

**Series:** The Letter to the Colossians

**Title:** The Gospel of Christ

**Text:** Colossians 1:6-8

**Date:** May 7, 2023

## **Verse 6**

Paul continued both his greeting and his focus on the gospel in verse 6, saying, “... 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.” The word “that” referred back to Paul’s mention of the gospel in verse 5. His intent in verse 6 was to make his readers remember the initial preaching of the gospel in Colossae. Many believe that the gospel was first heralded by Epaphras (1:7; 4:12). Perhaps the man had heard Paul preach the truth of Christ while Paul ministered in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). After being converted by the good news, Epaphras possibly returned to his hometown and started a church.

At the time of Paul’s writing, the congregation in Colossae had grown. Many faithful believers were a part of the church, but false teaching was threatening the church. As he did when writing to the Philippians (Philippians 1:5), Paul reminded his readers of their first interactions with gospel truth. His intent was to encourage them to stick with the message they had originally heard from Epaphras. They needed to be on guard against novel doctrines from spiritual novices. The gospel, not Gnosticism, had the power to convert and save souls.

Paul stressed the power of gospel truth through his use of two verbs — “bearing fruit and growing.” He likely borrowed his terminology from the teaching of Jesus, since Jesus used similar language to speak of the kingdom growth that occurs through gospel proclamation (Mark 13:23). Both terms — “bearing fruit and growing” — were drawn from the world of agriculture (Mark 4:28). The first depicted fruit or foliage growing from a plant or tree. As Jesus did (John 15:4-5), Paul used fruit as a metaphor of Christian virtue. He had previously spoken of such virtue in Colossians 1:3-5. In verse 6, his aim was to depict how the beautiful fruit of Christian virtue appears in the lives of those who are saved through the preaching of the gospel. When hearts are regenerated, the presence of the Holy Spirit produces things like “...love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:22-23).

In the original language of the New Testament, the word for “bearing fruit” appeared as a middle voice verb. Thus, it depicted the gospel bearing fruit of itself.<sup>1</sup> Human efforts don’t produce Christian character. The power of God does. In addition, Paul used a present tense verb, portraying a continual growth. When the gospel is faithfully proclaimed in love (Ephesians 4:15), souls will be converted and lives will be changed. The gospel is the only message endowed with supernatural power to accomplish such a feat (Romans 1:16). The church at Colossae needed to remember such things and they needed to shun the false philosophies in their midst.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 459.

The word for “growing” is one that was used by Luke repeatedly in the book of Acts to speak of gospel expansion (Acts 6:7; 7:17; 12:24; 19:20). Though it was nearly synonymous with the previous term used for “bearing fruit,” it carried the idea of a territorial advance. In the Septuagint (LXX), the term was used to portray Adam and Eve’s dominion over the Earth (Genesis 1:22, 28) and Israel’s expansion in Egypt (Exodus 1:7). Paul used the term to speak of the way a knowledge of the gospel had spread “all over the world.”

Paul did not mean that gospel knowledge had been spread to “every square mile of the inhabited earth.”<sup>2</sup> Instead, he used hyperbole to speak of the way the gospel message was impacting the entire Roman Empire and regions beyond.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the vast expansion of the gospel to Gentile believers was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy (Isaiah 60:3). Jesus’ prophecy in Acts 1:8 was fulfilled in the days of the apostles. The gospel was faithfully preached in the areas of “...Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

In speaking of the territorial advance of gospel truth, Paul employed a passive voice verb. He used what theologians and Bible linguists often call a “theological passive.” Such verbiage revealed that all gospel growth was accomplished by God. In writing to the Corinthians, Paul explained how gospel growth occurs, saying, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So, then, neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (1 Corinthians 3:7-8). When he wrote to the church of the Thessalonians, he requested prayer that his ministry would be marked by such gospel growth: “...pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you” (2 Thessalonians 3:1).

Paul’s rationale in Colossians 1:6 was to remind his readers that the gospel was “...the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Romans 1:16). He reminded them of the way they had first received the gospel by saying, “... since the day you heard it...” In doing so, he used what is known as a “definite aorist” tense verb in the Greek.<sup>4</sup> His intent was to make his readers recollect their first hearing of the gospel. Their reception of Christ through Epaphras’ preaching predated the teaching of the Gnostic heretics.

