

Jason Henderson
Colossians Transcription
140112

Colossians 1:1-2

True Grace

***Col 1:1-2** Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

I'm just going to say some introductory things to get started then we'll jump into the first couple of verses today. First, let's say a couple words about why we're doing this, and I know a lot of these things are things we've said before, but sometimes I feel like you can't say them enough. I'm not going through Colossians so we understand the book of Colossians. And I'm not going through Colossians because I think studying the bible is an end in itself. Some people may find that to be a strange comment, but I hope most of the folks that are listening understand exactly why I say this.

The reason we're studying Colossians is because it was a view that worked in the heart of Paul the apostle that he was driven to try to write down. It wasn't a book of theology or a Christian religion, it was something alive working in the heart of a man that came from the Spirit of God. It was a genuine reality and experience coming to be increasingly more real than any outward natural experience.

The things written in this book represent the things Paul's heart was abiding in and seeing and walking in and knowing in a great and incredibly real way. And so he sat down one day, or maybe someone else sat down with a pen and took down his words, but the purpose of the letter was to communicate to the body of Christ, a reality in Christ, or a group of realities in Christ, **that he wanted them to come into, see, and experience**—not to study the letter. I think if Paul knew what we've done with his letters, he would be horrified. We dissect them, we study them, we compare this with that... Now there's a place for some of that, especially when you're correcting errors and things, but that's not the purpose for the book.

Scripture speaks of a Person. It speaks of a Light. The gospel is the life of Christ given to the soul of man; a life that we're meant to receive, know, abide in. We are meant to grow in the experience of the reality of that life, which is to grow in grace. And it seems that we've done almost everything except that in the body of Christ. We've fought over those words, we've systematized those words, we've turned them into

creeds and doctrinal statements and confessions of faith, and fought wars over them, and all that garbage, and the only thing it seems we haven't done is come to the same view – the living view that Paul had – out from which these words came.

It's tragic that so many people read the bible and they say it just means to them whatever the words mean. But friends, if it means to you whatever the words mean, then you're the meaning of it! Do you understand what I just said? If you read the words and you supply the meaning of those words, then you haven't done anything. You've just attached the meanings and concepts that are real in your natural mind to these spiritual words. And you're not different. You haven't learned anything. You haven't grown at all. And that's not ok, and shouldn't feel ok. If it's felt ok for the last five years, or twenty years, or fifty years, it shouldn't feel ok this morning. I hope it doesn't.

Reading Paul's words and attaching your understanding to those words and saying, "Now I get it... Here's where love fits in... Here's where righteousness fits in... etc... Or here's what I think righteousness or love is," you know what you've done? You've just taken something foul and fallen and putrid and you've smeared it all over something beautiful, and walked away and said, "I've made something pretty! Now I can worship my own idea!"

That's not how knowing Christ works. **If you're going to know Christ, it's going to be His light and life, invading your soul, leaving no room for anything else, crushing every thought you've ever had about those words and those verses... And filling you up in such a way, such a living perspective and view of these realities that then you look down at these words that Paul says and you say, "Oh my goodness, I don't just see what he wrote, I see why he wrote it!"** And that's just so different.

So I always want to start classes mentioning something about the study of Scripture—because I love the Scripture and read them a lot, and think very highly of Scripture, just about as highly as one can think in terms of its infallibility and all, but it never stops being a window through which we see a light, a being, a Person who is the life of a believer's soul. And if it becomes something less than that, then you just need to humble your heart, get on your face and deal with the Lord about that.

And I'm not saying this as someone who doesn't need the same thing. To some extent I feel as if I am always haunted by my lack of knowing Christ; in a good way, but in a very uncomfortable way. It's a good thing, but it's not a happy thing. I don't walk around content in what I've seen of the Lord. I walk around joyful of what is true, and desperate to see Him more and to know Him more, because I know I've just touched the fringes of God.

