

## INTRODUCTION

This is the first message in a teaching series from the wonderful letter from the Apostle Paul to the Christians in Colosse, which was located in modern day Turkey. Although this letter was written almost 2,000 years ago, it contains principles and lessons that speak straight to the needs we have in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century culture.

I usually read the Tyler newspaper every morning. Our paper is outstanding for a city our size, but sometimes, newspaper headlines can be confusing—and even amusing. Here are ten headlines that actually appeared in newspapers around America:

1. Grandmother Of Eight Makes Hole In One
2. Dealers Will Hear Car Talk At Noon
3. Miners Refuse To Work After Death
4. Two Sisters Reunite After 18 Years At Checkout Counter
5. Cold Wave Linked To Temperatures
6. Something Went Wrong In Jet Crash, Experts Say
7. Joint Committee Investigates Marijuana Use
8. New Obesity Study Looks For Larger Test Group
9. Include Your Children When Baking Cookies
10. Hospital Sued By 7 Foot Doctors

Sometimes the news can be confusing!

As Paul began his letter, he wrote about the gospel. The word *gospel* literally means “good news.” In our day of crime and global terrorism, we really need some good news. There’s a song from the 1970s recorded by Ann Murray:

There’s a local paper rolled up in a rubber band  
One more sad story’s one more than I can stand  
Just once how I’d like to see the headline say  
“Not much to print today, can’t find nothin’ bad to say”,  
Because—nobody robbed a liquor store on the lower part of town  
Nobody OD’ed, nobody burned a single buildin’ down  
Nobody fired a shot in anger, nobody had to die in vain  
We sure could use a little good news today.

Well, now for some *really* good news—it is the truth about the gospel of God’s amazing grace.

Colossians 1:1-8. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has

been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God’s grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.”

In this message, I want to bring out some truths in this passage, but I also want to introduce the entire book. The theme of Colossians is “fullness.” The key passage of Colossians reveals the dual aspects of fullness: “For in Christ all the FULLNESS of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given FULLNESS in Christ.” (Colossians 2:9-10) In Jesus Christ we see the fullness of God—that’s a doctrinal statement. But the personal application of that doctrine is that WE have been given the fullness of Christ. Colossians follows that pattern—truth followed by application. In chapters 1-2, the Apostle Paul provides the doctrinal foundation for *who* we are; then in chapters 2-3 we learn what to do. To put it another way, chapters 1 and 2 teach us how to believe and chapters 3 and 4 teach us how to behave. This pattern of doctrine first followed by duty is repeated in many of Paul’s letters.

Let me illustrate the relationship between belief and behavior by using the sun as an example. A scientific lecture about the sun is like doctrine. I could tell you that our sun is 93 million miles away and that it is one of 100 billion G2 class stars in our galaxy. The diameter of the sun is 108.6 times larger than the diameter of our planet. In the sun, hydrogen is heated to 27 million degrees Fahrenheit, at which time it is converted into helium, generating 386 billion billion megawatts of energy. I’ll stop there before you doze off. Facts, or doctrine, without application can be boring.

Let me apply the truth about the sun for you. It is more than just a burning star; it touches each of us in different ways. You can go outside during the day and the sun will warm your skin and light your way. Application always leads to responsibility. If you ignore the power and force of the sun, it can be harmful. Prolonged exposure to the sun can burn your skin and even lead to skin cancer. So, if you’re going to spend time in the sun, you’d better apply sun screen.

In much the same way the Bible teaches us what to believe (doctrine), but then it teaches us how to behave (duty). We have too many people who want to believe, but they don’t want it to affect their behavior. It reminds me of the two Eskimos who lit a fire in their boat to stay warm. The boat burned up and sank, proving that “you can’t have your kayak and heat it too.” When it comes to God’s truth, you can’t just take the doctrine and say “no thanks” to the duty. Like the sun, our God is real and powerful, but it’s up to each of us to apply the sun screen.

