Christ. Our faith rests not on ignorance, but on knowledge. Truth is crucial to growing in Christ. Knowing the true God protects us from false teaching, which was vital for the Colossians who as we are today were assaulted with crazy ideas. Pleasing Christ is not only active, but also reflective. It is both doing good works actively and knowing God deeply. The more you know God the more you want to do good works and the more good works you do, the more you see who He really is. And so it goes in a spiral onward and upward to pleasing Christ more and more fully. And yet we could never do this in our own strength. To please Christ we must increasingly

Be strengthened in God's power to endure

We do good works and know God only by His power. Fruitful living is dependent on divine enabling. Christianity is not a do-it-yourself religion; the believer can only be strong through God. There seems to be a parallel between 'in every good work' and 'with all power.' God never calls us to a good work for which He does not provide the power. We serve God in His power, not our own.

Notice what the power is directed toward in verse eleven. Is this an anti climax? It is not power for a dramatic miracle. It is power for great endurance and patience. Patient endurance is the rare commodity of the spiritual mature who live for Christ in the real world.

There is a slight distinction to be drawn between ‘endurance’ and ‘patience.’ Endurance looks to an apparently impossible situation and patience to an apparently impossible person. Endurance is the power to cope and be content in all circumstances. Patience refuses to succumb to bitter feelings or to strike back when frustrated by incompetence or wounded by malicious people.

Over Labor Day I traveled to Colorado by plane and rental car. Let me just say I needed lots of endurance and patience. Today travel is a spiritual maturity test. Much more seriously, we please Christ when in God’s glorious power we endure physical disability, relational collapse, dashed dreams and financial ruin. We can only endure patiently by relying on His power. And yet we do not endure stoically with a frown. A person who pleases Christ will increasingly

Give thanks joyfully

Our patient endurance is to be in an attitude of gratitude. We give thanks joyfully. A Christ-pleaser does not just grit and get through grimly, but grins and thanks God through it joyfully. Christ pleasers live in a deep sense of gratitude for what God has done for them in Christ. Joyful thanksgiving is more than a feeling over which we have no control. In the power of God we choose to joyfully give thanks. This is a discipline in which we can improve. Left to ourselves our tendency is to complain over what we are not happy about, but a Christ-pleaser replaces complaint with gratitude.

This is an awesome prayer. It is the only prayer in Colossians. I encourage you to pray it everyday during our Experiencing Christ journey through Colossians. In fact, pray it silently with me as I pray it now.

God fill us with the knowledge of your will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. In order that we may live a life worthy of You and may please You in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of who You are, being strengthened with all power according to Your glorious might so that we may have great endurance and patience, joyfully giving thanks to You, Father, in Jesus’ Name Amen.

Following his prayer, Paul turns back to the Gospel sharing three powerful reasons why we would want to please Christ.

Reason: because God has . . .

Paul reminds us what God has done for us in His grace. If we will understand the word of truth, the Gospel, in all its truth we will be compelled to please Christ. First God has

Qualified you to share in His inheritance

There are many Christians are sure that they are qualified for heaven. And the truth is that in yourself apart from Christ you are not, but in Christ you are qualified. Every athlete knows the importance of qualifying. To earn the right to play in the tournament, the golfer must compete successfully in the qualifying rounds prior to the main event. Christ qualifies us for inheritance in God's kingdom of light. The word 'inheritance' alludes to the promised land of Canaan, apportioned to each Israelite tribe after the conquest. That promise is now expanded to God's kingdom. You might live differently today if you knew for absolute sure that you had an inheritance of 10 million dollars right around the corner. You do, only much more than that. Not only has God qualified you for His inheritance, but He has also

Rescued you from darkness into Jesus' kingdom

When you know where you've come from, you appreciate where you are. We are rescued from the dominion of darkness. We are rescued from our own moral darkness and from dark forces of evil. And we are brought into the kingdom of the Son, the Father loves. The word, "brought" was used from transplanting or transporting a population of people. Just as a conqueror in the ancient world often transplanted an entire people to a new land, so our heavenly Conqueror has uprooted the people of God from alien soil and brought them to the liberty of their true homeland. Pp 40 You have been rescued from the domain of darkness into God's kingdom of light. And thirdly God has

Redeemed and forgiven you

The word 'redeemed' describes the ransom of a captive or prisoner of war from slavery. It was used of Israel being redeemed from Egypt. Paul explains that our redemption involves the forgiveness of our sins. God pardons us, expunging our offense from His memory.

Look what Christ has done for you! He has qualified you to share His inheritance; rescued you from darkness, transferred you to His kingdom, redeemed and forgiven you. I want to please Him.

Each week I have picked a key verse or verses for us to memorize. They are listed in your study guide. For this week you are to memorize chapter 1, verses 13-14. To help you with your memory we have two gifts for you. We have little treasure boxes with a card for every verse. You can put these on your breakfast table. Then we have laminated cards provide by a Life Group in our church. As you leave you can pick up either or both. Each week we will be saying our memory verses. For today I will have them on the screen. Let's stand in all venues, Traditions, Revolution, Live and Café and say verses 13-14. Then stay standing.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." (Colossians 1:13-14, NIV)

Stay standing. In addition to our memory verses, we have written a responsive reading taken from the text of Colossians that expresses the heart of the book. We will say this each week of the series. Please follow along with the slides:

Leader: *May we live a life worthy of the Lord*
Congregation: *Let us please Him in every way*

Leader: *He is the image of the invisible God*
Congregation: *Let Him be supreme in everything*

Leader: *Be encouraged in heart and united in love*
Congregation: *Let us have the full riches of complete understanding*

Leader: *In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*
Congregation: *Let us know Him fully*

Thank you. You can be seated. I hope and pray that in the course of the next few weeks those affirmations will come not just from your lips, but from your hearts.

We started today talking about pleasing. I shared my own spiritual growth struggle with pleasing people. Pray for me that I can be a man who aims to please one person, Jesus Christ. There is only one person you really need to please, and you really do need to please Him. How can we please Christ? Trust in the Gospel to become a Christ follower.

Then pray. You cannot please Christ without praying. Pray Paul's prayer for each other in your Life Group. Pray that you will be filled with the knowledge of God's truth in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so you can live to please Christ. You will please Christ by increasingly doing good works, deepening in knowing God, relying on His power to endure and giving thanks to Him joyfully because you know that He has qualified you for inheritance, rescued you and redeemed you.

One day you will see Christ face to face – will He say – “well done. You pleased me”?

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