

We are going to take some time to examine Paul's letter to the church at Colossae, known as one of Paul's Prison Letters (the others being Ephesians, Philippians and Philemon) written while he was under house arrest for two years in Rome around 60 AD. The Colossae church is unique to Paul in that it was neither planted by Paul nor ever visited by him; The church was planted through the ministry of Epaphras or Epaphroditus. Evidently, Epaphras had been saved during Paul's three-year ministry in Ephesus and then became an evangelist among the Gentiles.

The church in Colossae, in what is present day Turkey, was a flourishing church but it experienced the same challenges that threaten many churches today. There was a mixture of religious error within as well as cultural pressure from all around which was undermining the Colossian church. Today many churches in our country have succumbed to various humanist philosophies, cultural trends, and basically outright disregard for the Bible as God's authoritative Word for life. The unrest and uncertain atmosphere in society often invades the Church and assaults the very Gospel which is the only hope for the world.

In the middle of a world of chaos and hopelessness, Paul writes a letter which is primarily a letter of hope, the hope that comes by the means of the Gospel which is characterized by the Grace of God in Jesus Christ. I know we went over verses 1&2 but let's look at the first eight verses together.

Colossians 1:1-8 (NASB): "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,²To the saints and faithful brothers *and sisters* in Christ *who are* at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.³ We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;⁵ because of the hope reserved for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel⁶ which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is bearing fruit and increasing, even as *it has been doing* in you also 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 bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,⁸ and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

1 - Understanding the inscription and the benediction

These verses are brimming with Christ-centered, Gospel Hope. The opening two verses are typical of written letters in general in Paul's time, containing the name of the writer and the names of the recipients. Paul adds an important self-identifying, description, that he is "an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." An apostle in the Early Church was called by Christ, Himself, to plant the Christian Church and confirm and complete the doctrine of the Church in the New Testament writings. Paul's apostolic authority is God ordained not man-made, and at this time he is partnered with Timothy.

The letter and the Promise of Grace and Peace is addressed to the "saints and faithful ones" in the Church at Colossae. The root word for "saints" is the word "Holy", so the "Saints" are God's

Holy Ones. We are the people whom God has set apart for His own possession. God declares us to be Holy, not on account of our good works or faithfulness but on account of the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit in us.

God works within our hearts in order to bring us to faith in His Son, and that's what makes God's people "faithful" or "faith-FULL". The Greek root word for "faithful" (GR, pistos) is "Peitho" meaning "to persuade" or "to believe"; so the "faithful ones" are those who have grounded their faith in the work of Jesus. They are persuaded that the work of Jesus is their only way to forgiveness and life. They are not "faithful" because they have done everything righteously but because they have faith and trust in the only Son of God who has done everything righteously and then paid the penalty for sin for those who trust Him.

The Grace and Peace from "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" is to this particular people, God's Holy Ones and to those who believe in Jesus' redemptive work. God's grace and peace to His people are inexhaustible; God's grace (GR. charis) in Christ is not only in the past, but it continues second by second in the present, and forever throughout all eternity. His grace alone is redemptive, superlative and "salvational". Anyone can be gracious to someone else, but only God's grace can save and give eternal life.

His peace is not according to the world's standard either. Many of the Greek nouns used in our text take on new, expanded, spiritually rich meanings in light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Peace in the world is the absence of war, but the peace which comes from God means forgiveness and eternal life and an eternal relationship WITH God. The peace from God establishes a deep-seated tranquility in one's soul, being assured of salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and at the same time being content in our earthly circumstances no matter what they may be. And so God's Grace and Peace in Christ alone are inexhaustible and particular to His chosen people.

2 - Thanksgiving and Prayer

Verse 3 continues: "We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you." Paul begins most of his letters the same way, namely with thanksgiving. It is a natural transition from the benediction to verse 3, isn't it? If you have been a recipient of the Grace and Peace of God the Father, thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ naturally flows from the redeemed heart; God is the only source of all that is good and gracious, and so it is a natural heart response to thank Him.

The Greek word for "thanks" is "eucharisteo". It is a compound word and has several root words, one being the word for "forgiveness", but at the very center of this word is the Greek word, "charis", which is the word for "grace". For the believer, this word is abundant in its meaning: We give thanks to God daily for the gift of His saving grace in Christ. Thanks is central in our lives because it is by His grace we have forgiveness, we have constant access to His throne, and we have His Holy Spirit living within us; He makes His Tabernacle within us. WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ because He is in the midst of us.

The second heart response is incessant prayer, and in this case, prayer for God's People whom we may not have met personally. Paul gives his reason for his prayers for the Church in Colossae in verse 4; He prays for them "since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints." How amazing is the penetrating influence of faith in Christ Jesus! Faith in Christ Jesus brings us out of ourselves and into fellowship and love "for all the saints." Being part of the Body of Christ expands our prayer life to God's Kingdom perspective. Paul never met these people but he rejoices in them and prays for them because they are people of faith and they have exhibited love, not just for Christ Jesus, but for all His "Holy Ones", His saints. So being a person of faith causes expansive and intensive prayer for God's Kingdom and His Holy Ones: Lord, may THY KINGDOM come!

3 - The Present and Future Heavenly Hope

The basis for Paul's thanks and prayers continues in verses 5 and 6: "We give thanks and pray "because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth..."

Here Paul mentions the Gospel as a present and future Heavenly Hope. The Gospel is not only "good news" as it is translated, but it is the BEST news. We often think of the Gospel in terms of salvation in the past, and that is the very core of the Gospel, but it also represents the future hope of Heaven. The Gospel is God's Grace which is active, saving in the past, providing in the present, producing fruit now and the future, while also preserving us for all eternity.

