

Colossians - Part 1: 1:1-8:
“Faith And Love Because Of Hope”
August 29th, 2021

Intro:

If you've read Colossians, you know that this is a really incredible book.

- So much to learn
- So much for our own exhortation
- So VERY much about the Person and Work of Christ.

(English Standard Version)

Colossians 1:1-8:

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

[2] To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

[3] We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

[4] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,

[5] because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

[6] which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing - as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,

[7] just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf

[8] and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

We always want to try to:

- Provide some background & history to the text that we're examining.

There is only ONE correct interpretation:

- The only correct interpretation of any passage is what the original writer intended for the original listener to understand. We examine the Bible **as it was written**.

First, this letter was written by Paul WHILE he was imprisoned in Rome, most likely in the infamous Mamertine Prison; the awful dungeon where he would be kept prior to his execution under the Roman Emperor Nero. And because Paul wrote this letter while in prison, this letter is therefore referred to as a "Prison Letter" or a Prison "Epistle".

Colossae:

- Located in what we would nowadays call modern-day Turkey.
- About a hundred miles or so southeast of Ephesus and it would have been very near to the city of Laodicea.
- Planted by a man named Epaphras (who is introduced to us here in the 7th Verse).
- Paul had written this letter to the church at Colossae having visited prior to writing it.

The Colossian church was struggling with a form of Greek-influenced Jewish religious philosophy common in that area at the time. This would have been a very confusing matter to the believers there, both old and new. See, they had been taught by Epahras the essentials of the Gospel, that they were justified by Grace alone, through Faith alone, by Christ alone, for the Glory of God alone. And here they had these Jewish philosophers that were now teaching that you had to conform to strict dietary standards, honor certain days prescribed in Old Testament ceremonial law, and some other odd things in order to gain acceptance before God. And this

was a source of confusion for the Christians there. So one of Paul's chief aims in his letter to the Colossians is to reinforce the Gospel truth and to exhort them to always remember that they are **already acceptable** to God by virtue of the crucified (and risen) Lord Jesus to whom they were already united to. There was no need for these other superstitions which only served to muddy the waters, to confuse the believers, and lay further heavy burdens on the backs of people who could no more adhere to those standards than the very Law of Moses in the first place. Which, by the way, was the whole point of the Cross to begin with.

Verse 1 & 2:

Beginning with Verses 1 and 2, Paul begins "*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" This greeting is common to Paul's epistles. And there's a couple of very important words there. Grace and Peace. And why not? Grace and Peace are so very necessary to this work of ministry. So necessary to our walk in Christ. Paul knew this, and therefore always included it at the beginning of his letters.

And after all, what can't be accomplished through the gift of much grace? Many difficulties, so much healing, and seemingly impossible reconciliation can be accomplished through granting grace. Especially when one has received such a great measure of grace as we have, as Redeemed believers in Christ who because of what WE have been given perhaps most understand its power and need. Paul certainly did. The just punishment for our sin against a Holy God was laid upon Christ. Christ received the Justice that ***we*** deserved, ***we*** received the Grace that **He** deserved. So how much more should we be willing to give grace as freely as we have received?

And in Verse 2, Paul refers to the church of Colossae as “...*faithful brothers in Christ...*”. Here they are, battling this weird heresy that threatens the church which says, “Oh no - Christ isn’t enough. You have to do this and this and that” and they have this list of things and they walk around appearing to know what they’re talking about. Our sin nature LOVES to revel in its ability to come up with all sorts of self-righteous measures to make ourselves seem more acceptable to the Lord. We all want to stand before the Lord and say, “Look what I did, Daddy!”. “Look what I made. Look what I did for you”.

Last Wednesday we talked about faith being a gift from God. It doesn’t even originate from us. Paul tells us clearly in Ephesians 2:8 that faith is a GIFT. Nobody can ever say, “Well, I’m a man of great faith” or “If you only had more faith then you could -blah blah blah-”. Nonsense. So when we are being “faithful” or when we’re acting or walking in “faith”, we are properly appropriating what God Himself gave us. He isn’t dependent on faith - he GIVES faith. God gives it, we appropriate it. God creates the means BY WHICH He is pleased. Is it impossible to please God without faith? Absolutely. Therefore God is EVER the giver of the ONLY things which please Him. Only He can provide the very things that are acceptable in His own eyes. Anything that pleases God, **COMES** from God.

And here Paul is commending these brothers and sisters in their appropriation of the gift God gave them. Theologically speaking, the focus is not so much on how faithful **they** have been - but rather on how faithful **GOD** has been in sending them what they need to keep them focused on Him - and that is FAITH.

