

From Seed to Fruit Colossians 1:1-14

Introduction

Hook: Monthly photos Jackson; would be awkward at 18. The goal of parenting is not *simply* to love your children but to help them grow into the people God wants you to be.

- Jesus calls us to childlike faith, not childishness. We are God's children, not perpetual infants. I'm still my parents' child/baby (by position) but I'm a grown-up *hopefully (by stature/behavior/attitude).

Background: 10 weeks in Colossians (return to Exodus in Fall). ¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

- Written to a church he'd never visited but he had heard a lot about, Paul still feels a deep pastoral connection to their health and well-being.
 - To the saints (holy) and faithful brothers (brethren, siblings). Brothers and sisters around the world (the gospel opens up our world); can't only have local concerns.
- He knows that false teaching has crept in or is threatening to creep into the church. The false teaching will **mess up** (that's the technical term) the church.
 - False teaching undermined the **supremacy of Christ** by trying to lower him to the status of other created beings (e.g., angels, spiritual beings, worldly philosophies). Today we see him made into a "great teacher."
 - False teaching undermined the **sufficiency of Christ's redemptive work on the cross** by telling them there was some extra effort or additional rituals they needed to do, or secret knowledge they needed to have.

False teaching is dangerous. It will mess up our church and it will mess up our faith. What we believe isn't just theoretical, it is practical because it is the foundation of how we behave when things get tough.

- If I think I need to do more for God to love me then my life will be filled with anxiety whether I've done enough, or despair because I can never get it right. The gospel beautifully calms those fears because Christ has done it all and calls me to trust and obey him.

The gospel redeems us from sin and produces characteristics of Christlikeness in us. We can't be redeemed and live an unredeemed life. Heart transformation leads to life transformation.

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. 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. 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. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. 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 to the Father, who has qualified you 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.

1. The Seed Planted (vv. 3-8)

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. 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. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Jesus is Lord: ³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, This section **looks back with thankfulness** on what God has done in the lives of the saints in the Colossian church. But even in the thankfulness, we see hints of the things Paul wants to teach them (he never misses an opportunity). E.g., a lot of Jesus and Paul's teaching was "on the way," parenting, and "teachable moments."

- The language of his prayer is fascinating he hints at the diverse unity of our triune God by reminding us that Jesus is both **Lord** and **Christ**.
 - Lord (e.g., *Adonai*, YHWH) and Christ (messiah, promised one).
- Calling "Jesus Christ" Lord is not only a **positional statement** (e.g., teacher) but a **functional statement** (e.g., artist). He is Lord based by **position** and **power**. As such, he has the right to all of our lives. **Jesus is Lord, but is he Lord of your life?**

Testimony: 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. He heard about them. They had a testimony, their reputation was known. When people talked about them they talked about their **faith, hope, and love**.

- Paul often uses the **trifecta** of faith, hope, and love as summary virtues of the Christian faith (cf. 1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:5-6; Col 1:4-5; 1 Thess 1:3; 1 Thess 5:8).
- It's not **generic faith** but **specific** faith in Christ Jesus.
 - Lots of faith in the wrong thing (e.g., self, false teacher, world system, etc.) is fatal. A little faith in the right thing (e.g., Jesus) is life. E.g. falling off a cliff (lots of faith in a weak branch vs. trepidations faith in a strong branch).

- It's not **sentimental love** but **specific** love for all the saints. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another (Jn 13:34). Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart (1 Pet 1:22). Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God (1 Jn 4:7). Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 Jn 4:11). No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (1 Jn 4:12).
 - The world understands **affinity** (love those like us) and **reciprocity** but they don't understand the **gospel**. We don't exclude loving those outside of the Body of Christ but how can we love others if we can't even love our own Christian brothers and sisters?
- It's not just **wishful thinking** but the specific hope laid up for you in heaven.
 - But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil 3:20-21).
 - Jesus said to her (to Martha), "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:25-26).
 - Few of us are "too heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good." **We must be heavenly-minded to be of any earthly good?** I promise, if you're only "earthly minded" then you'll be of no "earthly good."
 - Without heaven there is no final redemption, justice, or hope.
- This is the testimony of the Colossian church. Is this the testimony of our church? When people think of us are they reminded of our faith in Christ, our love for one another, and our hope of heaven?
 - Churches and pastors and "Christians" make it way harder than any atheist or false religion. The least we can do is make sure that we are not part of the problem (e.g., usually pastors are hypocrites, but he's a "real one"). What more can you ask of your pastors? (not agree with every decision, etc.).

Gospel Truth: Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel It is the gospel that has produced this in their lives. It is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom 1:16). It is this word of the truth, this seed, that has been planted in our hearts, that has produced these virtues.

- We do not produce faith, hope, and love, it is produced in us by the power of the gospel.

