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Colossians 1:1-8

The apostle Paul wrote this letter in A.D. 60. He had a long-distance relationship with his recipients because he was 1,000 miles away in a Roman prison. Colosse was in Asia Minor, which is present-day Turkey. One of the unusual facts of this book is that Paul is writing to a group of people he had never met before. In fact, commentators believe that a man named Epaphras, who was converted under Paul's ministry, (in Ephesus) started the church. The church was flourishing until some false teachers came and disrupted the growth and confused their theology. Paul's purpose in writing was to encourage the believers and to combat errors in the church. (Epaphras and Philemon were two of Paul's converts from Ephesus)

So, it is believed that the church in Colosse was started by Epaphras and not an apostle. The gospel can be taught and shared by any of God's followers. All of God's followers are called to be messengers of the good news.

This false teaching was partly pagan and partly legalistic Judaism. The church in Colosse was dealing with a mixture of philosophies, beliefs, and errors. The Jewish element asserted that believers had to observe certain days, deny themselves some types of food, and follow various rituals. The pagan segment emphasized self-denial, the worship of angels, and a mystical wisdom that was available only for those who had special knowledge.

Paul recognized that the most dangerous part of this heresy was the deprecation of Christ, so he focused much of his attention on the supremacy of Jesus. In fact, Colossians is the most Christ-centered book in the entire Bible.

If we want to right this ship (America), we must come back to Christ's absolute superiority and preeminence. There's a lot of mixing of views today, isn't there? People borrow a little from this and a little from that. It comes from movies, TV, social media platforms, friends, books and philosophies that have their root in the same beliefs that surfaced in Colosse.

Colossians is one of Paul's shortest letters but also one of the most exciting. We're encouraged to explore the treasures of the gospel and to order our lives accordingly under the lordship of Christ. We'll see that wrong doctrine always leads to wrong living. While we're going to go through its section by section, it's important to keep in mind that this is primarily a letter, meant to be read as a whole. **Colossians 4:16** encourages us to read it out loud, which we will do throughout the series. To fully comprehend it, you might want to consider reading the entire book a couple times each week.

Read Colossians 1:1-2.

Paul was not one of the 12 original apostles, but he had a special commission by the "will of God." He did not choose the career of an apostle but was selected by Jesus Himself in **Acts 9:15**

where we read, **“This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel.”**

Paul was not writing this alone but with **“Timothy our brother.”** Paul understood the importance of partnership in ministry. Timothy was not an apostle but was extremely close to Paul.

Having introduced himself, next he addresses the congregation, **“To the saints”**, we are saints by virtue of our position in Christ. **“Faithful brethren”** refers to the fact that even during false doctrine, many of them were dependable and faithful to the truth.

I want you to notice that these believers were **“in” Christ** and **“in” Colosse**. In the Greek, this is the same preposition. They were in Christ and in Colosse. The same is true for us. You are in Christ and in Prospect, or wherever you live. We’re called to live out our position in Christ in the context of where we live and work. Faithful believers are also public witnesses. Our position in Christ and our proclamation within our culture are linked. Because we belong to Jesus, we must call others to believe. We are citizens of heaven on site in Oneida County.

Paul continues his greeting by saying, **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father.”** Paul chose the word first that reminds and centers all believers, **“grace,”** or unmerited favor. Only God the Father can offer grace and peace. Grace always precedes peace. Grace is the provision for the Christian life. Peace is the enjoyment of those provisions.

Now, as we look at **verses 3-8**, it’s important to keep in mind that this passage is one long sentence in the Greek and is built around the subject of thanksgiving.

As I studied and read this book I was challenged and reminded that I need to be more thankful. Paul mentions being thankful 6 times in the book of Colossians. **(1:3, 1:12, 2:7, 3:15,17, and 4:2)** It is easier to recognize Christ’s preeminence, supremacy with a thankful heart than an unthankful one.

Sometimes we must be reminded to be thankful, huh? (Sometimes?!) What were some of the things Paul was thankful for?

Read verses 3-5.

I. The Faithful Family in Colosse.

- Paul states that he was **“praying always for you”**. When you pray for someone, the Holy Spirit will make you more aware to be thankful for others. It has happened some many times in my life. I go to God complaining, being critical about others, or certain circumstances, convincing myself that God is on my side, realizing later through correction that God is on the right side.
- Paul was thankful for their faith in Christ Jesus. Faith is mentioned first because it is the starting place for everything else in the Christian life. They weren’t commended because they had a commodity of faith but because they had put their trust and confidence **“in**

Christ Jesus.” It’s amazing to me that the testimony of their faith reached all the way to Paul in a Roman prison. When was the last time we were thankful for someone’s faith? When was the last time we encouraged someone because of their faith in Jesus. What their faith testimony did in our lives?

- He was thankful for their love for ALL the saints... oh boy! Remember, it is believed, based on scripture that Paul had not visited the church in Colosse (**Col. 2:1**). Yet, he had heard their reputation was that they loved ALL the saints. Most of you are like me, we will say, “we love all other Christians, but we don’t like some.” And that is fine IF we obey the Holy Spirit when He prompts us to move closer, get more involved, to the ones we don’t like.
- Are you thankful for your Bethel family? Do you pray for them? Are you encouraged by individuals’ faith, if so, have you encouraged them in any way? Do you love ALL the saints? In the way the Holy Spirit is challenging you.
- If we want to put Christ first, we must put others first, that is what He did. Naturally we can take each other for granted, even grow tired of each other. This is from the flesh, not the Holy Spirit.
- It would be malpractice if I didn’t state that loving ALL the saints also means holding them accountable and if need be spiritual correction. I think of it this way. My spiritual life is like driving. When I drive down the road, I am always making corrections, maintaining the right speed, keeping it between the lines, checking my mirrors to observe my surroundings, and watching the brush line for a deer to decide to play frogger. There is a lot of things to constantly correct. The Holy Spirit spends every day as the co-pilot of my spiritual vehicle, suggesting all the redirections, but I must trust Him and make them. Now let’s say I decide to start picking up my phone and tiktoeing in the car. A police officer catches me doing this what will he do? He will pull me over and most likely give me a ticket, correction. So, the next time God sends another brother or sister in your life to talk to you about spiritually tiktoeing, instead of getting angry and justifying, ask God to search your heart for the truth. It is not loving to allow someone to hurt themselves and not try and step in.
- Paul was thankful for their hope. Their hope in Jesus Christ. Because God has **“laid up”** hope for us in heaven, we can have full confidence in our faith and express our love without holding back. We don’t have to vaguely wish for something better to come when we have complete confidence in the reality of heaven.
- Why have faith in Christ if there is no hope for a glorious future? Why love others if it doesn’t matter in the end? Hope makes all the difference because we have a confident expectation that everything God says in His Word is true today or will come true in the future. Hope is stored up for us like a treasure. God guarantees our salvation in eternity. We can blow it down here, but we will never lose our salvation because we didn’t do anything to get it or deserve it in the first place.

- I see people all the time who have no hope. Without it, we end up without any anchor for our life. There's nothing worse than seeing someone grieve because they have no hope.

