

masquerade – to operate under false pretense or character; to disguise oneself or to present a façade. To pretend to be someone or something you are not.

Over the next few weeks we're going to investigate the book of Colossians to unmask the problem of cultural Christianity and to call us to a faith that's steadfast, immoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord. To do this will require we see Jesus through the lens of Scripture instead of through eyes of culture – and to see our beliefs for what they are in light of who He is so that the very thing Paul prayed for the Colossians would be true of us – *that we might be filled w/ the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding so we might live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way.*

Now this might not seem to like a critical issue to you, yet there might not be a more vital issue facing the modern Christian living in a postmodern world.

In a time when spirituality is at an all-time high, Christianity appears to be in a free fall as people are wandering from the faith like never before. And if not walking away from the church completely; certainly we're wondering if the church has any relevance whatsoever to our lives.

To make matters worse, almost daily we hear of some politically correct twist to the Gospel that celebrates the efforts of humanity or invites a touch of universalism to afford everyone who wants their ears tickled an invitation to salvation apart from Jesus... Maybe this is why Paul wrote;

For the time will come when people will not put up w/ sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 2 Tm. 4:3-4

Across denominational lines, we've found ourselves in a battle of faith and culture – and in the process of striving to survive, too many church/believers, despite good intentions, have succumbed to culture compromising the Gospel – and now many appear to have lost their identity for the sake of expediency, comfort, and convenience.

But this isn't a new problem. We're once again facing a similar challenge to what the early church was facing in the city of Colossae. We're trying to navigate truth in a midst of moral relativism and cultural correctness.

Colossae in Asia Minor was a culture like ours today cluttered w/ unparalleled religious influences that mixed the manmade gods/philosophies of the Greeks/Romans w/ the ceremonialism of the Jews and mysticism of the Oriental's.

Yet in the midst of this pluralistic culture, God planted a church to be a beacon for His glory. But they struggled. They struggled b/c the **culture was having a bigger influence on them than they were having on the culture.** At the heart of their struggle was the *Colossian Heresy*.

The Colossian Heresy threatened the credibility/growth of the Colossian church b/c it was a synchronization of Greek philosophy and legalistic Judaistic ceremonialism assailing the Christian faith was immature, irrelevant, and that Jesus wasn't sufficient to reveal sin and redeem the sinner. Considered a form of pre-*Gnosticism*, the heresy placed a premium on asceticism and the worship of angels/demons. It claimed God was good – matter was evil, so Jesus couldn't have been God in the flesh and was insufficient for salvation.

Little has changed on the landscape of religious beliefs from the 1st century to today. We too live in a melting pot of religious conjecture struggling to make sense of the truth. The question is how can we live and have impact in our pluralistic culture. Let's see what Paul had to say...

I A GOSPEL Centered Life

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To God's holy people in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

Paul begins this epistle by sharing his divine call to preach the gospel, to testify to the veracity of the life and sacrifice of Jesus, and to establish churches throughout the world by planting the seed of truth into the hearts of receptive people.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, b/c we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people—the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you. In the same way, the gospel bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God's grace. 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.

Paul was thankful the Colossians had an **authentic** faith **measurable** by their love for one another and by the growth of the church in Great Commission ministry. He was grateful there was evidence this church was alive and fruitful.

gospel (*euaggelion*) – meaning glad tidings. It refers to the good news that Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins, was buried, and arose from the grave on the 3rd day conquering sin and death and providing a means for all men to have their sins forgiven and to be redeemed.

The gospel is nothing less than Christ entering time and space to become our satisfactory sacrifice. It is a gift that's **RECEIVED** by faith; **RESULTS** in love; **RESTS** in hope; and **REACHES** out to the world.

II An **ABIDING** Life

For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you w/ the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,

filled (*pleroo*) – to be controlled and under the influence. Like a man under the influence of alcohol – he's not able to control himself b/c he's controlled by the intoxicating drink.

Paul prays that as followers of Christ we'd be indwelt and filled w/ the Spirit of God living completely under His control. **DUI for God – Dwelling Under His Influence.**

Do not be drunk w/ wine, but be filled by the Spirit.

Much like our culture, the Colossian culture placed a high premium on knowledge while condemning the empirical as evil. They held that truth could be known intellectually, but not necessarily experientially b/c that which was spiritual was considered good, while that which was fleshly was evil.

Knowledge of His will (*epiginosko*) Paul is referring to a deep, experiential understanding of Him and His will. For revelation so real you can see it, taste it, touch it and hear it.

This isn't just a mental knowledge or 'smarts', but a participatory knowledge controlled by God's will (*thelema*).

Meaning God isn't concerned w/ how well you do in a game of *Jeopardy* or *Trivial Pursuit*, but w/ your realization and understanding of His plan for you. He is praying we receive absolute insight and clarity so we might know whom we have believed and would be persuaded by God.

III A **PLEASING** Life

...so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened w/ all power according to his glorious might so you may have great endurance and patience, giving joyful thanks to the Father,

A A **WORTHY** Walk

live (*parapateao*) to walk – the everyday pitter-patter of life.

Paul used a word understood by the Greeks. Plato sponsored a school (*parapateao*) where philosophy students would go on walks of enlightenment but never acted on their insights.

Paul wanted the Colossians to understand the reality of life wasn't philosophical in nature but practical. We're to walk the walk and not just talk the talk.

worthy (*axios*) to balance out – practice what you preach.

Paul calls Christians to live an everyday life that would bring honor and glory to God b/c it possesses a balance b/w what they profess and what they live. A worthy walk always lives what it professes. It is a life w/out hypocrisy.