What does it mean to experience God’s fullness? How do you know when you’re full of God? When my daughters were young, we measured their height by drawing a pencil line on the inside of a closet door and then we wrote their name and the date above each mark. It was fun to watch their growth over the years by comparing those pencil marks. In these first few verses we find three important spiritual markers. They are easy to remember, because you’ve heard of these three before: faith, hope, and love. The first mark of spiritual fullness is:

### **(1) A STRONG FAITH IN JESUS**

Even though Paul never visited Colosse, he knew their pastor, Epaphras, and he wrote in verse 4,

“we heard of your FAITH in Christ Jesus.” The first mark of spiritual fullness is having genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is not just believing facts about Jesus—it is trusting Him. It’s possible to give affirmation to the historical facts about Jesus without really trusting Him. You can believe He was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross, and was raised from the dead—and still not possess a saving faith. As I’ve often said before, “I believe in George Washington—he was our first president. But I’ve never trusted him for anything.”

It’s not a question of whether you have faith, because everyone has faith. When you mail a letter you’re putting faith in the postal system. When you drive over a bridge you’re putting trust in the architect and builders of that bridge. The key question is: In what (or whom) are you placing your ultimate faith?

With each one of these marks of fullness, I want to offer a practical spiritual lesson you can take with you when you leave. I call it a “take out truth.” Too many people go to church the same way they go to a restaurant. They enjoy the experience, pay their money, but they leave the restaurant and soon forget all about the meal. However, sometimes a meal is so good and there’s so much left over that you request a take out box. That’s what church ought to be for you—you should *always* take away some truth to enjoy long after church is over.

### **TAKE OUT TRUTH: The object of your faith is more important than the quality of your faith!**

Here’s the first Take Out Truth: The object of your faith is more important than the quality of your faith! You don’t need a BIG faith—you only need a little faith in a BIG God. Colossians teaches us that Jesus Christ is God and He alone should be the object of our faith. For instance we read in Colossians 1:19-20, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things...by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

It’s not faith in faith; or faith in the church; or even faith in Christianity that will make a difference. It is faith in Jesus Christ that will change your life and your eternal destiny. Even a tiny amount of faith in Him is more than sufficient. Jesus said if you have faith the size of a mustard seed—you can command mountains to get out of your way! (Matthew 17:20) The second mark of spiritual fullness is:

### **(2) A SINCERE LOVE FOR ALL CHRISTIANS**

In verse 4 Paul wrote about, “the LOVE you have for all the saints.” (1:4) In the New Testament, all Christians are called “saints.” You don’t have to die and be canonized by a Pope to be a saint—every Believer is *already* a saint. The term was never used individually, but always for the entire body of Christians. So don’t start calling me St. David, but I am one of the saints who make up this church—and you are too. The good news is when the saints go marching in, you *will* be in that number, if you know Jesus Christ.

One of the first things Paul comments about is how much they loved one another. He had heard from their pastor, Epaphras, about their “love in the Spirit.” (verse 1:8) Churches should be a

haven of love, but that can't be said of every church. Like Colosse, every church has a reputation, and we've all known of some churches that have a reputation of being unloving. Some churches even have a reputation for being “Preacher killers.” These kinds of churches have such an argumentative spirit that they go through pastors like water through a screen door. That's why they can never keep a pastor more than two or three years.

I'm so glad our fellowship has a reputation for being a loving church, too! The studies of George Barna show the primary indicator for healthy churches is how long a pastor stays there. In fifty years, we've only had five pastors, and between Paul Powell and me, we have served for 32 of those 50 years. This is a loving church. It has a great reputation. We have people who move here from all over America who have already heard this is a loving church. We're not perfect (as the church at Colosse was not perfect), but we have a love for all the saints.

### **TAKE OUT TRUTH: The primary fruit of the Spirit is love**

That leads to the Take Out Truth: The primary fruit of the Spirit is love. In Galatians 5:22 we learn the fruit of the Holy Spirit is expressed in nine different character qualities and the first one mentioned is love.

In I Corinthians 13 we learn love is patient and kind; it is not irritable or resentful; it is not jealous or boastful; love does not rejoice at wrong; it rejoices in the right; it always protects; always endures, always hopes, always perseveres—love never ends. When you hear those words, you may get frustrated by thinking you have to generate these kinds of feelings for everyone—even those unlovely people. But the secret is to let Jesus love unlovely people through you.

