

Col 1:1-23
Jeremiah 17
Psalm 1

“The Fruit of the Gospel, Part 1”

July 10, 2022

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”

In Hebrew there are two ways to ask a rhetorical question.

One makes clear that the answer is yes.

The other makes clear that the answer is no.

This is a no.

Jeremiah understands the problem.

Who can understand the heart?

Who can understand the innermost workings of a human being?

When I first got married, I remember sitting there looking at Virginia,
realizing that *I had no idea* what was going on inside her heart!

It kinda terrified me!

24 years later, I’m really no closer to understanding her.

I’m not as terrified – since whatever is going on in there,
it doesn’t seem to bear me much ill will...

But what I have come to realize is that it’s not just “other people”
who are inscrutable to me.

It’s also me.

Jeremiah captures this in his depiction of the two trees:
the cursed shrub of the desert –
and the blessed tree planted by water.

A person who trusts in man – a person whose heart has turned away from the Lord –
is like a desert shrub –
dwelling in a parched wilderness,
in an uninhabited salt land.

What does a desert shrub produce?

Thorns.

Briers.

Ever thirsty – but never truly fruitful.

But the one who trusts in the Lord – whose trust *IS* the LORD –
he is like a tree planted by water –
who has roots that go down deep and drink the plentiful water!
And when you've got deep roots,
you don't fear the heat – the difficult times –
because your roots are firmly planted in good soil.
And so even in a year of drought, it does not cease to bear fruit!

Whom do you trust?
Where is your hope?
Where is your heart set?

I know.
Sometimes I find those questions frustrating too!
Because sometimes *I don't know!*

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?!
Sometimes the answer is *not* to try to analyze and *fix* things.
Sometimes the answer is simply:
“I the LORD search the heart and test the mind,
to give every man according to his ways,
according to the fruit of his deeds.” (v10)

Sometimes we just need to *hear* the word of the LORD and *do it*.

And that's how Psalm 1 uses the same imagery!
The blessed man is one who delights in God's law –
who meditates on God's word – and puts it into practice.

Sing Psalm 1B
Read Colossians 1:1-23

What does it mean to “bear fruit”?
In Jeremiah 17 – as in Psalm 1 –
the blessed man bears fruit because he is planted near the stream.

In Colossians 1:10 we are “bearing fruit in every good work
and increasing in the knowledge of God”
because *the gospel* “is bearing fruit and increasing” (verse 6).

The whole of Colossians is about four questions:
Who is Christ?
What has he done?
Who are *you in Christ*?

And what does that mean for your life?

And right here in the opening verses,
Paul gets at this central theme.

How can you be bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God?
Because the *gospel* is bearing fruit and increasing – in you, and in all the world!

Introduction: Grace and Peace (v1-2)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

² To the saints and faithful brothers^[a] in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

The Colossian congregation was fairly new.
It had been planted by Pastor Epaphras (v7).

Colosse is not far from Ephesus –
so probably Epaphras had been converted under Paul’s ministry in Ephesus,
and then he was ordained to go back to Colosse and plant a church there.

Epaphras apparently had some concerns about false teaching that had been spreading,
so he came to Paul for help.

This false teaching seems to have blended aspects of traditional Jewish teaching
with various aspects of Greek philosophy.

Epaphras came to Paul and Timothy,
asking them to write a letter to his church to refute the false teaching.

(And we’ll hear that in chapter 2).

I say that Epaphras came to Paul and Timothy,
because verse 1 makes clear that this letter is from *both* Paul and Timothy.
In some epistles, Paul will use the first person singular a lot –
in Galatians, for instance, Paul constantly says “I” (singular).

But in Colossians, the first person plural (“we”) is the standard,
which suggests that Timothy was a very active co-author
(the only exceptions are sections where Paul refers to his own apostleship
and his own sufferings).

Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.
Later we will see that the Colossian church was troubled by teachers
who made a big deal about angelic powers.
Paul says I am an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.
OT leaders were sometimes appointed by angelic visitors.

But Paul says – no, I am an apostle by the will of God himself!

And Timothy our brother is writing this with me.

And we are writing to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

What does it mean – saints and faithful brothers?

Well, in all of Paul’s letters “saints” – holy ones – refers to the whole church.
All Christians are saints!

So who are the “faithful brothers”?

Brother is a term that Paul often uses to refer to ministers of the gospel.

Sometimes it just means “fellow Christian” –

but when it is used in connection with the “saints” –
it seems to mean “pastors.”

In fact, when he refers to Timothy as “our brother” –

he is referring to how Timothy is a fellow minister of the gospel.

The “faithful brothers in Christ” in Colossae are those pastors

who have remained faithful to the gospel,
and have not been led astray by the false teachers.

And so Paul and Timothy write to the church – and to the pastors – in Colossae,
they say “grace to you and peace from God our Father.”

The standard Greek greeting was *chairein* (greetings).

Paul changes it to *charis* (grace)

The standard Hebrew greeting was *shalom* (peace).

Paul simply translates that into Greek (*eirene*) –
with the result that it is *grace and peace*.