I just shared at a church - a different church - two weeks ago and someone came up to me afterwards. I had said something somewhat like this in the meeting and the person said I wasn't giving Scripture a "fair shake." He said to me, "What you're saying about Scripture is not giving them enough credit." And he said, "I wouldn't know anything about God unless I'd read it in this book!" And I don't know why but my heart sunk when he said that, and I had nothing else to say. I just said, "Ok..." And there was this awkward thirty seconds and there was someone else waiting to ask me a question, so I just said, "Nice meeting you," and turned to the next person.

But I've been thinking about that on and off ever since that guy said that to me. What came to my heart was, "Then, my friend, you don't know God." **Every word in this book is pointing toward the knowing of God, but the reading of the book isn't the knowing of God.** The book is vital.... The book is an incredible gift, every single phrase and type and shadow and picture, like we've talked about in other classes, is pointing to the living, resurrected Christ. And yet, if you just stare at an arrow that points to Christ... If you're just looking at an arrow, then you're not looking where the arrow points. And you can learn it and you can study it and you can memorize all the arrows and still not know Christ.

I know where he was coming from. I've been there... I was an academic Christian, a philosophy and religion major in college, and that's where I was for a long time and I understand that view. And yet the Lord in His mercy showed me a few times that that was a very sandy foundation. When my house fell down I was driven to look for something more real.

The goal is to know Christ, to live in Him, in the reality that is true and real in Him, and to die to all else. And that "all else" is what we've called our life. It's the nature that has filled our soul since birth. You can call it the nature of sin, you can call it the nature of Satan, you can call it death, slavery to sin, or Adam. I'm not saying these things are perfectly synonymous, but I think they all have the same nature.

We're doing this class because Scripture is a testimony of spiritual reality. Scripture came out from a view and an experience of spiritual reality, and it points us back to where it came from. That's what Scripture does, and yet learning Scriptures and meanings and verses is never the goal.

I've had a couple of people ask me recently—and I don't mean to offend anybody-- if I would make a 'Not I But Christ' workbook where it would go through the book and offer question and answers. I don't know all the reasons people have asked me to do that, but I resist doing it because it's not about right answers. I know having a workbook is really popular in the church today, but putting the right answers in blanks and then finishing the workbook and saying, "Ok I did it!"... I feel like saying, "Just throw the book away and don't even read it until your heart is desperate to know the Lord, and then you probably won't feel the need for a workbook."

Ok, let's read the first couple of verses.

"Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colossae, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. "

Basically Paul starts all of his letters the same—I don't know if you've ever noticed that... Most of you probably have. He starts and ends his letters by saying 'Grace to you and peace,' and with, 'the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,' or something very similar to that. This one ends with "Grace be with you.' Thessalonians ends with, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all.' Philippians ends with, 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.' Grace was a very big deal to Paul, and I would guess most Christians would say that grace is a big deal to them too, but I wonder what "grace" means to them? I wonder what grace means to us. What is grace?

Recently I was somewhere and I heard someone say, "So-and-so teaches a really great Grace message." I get a little confused when people say things like that because I don't really know what a "great grace message" is. First, because I don't think there's more than one gospel of grace to speak of. Second, it seems to me that grace means something different to almost every Christian out there.

For Paul, the gospel was a gospel of grace. Grace meant so much to Paul. And the question that we should maybe start with is, "Does grace mean the same thing to us as it did to Paul." In other words, going back to what I said before, are we seeing and experiencing grace in the light and truth of Christ, or is there something about the word or the term or the teaching we've heard about grace that attracts us.

I'm going to spend today talking about grace. Some of this maybe I've said before, some of it maybe I haven't. I don't know. It doesn't really matter to me because grace is something we could talk about for a long time, for many months, so I want to hit a few key things about grace here in the time we have left.

When I hear people talk about grace, most of the time it has to do with the absence of something. People try to define it negatively, I mean, they try to define grace by what is NOT involved in our relationship with God. For example, 'grace is the absence of punishment.' Or 'grace is the absence of rules', 'the absence of the Old Covenant law,' those kinds of things. We say that grace means God is not going to open up the ground and swallow you alive like He did to the sons of Korah.

