

You Were Raised Right

Studies in the Book of Colossians

Text

Colossians 1:1-2

Topic

In order to combat the lure of false teachers that they need something more than Jesus, Paul reminds the believers in Colossae that they are “in Christ,” and that His Spirit is in them

Title

“Salvation is an In-In Situation”

In the movie, *The Lion King*, Simba, heir to the throne of his father King Mufasa, flees from the Pridelands when his father is murdered by Scar, Mufasa’s brother and Simba’s uncle.

Deep in the safety of the jungle Simba joins up with two characters, Timon and Pumba, whose philosophy of life is *Hakuna Matata* - "no worries." Simba buys into this for many years enjoying a life not only with no worries but also no responsibilities.

Meanwhile under the dictatorship of Scar the Pridelands fall into ruin, famine and despair.

One day Rafiki the wise baboon tracks Simba down and offers to lead him to a place where he will meet his dead father. Intrigued, the young lion follows Rafiki through the twisted roots of ancient trees until he reaches a clearing. There, in the clear night sky, Simba remembers his own roots. He has a moving vision of his father, who laments, "You have forgotten who you are, and therefore, you have forgotten me."

Simba rediscovers who he is: He is Mufasa's boy, the son of the king.

Christians sometimes forget who they are. Or at least we act as if we have forgotten. We lose our joy; we're not at peace; we try to live by rules rather than empowered by grace.

The mostly Gentile believers in the first century city of Colossae were forgetting who they were and, for that matter, *whose* they were.

A number of false teachings were challenging the supremacy and the simplicity of Jesus Christ in their lives and thus weakening their walks with the Lord. They needed to rediscover they were “in Christ” Who is preeminent and supreme over all creation and is the head of the church.

So do we from time to time. I’ll organize my comments around two points: #1 Rediscover **Who** You Are, & #2 Rediscover **Whose** You Are.

#1 Rediscover **Who** You Are

(v1-2a)

Identity theft is a reality in today’s world. If you’re not vigilant you’ll find yourself victimized.

Spiritual identity theft assaults Christians. False teachings about Jesus Christ undermine your identity “in Christ” as a believer and pretty soon you are struggling when you should be overcoming.

The believers in Colossae were being victimized. In chapter two the apostle Paul will urge them “let no one judge you” (v16) and “let no one cheat you of your reward” (v18).

We'll discuss the particulars of the heresies when we get to chapter two. But whether it is the first or the twenty-first century, no matter the particulars, every false teaching chips away the supremacy of Jesus Christ and the simplicity of your relationship with Him.

False teachings always accuse you of lacking something in your walk:

- The health and wealth heresy that has been prevalent for many years accuses you of missing out on perfect health and unlimited blessing because you lack faith. In essence, they promote faith in faith rather than faith in Jesus.
- The Hebrew roots movement popular today promotes the teaching that Christ's death on the cross did not end the Mosaic Covenant, but instead renewed it, expanded its message, and wrote it on the hearts of His true followers. They teach that the understanding of the New Testament can only come from a Hebrew perspective and that the teachings of the Apostle Paul are not understood clearly or taught correctly by Christian pastors

today. They are similar to the first-century Judaizers.

- I can't say it is a movement, but what one author calls "retro-Christianity" has become popular. It's the idea of "retrieving ideas and practices from the whole Christian past," and applying them to our contemporary church life. While this isn't always a bad thing, it can be taken too far, suggesting that we are not worshipping God properly unless we do it the way the Church Father's did.

What we'll learn in Colossians is that the only thing we are ever missing is our own identity as believers as it is undermined by these and other false teachings.

Verses one and two may be a greeting from Paul to the Colossians, but they contain everything you need in order to rediscover **who** you are and eliminate the nagging doubts that you are somehow lacking some important practice.

Colossians 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

Paul had never been to Colossae but he had a lot to do with their being saved. While in Ephesus for three years we're told in the Book of Acts that the Gospel Paul was preaching spread to all of Asia (19:10). It's believed by scholars that one of Paul's converts, either Tychicus or Epaphras (a.k.a., Ephaproditus) took the good news about salvation by grace through faith in Jesus to Colossae and thus the church was founded. Paul was their spiritual grandfather.

I always like to hear why and how a church was founded. A church ought to be the supernatural working of the Lord. Most are. Occasionally something gets started from a split or a disagreement and that, to me, is a sad foundation to build upon. For the most part churches have a story to tell in their founding of the wonderful love of God for His people.

Paul summarized his entire spiritual career when he said he was "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." The "apostles" were the guys Jesus tapped to establish the foundation of His church on the earth in the first century.

They were men who had seen the risen Christ and had been directly commissioned by Him. Their ministries were authenticated by miracles, signs, and wonders following their preaching of the Word.