The Bible is a book of virtues: In other words it tells us how to live. When we get into the practical section in Chapter 3, we discover what these virtues are. And just like in the list of the fruit of the Spirit, we see the primacy of love. “And over all these virtues put on LOVE, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” (Colossians 3:14)

A loving church is filled with loving Christians. It's easy to talk about love in general terms, but when it boils down to loving ALL the saints, it's not as easy as it sounds. There's a little poem that says, “To live above with saints we love; oh, that will be glory; but to live below with saints we know; now, that's a different story!”

I heard about a preacher who was preparing a sermon on loving one another. He recently poured concrete for a new driveway at his house. As he was working on his message, he heard some kids laughing. He investigated to discover some neighborhood boys were walking through his driveway, leaving their footprints in the concrete. In fury, he ran out of the house screaming for the boys to get out of his driveway. They quickly dispersed, he returned to his study. His wife thought she's kid him by saying, “I thought we are supposed to love one another. It didn't sound like you loved those boys very much!” The pastor said, “I DO love them. I love them in the abstract but not in the concrete!”

It sure is easier to talk about loving Christians than it is to love all Christians! Some Christians are unlovely—but they are never unlovable. Jesus loves them. I have said before that I've found

two kinds of Christians in my experience. Some of them are easy to love and the rest of them are easier to love! The secret is allowing Jesus to love unlovely people through us.

The third mark of spiritual fullness is:

### **(3) A SURE HOPE OF HEAVEN**

In verse 5 we can learn the relationship between faith, hope and love: “the faith and love that spring from the HOPE that is stored up for you in heaven.” (verse 1:5) According to this, it is our hope that generates our faith and love. And it says our hope is “stored up” in heaven. It’s a word that means “to store in a safe place.” It’s the same word Jesus used when He spoke about “laying up treasures in heaven.” (Matthew 6:19-21)

Over the last forty years a new industry has exploded in America—the self-storage business. As recent as 1995 there were about 6,000 self-storage outlets in America, and today there are over 45,000. What does that say about our culture? We have so much stuff that we can’t even store it all! Our greed has created a \$15 billion annual business just to store our stuff.

If you are a Christian, you have something stored up in heaven, and it isn’t in a metal building with a garage door. It is the HOPE we have in Jesus Christ.

Last year I taught an entire series on hope, in which I told you the four letters in hope can stand for “Having Only Positive Expectations.” Our English word “hope” doesn’t capture the power of the word in the Bible. We use hope in sentences like: “I *hope* I make a good grade on this test; I *hope* my team wins; or I *hope* things will work out.” But the Bible word for hope, *elpis*, means to have an absolute assurance of a promise being fulfilled.

### **TAKE OUT TRUTH: Hope is knowing that Jesus lives in me!**

Here’s the Take Out Truth: Hope is knowing that Jesus lives in me! If I asked you, “If you died today do you know for certain you would go to heaven?” how would you answer? Can you say, “I *know* so” or would you have to cop out, using our English word for hope by saying, “I *hope* so?”

Jesus is my hope. Because He is seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father, my hope is laid away safely in heaven. If I trust my own goodness, or my own works to get me to heaven, then there’s no hope for me. But if I am trusting Jesus alone for salvation, He alone is my hope.

Still not sure about hope? This great verse later in Colossians 1 makes it unmistakable: “God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is CHRIST IN YOU, the HOPE of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)

Do you know what else is so good about this good news? It’s for all people. It wasn’t just for the Jews or the people in Turkey or Rome. This is good news for the whole world. On the night Jesus was born the angel told the shepherds, “I bring you good news of great joy which shall for ALL people.” (Luke 2: 10) And in Colossians 1:6 Paul wrote “all over the world, this gospel is

bearing fruit and growing.” The good news about Jesus isn’t just an American religion—it’s not restricted to any culture or country it offers hope to all people.

Whenever I think about the doctrine of hope these days, I always remember something special that happened on one of my first visits to Asia few years ago. Every time I visited this city, I have always been allowed to be a guest teacher in a college English class. Each of the students has an Asian name as well as an English name they use when practicing their English.