He doesn’t just wish them well – he *blesses them* with the grace and peace of God himself!

And then – as is common in Paul’s letters –

he gives thanks for his readers!

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...

Paul is grateful to God because God is doing what he promised!

The gospel is growing – increasing – flourishing!

And so I give thanks for you!

Paul is famous for his long sentences.

Verses 3-8 is one sentence.

Verses 9-23 is another sentence!

But these two sentences form something of a chiasm.

1:3-8 we have heard of your receiving the Gospel, with faith, hope, and love
1:9-12 so we pray that you might please God, being fruitful in good works
1:13-4 because of your Redemption, deliverance through Son
1:15-18 by Christ the Center of All
1:19-20 Reconciliation through Son
1:21-2 from wicked works so that you are blameless in his sight
1:23 therefore continue in Gospel, hope, faith

Christ IS the center.

He is the center of Creation.

He is the center of Redemption.

And indeed, he is the center of this paragraph!

Paul wants us to see that Christ is the center of everything!

As I said earlier, the whole book of Colossians can be summed up as setting forth
who Christ is,
what Christ has done,
who you are in Christ,
and what that means for your life.

Paul and Timothy first assure the Colossians that they give thanks for them, praying for them
“Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;
Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven...”

1. Paul’s Thanksgiving (v3-8)

a. Faith, Hope, and Love – the Basics of the Christian Life (v3-5a)

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Faith, hope, and love.

We are perhaps most used to Paul’s treatment of this in 1 Corinthians 13 –

“these three remain: faith, hope, and love – but the greatest of these is love.”

But have you ever noticed how often these three words go together in the NT?

Paul also blends them together in his greeting to the Thessalonians:

“We give thanks to God always for all of you,
constantly remembering you in our prayers,
remembering before our God and Father

your work of faith and labor of love
and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 1:3)

I want you to think about how Paul relates these three:
your work of faith and labor of love – faith and love focus on the present;
and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ –
this steadfastness is also present – hope is also *present* –
but hope has a forward gaze.

What enables me to do my work of faith and labor of love
is my steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Likewise, at the end of 1 Thessalonians – in chapter 5, verse 8-9 –
as Paul warns against losing our focus, he says –
“since we belong to the day, let us be sober,
having put on the breastplate of faith and love,
and for a helmet the hope of salvation.
For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation
through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us
so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.”

Again – *hope* is what motivates faith and love.
If I have no hope – why would I believe?
If I have no hope – why would I love?
Without hope – all I have is cynicism!

In Romans 5:1-5, Paul puts *faith* at the center:
“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith,
we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.
Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand,
and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.
Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings,
knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character,
and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame,
because God’s love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit who has been given us.”

I won’t read it right now, but the whole of 1 Peter chapter 1,
is woven around the themes of hope (v3, 13, and 21),
faith (v5, 7, 8, 9, and 21),
and love (v8, 22)

There are a dozen other passages that relate to these –
but I think that should convince you that faith, hope, and love are closely connected.

In Romans 5, Paul focuses on *faith* as the starting point of the Christian life,
and talks about how hope and love relate to faith.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul is describing *love* as the enduring virtue of the Christian life,
and how faith and hope pale in comparison to love at the end!

But here in Colossians, Paul takes *hope* as his central theme –
and he says that our faith in Christ Jesus and our love for the saints
are both *rooted* in “the hope laid up for you in heaven.”

Paul thanks God for your and your love – “because of the hope laid up for you in heaven”

WHAT is this hope?

What is laid up in heaven for you?

Some might say, "my rewards"

Others might say, "eternal life"

Others might say, "peace and rest "

These are all basically correct, but they also miss the heart of hope.

What is your reward?

What is eternal life?

What is peace and rest?

Or perhaps I should ask, "who"?!!

Your reward is Jesus Christ.

Your eternal life is Jesus Christ.

Your peace and rest and eternal bliss is Jesus Christ.

Col. 3:1-4 is the center of the book of Colossians.

Everything comes together in these four verses (read)

“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is,
seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are
on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is
your^[a] life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Your hope is not merely IN Christ,

Your hope IS Christ.

When Christ *who is your life* appears – you also will appear with him in glory!

If you are putting your hope in *anything else* –
it will disappoint you.

I want you to understand that the *hope* that is rock solid is Jesus Christ himself.

What is the relationship between faith, hope and love?

I Cor 13, we are told but these three remain, faith, hope, and love,
but the greatest of these is love.

Love is surely the greatest, because it will never pass away.

Now, we walk by faith, but when Christ returns, we will walk by sight.

Now, we live by hope, but when Christ returns, our hope will be fulfilled.

Yet love will endure forever.

From another viewpoint Faith is the key,

because apart from faith no one can please God.

How does hope relate to faith and love?

Hope is the foundation of our faith and our love.

Hope is not some vague wish.

We often speak as though it is.

We say, "I hope it doesn't rain today,"

when we are afraid that it might.

For the believer, Hope is something that is absolutely certain.

