

It was when I was a child, that they started taking Christ out of Christmas. At that time, it was probably because Christ wasn't so important to the community and it was because the advertisers wanted something short and snappy for their Christmas sales, and they shortened it to Xmas.

But things have changed now. Christ is now an offence. They don't even want to have the "mas" in Christmas, because the mass has religious connotations – that's why it was called "Christmas" – it was a time to celebrate the Christ Mass. (Mass being the Roman Catholics communion service.)

And so Christ has gone; the Mass is gone, and now it's called the holiday season... And I wonder how long it's going to be until they change that. Do they realise that the word "holiday" means "holy day"?....

You see, when it comes to Christianity, the thing that's offensive, is Christ. Many people are happy to embrace the good teachings of a man named Jesus,, but when we start sharing our faith about Jesus Christ, that's where the offence lies...

We're beginning our new series today, on the letter that Paul wrote to the church in Colossae. He calls them **the saints and faithful brothers in Christ** at Colossae:

And as I read this letter to the Colossians, what really stood out to me, is it's all about Christ...

Ianity is useless... **Christianity** is what we are about...
We're not a bunch of "Ians" – We're a bunch of **Christians**.

We're not disciples of any old person – we are disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's all about Christ. And this whole letter is unashamedly Christ-centred/focused.

Paul is an apostle of Christ Jesus. He's writing to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae

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 he reminds them of Epaphras who first took the Gospel to them, and he's a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf

This letter is unashamedly about Christ. And for us, we are to be unashamedly **Christians**... And we're going to see this all the way through this letter.

Righto, now Paul (as he usually does), begins his letter by introducing himself. And he really did need to introduce himself to these folk. In many of his other letters, Paul is writing to people whom he knows. Often he'll be writing to a church that he planted, or to a church that he's visited. But not in this case. Epaphras is the one who took the Gospel to Colossae, and Paul (as far as we know), hasn't been there.

And so he introduces himself, and he describes himself as an "**apostle**" of Christ Jesus (by the will of God). Paul was commissioned and sent by Jesus Himself. And as an apostle,

Paul was recognised as having authority to correctly explain the Gospel, and lay down what the Gospel actually is.

But the letter isn't only from Paul. His missionary mate (Timothy) is with him as well. BTW, we'll find out a bit later, that Paul was actually in prison when he wrote this letter. We're not sure which prison stint it was though.

So, what's the address? ² **To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:**

Their primary address is “in Christ”, they just happen to be at Colossae... And do you realise this about yourself??? As a Christian, your primary address is “in Christ” – you just happen to live at St George; Bongeen; Ipswich; Glen Morgan; Muckadilla; Richmond; Dirranbandi; Beerwah.... You just happen to live there,,, but your address, is in Christ. You see, we're strangers/aliens in this land. We're just passing through...

But did you notice, he described them as “saints”? They must be extra-good Christians, hey...

When it comes to “sainthood”, there's a bit of confusion around that. Some people believe that to be a “saint” means you're extra well behaved... Others believe you have to have performed a certain number of miracles and be canonised by a man in Rome... But in the Bible, **Christians** are saints. The Greek word ἁγίοις (hagiois) literally means “holy ones”... **We** are saints because we are holy ones.

Now, is it because we were so holy that we became Christians? No, in fact it's the complete opposite – it's because God revealed to us how utterly sinful we were, and we realised we needed a saviour. It is because we became Christians – it's because we are in Christ, that we are made holy.

And that's what Paul brings out when he refers to them as: **faithful brothers in Christ** . In this context, being “faithful” is about being “believing” — it's the same word. In the Greek, πιστος (pistos) belief, faith, trust... And so any holiness we have – it isn't of our own doing – it is because we are believing in Christ Jesus... Essentially, we are holy, because we are Christians.

What benefit is there, to being a Christian? Well, the blessings are enormous, but what a blessing it is to be “holy”, and what a blessing it is, to believe together...

