

# "How Scripture and Prayer Fuel our Love"

## *Colossians 1:1-14*

Our theme for 2025 has been 'Love One Another'. We've looked at numerous passages that challenge us to make sacrificial choices to meet someone else's needs. The Greek word for 'love' [agape] was not commonly used in the secular world because it spoke of a kind of love that is above and beyond. More than love for family members [storge], more than friends or brothers [philia], and far more than the physical love between husband and wife [eros], agape speaks of a commitment to seek to meet someone's need even if it costs you [time, resources, pride] with no regard to being paid back. So the biblical writers under the Holy Spirit's guidance used that word to describe the way God loves us and the way we – now that we are God's through Christ – are to love one another. Agape is not an emotional term; it's an action word. Agape is something you do for others, not something you feel.

I want to use Paul's opening words this morning from Colossians to show how we 'love one another' the way Scripture describes. If agape is something we do for one another, that means we have to think beforehand what we're going to do for others. We've got to develop a mindset that prepares us to show this kind of love to one another. And Paul's intro to the Colossians is helpful in this regard.

What do we know about Colossae and the believers there? Paul wrote this letter in the late 50's AD, while under house arrest in Rome (Acts 28) when he also wrote Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon. Colossae was a key commercial city under Persian and Greek rule from the 5<sup>th</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BC. It was a booming place. But when the Romans took over, they built their network of roads it included a new road north of Colossae. People travelling east to west now bypassed Colossae and by 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Colossae had become a town overshadowed by the nearby cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis – only 10-15 miles away. While Colossae may have become insignificant to Rome it was not insignificant to God or the apostle Paul. Isn't it encouraging to find a New Testament letter written by the apostle Paul to a church in a smaller community? Does God care about churches and believers in small communities? Yes He does.

But God is not the only one who has an interest in small communities, so does Satan. Colossae attracted the cults and false teachers. Some had influenced the church there and caused them to doubt the sufficiency of Jesus for their salvation and the Word of God as the authority for life. Isn't that what all cults and false teaching do? Question the character of Jesus and the authority of God's Word?

Paul did not plant the church nor had he been there but his friend Epaphras had and his friend Philemon lived there and a church met in his home. He was burdened for the church at Colossae with this false teaching having infiltrated their ranks. Paul's desire is laid out in 1:28-29,

*We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labour, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me."*

This is God's goal for every church – to present everyone perfect in Christ. One day we will be. We who have been justified will one day be glorified. The process from justification to glorification is called sanctification. Sanctify means to be holy, set apart for God. Or even simpler, spiritual growth.

God's goal is to see us grow in Christlikeness. Since Paul's desire is to present everyone perfect in Christ, he emphasizes spiritual growth right from the start of his letter. How can we grow spiritually in a way that is pleasing to God? Paul gives us some guidelines right from the start: to apply to ourselves and to help each other grow in a way that pleases God. And what pleases God is to show God's kind of love to one another.

Paul identifies himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, writing to this group of believers in a smaller community. To receive a personal greeting from someone who tells you God's will led me to write to you would be extremely encouraging. Paul says 'I'm an apostle in Christ and Timothy is my brother in Christ and you Colossians are also my brothers in Christ. We're all in Christ! We're family and family encourages one another in words and loving action.

If you were a believer in Colossae and you got a letter from Paul, you would be like – 'Wow! The apostle Paul recognizes us! He knows we're here. He's heard about our church. Neat!!' Wouldn't that encourage you to keep serving the Lord?

When another believer in Christ speaks words of encouragement to us it builds us up. Negative words tear us down – we don't need to be reminded of that. Yet, negative words seem to come off our mouths a little too quickly and perhaps more often than positive. Why does it take more effort to say positive words? We have to think a little more about it. We have to be paying more attention to others more than ourselves. If I'm a believer in Christ and you're a believer in Christ but 94 % of people in Canada are not then we're not going to hear a whole lot of encouraging words from most people. If we're going to hear encouraging words it's going to have to come from each another. So then how do we speak more words of love and do more loving acts to each other?