The objective nature of the gospel. It is a word of truth. It is not a technique for changing your life (though it changes everything), it is a truth to be believed and obeyed. **The gospel is true whether you believe it or not** (e.g., God is glorious whether you recognize it or not). But your belief and recognition **change you** (once you see it, it makes sense of everything else).

Relativism: In an **age of relativism**, that says "You do you, as long as it works for you; who cares if it's true," the gospel is a truth claim (e.g., true facts as opposed to false ones?!?; Al doesn't care about truth; notice that Snapple facts are called "Real Facts" with quotation marks, they might be true, might be false, or might be ambiguous to the point of absurdity;

Pennsylvania isn't misspelled on the Liberty Bell #300 because it was an accepted spelling the 18th century).

- At the end of the day, we don't find ourselves through ourselves, we see ourselves through the lens of God's truth. We pray like the psalmist for God to "lead [us] in [his] truth" (Ps 25:5). We value truth (Prov 23:23). We know that Jesus is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6), and the HS is the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 17:17). Gospel living and gospel love "rejoices with the truth" (1 Cor 13:6).

It is vitally important that we confront the lies of culture, the lies of sin, the lies we tell ourselves with the truth of the gospel.

- You say that you are good enough. **Lie!** The gospel reminds us that none of us are righteous, none of us are good enough to save ourselves.
- You say that you are not loved. **Lie!** The gospel reminds you that in Christ you are loved more than you could ever imagine.

The **truth of the gospel actually frees us to be honest** with ourselves, honest with God, and honest with others.

- One of the reasons we struggle with vulnerability, is because we haven't fully believed the truth of the gospel. Or we run from accountability because we know the truth of the gospel means we are not the lords of our lives and we can't just do what we want.
 - The Colossian church has these falsehoods coming against them, and so does our church. These old heresies are packaged in trendy new TikTok videos, but they are the same ole lies of Satan.

As Christians we don't really search for truth, we start from truth (micro and macro gospel, define and explain).

Gospel Advance: 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,

- Paul has witnessed the gospel multiply in the decades since Christ's death. It has crossed geographic and racial barriers. The gospel advanced despite suffering and persecution.
- Today, the church may be declining in America but it is advancing around the world.

Epaphroditus: ⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. How did the gospel multiply? How did it get to the Colossians? Through the faithful witness of Epaphras (short for Epaphroditus, Phil 2; cf. Nick/Nicholas, Abby/Abigail). **The gospel can only grow when people go!**

- Who are you telling? Where are you going? Who are you inviting? How are you investing? God has chosen to work through us, his church, to take the gospel to everyone. The church is God's Plan A (and there is no Plan B).
- *Transition* If the gospel has been planted deep in your soul, and you have received it joyfully by faith, then it should produce gospel fruit in your life!

2. The Fruit Produced (vv. 9-14)

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 to the Father, who has qualified you 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.

Filled: 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,

- And so, shows the connection. Paul's great prayer is that this gospel that has taken root in their lives would overflow with fruit for the glory of God. The seed that has been planted will bloom into fruit.
- The fruit of the gospel is **produced** in us, we do not produce in ourselves (e.g., filled is *passive*; πληρωθητε).
- **The gospel is accepted, not invented. It is cultivated, not created. It is received, not generated.**

At salvation, we are indwelt and sealed by the HS (Eph 1:7) but in the Bible there is a description of the "filling of the Spirit" (10x in Acts) that is not a one-time event. It is characteristic the fruit of the Spirit growing in your life. It is to recognize the empowering presence and follow the guidance of the HS, applying the work of Christ to every area of life. To follow the Spirit of God is to be equipped to serve the church and the world like Jesus served. We must be filled with God's Spirit to live out his love.

- What if I gave you the keys to my car and said, "drive it wherever you want." There's one catch, it's out of gas. You can no more serve God on empty than you can drive a car that is out of gas. You must be filled. How many of us desire to serve God, but our spiritual tank is empty?

The wisdom and understanding that we seek doesn't come from us, it comes from the God who fills us with his knowledge.

- Knowledge of God is essential to producing fruit. But knowledge isn't simply **informational**, it's also **relational** and **experiential**. Transformative knowledge actually comes first from trust. You can't learn anything unless you trust the person teaching you. You didn't wake up one day and realize $1+1=2$, someone you trusted (a parent, or a puppet from Sesame Street) taught you.
 - We don't "think" ourselves into faith. We actually "faith" ourselves into correct thinking.

Holiness Spiral: This is not a circle but a spiral (e.g., understanding fuels holiness and holiness increases understanding).

Living Worthy: ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: When we are filled with Christ, our lives begin to live up to the beautiful gospel picture that Christ has given us.

- The path of Christian living is to follow Jesus. We want to look, think, and act more and more like him.
- We want the fruit of the Spirit to manifest in our lives.

Who are you trying to please?

- Are you trying to please God or the world? Do you care more about the opinions of other people than God? Are you trying to validate the opinions of others or of God?

