

Fourteen years ago on Friday it seemed like the world stopped. As word spread regarding the events happening in New York City that early fall morning one by one we all stopped to watch. It was a sad oneness shared by so many as each passing moment more and more people from all over the United States and the world saw the same thing at the same moment. One event happening many miles away from most people had a huge effect. Schools stopped their lessons, workers stopped their jobs, and everyone held their breath over the same thing.

We know what brought people together as one on September 11, 2001. The loss of life, the horrific attack, and the response of so many made witnesses of all of us. We watched it live. That united people together in common shock and horror. There was oneness in knowing we weren't alone experiencing the pain and heartache from that day. The Colossians had oneness over something completely different. They lived in a second rate market town with no real power or importance. They were under attack of a different kind. Yet the people weren't in it alone. This letter assured them of that. They were part of the...

Oneness by the gospel in all the world
Growing faith in hearts
Producing fruit in lives

As a new business gets started there's usually a pretty nice bump when it opens. A couple of restaurants and gas stations have recently opened up near us. They're perfect examples. I watched as the building was built or remodeled, the landscaping was installed, and the parking stripes were painted. Everything was just right for the big opening. Opening day and the parking lots were full. Cars struggled to get in from the road. Lines of people on the inside formed quickly as everyone seemed to want to try the place at the same time. That's what the Colossian church experienced. There was good growth in the early going. A fire was ignited and it spread quickly. That fire was started by the gospel. Faith came into their hearts, a faith in Christ Jesus as the Savior. Love followed from that same gospel. As they considered the promises of heaven and the hope Christ gave them that faith and love continued to grow.

And it wasn't just among the Colossians. Everywhere the gospel was proclaimed it had the same effect. **"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."** This gospel revealed the truth God wanted people to know. The work of Jesus was for the whole world. Jesus came to show his love to all people, which in turn wins people's hearts to faith. This faith grows where the gospel is being proclaimed. Love springs to life in people's hearts. Genuine love for God spreads to people all over the world as they hear the gospel truth. That gospel, Christ Jesus, faith and love, it unites all who hear and believe it. It united the Colossians with everyone everywhere who believed in Jesus.

Paul wrote his letter to say he was praying this growth would continue among them. He prayed for the preaching of Christ and the faith that grew every time Jesus was preached would continue. **"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."** While they were one in Christ with all believers, Paul wanted their knowledge and understanding of God's will to grow. It's like a circle. To grow in understanding they need faith to grow. To grow faith they need to hear about Jesus. To hear more about Jesus they need to study what God had done for them. This would come around and grow their understanding. The circle would be complete. Every believer is in the same circle loop. All Christians, growing in faith by gaining more knowledge about Jesus, are refreshing their minds regarding forgiveness, the hope of heaven, and the reality of God's love. Here is oneness. Faith growing in each heart by the gospel.

Faith isn't natural in the human heart. Neither is oneness. Separation is natural. Perhaps we've been believers so long we forget our sinfulness from birth separated us from God. No spark of faith. No little nugget of faith inside us that God could work with. No relationship with God or with each other. Separation because of sin. That might be hard to imagine, but our sinful nature is still that way. Instead of oneness our sinful nature eyeballs everyone here wondering what kinds of ways we're against each other. What does that person have against me? What do I have against them? Separation means love isn't natural either. Love as emotion, love as physical attraction, those are human. But genuine love for all other people isn't natural in our sinfulness. Only separation.

The gospel changed that in you. The work of Jesus Christ changed that. The good news reached into your hearts and brought about oneness where there was only separation. Forgiveness from Christ Jesus for questioning others' motives. Forgiveness for holding on to things against someone else. Complete and total forgiveness for lack of love. Forgiveness that brought about oneness was achieved when Jesus allowed himself to be separated from God his Father. Punished on a cross. Dead in a tomb. Jesus faced it all perfectly. That's the gospel. Jesus showing his love in life to be your hope for life. His love is the basis for your love. The gospel of Christ creates faith and the more you hear about Jesus the more that faith grows in your hearts.

Thanks to God it wasn't just in you but it was for all the world. We're brought into a oneness by the gospel with people all over the world. Hearts brought to faith in Christ, growing in the Word of God. Many languages, many cultures, one Savior. **"We always thank God when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints—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."** It isn't just for you or me. Faith brings about love which extends to all the saints. Christ keeps us one, unified with each other. Love springs into action. The more we're in the Word of truth the more oneness in the gospel we'll have.

These new restaurants and gas stations have an ongoing problem. They need customers. Already activity has dropped off. Turns out other gas stations and other restaurants close by also need customers. Growing is hard. Producing results that keep the doors open is hard. The Colossians ran into the same kind of problem. Once the initial burst of growth slowed competition arrived. Enemies of the gospel showed up and really slowed growth. Producing fruit slowed to almost nothing. Something needed to be done.

Paul praised God for the fruit the Colossians were producing. The gospel made them one and they were acting on that gospel. They demonstrated their faith and love for others. They wanted to serve the saints. The gospel had been proclaimed. People were brought to faith and then faith looked for a way to express itself. Other people benefited by this faith expressing itself. But false teachers raised doubts about the gospel. The Colossians wavered with the gospel message about Jesus. Without the gospel the power of the Holy Spirit went away. Knowledge and understanding of God went down. Faith wasn't exercised as much. Oneness was on its way out without growth in the grace of God.

There are times we might evaluate ourselves as growing Christians. Things look fine on the outside. But inside we're separating from others. Inside nothing is changing. The gospel isn't effecting our lives. We act like the rest of the separated world. We inflict hurt and receive pain. We continue to look at people for what they can do for us as individuals. We feel no unity with them. We come to church, but our oneness with each other is only on the surface. Fruits of faith are few and maybe far between.

The only solution is the gospel. Only Christ Jesus changes hearts and gets hearts to produce fruit. Only Christ can give you a promise you can have joy in. Joy in the reality that God **"has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."** It's an inheritance. It's a shared promise where everyone gets the same. God frees you from the darkness of sin and brings you into the light of his love. In Jesus God qualifies you to share in this promise. It's completely by his grace. Since it doesn't depend on you independently, it's the same for everyone. If it's the same for everyone then anyone who is under God's grace in Christ is united and one.

We have oneness in the gospel as God's grace moves us to produce the fruits of faith. We rejoice in our one faith. We give thanks for our one inheritance. One promise unites us together as one. Oneness in the gospel all over the world. When you come across a fellow Christian, whether you've met them or not you treat them as a brother or sister. You can love them knowing Christ sacrificed himself for both of you. Here among yourselves form relationships and nurture them. Look for ways to serve and show love to the saints. And don't stop at those who know Jesus. Christ will grow a desire in you to go out and share with others who don't yet know this fellowship and oneness. God wants them to be one with you as you are already one with each other. Jesus for us is the same Jesus for them. Desiring growth in this oneness. That's fruit.

I've never been to New York City. But the events of September 11th make me feel a certain oneness with people from that city and all over. Paul may have written this letter to the Colossians, but it might surprise you he never met them. He thanked God, rejoiced, and spoke of oneness. Oneness didn't come from face to face contact. It was oneness in the gospel. That same gospel makes us one. The good news of forgiveness in Christ has grown faith in our hearts. That gospel has produced fruit in our lives. We have oneness in the gospel shared by people all over the world.