Paul begins his letter as he does many of his letters with thanksgiving to God for what he's seen and heard God doing in the church.

*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, <sup>4</sup> because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— <sup>5</sup> 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 <sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our<sup>[c]</sup> behalf, <sup>8</sup> and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

Paul shows us the way we become more loving; it starts with our minds:

## **Heavenly Mindedness Produces Earthly Goodness** **(1:3-8)**

Perhaps you've heard the phrase, 'He is so heavenly minded he's no earthly good'. That's not really true if we apply the heavenly/biblical mindset to our life. We will do the earthliest good because we're listening to who we are in Christ, what we have in Christ and what we can do in and through Christ.

"We always thank God when we pray for you because we heard of your faith and of the love you have for all the saints". Faith [heavenly mindset] and love [action] go together. Your faith is not something separate from your 'real life', your faith is supposed to be your life. Paul says we heard about your faith showing itself in loving actions

### ***Faith in action results in love for others (vv.3-4)***

Paul had never been to Colossae but when he heard about the ways they showed their faith and love in Christ he praised the Lord! It's easy to see what we are not doing or should be doing but when we do see us showing our faith in action we need to thank God for each other. Paul heard about the Colossians' faith through their love for each other. "Love God and one another" is the greatest commandment. Our love for God and each other summarizes our faith. Thank God when you see or hear of someone in the church putting their love in action. Faith in action, Paul says, springs from our hope that is stored up in heaven for us, that we know is true because we believe what the Bible says. So,

### ***Future hope affects our present attitude (vv.5-8)***

How?

— <sup>5</sup> *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*

Their acting sacrificially towards each other to meet their needs comes from an active faith where their mind thinks about how to live out God's Word, and that mindset allows God's purposes to trump ours.

Our faith in action springs from daily putting into practice what we believe God's Word says. If we believe God's Word then we should do what God's Word says. We serve others not out of guilt but out of genuine desire so as to please God. Do we want to please God with our life? We say we want to, but many times we choose not to help someone or serve because we selfishly don't want to. If that's the case I need to change the way I think. So I must remind myself regularly through the Word of God of how graced I am to even be saved, and now know what life is all about (serving God and others for His glory), then the Bible changes my desires to do what God wants more than what I want.

When we let the Word direct our thoughts, we will

### ***Share the Word with others (v.6)***

*and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel <sup>6</sup> 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.*

Paul is talking about evangelism – yes – and spiritual maturing. We plant the seeds of the gospel, which God takes and saves some (us) who now learn more and more about how knowing God's message is supposed to change us [bearing fruit and growing] and are growing in our understanding that God's grace in your life changes everything.

That presumes we're paying attention to each other because we're involved in each other's lives so we see or hear about each other's needs. If we're not in contact with each other we will not hear about these things. Not only was Paul in contact with the church in Colossae but he was attentive to many churches and the work of God in the world. When you hear where God has been working thank Him that He is working and is in control of this world. When you hear where God is working in our church family . . .

## **Be thankful for the Word sharers (vv.7-8)**

*.7 You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, <sup>8</sup> and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

Epaphras probably planted the church and was the first shepherd. They grew as they listened to God's Word and applied it to their lives. Later in Ch. 4 Paul will thank Epaphras again because he was *"always wrestling in prayer for you"* (4:12) and Tychicus and Aristarchus and Mark for their ministry, but also the Colossians themselves. Because it was through Epaphras he heard about the Colossians love in the Spirit.

Can I put a plug in for our ministry team lunch next Saturday? I want anyone who's involved in any ministry in the church to come and be encouraged by all of us, to know that your ministry is important and is helping us directly or indirectly grow and bear fruit. If we want people to keep serving God then thank them whenever you see or hear about it no matter who it is. Because when people feel neglected for their ministry, they will quit. I know we're not here to serve for recognition but a thank you will encourage spiritual growth just as much as neglect encourages quitting.