Paul reminded his readers of how they had “understood” the gospel from Epaphras. The Greek word underlying English translations is one that spoke of “higher and spiritual knowledge received through revelation.” It meant “to know fully” or “to know perfectly.”<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, Paul used a compound word that took a shot at the false teachers in Colossae. While the Gnostics famously used the word *ginóskō* to

---

<sup>2</sup> Wright, N.T. *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*. (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 53.

<sup>3</sup> Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume IV, The Epistles of Paul*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), 474.

<sup>4</sup> Robertson, 475.

<sup>5</sup> Friberg, Timothy, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 163.

speak of their supposed super-special “knowledge,” Paul used the Greek word *epignósomai*. His term spoke of a deeper knowledge. It was made up of two words that literally meant “upon knowledge.” It seems Paul made a tongue-in-cheek jab at the false teachers. Though the Gnostics boasted of secret knowledge, real knowledge was found in the true gospel of Jesus Christ. Later in his letter, Paul would speak of Christ by saying, “...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:3).

Ultimately, it is Christ’s will for knowledge of the gospel to spread through the ministry of His church. The Great Commission reveals such to be true (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8). The believers at Colossae needed to reject Gnostic philosophy and teaching. They had been changed by the pure gospel of Jesus. That same gospel was growing and bearing fruit all over the Roman Empire. It had even made inroads into Africa (Acts 8:26-40). The gospel contained the supernatural power of God to transform lives. To cheapen it with human philosophies would have been foolish.

At the end of verse 6, Paul provided two important descriptors of gospel truth. He referred to it as “...the grace of God in truth.” The Greek word for “grace” is the same one Paul employed back in Colossians 1:2. It referred to, as one has said, “God’s unmerited and undeserved help to someone in need.”<sup>6</sup> Paul invoked the word to remind his readers that Christian salvation is always of God’s grace (Ephesians 2:8). The apostle often held up salvation as being the result of God’s unmerited kindness in his New Testament letters:

“...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:23-24).

“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” (Romans 5:2).

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8).

“...who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (2 Timothy 1:9).

---

<sup>6</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 459.

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12).

“...he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:5-7).

Paul’s mention of grace was relevant to his readers. The false teaching in Colossae placed legalistic burdens on God’s people. It boasted of human knowledge. It made fanciful claims concerning mystical experiences.

The Colossians needed a reminder that real religion has its origin in the unmerited kindness of God, not any form of human goodness. The Gnostics vainly imagined that they were righteous because of their own goodness. Paul wanted his readers to know that grace deals a death blow to all self-congratulating, man-centered religion.

Paul also described the gospel with the word “truth.” Twice in two consecutive verses (Colossians 1:5, 6), the apostle used the Greek word *alétheia*. It referred to truthfulness, what is real and certain.<sup>7</sup> Though the Gnostics claimed to be the possessors of elite knowledge, real knowledge and truth was found in the gospel. The birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus provided the Colossians with total truth for all of life. They had no need to look to the heretics for help.

### **Verse 7**

In verse 7, Paul undergirded what he said in verse 6 by mentioning the way the Colossians had originally heard the gospel. He said, “...just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf...” (Colossians 1:7). The first words in the verse — “just as” — point back to what Paul said about the gospel in verse 6. In the original language, the Greek word meant “exactly” or “in exact correspondence with.”<sup>8</sup> As used by Paul, the term revealed that Epaphras’ gospel preaching was in precise alignment with that of Jesus and the apostles. It is the duty of every minister to proclaim the good news exactly as it has been given in God’s Word.

Paul said the the Colossians “learned” the gospel from Epaphras. The apostle’s verbiage referred to a definite activity in the past. As mentioned earlier, many believe Epaphras had been converted under Paul’s preaching during the season in which Paul used Ephesus as a base of operations for spreading the gospel throughout Asia Minor

---

<sup>7</sup> Gingrich, Wilbur F. *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Beale, G.K. *Colossians and Philemon: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 44.

(Acts 19:10). After he came to know Christ, Epaphras became a fireball of an evangelist for Christ, preaching the gospel throughout the Lycus Valley.<sup>9</sup>

In Colossians 1:7, Paul exhibited his high regard for Epaphras by calling him a “fellow servant.” The Greek word underlying English translations was a compound one that literally meant “with slave.” It depicted Epaphras as working together with Paul for the sake of gospel ministry. Epaphras stood in line with the teaching of Jesus and Jesus’ apostles. One has said Paul’s term highlighted Epaphras’ “...humility and absolute desire to carry out Christ’s will.”<sup>10</sup> All faithful ministers have need of similarly humbling themselves to Christ’s gospel. None should be so self-willed as to attempt to create a new Christian message. Each should make it their aim to stand in line with the apostles’ doctrine (Ephesians 4:11-12).