I've also heard this: "Here's the greatness of grace: Grace is great because no matter how big your sins are, grace is bigger."

And I think that there's some truth in these statements, but I think it's possible to believe those statements and totally miss the reality of grace. Does that make sense?

I think that seeing and knowing the reality of grace could bring you to some of these same conclusions, but I think you could have these conclusions and believe these conclusions and totally miss the substance of what grace is all about. And I think that we do. We really do.

The absence of these things (sin, condemnation, hell, etc) doesn't define grace; grace is defined by the giving of something, the presence of something, the offer of something that also, in experiencing what is given, removes those other things too.

There indeed are things that are removed. There are things that are no longer in view because of grace, **but they're not in God's view because of what IS in view.** And that's what we don't see.

I've tried to put it in simple words bunches of times, and I have a few different sentences I like to say about grace you've probably all heard a few times. If I could come up with better ones I would. **But I would say that grace is Christ made unto you all things—absolutely everything. Everything you think you're not, and everything you think you are. Grace starts by giving you a death that you don't know how to die, that you can't die. You can't end the things that grace kills... You can't do it.**

Do you see what I'm saying? You can't put away the things that grace lets you die too. It's a gift of death that's one hundred percent outside of your reach. **You can kill yourself, but you can't end the things in you that grace can end.** Even if you kill yourself a hundred times in a row, and someone is there with those little shocker things... bzzzt! and your back... And you do that a hundred times, it doesn't matter. Penance is not the issue. There's no need for Purgatory. Physical pain can't do it to you. Only grace offers you an end of yourself.

The idea that man can work this death—a death that comes to you by grace—the thought that man can produce this type of death in him is, in my opinion, the source of many strange and wrong ideas throughout church history, like self-flagellation, for instance. There is a place for discipline, but discipline will never kill Adam.

Paul says later in Colossians:

"If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as though you are living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as do not touch, do not taste, do not handle, which all refer to things destined to perish with use, in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men. These things have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom and self-made religion and self-abasement, and severe treatment of the body, but they're of no value against fleshly indulgence."

It doesn't say they're of little value... It doesn't say, "Don't over do it!" There is a place for discipline, and maybe we'll talk about it one of these days, but we have to understand what discipline is, and it's certainly not a way to die to the flesh. Grace is how you've been put into the death of Christ, and grace is how this death becomes real in your soul.

I see grace as a constant stream of Christ flowing from God to your soul. It's like this giant river that God offers you, and yes, in that river, there's no condemnation, or sin or hellfire... But the reason these things are not there is because grace is the Niagara Falls of Jesus Christ pouring out of God to you as the supply of light, of righteousness, of truth, of love, of everything that Christ is. And all of it excludes by death a man that cannot love, that is not righteousness, that is a lie, that knows no truth. None of that is in there in Him.

Grace is this relationship where Christ is made unto you, and poured out to you, everything that you need and everything that God desires. All of it is right there in grace, because grace is Christ. I'm going to say it a bunch of different ways and hopefully one of these times it goes a little deeper in our hearts.

Grace is God's supply of Christ to your soul. Grace is Christ living in you as the end of the Adamic man, the increase of a new Man, as a light that you've never seen with before, as a nature that starts to conquer your soul and expand the boundaries of His kingdom. We could go right on down the list. Grace is all these things and more. Grace is this reality that as you grow in it, you begin to see that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. That's grace. That describes grace. It's no longer "I" living for God, it's Christ living in and through me, because grace is showing in me, making real to me a life that is totally foreign to the natural man.

So my friends, Grace isn't that God lets you live even though you're a sinner; grace is that God lets you die in His Son so that His Son can be your life.

Grace starts with this death, and then it raises us up and seats us in the heavens in Christ, and then grace reveals the Christ we've been given and shows Him to be the reality of life in our soul. Grace does all that. Because grace isn't just the status of Christ's righteousness given to you, it's the actual righteousness Himself. It's not just truth given to you in a book, it's the Person of truth becoming the perspective of your soul.