So then, if a biblical mindset is necessary for our faith to result in loving action towards each other and the lost, how can we help all of us to grow in that?

## **Pray Biblically So Faith and Love Increase** **(1:9-14)**

Jesus said in John 15:5,

*<sup>5</sup> "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.*

So prayer is staying connected to Jesus and asking Him and His Father to help us all to have an active faith. James wrote in James 5:16

*"The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective"*

He also said in 4:2

*"You do not have because you do not ask God".*

Jesus challenged us to

*"Ask and it will be given to you. Seek and you will find. Knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; he who seeks finds and to him who knocks the door will be opened."* (Matt. 7:7-8)

How did Paul pray for believers?

## **Pray for our spiritual maturing (v.9)**

We often pray for tangible things; healing, safety, meeting of needs – because sometimes they are pressing. But the most repeated prayer in the New Testament is for spiritual growth. So if we want

to see spiritual growth in our church and in each other's lives we need to pray for it. This is what Paul prayed for the Colossians. 1:9-12 is a great prayer we should be praying regularly since prayer fuels spiritual growth too.

*<sup>9</sup> For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*

God wants you and I to be filled with the knowledge of His will through spiritual wisdom and understanding from the Word of God which, as we just saw in vv.3-8

### ***Impacts our personal obedience (v.10)***

*<sup>10</sup> And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,*

When we fill our minds with the knowledge of God's will, we will produce spiritual fruit. Fruit is the outward evidence of internal growth. Good works is love produced by our faith. When we are saved by faith God pours the Holy Spirit in our hearts so that our desire now is to please God with good works in thanks for what He's done for us. These works are the evidence that the Spirit is in us producing fruit that pleases God. You can't get this without growing in the Word. Paul is always telling us to be in the Word, in the Word, in the Word! We can't know God if we're not in the Word. And

### ***That equips us to live faithfully (v.11)***

*<sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may [live a comfortable and safe life] have great endurance and patience*

We need spiritual power from God to endure the trials life brings, to be patient with each other since none of us are fully mature in Christ. And to discern truth from error. There were cults and false teachers in Colossae. They are here too as are numerous anti-God people. They will challenge our faith. We need to have God's strength to get through these things. Paul wouldn't have prayed this if God didn't expect us to go through tough times in life.

We need to pray for each other asking God to work in each other's lives so we will please God with our life because ...

### ***Our identity is in God's hope and love (vv.12-14)***

*and joyfully <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, <sup>[e]</sup> the forgiveness of sins.*

We don't qualify ourselves based on our supposed goodness. None of us are. We're all on equal footing, sinners in need of Jesus. But through faith He saves us and gives us new life and purpose. We are now His. We belong to God.

When we pray for each other's growth we will become more thankful people because we're seeing our life more clearly from God's perspective. This Christian life is God working through us. He qualified us to be part of His kingdom because of Christ. It's not about us; it's about what Jesus did on the cross for us and our acceptance of His forgiveness of our sins. The more we grow spiritually the more we'll be thinking spiritually and thanking God for His work in our life.

Westport, Elgin, Crosby, Newboro, Portland, Fermoy, Perth – we're the Colossians of our day. God knows we're here. So we need to encourage each other and pray for one another so that we grow spiritually and please God with our life.

Paul shows us how crucial the Bible and prayer are to spiritual growth. Reading our Bibles is great but applying it is the key to living a life that pleases God. Understanding God's Word helps us see life through His eyes and see each other through His eyes. God has entrusted you and I with the mutual responsibility to live out our faith in sacrificial [God-like] love that puts your needs ahead of our desires. When we're challenged to live out our faith in love to serve one another, how often do we say yes to God's desires or yes to our own desires of dis-obeying God and neglecting each other? More often than we should if we're honest.

*Heb. 10:24* And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, <sup>25</sup> not giving up meeting [connecting] together, as some [all of us] are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please  
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