Paul also regarded Epaphras as a “faithful minister.” The word for “faithful” in the Greek is one that meant “reliable” or “trustworthy.” Such is the Lord’s primary requirement of His gospel ministers (1 Corinthians 4:2). God’s preachers aren’t called to be flashy, impressive, entertaining, engaging, or successful. They are called to be faithful to Christian living and Christian doctrine. Such is made clear by Paul’s list of qualifications for church leaders in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. From his personal acquaintance with Epaphras, Paul could vouch for the man. He knew that the man exhibited faithful Christian character and he knew the man adhered to orthodox Christian teaching.

Paul’s intent in speaking of Epaphras was to encourage the church to respect their pastor’s ministry. At the time of Paul’s writing, there were several flourishing churches in the Lycus Valley that were birthed as a result of Epaphras’ faithful preaching.<sup>11</sup> The Colossians needed to listen to Epaphras, not the Gnostic heretics. Paul gave similar counsel regarding the necessity of pastoral respect amongst Christian congregations when he wrote to the Thessalonians: “We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you” (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

Most Christians are completely oblivious to the emotional heartache and grief suffered by faithful Christian pastors who have to deal schismatic divisions and erroneous teachings within their congregation. Upon visiting Paul in Rome, Epaphras had likely shared all of his burdens with the imprisoned apostle. Paul knew the man was discouraged and exasperated by the problems in his church; thus, he wrote what he wrote in verse 7 to encourage the church to appreciate their faithful pastor. Instead of listening to the opinionated Gnostics, they needed to listen to the man who had faithfully preached God’s Word to them.

### **Verse 8**

Paul concluded his commendation concerning Epaphras by speaking of the way the pastor had given a report concerning the Christian love at Colossae — “...and has made known to us your love in the Spirit” (Colossians 1:8). The apostle’s word most likely alluded to a report Epaphras had given Paul upon his arrival in Rome. When the

---

<sup>9</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 459-460.

<sup>10</sup> Beale, 43.

<sup>11</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 459.

pastor at Colossae visited the apostle in prison, he told of the way Gnostic thinking was corrupting the church. However, he also told about the beautiful displays of Christian love amongst the true believers in the church.

Interestingly, Paul talked about the way the Colossians embraced and embodied love twice within the span of a few verses (Colossians 1:4). Apparently, the church at Colossae was a loving group of believers. However, the congregation was tainted by Gnostic teaching that was being pushed by a vocal minority. From reading the letters of John, we learn that Gnosticism was marked by an air of spiritual superiority that often led to unloving behavior (1 John 2:9-11). Perhaps Paul wanted to affirm the love of the true believers at Colossae, holding them up as a showcase of true spirituality.

In speaking of the love amongst the Colossians, Paul was careful to identify the source of such love. He spoke of it being based "...in the Spirit." Paul used a noun in the instrumental dative case of the Koine Greek.<sup>12</sup> The idea was of love being "grounded in the Holy Spirit."<sup>13</sup> The basis of the Colossians' love "...was not individual sympathy, personal acquaintance or the like, but belonged to the sphere of the Holy Spirit's influence."<sup>14</sup> The apostle's language revealed that the love in Colossae wasn't built on feigned friendliness or phony sentiment. It was the supernatural result of the Holy Spirit's work in the lives of God's people (Romans 5:5; Galatians 5:22-23). The doctrines of the Gnostics had no ability to produce such change.

Paul's language in Colossians 1:8 reveals important truth for believers of all generations. Manmade religion cannot produce the life of God. In order to live lives that are marked by true Christian character, God's people must learn to draw transformational power from the Holy Spirit. Francis Schaeffer has said, "True spirituality is not achieved in our own energy...This is the 'how', and there is no other. It is the power of the crucified, risen, and glorified Christ, through the agency of the Holy Spirit by faith."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Beale, 44.

<sup>13</sup> Robertson, 475.

<sup>14</sup> Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 460.

<sup>15</sup> Schaeffer, Francis A. *True Spirituality: How to Live for Jesus Moment by Moment*. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1971), 53.