Verse 3:

Looking at Verse 3, “*We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...*”. I love that: “We always THANK God...”. Thanksgiving, that verbal demonstration and

acknowledgement of gratitude before the Father is so important because not only is He worthy to receive Thanks and Gratitude, not only are we instructed by our Lord Jesus Christ to pray that way, but His character of Perfection demands it! His ways are so much higher than ours.

- Charles Spurgeon: "Blessed are the WAVES that wash the shipwrecked Mariner upon the Rock of Salvation".

Blessed are the waves - the trials that wash us upon Christ. The waves that bring us to Christ.

Who has power over the waves?

- Christ
- So if the Lord controls the storm, does that also mean that He is in control of the trials?
YES!
- So therefore, we might render Spurgeon's quote like this: "Blessed is Christ who brings us to Himself".

So the point is, always be thankful - the Lord is always calling us to Him. Through the storm, through the trial, through the illness, through the depression, through the unemployment, through the physical pain, through the divorce, through the death of a son or daughter, through an addiction, through whatever storm or trial He has allowed, in order to bring us closer and closer in dependence upon Him. Whether driven or drawn, He will bring His kids closer and closer to Him and cause us greater and greater measures of dependence upon Him. And that should be a comfort that we are all thankful for. Why? Because it is His hand that controls it all. And we can be thankful for that.

Verse 4 & 5:

Here in verse 4 and 5 Paul continues the thought with, “...since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel...”. This church was well-known to Paul for their love towards Christ and the saints.

And these 2 verses contain 3 important words: Faith. Hope. And Love. Faith in Christ Jesus. The Love that they had for all the saints. And Hope. Faithful and Loving - **BECAUSE** - of the Hope laid up for them in heaven. That is what awakens faith. And faith is a demonstration of that hope. Faith is ACTING OUT that hope. Faith means that you FIRMLY stand on the truth of Who God is. Faith is not looking at your situation and then basing who you believe God to be based on that. No, it's the opposite: Faith is standing firmly on what we know to be true about God and using THAT to judge our situation.

We all know what it's like to have someone come alongside us in our time of need, right? I mean we can all recall a time when someone showed up at just the right moment, or who was able to provide a resource or relief from a situation. And we can all remember the unbelievable relief we felt and the gratitude we had for it. Well now, let's insert God Himself into that equation. What if that “someone” who came alongside us to help us in our time of need was none other than the King of Kings, the Lord of Glory Himself? How relieved would we be? What would that do to our hope in Him? What if I were to tell you that He is with you right now? He has come alongside you today.

Verse 6:

“...which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing - as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth...”.

Paul acknowledges that all over the world, the Gospel is bearing fruit and growing just as it has

done in YOU since YOU first heard and understood the truth. That it has come to YOU. To ME. It's very personal. And that reflects how I feel about my own walk with the Lord. That it's an intensely personal one - "personal" in the sense that it's a very personally **intimate** relationship.

The gospel was intended to be good news for the whole world. The gospel transcends all cultural, ethnic, racial, and political lines. Pastor Dale has been leading us through the book of Revelation on Wednesday evenings. A fascinating study for sure. Well, Revelation 7:9-10 underscores perfectly the work of the gospel in the world. *"...After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"*. Do you realize that we are seeing that very thing play out before our eyes this very day? And what about the Team down in Central America? You sent them. You are praying for them. You are part of this very verse playing out. You are all a part of it. That's exciting.

Verse 7 & 8:

And finally, we conclude our very brief look at the first part of our look at Paul's letter to the Colossians with verses 7 and 8 where Paul writes, *"...just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit..."*. Paul says, "just as you learned it from Epaphras...". What a fascinating reality that the gospel is delivered by people. God could very well have used angels to spread His word upon the earth but no. He chose to use fallen creatures. And here, the fallen creature that God decided to use to send the gospel was Epaphras. Epaphras was the one who then spread the gospel to Colossae. The church there then grew and thankfully, we even got a letter from Paul out of it that continues to exhort us and encourage us today.

Romans 10 puts it like this: *"How then shall they call on Him whom they have not believed? How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher?"* We read in 1 Corinthians 1:21: *"For seeing that in the wisdom of God, the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."* God uses humans as messengers of the gospel. And if you're not going to do it, then God will find somebody else to do it. What a joyous thing to participate in it though. Little old me. Little old you. This is the gospel and Paul thanks God for it.