You can have all the love in the world,

but if it is not rooted in faith, it cannot please God.

You can have all the hope in the world,

but if your hope is in the wrong things, it will not please God!

But here in Colossians, Paul and Timothy tell us that Hope is the foundation,

because without the Hope that is laid up in heaven,

why should we believe?

Without the promise that Christ is ours, and we are his forever,

why should we love?

As Paul puts it in I Cor. 15--if it is only for this life that we have hope in Christ,
we are the most miserable of men.

And it is this hope--in Christ--that produces fruit in us, through the word of truth--the gospel.

As long as your hope is focused on this life,

you will not find hope in this life.

It is only when your hope is firmly fixed on Jesus -- in Jesus -- because he *is* your hope --

only then can you walk by faith -- only then can you love well!

As Theodoret put it in the fifth century,

"We already see heaven with the eyes of faith,

even as we prepare for it in the present with an eager spirit." (Theodoret, 3)

Hope is not a *feeling*.

You may not always *feel* that hopeful.

But your *hope* is nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness!

And Paul and Timothy point out that this is the message that you have heard:

b. The Gospel Is Bearing Fruit in the Whole World – and in You (v5b-8)

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant.^[b] He is a faithful minister of Christ on your^[c] behalf⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

This is what Epaphras taught you.

This is the word of truth – the gospel.

And the gospel – the word of truth – has come to you!

The good news is the good news about Jesus – the good news that *is* Jesus!

And that gospel is bearing fruit.

Paul uses the language of fruit twice (v6 and again in v10)

This is a familiar image in Scripture.

Think all the way back to Eden–

the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Psalm 1, Jeremiah 17, the Stump of Jesse, the cursed fig tree,

the Vine and Branches, the olive tree,

the tree of life in the heavenly Jerusalem

The gospel is growing and bearing fruit throughout the world.

What does it mean that the gospel is growing?

You see, Paul thinks of the gospel as a living organism.

Jesus Christ, who is himself the Tree of Life,

has sown the seed of the Word in you.

You have been grafted into the Tree of Life,

and now you are a part of that indestructible Tree

that is growing and flourishing in all the world.

This means that Christ himself now lives with us.

By the power of the Holy Spirit,

Jesus Christ has united you to himself and to one another.

This is what it means that the gospel is growing.

And this is why Paul says that YOU also have grown since

"the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth."

This is not bare, empty knowledge.

This is a true and saving knowledge which is the fruit of your being united to Christ.

Let us look for a moment at these two fruits of the gospel:

One fruit of the gospel is our faith in Christ Jesus

What is faith?

- 1) *accepting* the truth of the gospel--that Christ died for sinners
- 2) *receiving* the truth of the gospel--that Christ died for me
- 3) *resting* in the truth of the gospel--that Christ's death has done it all.

WCF "the principal acts of saving faith are accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life, by virtue of the covenant of grace."

Or as Calvin puts it, "faith is a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit."

Faith is not merely assent

Faith does not mean simply that we intellectually *agree* with the gospel. Rather, faith is an inward conviction produced by the Holy Spirit that we belong to Jesus.

Faith, like hope, is not merely a wish.

When I say that I believe the gospel,
it is not merely that I think that it's probably true.
Rather, when I say that I believe the gospel,
I am saying that I will stake my whole life upon it.

The Colossian Christians were facing the challenge of another belief system, and Paul reminds them of their basic belief their faith in Christ Jesus.

The second fruit of the gospel is our love for all the saints.

Why does Paul add this?

Isn't faith enough?

After all, we are justified by grace, through faith,

why does Paul place love for the saints as one of the marks of the Christian?

The simple answer is because Jesus did:

John 13:34-35

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

But not only that:

John 17:20-23

Christ prays that the church might be one, "that the world may believe that you sent me"

If the church does not love one another,

then the world has the right to say that Christ has not been sent from the Father.

The gospel produces love for the saints because we all have been united to Christ, and if we are all united to Him, then we are united to one another.

And it is impossible to love Christ without loving each other.
As I John 3:14 puts it
"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.
He who does not love abides in death."

This first section of Paul and Timothy's epistle is summarized nicely by John Chrysostom:

"Don't doubt, Paul says, the hope which is to come:
you see that the world is being converted.
And why do we need to refer to the cases of others?
What happened in your own case is independently a sufficient ground for belief,
for 'you knew the grace of God in truth': that is, in works.
So that these two things, namely, the belief of all, and your own too,
confirm the things that are to come.
Nor was the fact one thing, and what Epaphras said, another...
'He has made known to us your love in the Spirit.'
For this love is wonderful and steadfast.
All other love has but the name...
For nothing, nothing is so strong as the bond of the Spirit." (Chrysostom, 4)

But you're not finished yet!

You must continue to grow in grace.
Your life must continue to change:
in your mind--you must still gain more wisdom and knowledge
in your walk--you must still increase in holiness and good works
in your suffering--you must still persevere patiently through trials
and in your thanksgiving--you must still remember your great redemption.

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks^[d] to the Father, who has qualified you^[e] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.