On this particular day, each student in the class stood and told me their English name. I noticed one of them was named Hope. During the class I talked to them about what I do in America. I told them I was a teacher—and their eyes always lit up, because most of them were training to be teachers. I told them I taught history, philosophy, and the Bible—and of course, that’s exactly what I do. Then I use that as a platform to explain about why I believe the teachings of the Bible and a relationship with Jesus Christ can make a person’s life so much better. As usual, these students listened attentively. They were so interested in learning about America, that they never suspected I was sharing the good news with them!

After this particular class, the girl named Hope came up to me. She asked me, “Can you tell me please, what is the meaning of my name, Hope?” You talk about an open door! That was like saying “sic ‘em” to a Doberman! In that moment, God gave me an acrostic for Hope I had never heard before, but I have used many times since. I said, “H.O.P.E. means ‘Having Only Positive Expectations.’” She smiled and wrote those four words down. I told her it was a word used many times in the Bible. Then she said, “I wish I had a Bible to learn more about hope.” And I reached in my satchel and said, “I just happened to have an English/Chinese New Testament. You may have it so you can practice your English.” She took it as if was giving her a gift of gold.

Over the next few weeks we emailed back and forth, and before long Hope had put her faith in Jesus and was leading a Bible study for other girls in her dorm. Many of you know Hope, because she visited our city with some other Asian students a few years ago. While she was here, she was baptized.

She has since returned to her country and now is a powerful witness for Jesus Christ. She has led dozens of her friends to Jesus. I told the workers in our meeting in Thailand, “If you ever meet Hope, be sure to ask her the meaning of her name. I guarantee she will beam her beautiful smile and say, “Having Only Positive Expectations!” And that’s the good news that is spreading all over the world!

## CONCLUSION

The secret to a fruitful Christian life is found in living the overflow of an intimate relationship with Jesus. That’s why I named this series “Life Overflowing.” Need faith? Jesus gives me faith as an overflow of knowing Him. Need help in loving unlovely people? It is His love flowing out of me that splashes on those around me. Need hope? It comes when I realize Christ is in me, and the overflow of His life gives me absolute assurance of heaven.

In our study of Colossians we’ll learn the Christian life is NOT about trying to imitate Jesus. It is

surrendering to Jesus to allow Him to live His life through us. Are you full of Jesus? Are you filled to brim with Him? The only way to tell when something is truly full is when it is overflowing.

I could illustrate that with a pitcher of water and a glass. I can fill the glass up with water, almost to the top, yet it still wouldn't be completely full. I could even add a little more, but if it's not running over, it's still not quite full. The only way to tell when the glass is completely full is when it is overflowing. How do you know when you're living the fullness of Christ? When you are overflowing His life.

I can recall my grandmother telling me about growing up on a farm where their only source of water was a well behind the house. Sometimes at night she would be sent out to get some water. She could hardly see the well, much less the water in the bottom of the well. She would drop the bucket into the well, and I'll never forget her saying, “The only way I knew when the bucket was full was when I could hear it overflowing.”

As the great hymn says, “My hope is built on nothing less; than Jesus' blood and righteousness; I dare not trust the sweetest frame; But wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.” (Words by Edward Mote)

## OUTLINE

KEY PASSAGE: “For in Christ all the FULLNESS of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given FULLNESS in Christ.” *Colossians 2:9-10*

MARKS OF SPIRITUAL FULLNESS:

(1) A STRONG FAITH IN JESUS “we heard of your FAITH in Christ Jesus.” (v. 1:4)

TAKE OUT TRUTH: The object of your faith is more important than the quality of your faith!

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things...by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” *Colossians 1:19-20*

(2) A SINCERE LOVE FOR ALL CHRISTIANS “the LOVE you have for all the saints.” (v. 1:4)

TAKE OUT TRUTH: The primary fruit of the Spirit is love

“And over all these virtues put on LOVE, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”  
*Colossians 3:14*

(3) A SURE HOPE OF HEAVEN “the faith and love that spring from the HOPE that is stored up for you in heaven.” (v. 1:5)

TAKE OUT TRUTH: Hope is knowing that Jesus lives in me!

“God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is CHRIST IN YOU, the HOPE of glory.” *Colossians 1:27*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes