

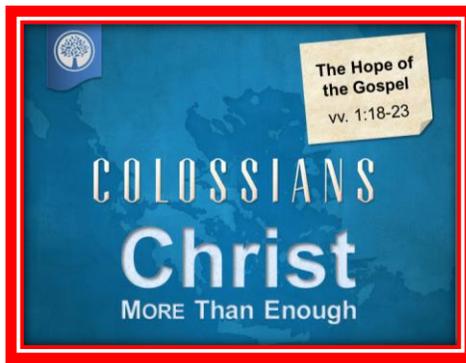
The Hope of the Gospel

Colossians 1:18-23 - NCBC, August 9, 2015

Main Point: *Because of Christ, Our Faith is Firm.*

- Christ – Our Head (vv. 18-19)
- Christ – Our Peacemaker (vv. 20-22a)
- Christ – Our Perfector (vv. 21-22b)

Application: Believe & Stand Firm in the Gospel (v. 23)



No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11). Christ is the only foundation for the church. He is more than enough. And because of Christ, our faith can stand firm.

So did you enjoy reading through Colossians this week? There's a lot packed into this brief letter isn't there? Reading God's word is good for our souls... and I trust that your faith will continue to be strengthened as you

repeatedly read through this short epistle every week throughout the duration of this present sermon series.

Last week we considered Christ's supremacy over creation. Christ is the image of the invisible God, and all things were created by him, through him, and for him. This morning we will consider Christ's supremacy over His New Creation. He is the all-sufficient Hope of the Gospel for all who believe in Him.

So please take your copy of God's Word and open to **Colossians chapter 1**. I'll be reading **verses 18-23**, so please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read our text for us from Colossians 1:18-23, reading from the **English Standard Version**:

Colossians 1:18-23 *And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. ¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. ²¹ And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²² he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

On August 5, 2010 a rock-fall at the San José copper-gold mine in Chile trapped 33 miners 2,300 feet underground and 3 miles from the mine's entrance.¹ The watching world held its breath as equipment was brought in to drill 8 exploratory boreholes as quickly as possible to an area where the miners were hoped to be. Would anyone be found alive or did they all perish in the cave-in?

Days followed days... the equipment continued to drill through the solid rock. Families gathered in tents on the surface and prayed. The world watched and wondered. Day 12. Day 13. Day 14. Still they continued to drill ... hoping against hope that their lost loved ones would still be alive. Finally on day 17 – August 22, 2010 – the entire world gasped as a bold red note appeared taped to a drill bit when it was pulled to the surface, saying **“We are well in the shelter, the 33 of us.”**

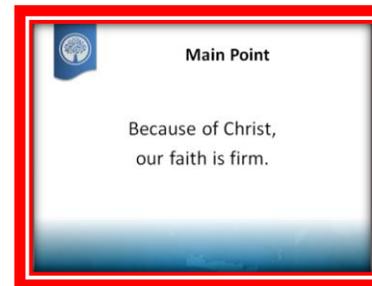
All 33 men had survived the cave-in but they were in great need of rescue and supplies. The world watched and prayed over the course of the next weeks and months as the miracle of their rescue unfolded – culminating in the last miner being safely brought to the surface on October 13, 2010 – 69 days after the cave-in!!

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Copiap%C3%B3_mining_accident

Some of us remember watching the television coverage of this miraculous rescue – how each miner was meticulously raised in a bomb-shaped capsule from their dark grave of rock some 2,300 feet below the surface.

Such a rescue stirs souls. It's thrilling and awe-inspiring to see death's strong grip so miraculously overcome. Can you imagine how the hearts of the miner's must have leapt as the first sounds of drilling began to reach their ears? There is hope! Help is on the way!

Loved ones – the experience of the 33 rescued miners is not unlike the experience of the Christian today. Though our present circumstances are dark and difficult, Christ has made a way for our rescue and final reunion with Him. And the refuge of Christ is enough for us. No matter what sin or suffering is pressing down upon you today, Christ is enough. **Because of Christ, our faith is firm.**

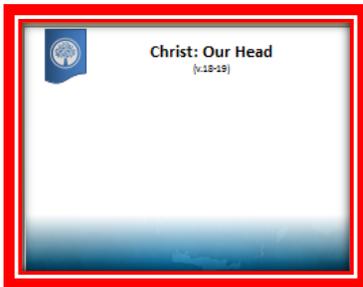


That's our main point this morning. The apostle Paul is encouraging the Colossians and by extension all of us

this morning – Because of Christ - we can continue in the faith and not be shaken from our hope of the Gospel which we've heard.

