

# Knowing and Growing in Christ

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Preacher: Peter Adam

[ 0 : 00 ] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 14th of September 2003.

The preacher is Peter Adam. His sermon is entitled Knowing and Growing in Christ and is based on Colossians 1, verses 1-20.

Dear Heavenly Father, please speak to us from your words in Scripture by the power of your Spirit and change us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, it's a great delight to be with you this morning.

Thank you very much for your welcome. I'm going to preach from Colossians 1, so if you have that open, page 956 in the Bibles, that would help you and also help me.

The encouragement that I want to bring to you from Colossians 1 is to know and to grow in Christ. To know and to grow in Christ.

[ 1 : 17 ] In some places around the world, Christians are trying to grow as Christians without knowing enough. The church leaders in Africa tell us that while the churches there are very quick at growing, many people are becoming Christians, coming converted to Jesus Christ, and bringing all their friends and neighbours to know Jesus Christ.

The big problem in the church in Africa, in many places, is that they don't know enough. They haven't got enough Bible teachers and preachers. They haven't got trained ministers.

And one evangelist can be travelling around and visiting lots of churches. They don't know enough. So they're trying to grow without knowing. And the danger is, of course, they might grow up and fall flat on their faces.

They don't know enough to keep themselves Christian. But if over there the problem is trying to grow without knowing, often in Australia, it's that people know but don't grow.

So people can know so much about Christianity, so much about Jesus Christ. They might know enough from the Bible to win a Bible trivia quiz.

[ 2 : 29 ] They know lots of things but they've stopped growing. And that can be true of churches as well. Well-taught churches who know the Scriptures really well, but there's no growing going on. No growing in knowing Jesus Christ and no growing in living the Christian life.

People are static or stunted. It's also possible for a Christian to be someone who doesn't know and who doesn't grow.

Just standing still, just indeed falling asleep as a Christian, indeed going backwards. The challenge from Colossians chapter 1, this morning is that we should know and grow in Christ.

Know and grow in Christ. Let's see how this process starts in Colossians chapter 1, verses 3 to 8. In our prayers for you, Paul says, we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for you've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, the love you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Whenever Paul prays, he thanks God for the Colossian Christians. Why? Well, verse 4 and 5 tell us the reason. They have faith in Christ Jesus, love for all the saints, and a hope laid up for them in heaven.

[ 3 : 54 ] So if Paul wants to know if a church is alive or dead, here's a simple test, a three-fold test. Is it a church which has faith in Jesus Christ and love for all the saints and a hope of heaven?

Now, I need to just check up that everybody in the building is alive this morning. If you are alive, would you please raise a hand or a foot, something like that? Some of you aren't sure whether you're alive or not.

I'll wave at you anyway. That's good. The reason I ask the question is because there was a great minister who preached a three-hour sermon in Oxford in the 18th century. At the end of the sermon, there was one person left at the congregation who was later discovered to have died during the sermon.

So it's always worth a preacher seeing if the congregation is still alive. But more significantly, are you alive in Christ? Here's the question.

If you take your pulse, can you feel faith in Christ Jesus? Is that there? Some of you aren't sure about that. Let me ask you the question again. Do you trust Jesus Christ?

[ 5 : 05 ] Yes. Do you love all the saints? You aren't sure about that one, are you? Yes. And do you have hope?

Faith, love, and hope. Makes sense, doesn't it? The three will go together because if you do trust in Jesus Christ, then you will love Christ's people, won't you?

You'll love all the saints. And if you trust in Jesus Christ, you'll be longing for Christ's return. You'll have a great hope. So the church at Colossae was famous because it was a church of faith in Christ Jesus and love for all the saints and a hope of heaven.

It's interesting, isn't it, how in churches today, we sometimes specialize in faith. So here's a church which is very keen about making people believers. Some churches specialize in love.

Let's be a loving community and learn how to support each other. And some churches specialize in hope, though actually not many churches in Australia, I think. It's more churches overseas under persecution which specialize in hope.

[ 6 : 23 ] So we often separate faith and love and hope, but what we separate, Paul puts together. He says, no, you need all three. Trust in Jesus Christ, faith in Jesus Christ, love for all the saints, and a hope of heaven.

You can't begin to live as a Christian unless you know Jesus Christ and trust in Jesus Christ. A friend of mine wakes up every morning and for his quiet time, he takes himself through the gospel again and again.

And he says to himself, do you trust Jesus Christ today? And he answers, yes, I trust Jesus Christ today. What a great way to start the day.

Yes, I trust Jesus Christ. I'm a person of faith in Christ Jesus. Faith, love, love for all the saints. Do you know that little poem, to live above with the saints we love would all be bliss and glory?

To live below with the saints we know is quite a different story. Well, that's certainly true, isn't it? I can love saints at a distance. When they're a bit close to me, they're a bit harder to love, particularly if they don't want the things I want.

[ 7 : 33 ] I'm just waiting for somebody to say to me after the end of a service, I hated that last song, but the person in front of me loved it so much, can we have it again next Sunday? Imagine that.

That's what love is, isn't it? It means putting our own needs and wants aside and wanting the benefit of our friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ. So a church annual meeting should be full of people saying not what they want, but what others want.

Wouldn't that be interesting? Would confuse the vicar a great deal if that happened. You'd think, make up your mind, what do you want? I can never work it out. Churches should be places which are jam-packed full of those who love their brothers and sisters so much that they want for their brothers and sisters what they want.

And they're not thinking of their own selfish needs all the time. Because, I'm sorry to say, that often being in church brings out our selfishness, not our selflessness.

But Paul is saying, a church which is alive, a church which is a real church, not just a Christian club, is a church which has faith in Christ Jesus, love for all the saints, and it has faith and love, verse 5, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

[ 9 : 01 ] Hope here, of course, doesn't mean hoping nice things might happen. It means a rock-solid certainty that Jesus Christ will return. That he'll change our lowly bodies to be like his glorious body.

That he'll bring a new heaven and a new earth. That he'll raise everybody. That's the Christian hope. And Paul says that our faith in Christ Jesus and the love we have for the saints springs from, comes from, the hope that we have.

Well, I heard a dreadful story the other day of a lady who'd been going to church for 60 years. and was facing death, the minister asked her, have you any hope? And she said, no, none at all.

Isn't that awful? What a waste of church going. 60 years going to church and end up hopeless. I think if I were like that, I'd ask for my money back. You know, all that collection for all those 60 years, I'll have the money back, thank you very much.

I've ended up hopeless. When, of course, what the Christian gospel brings us is great hope. We, of all people in this world should be full of hope for the future because we're waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our Lord.

[ 10 : 14 ] So Paul is full of thanksgiving for the church at Colossae, thankful to God because we've heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, the love you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Well, that's a wonderful picture of a church, isn't it? I'd love to meet a church like that, jam-packed full of faith, love and hope. How do you produce a church like that? How do you grow a church like that?

Well, Paul tells us in verse 5, you've heard of this hope before in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. It's bearing fruit and growing in the whole world.

It's being bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. So how do we produce people of faith in Christ Jesus and love for all the saints and a great hope of heaven?

Answer, you sow the precious seed of the gospel, the word of truth. That's how you produce people of faith, love and hope.

[ 11 : 16 ] That's why it's worth running a Sunday school because you're putting in the minds of these children the precious message of Jesus Christ, the gospel, the word of truth, the gospel of truth, God's grace and all its truth.

And what you're praying for and working for is that one day this gospel will bear fruit in the lives of these young people. They'll become great examples of faith in Christ Jesus and love for all the saints with a great hope of heaven.

That's why we do youth ministry. That's why we run evangelistic activities for our friends and neighbours. That's the message we have for the world, the gospel.

And our great prayer is that this gospel will indeed bear fruit and grow in the whole world. That's why we support our missionaries and pray for them and encourage them because we want this word of truth, the gospel, to bear fruit.

What will be the fruit that the gospel bears? Answer, churches. Full of people with faith in Christ Jesus and love for all the saints and a great hope for heaven.