Years ago, a pastor in London got on a trolley, bought his ticket, and took his seat. Once seated, he realized that the driver had mistakenly given him an exorbitant amount of change. Rather than rejoicing and keeping the change, he returned to the driver and pointed out this mistake. The driver responded, "Oh, this was no mistake. I was in your church Sunday and heard you preach on honesty; and I wanted to see if you practiced what you preached.

B A Life that PLEASES

What is the objective of your life? When you wake up in the AM, what do you aspire to achieve in the day ahead? As you lay your head on the pillow at night, what determines if the day has been well spent?

pleasing (*areskiea*) one whose ambition is to satisfy the heart of God. Not as a means to gain God's favor, but show God gratitude for his favor – **to put a smile on God's face.**

Paul suggests that a life whose objective is to please God is a life well spent. **He prays that the single-minded ambition of a follower of Jesus would be to think and act only on those things that satisfy the heart of God.**

True spirituality is not ME getting more of God, but rather it is God getting more of ME.

We can't manufacture the Christian life; we can only surrender to leading of the Spirit and the truth of the Word. We tend to humanize the traits of genuine faith.

GOOD Faith	GOD Faith
Attend Church	Fruitful in Service
Moral	Growing in Knowledge
Tithe	Strengthened w/ Power
Pray and Read Bible	Endurance
Mission	Patience
	Gratefulness

1 A **FRUITFUL** Ministry

fruitful (*karpophorountes*) one who continuously produces God-honoring characteristics and actions.

I am the vine and you are the branches; if any man abides in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; but apart from Me, you can do nothing. Jn. 15:5

To produce such fruit an individual must (1) have an authentic union w/ Christ; (2) have received spiritual knowledge as revealed by the H.S. through the Scriptures; and (3) have a focused effort concerning the Kingdom.

Spiritual fruit includes any Godly quality that **BUDS** in your life b/c of Christ in you, **BLOOMS** through your life b/c of the movement of the H.S., and **BEHAVES** w/ Godly actions that point others to Jesus.

2 A MATURING Relationship

growing in knowledge (*te epignosei*) a continuous action of maturing by coming into full awareness and understanding. Not solely gathering new information, but internalizing and applying it to your everyday life. **This is both qualitative and quantitative.** It's information leading to transformation and inspiration – I KNOW God so I SHOW God!

3 A STRENGTHENING Faith

strengthened (*dunamoumenoi*) an explosive reoccurring power propelling a believer to a stronger more fervent faith.

The idea is like the spark plug and pistons continually firing inside of an engine to propel the vehicle forward. It is like a continual firing of spiritual pistons in sequence to empower the Christian life.

D An ENDURING Faith

endurance (*hupomone*) to bear up under any circumstance – the ability to see things through under great distress. It refers to one who will not become frustrated w/ his circumstances and who is committed until the end w/out seeking revenge.

B A PATIENT Faith

patience (*makrothumia*) to be longsuffering w/ people. It is a reference to how we treat other people.

Paul is praying that under God we would have the ability to treat others the way Jesus would treat them even though they are treating us the way they treated Jesus.

C A GRATEFUL Faith

To make it more difficult, we're to be patient w/ people and circumstances. We're to be thankful God is giving us this opportunity to grow and to reflect His glory and goodness.

It was Paul's constant prayer for the Colossians that they would be completely filled and controlled by the revealed truth of the knowledge of God's will. Paul understood that only when a believer is controlled by God's truth can they walk in a manner that is worthy and honoring of the Lord. Such a life requires a fruitful and maturing life that manifests itself in a steadfast, patient, and grateful attitude.

IV A QUALIFIED Life

who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

A Jesus QUALIFIED Us

qualified (*hikanoo*) to make fit; to make sufficient or to authorize; to pay ones entry fee.

A few years ago I was given tickets to go to the Braves game. As I approached the gate, all I had to do is present the free tickets to the usher and they let me into the game. I got to see the Braves beat the Rockies b/c someone else paid my entry fee. I did nothing to earn or deserve it; I was simply the beneficiary of someone else's grace and generosity. The same is true for us with regard to salvation.

We're not qualified on our own efforts, but only through the finished work of Christ on the Cross. This is an instantaneous act that occurred at the point of our salvation when we invited Christ into our lives by faith whereby we have been made participants and partakers of all his blessings and promises reserved for His own inheritance.

B Jesus DELIVERED Us

rescued (*ruomai*) to instantaneously draw to oneself or to rescue – to retrieve with fervor.

It's as if we're drowning in a sea of sin and God through His grace and our faith snatches us out of the sea into safety. He delivers us from death/damnation and gives us life. Thus, anyone who has received God's gift of grace by faith has been liberated from the dominion and rule of Satan.

C Jesus TRANSFERRED Us

brought (*methistemi*) to remove or change – used in secular literature of the removing of a person from one country to settle then as colonist and citizen in another country.

We were lifted out of the citizenship of this earthly sinful world and relocated w/ full citizenship into God's kingdom. Though we live in this world, we're no longer held in its grip. We're stranger passing through to citizenship w/ God.

D Jesus REDEEMED Us

redemption (*apolutrosis*) to deliver or release by payment of a ransom or to free a slave from bondage (to emancipate).

Jesus has given us complete freedom from the penalty, power, and pain of sin (*Gal. 5:1, 13*) by dying on the cross to pay for our sin. He paid the ransom in full (*Mt. 20:28*). And b/c of this payment, we have forgiveness from sin.

For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. Hb. 9:15

ransom (*aphesin*) – to pardon or to give remission from penalty; to send away.

B/c of Christ's finished work on the Cross we've been redeemed. God has sent our sin away so that they will never be found again. *As far as the east is from the west...* (*Ps. 103:12*). Jesus became our scapegoat (*Lev. 16:10*) taking our sin away and bringing to us redemption through His blood the forgiveness of sin.