So let's be encouraged this morning as we gaze yet further upon the glories of our majestic Lord and Savior. He is the rock of ages – the safe shelter in whom we Hide. He is more than enough for us!

First, let's consider that **Christ is Our Head** (vv. 18-19).



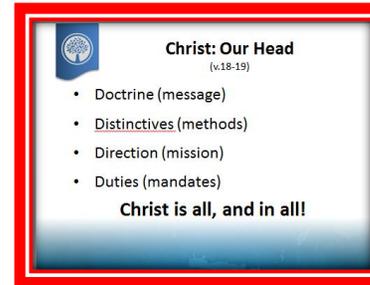
Our faith is grounded and steadfast because Christ is... how does it say it in verse 18 and 19? ...

He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

These verses contain a whole “truckload” of good news for our faith this morning. Christ is alive, and He is Lord!

That means no human being can ever take the title of the “head of the church.” King Jesus has no competition. The church comes from Him, and He is Lord over it.

Practically this means that only Christ has the all-powerful right to determine the church's **doctrine, distinctives, direction, and duties.**



He alone gets to define our **message** (that's our doctrine), our **methods** (that's our distinctives), our **mission** (that's our direction), and our **mandates** (or our Christian duties and responsibilities.) And He has revealed all of this to us through His written Word.

This truth is both a warning and a comfort to us today isn't it?

As a warning – since Christ is the head of the church – no one can ever add to or improve upon His sovereign instructions to the church. Scripture must be the only defining measure of our success as His Body.

But Christ's Lordship in His body is also a great comfort to us this morning. For even when His church has endured difficult seasons ... we know Christ is still on the throne. He hasn't left His church without a Word. He loves His church more than we do, and as our Head – He is building His church – the gates of hell will not prevail over her (Matt 16:18).

Because notice in verse 18 – **Christ is the beginning**, ... now if you're reading from the KJV or NKJV this morning, please note that Christ – not the church – is the beginning... **Christ is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.**

Christ is the originator and source of the Church. Here again we see the word **firstborn** – Christ is the most important one who has triumphed over death. Though others rose from the dead before Christ – He was the first to rise from the dead never to die again!

Loved ones, the reeking stench of death has been erased by the glorious perfume of Christ's resurrection life! The borrowed tomb outside of Jerusalem was merely the womb from which Christ came forth into life – for death could not hold Him (Acts 2:24).

No wonder Christ deserves first place in everything!

Have you noticed how the focus at the beginning of the letter here is all on Christ – before the teaching moves to practical matters of relationships, work, family, etc? This is because all of life can only be viewed properly when viewed from the perspective of Christ and His glory! He must be given 1st place in everything! In the original greek text, a form of the word “all” is used 16 times in the first chapter of Colossians alone. Christ is more than enough for us church! He is all, and in all!

Verse 19 nails the lid on the coffin of any doubt as Paul crescendos His teaching:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Jesus is the one mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). No part of God's attributes or activities exist apart from Christ. In Christ all the completeness of God finds its home.

Christ Himself is the hope of the Gospel. All of our hope and expectation finds its grounding in His person and work. Because of Christ's all-sufficiency, our faith is firm.

Our faith is unshakeable because Christ is our Head, and **Christ is also Our Peacemaker (vv. 20-22a).**



Let's look at verse 20 –

And through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace [Note – Christ is our Peacemakermaking peace] by the blood of His cross.

And then again in vs. 22 –

he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death,

in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

I pray that God will help us to get just a glimpse of His grand supremacy in these verses. Remember last week when I showed you an artist's rendering of the grand scale of Christ's creative work in the galaxies? Well this morning I want to show you another artist's rendering of an amazing work of God that far surpasses the glory of any celestial galaxy. Are you ready to be blown away by the wonder of our great God?