Now, when he says “brothers”, you can think of brothers and sisters if you like, or you can think of yourself as “a brother” – this isn't a ‘gender’ thing – it's a family thing. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are holy, because we have a common Heavenly Father, and we believe together.

Righto, so it's from Paul (Apostle).

The address is to **the saints and faithful brothers in Christ ...**

Next comes a blessing: **Grace to you and peace from God our Father.**

What a profound statement this is... Not only is God, the Father of Jesus – He's our Father too. And if God is our Father, Grace and Peace aren't things we hopefully wish for – they're blessings we already have.

Now, Grace and Peace: as Christians, we know about these things don't we, but it's always good to be reminded...

By grace, we are saved. By grace, our sins are forgiven. The cost of the forgiveness of our sins was taken care of at the cross...

And it is by the **Grace** of God, that we are at peace with God... This is something which is uniquely Christian... There is no other way to have peace with God, than by the Grace of God, in Christ Jesus...

Most people in the world, long for peace, but the peace they long for, is a shallow understanding of a peace.

- Their view of peace, might be an absence of war;
- A mother might be looking for a day when the kids don't cry;
- a teacher might be looking for a day when all the class just get on;
- a husband or a wife might be longing for a day of no nit-picking;
- Of course, a journalist has no desire for real peace, because that doesn't sell papers...

But real peace, lasting peace is much more than any of these things – it's to be at peace with God... And this is something

which is uniquely Christian... **True** peace is only found in the Prince of Peace (the Lord Jesus Christ) – the sort of peace, that Jesus could tell the Disciples about the horrors of tribulation, knowing that in Him we have peace (because He's overcome the world)ⁱ.

Righto. Now, even though Paul doesn't know these guys, he's been praying for them, and he prays for them often. He says:
³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you

What a wonderful thing it is, to know that somebody's praying for you. Every now and then, somebody who knows about us, and knows about this little church (Bush Disciples), every now and then, somebody says to me, "We pray for you every day/week". Isn't that amazing? And it's so humbling... And it's so encouraging, to know that we have brothers and sisters in Christ, who pray for us often... What an wonderful encouragement that is.

And what an encouragement it must've been to the Colossians, to know that the Apostle Paul would often pray for them and give thanks for them... And he's been praying for them, ever since he heard about their faith and their love...

Something that often comes up in the New Testament, is the classic Christian triad of faith, hope and love. **1 Corinthians 13: (ESV)** ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

And we've got an example of that classic Christian triad of faith, hope and love here in today's reading:

- The faith that they have in Christ Jesus;
- The love that they have for **all** the saints;
- because of the **hope** laid up for us in heaven.

Let's unpack that a bit: Faith; Hope; and Love.

Without faith, there is no Christian existence... *There've been times I've had conversations with people, and they're happy with most things about Christianity, and I ask them, what's stopping you from becoming a Christian, "I don't believe" ... I know Jesus died for my sins, but I can't believe that he was born of a virgin, and I can't believe that he was raised from the dead... And that's a pretty big barrier to becoming a Christian, isn't it...*

And I then explain to them, "The reason you don't believe is because those things you see as being outside the realm of scientific possibility". And that's why it comes down to faith. Without faith/belief, it's impossible to please God. **Hebrews 11:6 (ESV) ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**

If we genuinely seek God as God is, and don't try and make Him into something that we want to be, He'll give us the faith. **he rewards those who seek him.** God is sovereign. He can do that.

But without faith, there is no Christian existence.

What about love? Well, love, springs from faith. We love, because Christ first loved usⁱⁱ.

And the sort of love he's talking about, is a practical expression of care/concern/self-sacrifice. Faith (no matter how great it is) without love is empty... The love we have for our brothers and sisters in Christ, proves our faith.

Every now and then, I hear someone say, "I'm a Christian, but I don't go to church"... And they tell me why they don't go to church, is they don't like the people... They are so self-focused that they feel their faith is all about them... A genuine faith cannot help but love other Christians...