We can make too much or too little of credentials in the church. The credentials we should be interested in are first and foremost a servant's heart. Then faithfulness. Then gifting by God. Credentials added by men can be valuable, but they must remain secondary.

Paul was an apostle "of Christ Jesus by the will of God." When Paul was Saul, he was on his way to Damascus to arrest and otherwise assault Christians.

Jesus appeared to him, knocked him down and blinded him. Saul was saved in that amazing encounter. Led by the hand into the city, he was prayed for by Ananias and received his sight as well as the fullness of the Holy Spirit.

Paul knew exactly who he was. He was Jesus Christ's apostle chosen to take the Gospel to the

Jew first and then the Gentiles. No identity crisis, no identity theft, was troubling him.

We can and should be confident as we serve the Lord. Not arrogant, but confident. I mean, are we only 99% sure that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life? There's a lot of wiggle room in 1% of uncertainty.

Paul mentioned "Timothy, our brother." He was another convert of Paul's but one that also often traveled with him. His missionary career started when Paul asked him, as an adult, to undergo the pain of physical circumcision.

Paul would argue against circumcision for Gentiles, so was this a contradiction? Are there two Gospels - one for Jews, and one for Gentiles?

No. Paul wanted to take Timothy with him to evangelize but since Timothy was part Jewish the Jews would be offended if he wasn't circumcised. His uncircumcised state would keep them out of the synagogues where Paul liked to preach the one Gospel.

What an amazing support Timothy was to Paul throughout his ministry. It's a great thing to be a support to the ministry. Every small thing contributes to the larger work.

Paul calls Timothy "our brother." It is the beginning of his exhortation that they rediscover who they were. All of them - Paul, Timothy, the Colossians - were "brothers" in the Lord. The word means *from the same womb*. They were all born-again of the Spirit of God when they received Jesus Christ.

If you were a Colossian, the mere mention of Paul and Timothy was enough to encourage you. Think of it:

- While you were yet a lost pagan idolater God was at work on the road to Damascus saving a man who would be the apostle responsible for getting you the Gospel.
- He was already preparing Timothy with a godly upbringing to leave everything and travel with Paul.

Colossians 1:2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse...

Four things are told you about your identity. First, you are a “saint.” Think of the word “saint” as a synonym for the word “Christian.” Certain churches and certain beliefs have hijacked the word to apply to only super-spiritual folk. Too bad - **because that is not true at all.**

Every believer in Jesus Christ, from the moment of his or her spiritual birth, is a saint. It comes from a word that means “sanctify.”

You are called by God through the Gospel and you call upon the name of Jesus to save you and you are thus sanctified.

It means you have an acceptable spiritual position before God. It has nothing to do with achieving a level of holiness on earth that is beyond others.

Yes, you should grow and mature in your Christian walk. If you’re saved by grace, you’ll be changed by grace.

Spiritual growth is part of the larger doctrine of sanctification, as is your final glorification when you

have a brand new body incapable of sin. But here we are talking about your *standing*, not your *state*.

Your standing as sanctified:

- Is the result of the work of Jesus on the Cross.
- Is perfect; it cannot improve or get any better.
- Is the same as every other believer.
- Is totally based upon the grace of God and not any work of yours.

You have just as much access to God as every other believer. You don't need superior intellect or ability. You don't need any secret words or methods. No rituals or rites, diets or days, can improve your access. **You stand in a perfect relationship to God through Jesus.**

Next Paul described them, and us, as "faithful brethren." Since Paul was talking about their identity, their standing, he didn't mean to suggest that a saint must be "faithful" in order to maintain his or her standing. He was still talking about belief - not behavior.

“Faithful” is an interesting word. One of its possible meanings, according to Thayer’s Greek Definitions, is *one who trusts in God’s promises*. The Greek scholar goes on to refine his statement by saying,

... one who has been convinced that Jesus has been raised from the dead [and] has become convinced that Jesus is the Messiah and author of salvation.

The sense I get from this is that since you already are convinced Jesus rose from the dead and are saved, you are capable of believing every other promise God has made you. It is a reminder that your life that began by grace through faith continues by grace through faith. There aren’t rules, rites, rituals, or regulations that you must discover, then maintain, in order to grow, or to be truly spiritual.

You’re not left to yourself to develop this kind of faithfulness over time. In the Book of Romans Paul says,

Romans 8:11 But if [since] the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit **who dwells in you.**

The Holy Spirit indwells you. You can, right now, believe *any* and *every* promise in God's Word.

You are a "saint," one of the "faithful brethren," **and** you are "in Christ." Today we mostly call believers "Christians," or the more hip, "Christ-followers." Paul's favorite label was to describe a believer as being "in Christ."

Being "in Christ" means that what is true of Jesus is now true of you also:

- Jesus died; He was buried; He rose from the dead.
- Because you are "in Christ," **you** also died, were buried, and rose from the dead.