Ok, here it is:



Do you feel small now? O the depths of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God (Rom 11:33).

Beloved, Christ has made peace between us sinners and our holy Creator God. To reconcile means "to exchange" or "to change the sinner's relationship with his holy God."

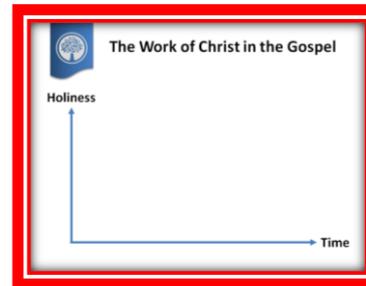
Through faith in Christ, we sinners can now have peace with the Sovereign and Holy Lord of all!

If you underline in your Bible, I would encourage you to

underline the words "*by/through the blood of his cross*" at the end of vs 20, and "*in the body of flesh by his death*" in verse 22.

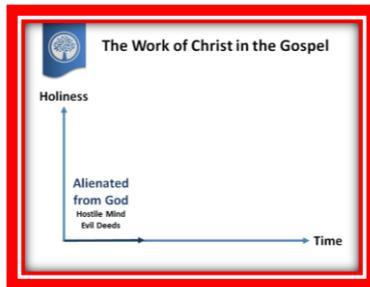
Here we see a holy and perfectly righteous God – who has been deeply offended by the sins of our own hearts – initiating our peace with Him by sending His own Son – Jesus Christ – to voluntarily pay our ransom – to sacrificially give up His life in death so that whosoever would believe in Him would not perish, but have everlasting life.

Let's see if I can illustrate the wonder of Christ's peacemaking towards us with a simple drawing this morning.



This graph represents our life. The horizontal axis is "Time" – so we are born at 0, and over time we progress to the right until the appointed day of our death. The vertical axis represents our holy standing before God.

So how does this graph start out for each of us? Well, according to verse 21 of our text this morning, we were all "alienated from God."



That doesn't sound very holy does it? No. In fact, because of our sin nature in Adam, and the indwelling idolatry of our own hearts, all of us are lost, without hope, without God, and cut off from His holy promises (Eph 2:12-13).

Notice how our text describes our condition,

Hostile (or hateful enemies) in mind and doing evil deeds (or wicked works). Please understand the severity of our unsaved position. We were not just nice people who didn't care for religion. That's not the testimony of Scripture against us. Our inner hearts hated God, and from within, out of the storehouse of our own self-worshipping hearts came forth evil and wicked words, actions, and motivations. Ephesians 2 says of this that we were all "By nature children of God's wrath" because the wages of such unbelief and idolatry is judgment and death (Rom 6:23).

But because of Christ – our rescue is secure church! For by the substitutionary death of the God-man on that old rugged cross, He reconciled us (notice that we are passive) and made us to be at peace with God.

On our graph, this looks like this:



At the moment that God saves us and makes us His child, we are at peace with God. **Romans 5:1** says,

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is amazing grace! No matter what guilt and shame plagues your past... in Christ you are justified – justification – that's the big \$10 word that describes the believer's position in Christ. From God's perspective, every believer in Christ is declared righteous – perfectly holy – justified – meaning – "just as if I'd" never sinned, and "just as if I'd" always lived out the perfect righteousness of Christ!

No longer alienated and cut off from God – but now we are accepted, loved, welcomed, forgiven – at peace. No longer at war, but now at peace with our Sovereign Creator.

Do you know this peace today? Christ is the hope of the Gospel, and His finished work on the cross is sufficient

for you. Because of this offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, there is no therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).

And notice Christ's purposes for your justification at the end of vs 22.... It says,

In order to present you holy, and blameless and above reproach before him,

You see, Christ is not just the Risen Head of all the Redeemed, and He's not just our Peace-maker, but our faith in His rescue is firm today because **Christ is also Our Perfector (vv. 21-22b)**



Christ is perfecting and purifying for Himself a people for his own possession (Tit 2:14). He is faithful to complete what He begins. The miners who were trapped in their dark tomb under the earth could not be confident that the rescue would ultimately be fulfilled. But for those of us in Christ, we can be confident that Christ will finish what He has begun (Phil 1:6). Like the old hymn so rightly sings,

*But I know Whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day.*

Christ is our Perfector. On our graph this morning, this is represented by our final glorification:



This restoring work is called glorification in the Scriptures. It's another \$10 word I know...but it just refers to the ultimate perfection of the believer in the presence of Jesus.