So far Paul has mentioned the gifts of God's grace and peace IN Christ. Faith and love were mentioned in verse 4 and now "Heavenly hope" springs into verse 5 to bring together the three everlasting gifts of God according to 1 Corinthians 13: Faith, Hope and Love.

Everyone has faith in something or someone but we know that Biblical faith is SAVING faith, having been persuaded and grounded by the Holy Spirit and in the Word. Biblical faith believes that Jesus is all that He has ever claimed to be: He is Master and Savior, Deity, Incarnate God in the Flesh, Crucified Son of God, Eternal, and He is Risen and Reigning Lord. He is the only way to the Father by faith in His Work, not yours. Jesus IS the "word of truth" mentioned in our text, and Jesus IS the Gospel.

Hebrews 11:1 explains faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Alright---"Faith is the substance of things hoped for..." What does "the substance" mean. "Substance" is that which has foundation. It is like concrete. Substance is firm. Substance is that which has actual existence. It's not fake or flimsy. The NIV uses the word "confidence". Another version says "now faith is the assurance of things hoped for." Another translation for the word substance is "the very nature". Faith is being absolutely sure of the things we hope for in Christ: Even though we don't see the things promised, we believe and live with the certainty of having them...because we do.

The Hope which comes from the Lord Jesus is certainty in Christ's Divine power, not wishful thinking. Hope springs from the Gospel; as a matter of Biblical fact, there is NO TRUE HOPE apart from the Gospel. The Greek word for hope (elpis) can be expectation of either good or evil but in the Biblical context of the Gospel, the meaning is always for secured good; it is a joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation and all that God promises in Christ.

The future hope of Heaven and Christ's appearing is a future certainty for believers; Titus 2:13 says that we are "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." As glorious as that will be, I am not certain that is what Paul is thinking of here. In verse 5, in the phrase, "because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven," the word "heaven" is actually plural, translated "in the heavens", or "in the heavenly realms.

In Ephesians, Paul uses this idea to convey the spiritual warfare that is all around us, and that the Lord God has equipped us for these battles so that we are not hopeless in our fight. While prepping for this sermon I was feeling hopeless and under attack. My son, some of you may know Keoni, called me and we talked about some of the things we are going through with work, businesses and relationships. I think we were both pretty down and just feeling exhausted. We both felt like we were going through some spiritual warfare. In that moment of weakness we prayed together and poured out everything to God. And in that moment we were both lifted up and encouraged. If you are ever going through spiritual warfare reach out, to me or to one of your other brother and sisters in Christ. We are better together. I am getting a little off topic but spiritual warfare is real. Let's jump back to Ephesians 6:10-12 says: "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." In the Church today, as in Colossae, we must be on guard against false teachings, philosophies, cults and the like, from within and all around, and KNOW the truth of the Gospel and be able to discern God's Word so that we continue to stand strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Biblical hope is not something that is only futuristic, it is practical for victory in spiritual warfare in our everyday lives from moment to moment.

In verse 6 Paul talks about the Gospel bringing forth fruit; that is the very nature of the Life-changing and Life-giving Word and Spirit. God's Word will accomplish what He intends for it to do. Look at the last two verses: 7 "as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 who also declared to us your love in the Spirit." When the Word takes root, it brings forth fruit. A self-less, self-sacrificing love is one of those fruits. It is a love that serves our Savior and each other in ways which mirror the Love of Jesus Christ to us.

Epaphras was taught under Paul's ministry. Now Paul, no doubt, is pleased to see him as a dedicated and faithful minister of Christ. And so the Gospel continues to be contagious

throughout the world because of God's saving work in people everywhere who are grounded in the gifts of God's faith, hope, and love in the Spirit of the Living God.

Lord, use us to share this Gospel truth, that Jesus came to die for sinners. May we not pass up an opportunity to share the faith, the hope, and the love of God in Christ Jesus. All praise be to you our great God. In Jesus' name. Amen

I. The Inscription and Benediction opens Colossians. (1-2)

A. Paul's apostolic authority is God ordained not man-made.

B. The Promise of Grace and Peace (the fruit of saving faith) is to the Holy and Faithful (or FAITH-FULL) ones in Christ.

C. God's Grace and Peace are inexhaustible and particular IN CHRIST.

II. Paul's Prayer of Thanks explains a Gospel Response. (3-4)

A. Thanks flows from grace. (eucharisteo: root words in the word "forgiveness" and "grace" (charis) at the center.)

B. Expansive and intensive prayer for God's Kingdom and His Holy Ones.

III. The Gospel is a present and future Heavenly Hope. (5-6)

A. Biblical faith is saving faith; foundational and firm. Hebrews 11:1

B. Biblical hope is secured good; it is a joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation and all that God promises in Christ.

C. Biblical hope is certainty in Christ's power, not wishful thinking. (Titus 2:13)

D. Biblical hope is practical for victory in spiritual warfare. (Eph 6:10-12)

E. When the Word takes root, it brings forth fruit.

Let's close in prayer – Father God we just stand in awe of you! We pray that as we journey through Paul's letter to Colossae that we would be drawn closer to you. We pray that you would grow faith, hope, and love in each of us and that we would not just hold onto it but share it with all of those around us in our unique circles of influence. Lord we lift this church to you, This is your church father. We thank you for the faith, hope, and love already planted in us and for the growth of it in the future! We thank you for all you do and we lift it all to you. In Jesus name we pray AMEN.