I've heard so many testimonies about how, before a person was a Christian, their parents or their wife, would drag them along to church, and they'd hate it... But when they became a Christian – everything changed... They loved to hear the word of God being taught; They enthusiastically sing praises to their Lord; and they genuinely love being with other Christians...

And I'm going to be really blunt and say, if there's someone hearing this today, who doesn't love being with other Christians, that's a sure sign that your relationship with God is in a mess...

And here's why:

Both **faith** and **love**, spring from the hope we have. If our hope is in the wrong thing, our **faith** will be flawed. If our hope is in the wrong thing, and our **love** will be flawed.

Our hope, is our unseen future expectation – it’s our destiny. Our hope, isn’t a ‘wishful thinking. It’s something that is laid up for us in Heaven (safe & secure). Everything that faith in our Lord Jesus Christ leads us to, is assured. It’s safe and secure in Heaven.

And so today we are reminded of the forward-looking character of the Gospel message that is truth... If our hope was to be in “physical blessings today”, our faith and our love would be flawed. Do you know why? Because we’d be focused on what we can get out of this life now...

But Jesus taught us what **real** love should look like. We give, expecting nothing in return.

And He taught us what real **faith** should look like. Real faith, is in Christ, and the eternal reward in the new heavens and the new earth... And so, faithful living, means we’re not living for today – we’re living for eternity...

This is the Gospel that was preached in Colossae... And this is the **true** Gospel. And the true Gospel is dynamic, and is spreading world-wide (even today).

The Word of Truth, isn’t a man-made gospel – there’s plenty of those around.

The Word of truth – the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, is a Gospel that is not fixated on blessings today – It assures us of

our future hope with Him... And **this** Gospel is bearing fruit and increasing... False Gospels are increasing as well, but they don't bear fruit for the Kingdom of God...

So, how does the true Gospel bear fruit and increase???

Through programs? Through advertising campaigns (come to Jesus & get your free steak knives)???

True faith/hope/love, expresses itself with testimony... If we truly believe this hope we have in Christ, what could possibly hold us back from sharing this hope with others???

The Gospel increases, and the Gospel is fruitful, when we **understand** the grace of God that we've received...

- In V5, Paul says, You have **heard** it (word of truth);
- In V6, You have **heard** it; and **understood** it (the **grace** of God in truth);
- In V7, You've **learned** it (the grace of God in truth)...

Do you understand why we keep on preaching this stuff (week after week)???

Because we need to hear it; understand it; and learn it... **And** we need to get it right...

How does the Gospel increase and become fruitful???

When we hear it; and understand it; and learn it...

But it's not just any old gospel – the true Gospel – the Gospel that explains the grace of God **in truth**... The Gospel that points us away from physical blessings, to Christ, and His glorious eternal blessings...

I've got a feeling that in this series on Colossians, Paul's going to keep reminding us of these things – that he'll remind us of:

- the true Gospel of Grace – that Jesus died for us on the cross, so that our salvation is a not earned, but by faith in the One who saves us
- of the hope we have – that we're not living for today – that our hope is in something which is much better than the best this world has to offer; and
- of how our love and the way we live, has this future focus, and so we willingly give sacrificially of ourselves today. Everything in this life is going to pass. We're looking forward to eternity...

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

We give You praise for Your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank You , that it is by Your Grace that we are saved.

By Your Grace, our hope isn't in this present physical world;

Our hope isn't in money; health; earthly blessings...

Our hope is in the future eternal blessings you've promised.

Lord, help us to live with this hope.

It's a hope that helps us to rejoice (even in times of suffering);

It's a hope that helps us to love (even when we feel 'used')

Because we know we're loved by You – an eternal love, that we Look forward to.

And Lord, we pray that over the next few months, (as we study this letter)

we would come to a greater knowledge and understanding

of Your immense grace...

that we would:

- hear it;
- understand it;
- learn it

And Lord, may we become fruitful in our faith, as we share this Gospel with those who so much need to hear it.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ John 16:33

ⁱⁱ 1 John 4:19