One YouTube pastor illustrated being "in Christ" using clear Tupperware containers. You need three of them, that will fit within each other:

1. One of the containers is you.
2. Another is God the Holy Spirit.
3. The third one is Jesus.

When you get saved, God the Holy Spirit comes to indwell you; put His container inside yours.

Simultaneously, you are described as being “in Christ,” so put your container with the Holy Spirit in the one marked Jesus. When God sees you, He sees you “in Christ,” thanks to all Jesus has done to save you.

Since you are “in Christ,” you are a new creation. You have salvation, acceptance, redemption, forgiveness of sin, an inheritance in Heaven, and every other thing promised to you by God and revealed in His Word. When God ‘sees’ you, He sees you in relationship to His Son and your Savior.

Fourthly, they were physically “in Colossae.” Their identity as believers would be played-out on the streets and in the homes and marketplaces of that city in Asia Minor - what we now call Turkey.

Colossae was a city in decline. The main road had been re-routed to go through Laodicea. The city was still noted for producing a black wool made from the chalk deposits in the area. But it wasn't the place to be anymore.

People were leaving, not settling, in California; I mean, in Colossae. As we'll see at the end of the letter, Laodicea was the popular town in the region.

Every city, every town, has its own personality and potential problems. So does every home, and every workplace. Naming their physical location last reminded them that wherever they were, whether it be Colossae or Laodicea, **who** they were was sufficient for them.

Hanford, Lemoore, Armona, Laton, Riverdale, Corcoran, Avenal, Kingsburg, Huron... They're all challenging in different ways to your walk with Jesus. But *where* you are is of no real consequence to *who* you are. You are a saint, one of the faithful brethren, and you are "in Christ."

You should have the understanding that God has sovereignly placed you in your exact location in order to grow you, and for you to glow with Him in that dark place. God didn't put you where you are to beat you down but to build you up.

In addition to being "in Christ," and Him being in you, in chapter three of Colossians Paul claims, "your life

is hidden with Christ in God” (v3). You could add a fourth Tupperware container - one you can't see through - label it “God,” and put the others in there, depicting safety and security.

Rediscover who you are. You're the King's kid in the truest sense. As you rediscover who you are, you simultaneously...

#2 Rediscover **Whose** You Are

(v2b)

The last few words of verse two, which contain Paul's usual greeting, describe what belongs to you everyday because you belong to God.

Colossians 1:2 ... Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul was not talking about *saving* grace in this verse but about *sustaining* grace. He identified them as being “in Christ,” and it is as saved men and women that they have sustaining “grace... and peace from God.”

By that he means that God promises you sufficient grace every day for every situation you face.

The grace we're talking about is described this way by J.I. Packer:

I am graven on the palms of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him, because He first knew me, and continues to know me. He knows me as a friend, One who loves me; and there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted for me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters.

You also have “peace.” The Bible uses the word in two ways:

1. When saved, you have peace *with* God, or *before* God. Before you are saved you are at odds with God. Your sin separates you from Him. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1).
2. As a saved person, you can experience the peace *of* God for daily protection from the hostile pressures upon your mind and heart.

Leon Morris says, peace is “not simply the absence of strife, but the presence of positive blessings.”

Later in this letter Paul will tell them “let the peace of God rule in your hearts” (3:15). We’ll see that word “rule” means *to govern* or *to arbitrate*.

Arbitration occurs when you allow a third party to settle your dispute. When you are tempted to worry, doubt, fret, be frustrated, you can instead experience God’s peace by looking to Him as your arbitrator. He’ll always tell you to trust and obey.

Whose are you? “God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” The Holy Spirit is present as well because He indwells you.

You are God’s. Can anything separate you from His love? Paul didn’t think so when he wrote to Rome:

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Romans 8:33 Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Romans 8:34 Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

Romans 8:35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Romans 8:36 As it is written: "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE KILLED ALL DAY LONG; WE ARE ACCOUNTED AS SHEEP FOR THE SLAUGHTER."

Romans 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Romans 8:38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come,

Romans 8:39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

There are a lot more potential pressures against you than you even realized. When life at home, at school, at work, and everywhere else, seems a crisis and a challenge, don't forget things like "tribulation..."

distress... persecution... famine... nakedness...
peril... sword... death... life... angels... principalities...
powers... things present... things to come... height...
depth... nor any other created thing.”

Everyday you face a veritable minefield of trouble in your walk. God promises you sufficient grace and complete peace as life explodes all around.

“What shall we say?” Simba said, *Hakuna matata!*

It sounds almost Christian - this worry-free philosophy. But he achieved it by forgetting who he was.

We receive it by remembering **who** and **whose** you are: You are “in Christ,” the Spirit is in you, and you are “hidden with Christ in God.”