Generally speaking, we don't really know what grace means. We haven't really experienced the Niagara Falls of Christ, if I can use that terminology. We don't really know that flow of life and light. What we know is that we've heard that we're forgiven. Or we think that grace is any nice thing that happening in our lives that we can attribute to God.

You got a Christmas bonus... by the grace of God.

Or tiny Tim's coming home for Christmas... by the grace of God.

But it's not that. **Grace has to do with a very specific thing given.** It's not the Christmas party that grace works towards. It's not just trying to get you out of the way of that falling piano. That's not grace. That might be bodily protection or God's goodness to keep you alive for a while for the sake of His body and glory, but I wouldn't really put that in the category of grace. Grace has to do with a very specific gift.

And let me say this too, because it's ugly and because it's true: We often don't even want the grace of God. People say, "Oh yes I do! Are you crazy?" Well what if I told you the grace of God excludes the natural man on every level. What if the grace of God not only gives you Christ, but requires and accepts nothing but Christ? What if what you bring to the table is excluded from the picture? What if grace only lets you return to God the measure of the thing that He's given you. What if that's what grace is all about?

People don't want to hear that. People want to have grace cover their bad stuff so they can give their good stuff to God, But that's not what grace does. Show me a type and shadow where Israel was allowed to offer up to God whatever they wanted to.

Now there are certainly types and shadows where Israel could bring voluntary offerings, but these were very specific! They had to be "a lamb of three years, perfect and without blemish, this and that... At this particular time, at this specific place, with this fragrance and that sprinkling, always the lobe of the liver, etc... All of it had to be perfectly representing Christ according to the pattern that God gave them.

They could never bring an ostrich to the altar and say, "I have a good idea! I'm just going to give this to God." It all had to be Christ. David says this in Chronicles 29:14 where David is offering these things to God and he says,

"But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to offer as generously as this, for all these things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You. O Lord our God, all this abundance that we have provided to build You a house for Your holy name, is from Your hand, and all is Yours."

Now, everything that isn't grace—we could call it a "works" gospel, but what is a "works" gospel? Again, these things need to be defined in the light; they need to be shown to us in His appearing.

For most of us a works gospel is just the idea that man has to work his way to heaven, or that he does good works to please God. Well, that is true, but I would like to enlarge our understanding of what I think Paul would consider a works gospel. We know from Galatians chapter 1 that Paul had a very specific thing in mind when he was talking about the gospel of grace, and he also warned in several different places, in several different ways, about nullifying the grace of God, or receiving the grace of God in vain.

So what's a works gospel? I would say that a works gospel – if we're going to use that phrase... It's not a phrase found in the bible, but it's something that people often talk about—a works gospel isn't only the idea that man does things to work his way to heaven or to please God. **I would say a works gospel is any gospel that includes something that man supplies for God. Anything! Not just mans physical works, but any of man's understanding, man's worship, man's nature, man's interpretation of the bible, man's emotions, man's giftings, man's resources. You see, all of this is rejected by grace.** If that's what God wanted, Jesus didn't have to come and offer us a new life.

If God wanted to receive from us from our own resources, Christ could have just come and taught some new teachings and left. He didn't have to die. He didn't have to put away the flesh and give you His life by grace. He didn't have to give you a totally foreign, different, contrary life, nature, righteousness.

If man could worship God, in and of himself, then Jesus died needlessly. If man could understand God with his mind, then why in the world do we need the mind of Christ? If man's nature could be tweaked and adjusted and made to please God, then why is it in so many places called "contrary to God," "enmity", "evil"?

If true worship is, as I've heard it said, God being enthroned on the emotions and songs of humanity... If this what God wants, and this is what we're supposed to be spreading through the nations—emotions and songs—then that was all very possible under the Old Covenant.