II. The Gospel.

- Paul is thankful for the faith, love, and hope of the Colossians. In **verses 5b-6** we see that he is grateful for the gospel itself. **Read verses 5b-6.**
 - These verses reveal four key elements about the gospel.
1. **The Gospel is the truth of God.** The last part of **verse 5** and beginning of verse 6 helps us see that our hope is based solidly upon the **“word of the gospel truth, which has come to you.”** The word of truth and the gospel are the same thing. “Gospel” simply means “good news.” The gospel is to be shared with others because it is the word of truth. There is no other truth worth proclaiming.
 2. **The Gospel is for the whole world.** Paul is rejoicing because this gospel is going “all over the world.” The gospel that has come to the city of Colosse is the same gospel going around the globe. God has one message of good news, one word of truth for everyone. Can you think of a better gift for the whole world than the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 3. **The Gospel produces life and growth.** Look at **verse 6: “is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard it and knew...”** The gospel is alive, growing, spreading, bearing fruit, and spreading some more. When the gospel is heard and believed, lives change radically. I can personally attest to this in my own life. I remember my Greek professor teaching us, the word “power” comes from the word “dunamis,” or dynamite. The gospel message is the dynamite of God, to break through hard hearts and sinful habits so that the Fruit of the Spirit can grow and ripen to maturity.
 4. **The Gospel is the grace of God.** The last part of **verse 6** refers to **“the grace of God in truth.”** The message of God's truth is a message of grace. You and I cannot earn acceptance before God. Salvation is by grace alone through faith. You don't have to jump through certain hoops or follow some man-made regulations. We receive what we don't deserve, not when we're good enough, but when we recognize that we're bad enough to be disqualified from it. Of all the world religions, Christianity alone offers salvation without demands for pious works. The gospel of grace is truly good news. It brings faith, love, hope, and a desire to share it with others.

III. Epaphrus.

- In **verses 7-8**, we see that Paul was thankful for Epaphras because he had been the one to share the life changing message of grace with the Colossian people. **Read verses 7-8.**
- Epaphras is faith, love and hope in action. He illustrates that the good news of the gospel of grace must be proclaimed.

- Paul developed people like Epaphras wherever he went and reminded the Colossians that they had first heard the gospel from one of their own. He was a dear fellow servant and a **“faithful minister of Christ.”** He faithfully took the message of grace to them and as a result he could be trusted. Epaphras both evangelized Colosse and edified the believers through his teaching. The verb **“learned”** is the basis of the word “disciple.”
- God’s plan has always been to use human instruments to bring forth the gospel to a dying world. Epaphras was faithful in spreading the seed. He wants us to be faithful to Him and to the gospel of grace. Are you? Am I?
- This section ends with a report by Epaphras about their **“love in the Spirit.”** When Epaphras traveled all the way to Rome to tell Paul about these Christ-followers, he told him that they had a Spirit-produced love. The word **“declared”** was a legal term indicating evidence. This means that he gave the apostle solid proof of their conversion, their subsequent spiritual growth, and their love in the Spirit.
- Would those closest to you say the same about you?

Conclusion

Be thankful of others in your life. Pray for others, ask God to reveal your heart. How can you be an encouragement to someone else in the church body?

Identify one person you have a hard time loving. I’m convinced that there is at least one person in each of our lives who we simply don’t like. Ask God to help you love this individual in the Spirit. You’ll need God’s help here. Thank Him for the opportunity you must put your faith into action. Ask Him to change your heart and He will teach you how to love.

Take the next step in your journey of growth. If you’ve never responded to the gospel message by putting your faith in Jesus for forgiveness of sins, then you need to do so! If you don’t, your life will never change, and you’ll enter a tragic eternity.

Do you need to be baptized? Is there a habitual sin you need to stop giving into? Can you be more faithful to God with your finances? Maybe you need to be around His people more and need to get plugged into a Life group, come on Sunday nights or Sunday school? Perhaps you’ve simply been too busy with things that keep you from what is truly important. Ask the Holy Spirit to put His finger on what needs to change and then take the step that He is prodding you to take.

Determine this week to share God’s grace with at least one person. Take advantage of this window of openness in our country. Let’s be like Epaphras and share the gospel of grace with those around us.

Thoughts after studying and reading Colossians:

What we believe determines how we behave.

Wrong doctrine always leads to wrong living. Right doctrine should lead to right living.

If Christ is truly preeminent in our lives, then we will glorify Him by keeping pure, by enjoying fellowship with other saints, by loving each other at home and being faithful at work, and by seeking to witness for Christ and serve Him effectively.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon: "When we were united by faith to Christ, we were brought into such complete fellowship with Him, that we were made one with Him, and His interests and ours became mutual and identical. We have fellowship with Christ in His love. What He loves we love. He loves the saint, and so do we. He loves sinners, and so do we. He loves the poor perishing race of man, and so do we."