[ 12 : 24 ] Without that foundation nothing will happen. Without that great work all we do is waste it. Without that great work of sowing the gospel seed and seeing it bear fruit around the world there is no hope for the world, no future.

We might as well give up now. For people can't know and grow in Christ unless they become people of faith in Christ and love for Christ's people and with a great hope for his return.

So in verses 3 to 8 we've seen Paul describing to the Colossians what's happened to them, how they've become Christians, how the church at Colossae was founded, was planted.

Then in verses 9 to 14 we discover the wonderful prayer that Paul is praying for them every day. Verse 9 For this reason since the day we heard it we have not ceased praying for you.

One of the funny things about our prayers is we often don't know what to pray. God we pray for our church. God bless our vicar. God bless everybody.

[ 13 : 40 ] And I'm sure God answers prayers like that. If that's what we pray God will certainly answer that prayer. But look at the magnificent prayer that Paul prays for the church at Colossae. This is the kind of prayer that you could well pray for this church, for the church in Nigeria, for other churches around Melbourne.

We have not ceased praying for you and asking, so Paul's telling them what he's praying for them, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

So they have to know not only the gospel but God's will. What does that mean? Well, God's will means how they're meant to serve God in every part of their lives.

To know God's will is to know how to honour God and please God in everything we do. And Paul's prayer is that they won't just have a distant knowledge of God's will. How does he put it there in verse 9?

That you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. He's praying that the knowledge of God's will will so fill their mind that there's no room for anything else.

[ 14 : 49 ] Well, imagine that. Imagine being not just individuals but a church full of the knowledge of God's will. What would that look like in practice?

Well, Paul goes on to pray what that would look like in practice. Verse 10, he tells them, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord fully pleasing to him as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.

I think that's an astounding verse, isn't it? Verse 10. Here's Paul praying for new Christians just been converted, a new church just been founded.

What's he praying for them? That they might know God's will so that they may lead lives worthy of the Lord. I can't think of the last day in which I led a life worthy of the Lord.

It's a big thing to pray, isn't it? You, worthy of the Lord. That's something. Paul explains what it means that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord fully pleasing to him.

[ 16 : 03 ] So at the end of the day, God says to himself, I looked down and I saw Jack today or Mary today. Everything they did pleased me.

Isn't that a miracle? Not just individuals, but Paul is praying that for all the Christians, for the advanced Christians and the slow Christians, for the lapsed Christians, as well as those whose faith is faltering.

What a great thing to pray. What an ambitious prayer. It's a magnificent prayer. That you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God.

Then verse 11, Paul goes on to explain what else this will mean. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power. And what's the result of this strength?

Verse 11, it is that you may be prepared to endure everything with patience. I am very patient with other people's problems, not with my own.

[ 17 : 11 ] If you have toothache and you start complaining to me, I'll say, don't complain about toothache, just a bit of pain, don't worry about it, you'll be okay, your tooth will fall out one day and then it won't hurt anymore. When I have toothache, it's very, very different, let me tell you.

Toothache today, death tomorrow is my theory. Too much pain, I'm going to carve it in no time, slip off my twig, it'll be the end of me, I can't endure this pain. For we're trained in our society to be impatient, aren't we?

To get things now, get results now. When I go to the doctor and she says, I know what's wrong with you but you can't cure it, I think, that's hopeless, I'm paying good money, you should be able to cure my disease, you know.

I'm not a very patient person and if you see me driving you'll notice that my is an interruption. Your character does come out when you drive, doesn't it?

Isn't that interesting? But Paul is praying that God's will will so fill these Colossian Christians that they will lead lives worthy of the Lord, bear fruit in every good work, be strong to endure, and finally, verse 11 and 12, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

[ 18 : 30 ] So what does the church look like where the believers are full of the knowledge of God's will? It's an extraordinary church, isn't it? A beautiful church, a lovely church, a church where people lead worthy lives, are fully pleasing to God, bear fruit in every good work, grow in the knowledge of God, a patient and full of joyful thanksgiving.