At the point of our death – whenever that is according to the divine appointment of our Creator, our faith shall be made sight and we shall be delivered not just from the penalty of sin as we were in our justification, but now from the very presence of sin itself. As Paul teaches so clearly in **Romans 8:30**,

...those whom he justified he also glorified.

This truth gives us so much hope this morning. Do you feel beat down by life today? Has Satan been whispering in your ear that you will never be good enough? Are you tired and weary, and losing heart? Be of good cheer dear child of God! Christ is our Perfector! The tomb is empty today to bear testimony to the fact that He has done all of this to finally perfect us and make us truly holy again! Not just in our position, but in our very practice and person – Holy – and blameless and above reproach! No one will be able to bring any charge or accusation against us. Our rescue is not complete until we are made entirely righteous for all of eternity by the perfecting work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

So our hearts swell this morning with confident assurance of Christ's work in the Gospel don't they? Because of Christ, our faith will continue another day. We will not be shaken. Because of Christ, we can continue to believe that our rescue will be ultimately be accomplished even when life is hard in the here and now.

So now for our application this morning. Since Christ is our Head, our Peacemaker, and our ultimate Perfector, we can **Believe & Stand Firm in the Gospel (v. 23)**



This is the very application that Paul draws for the Colossians church in verse 23:

If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard,...

This verse captures the heart of our response to Christ this morning. You see, our rescue isn't yet final and ultimate yet. By God's grace, we've been made righteous and granted peace with God. We've been promised an inheritance of glory in the sinless presence of Christ Himself for all of eternity. But we still live here. We're not home yet, are we?

In the here and now, we must continue in the faith. We must pursue Christian growth and discipleship. Though we see through a glass darkly now, we must not ever move away from the hope of the Gospel which has yet to be perfected in us. And so we must add one more part to our graph this morning:



The green line represents our daily experience as redeemed believers between the day of our salvation (when we are justified and declared positionally righteous in Christ), and the day of our death (when we will be glorified and made perfectly holy and righteous in the presence of God).

This green line of Progressive Sanctification is what Paul is urging the Colossians to continue in as he warns them from shifting from their hope from the gospel. He wants them to continue forward in the faith – as imperfect as this experience is for every believer day to day.

Note that this green line is kind of messy. That’s because some days are better than others. Though our union with Christ has fixed our identity in Him – our personal obedience and communion with God’s Spirit has ups and downs. Some days we have Gospel amnesia – and fall back into living a life of self-reliance and self-justification. Other days our affections are set on things above and our hearts are growing more and

more into the image of Christ by the power of His indwelling Spirit. (Jn 17:17; 2 Cor 3:18; 2 Pet 3:18).

So look carefully at verse 23 with me. The words “If you continue” are significant. In the original language, they are written in a 1st-class conditional form that assumes a positive response. In other words, Paul did not have any doubt about them continuing. You could rightly translate the passage, “Assuming that you continue in the faith...” or even “since you will continue in the faith.” **Paul knew that all who have truly been saved by Christ will persevere to the end by their faith in Christ.**

Continuing in the faith does not happen naturally. It is trusting in the work of Jesus – and not the works or efforts of my own life—for my righteousness and eternal hope.

So let’s take his warning seriously this morning. **What would it look like for you to shift your hope from the Gospel today?**



There are two primary ways we typically shift our hope from Christ and His Gospel in our daily lives. We either minimize our sin, or we minimize God's holiness.²

Think about this with me. We minimize our sin by **pretending**. Pretending that we are better than we really are. When confronted by our sin by God's Spirit or by other people, we pretend it's not that big of a deal, and respond by defending, or hiding, or exaggerating, or blame-shifting, or downplaying our sin. The point is we fail to take responsibility for our own sinfulness – and thus shift our hope away from Christ's supreme sufficiency for our desperate needs. The gospel is only meaningful for us to the extent that we acknowledge our sinfulness and need for Christ.