What's different about this covenant? **The difference is the presence of life. A life was given that is the source of all worship and understanding, of all the nature that is pleasing to God. A life was given that contains all giftings that work in His own body. Indeed, there are works to be done in the gospel. There are works to be done by grace, but these works are never done from the seed of the Adamic man, from the seed of Satan. Adam's works are excluded by grace.**

You serve God by grace. You serve God by His own grace. In fact, if you turn to the end of Hebrews, there's this great verse and it makes so much sense when it's translated correctly, and it makes zero sense if it's not. I think the New King James and maybe the King James say it correctly, but I have the New American Standard here—I just grabbed it this morning—and it says this:

Hebrews 12:28- "Therefore since we have received (or "are receiving" literally), a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire."

Now at least in the New American Standard, it has a little marginal notation next to "show gratitude" and it says that the actual translation here is "let us have grace by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe." It's not "let us have gratitude", its "let us have grace".

"Show gratitude"... What a sad translation. I mean, of course we're supposed to have gratitude to the Lord. You can't stop gratitude towards the Lord if grace is becoming real in your heart. But Mr. Translator, are you serious? Is it through human gratitude that we serve God?! Impossible. GRACE is how we serve God! That's how David served Him. "From Your own hand Lord we have given to you" His consuming fire destroys all else.

God GIVES you the thing (Christ) with which you can serve Him. He gives you the thing you must put on the altar of your soul and offer up to Him. It's something that he has always had, but now it's Christ working in you, Christ returning to His Father in a greater expression; in a greater body, in a greater kingdom, in a greater harvest. It's the increase of Christ, Christ in a greater expression, by grace you serve Him.

Grace is the eternal and full flowing of Christ to the human soul, a flow that eliminates all else.

When Paul is starting this letter wishing grace and peace to them, this is not just some formal Christian greeting. He's saying, "I want you to be ever-growing in the experience of grace and peace." We'll talk about peace, too, because peace is hugely important. But Paul is desiring that grace becomes an ever-increasing reality in the soul. He's saying, "I want grace to be the supply that you are knowing from God, the supply by which you are receiving all things. I want grace to be sufficient."

And do you know what? We always want God's grace to supply something other than Christ... and it doesn't. I hope you can follow what I mean by that. We want grace to give us health and money and friends and natural things. We want God to be the supply, but we want the thing that's flowing from Him to be almost anything except Christ, because that almost seems so impractical.

"What am I going to do with Christ? I need to pay my bills!" I had someone say something like that to me once. They said, "That's all very nice, Jason, but it's not going to pay my bills."

We want grace to be almost anything except for this spiritual, inward, ever-increasing reality of the Person of Jesus Christ. But again, grace has to do with a very specific gift. It's the gift of Christ, and you must learn its sufficiency.

There was a time in Paul's life where he wanted something more than what grace was offering. Do you remember that time? He had some thorn in his flesh, whatever that was, and we don't usually think of it this way, but this is what the Lord said to him: He

said, "Paul, I'm not going to give you the thing you are requesting, this thing in the flesh, because I want you to realize that grace is sufficient."

Now you see if grace had to do with fixing the flesh, He wouldn't have said that. God knew that Paul could have this thorn in his flesh and still have the fullness of grace. Paul could have this problem, this pain, this thing that tormented him, and yet God says to him, "I'm not going to fix that." Paul says, "Why not?" And God says, "Because there's one supply of one thing I want you to know. I want it to be sufficient. I want it to be the only thing that you understand that you need. You don't need anything else outside of the flow of Christ to your soul. You just don't."

I hear this verse quoted in a lot of different contexts, but I hardly ever hear people say that God said "NO" to Paul because He wanted Paul to know grace, and nothing else.

And that's a question that's come to my heart a number of times, and I'm sure it will come to me a number more. It's that question - "Is grace really the sufficiency of your soul, or, are you seeking grace plus something else?"

And so Paul says, "Grace to you..." And, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit..." And, "Grow in the grace and knowledge of God..." Or one place in Titus he says that "grace instructs us..." Grace is the perfect, pure and abundant flow of Christ to the believer's soul.