It would be wonderful if the next AGM person for Holy Trinity got up and said, we've had a good year. People have become Christians. We've seen lots of faith in Christ Jesus, lots of love, lots of hope, and lots of people whose lives are fully pleasing to God, worthy of the Lord.

Wouldn't that be great? Well, that's the kind of thing Paul is praying for the church at Colossae, that they'll know and grow in Christ.

Keep on knowing, keep on growing. Why should they know and grow in Christ?

Well, Paul gives us the answer in verses 15 to 20. He, that is Christ, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[ 20 : 02 ] For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, rulers or powers. All things have been created through him and for him.

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. If I asked you to describe the storyline of the Bible, I suspect you wouldn't start talking about Jesus Christ until you got to the New Testament.

But Paul says, actually there's more to Jesus Christ than that. Look at it there. He is the firstborn of all creation, that is the inheritor of the whole creation.

For in him, that is in Christ, all things were created, all things created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

So we should know and grow in Christ, because if we don't, we miss the great secret of the universe. Isn't that extraordinary? I was watching a program last night which told me how seahorses breed.

[ 21 : 07 ] It seems a particularly funny system to me, whereby the female seahorse gives her eggs to the male seahorse, and he holds them and then has contractions and gives birth.

It was a very painful process, I might say. The poor male seahorse was looking quite shattered by the end of it. It seems a funny way to organize seahorses, but that's the way God chose. Presumably the seahorses enjoy it in some mysterious way which I don't understand.

But you see, we know more and more about our wonderful world, but the bizarre thing is that people who know more and more about the creation miss the most important thing about the creation, and that is it all is all created through Christ and for Christ, and everything holds together in him.

If Christ disappeared, that would be the end of us. It would all go, because everything holds together, hangs together in Jesus Christ. Without Jesus Christ you don't understand the meaning of the world, you don't understand why we're here, or how we're here.

Unless you know Jesus Christ, you don't know anything of importance at all about this universe. for Christ is supreme in creation.

[ 22 : 20 ] That's why we have to know and grow in Christ. We can't get the world right unless we know him. He is before all things, in him all things hold together, verse 17. But Christ's significance is not just in creation, in the world, in the universe, but also in the new creation.

Verse 18, he is the head of the body, the church, the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

Christ. So the Christ in whom and through whom and for whom the whole universe was made, is the Christ who reconciles all things to God by his death on the cross.

When you think of Jesus' death on the cross, not just Jesus dying for you, though that's true, not just Jesus dying for his people, but Jesus dying to reconcile all things to God.

Because in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God reconciled all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross.

[ 23 : 48 ] So it's unthinkable to miss out on Jesus Christ. Unthinkable that we should imagine that we can just begin as a Christian and leave it at that.

unthinkable that we should think that the progress we made 30 years ago as a Christian is enough for our lifetime. No, the challenge here in Colossians 1 is to know and to grow in Christ.

I love asking people, what have you learnt from the Bible in the last year? How has the Bible changed your life? I'm asking, are you still knowing? And here's the question which would follow it.

God's gospel. And if you've learnt something new about God from the scriptures, then how have you put that into practice? How are you growing? How has your life changed as a believer in the last six months?

Not only should we as individuals be knowing and growing in Christ, but our churches should be knowing and growing in Christ as well. Radically transformed by the great power of God's gospel.

[ 24 : 52 ] people. As Paul puts it later in this chapter, his aim is to present everyone mature in Christ, grown up in Christ.

Here's the challenge, friends. To us as individuals, to us as a church, know and grow in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. God, you're a great God who provides all our needs in your son, Jesus Christ.

We thank you for the universe you made through him and for him. And we thank you for his great work of reconciliation by his death on the cross. We thank you that in your mercy you've taught us the gospel of your son, of your grace and kindness in him, of the forgiveness of our sins, of your gift of eternal life.

Thank you for giving us faith in Jesus Christ. Thank you for giving us love for all the saints. Thank you for giving us a great hope of heaven. Please fill us with the knowledge of your will that our lives may be transformed in every part, that we might be fully pleasing to you, living lives worthy of you in every way.

[ 26 : 16 ] We ask these great prayers for Jesus' sake. Amen.