Or we shift our hope from the Gospel by **Performing**. We minimize God's holiness. We reduce God's holy standard to something that we can meet. We believe that somehow we can earn God's satisfaction with us if we are just better than others. This Gospel amnesia fails to remember that God is so holy that just one sin of partiality or covetousness is enough to separate us from His presence forever. The performance trap usually leads to comparing ourselves with others – creating within us a very critical and judgmental spirit of others by

² Thanks to Tim Keller, Jack Miller, and Donny Cho for their helpful insights on these truths.

which we self-justify and self-rationalize our own performance as really being pleasing to God. But this too is shifting from the hope that is ours in Christ.

And this kind of drift can happen so easily. Have you ever been to the ocean playing in the waves, only to look up a few minutes later and realize that your towel, and your umbrella, and your sandals are now far down the beach somewhere? Yeah – the tidal current is so strong that unless you consciously are working to stay in front of your family on the beach, you will always be drifting and shifting away from your home base...most of the time without even knowing it.

So this morning is a good time to reassess where you are practically putting your hope in the day-to-day aspect of your Christian life. You see, most Christians would readily agree that they are trusting in Christ for their justification (in the past) and their final glorification (in the future). But what are you trusting in today – in the midst of your present struggle with sin, suffering, broken promises and unrealized expectations? Where is your hope for your present joy and peace this morning?

There are four different places your hope will drift towards if you have not been conscious to keep it securely anchored in Christ and His finished Gospel work. Before you know it, your faith will have drifted into:

- License
- Legalism
- Lukewarmness, or even
- Leaving the faith altogether.

License is that sinister blindness to the destructive end of sin and its death that leads to a critical judgment of others in self-rationalized self-worship. **Legalism** is the pursuit of religious success through works-based approval and critical judgment of others. Such moralism seeks security, status, meaning, and purpose in one's own accomplishments, rather than the finished work of Christ. **Lukewarmness** is that suicidal commitment to Christ in word, but not in deed. Neither hot nor cold – but blind to your own spiritual neediness, believing yourself to be ok without him, saying, “I am rich, and have need of nothing ... while in fact you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked” (Rev 3:15-19). And some who professed faith in Christ at one point, have even **left the teaching of Christ** to follow other “so-called” gospels which do not have the power to save.

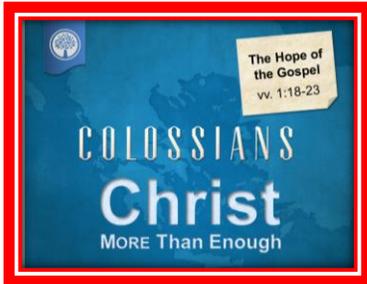
Brothers and sisters – Christ is more than enough for us. Our final and ultimate rescue is secured in His finished work. We must not move our dependence away from the hope of Christ's gospel.

Well pastor – you say... what if I have lost sight of the shore? What if I'm looking up now to see the cross, but

instead must admit that my joy is gone. Having begun by the Spirit, I am now trying to be perfected by the flesh (Gal 3:2-3). I've started to settle for less than Christ and His full sufficiency. What hope is there for me today?

Dear friend – God's arms are wide open! You can come back to him this morning. Look to Jesus - He's still off the cross. The tomb is still empty. He's still on the throne! Revisit the glories of His Gospel – the riches of God's grace, the righteousness of Jesus Himself fully entrusted to your account, the indwelling of God's Spirit that will never leave you, the covering of your shame, and the opening of your eyes to His beauty and love. In Jesus there is peace, rest, full acceptance, forgiveness, and rescue.

*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.*



Next week we will pick up our study at the beginning of chapter 2 and consider the apostle's desire for the church to strengthen their assurance in their understanding of Christ. So keep reading Colossians this week, and pray that God will continue to build your faith in His all-sufficiency as you meditate upon these truths. Christ is more than enough.

Let's pray.

Closing prayer.

All I have is Christ – Closing Song

***Jude 24-25** Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*