Producing: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

- We need Christians who are not simply Christians in name but in life. The proof of godliness is not empty talk but faithful action.
 - A Conversation with a 10-Year Old:
 - Me: "This guy (a politician running for president) isn't very smart."
 - 10yo: "Then why don't you run for president?"
 - Me: "I don't want to be a politician. They do a lot of talking and don't get anything done."
 - 10yo: "Sounds like something you'd be great at."
- This isn't perfection, but production. We are called to be ever-increasing (we won't arrive until heaven). Look at the gaps in your life. In what areas does your life and Christ not align? What behavior, attitudes, actions, habits, allegiance, and priorities are far from those of Christ?
- Is the gospel bearing the fruit of Christlikeness in your life? More obedient? More sacrificial? Desire the Word of God more? Love the people of God more? More motivated to reach the lost? Fighting harder against your sin?
- The gospel is multiplying around the world, is it multiplying in your life?

Strengthened: ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; The beautiful reminder of the gospel, is not that you must find the strength, but you can receive it. God will give you the strength you need to grow in his grace (e.g., "being strengthened" is passive; δυναμούμενοι).

- The call is not to work harder but to surrender more. **You can't live life in your strength and his strength at the same time.**
 - Why do we substitute his strength with our strength and then wonder why we aren't strong enough? E.g., Ps 139, we want to do our own thing but want him to bail us out.
- Power (his strength), purpose (his glory). If it's our power, it's our glory (e.g., power socket plugging in vs. bicycling generating electricity).
 - Where is our power? Money, gifts, education? **Prayerlessness** belies the truth that we think we are the power. Prayer is a measure of faith. A litmus test of dependence.
- Endurance (hard) and joy (good). Life gets harder and more joyful at once.

Qualified: ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

- Christ has made you righteous (2 Cor 5:21). Christ has redeemed you. Christ has brought you new to God (Eph 2:13). You were dead, he made you alive. You were lost, he found you. You were unqualified, he qualified you.
- “We dare assure ourselves that eternal life, of which Jesus is the heir, is ours and can no more be taken from us than from him; we cannot be condemned for our sins, because he has pardoned us, since he took them on himself as his own. What an exchange!?! By taking our mortality, he has given his immortality; taking our weakness, he has strengthened us by his power; taking the weight of our iniquity upon himself, he has clothed us with his righteousness” (Calvin *adapted*).

Transferred: 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.

- We just finished the first 15 chapters of Exodus. What a vivid reminder of what God has done. He rescued them from slavery in Egypt and, more importantly, brought them into the freedom of his love. “In Christ, the true King, the one whom God loves, God’s people are rescued from the dark power that has enslaved them and are brought into all the blessings of membership in his new covenant” (Wright). And so are we. We are no longer slaves to sin.
- **This is the fuel for our godliness.** When we look into the beauty and glory of Christ, “it’s not just a good thing to do, it does something to us. It transforms us” (Comer).
 - We dare not guilt each other into godliness (sugar rush vs. healthy eating, temporary high with a big crash vs. long-term fuel). The gospel is a steady fuel to follow Christ through life’s ups and downs.
 - We do not obey to be made righteous, we are made righteous which produces obedience (e.g., pursue justice not to justify ourselves but because our justification produces just living in us; e.g., the Bible tells me so).

Conclusion

A. Receive the Gospel: There can be no gospel fruit in your life if you haven’t received the gospel deep in your soul. You can’t be like Christ until you’re a Christian.

- This can’t simply be a surface level or it will be snatched away, trampled on, devoured, scorched, or choked out by Satan, the cares of the world, suffering, temptation, worry, the love of money, the dependence on comfort, or something else.

But when it’s received truly, deeply, with complete surrender, it takes root in and transforms you.

- God has designed each of us to dwell with him, to find our deepest satisfaction, identity, and belonging with him, among his people, and living for his mission (even the best things in the world will fall short of this and leave you empty).
- Invitation to salvation (faith, forgiveness, surrender).

B. Abide in Christ: How do you then produce fruit? You must be filled by Christ. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can

you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:4-5). Abide means to dwell, remain, tarry, accept. "Continually receive, believe, and trust that Jesus is everything we need." When we disconnect from Jesus, we die.

- How do I abide with Christ? I commune with him in prayer and Scripture. I feed myself on the Word of God with the saints of God.
 - Most of us want to eat the apple but not grow the apple tree (e.g., we can just go to the store and buy fruit; seasons no longer matter to us; cantaloupes should not be in the store in February).
 - The disciplines of Scripture, Prayer, Worship, Discipleship, Accountability, and Evangelism are not obligations to make God love you more, but invitations to abide with Christ.
- It's not enough to simply plant the seed. You must continually prune the dead branches, tend to the soil, and water the tree so the fruit will grow.
- Are you watering the gospel seed that has been planted in your life?