

Message #3**Colossians 1:3-8**

There are some people, when you see them coming or think about them, you quietly say or think to yourself—Oh No. What a disaster or wreck. These are the kind of people who are a constant drain and a pain. They always have some issue about them and they never seem to have any joy or happiness. They never seem to have a good day or positive attitude. They are downers who are totally absorbed with their own self and their own problems.

Then there are other people when you see them coming, you light up. They light you up. They have a zest for life and a love for truth. There is a joy in them. There is a vibrancy and vitality in them and to them. You love to see them coming.

Those are the kinds of people that you can truly say, “I thank God for you always.” Now Paul was the kind of Apostle who would thank God for anyone who had responded to the grace of God. But he was very thankful for people who had responded to grace and then had developed to a deeper level in their faith.

Apparently the vast majority of people in the Colossian church were people like that. Now Paul had never been to Colossae. He had never been to the city and had never seen most of the people who were in the church (Col. 2:1).

But Epaphras had traveled to see Paul and he told him about the church and the people in the church. He told Paul about the way the Colossians were responding to the word of God and grace of God and it thrilled Paul.

In fact, when you go through the book of Colossians that theme of thanksgiving and thankfulness keeps showing up in every chapter (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15-17; 4:2). Paul was very thankful for these people in this church and he wanted them to be thankful as well.

So when Paul opens this letter he says to these Colossians:

WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD FOR YOU AND WE PRAY FOR YOU ALL OF THE TIME BECAUSE OF WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED ABOUT YOU.

The things Paul had learned about the Colossians prompted him to continually thank God for them, even though he had never been there and didn't even personally know most of the people. He is not delusional in using religious rhetoric “I thank God for you.” He means this and there are legitimate reasons for it.

What a privilege to have an Apostle like Paul so positive about a church that he tells the people that he thanks God for them. He was thankful for God's people and God's churches. Even though there were different problems in the churches, he was still thankful for them. There are four main prayer points that Paul wants to communicate about this prayer:

PRAYER POINT #1 – This prayer of thanksgiving was being prayed personally and continually. **1:3**

In fact, there are seven specific facts to observe about this prayer:

Fact #1 - His prayer was a pastoral prayer. Paul himself prayed because he felt responsible.

Fact #2 - His prayer was a plural prayer. Paul, Timothy and Epaphras prayed together.

Fact #3 - His prayer was a persistent prayer. Continual, present tense prayer.

Fact #4 - His prayer was a paternal prayer. Specifically aimed at God the Father.

Fact #5 - His prayer was a perpetual prayer. This prayer was prayed “always.”

He is always praying for people in a church whom he had not personally met.

Fact #6 - His prayer was a personal prayer. Prayed “for you.”

This is not a generic prayer. This was very specific prayer for them.

Fact #7 - His prayer was a positive prayer. Prayer of thanks.

H. A. Ironside wrote:

“He felt, as few men ever have felt, the great need of intercession for the people of God, for he knew well the fearful opposition of Satan, the prince and god of this world, toward those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ; and he realized the prevailing power of prayer to defeat the adversary” (*Colossians*, pp. 22-23).

Again we need to remind ourselves that Paul is praying for a church and group of people that he has not personally met. He knows that one of his responsibilities as an Apostle was to pray for those people and that is precisely what he did.

Now it was not uncommon for Paul to thank God for His people at a church. He did that in Romans, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. He thanked God for Timothy and for Philemon. The only church for which Paul does not thank God is Galatians. Those people in those churches were drifting from the Grace Gospel and he did not thank God for them or for that.

Any church that was embracing the grace gospel was a church for whom Paul prayed and Colossians was one of those churches.

Prayer is an important part of a church moving forward for God. Having men and women of God pray for the church and thank God for the church is a major key to God’s blessings. One other point on this, the more you personally pray, the more thankful you will become.

PRAYER POINT #2 – This prayer of thanksgiving was being prayed for specific reasons.

1:4-5

Now the fact is the Colossians gave Paul several reasons to thank God for them. Paul and his team “had heard” of the great things taking place in their lives. Dr. Curtis Vaughan appropriately observed, “The content of the thanksgiving is determined by the condition of the church...” (*Colossians*, p. 173).

Paul made this thanksgiving prayer to God when he knew something for which he could thank God.

Specific Reason #1 - His thanksgiving prayer was because he heard of the Colossians faith.

1:4a

Understand this critical point. When it comes to God, there is only one object of faith that He accepts. There is only one object of faith that will cause someone like Paul to be thankful and that is faith in Jesus Christ.

The object of their faith was not themselves, or the church, or a denomination or the O.T. Law. The object of their faith was Jesus Christ and that was something for which Paul could and would thank God.

This Colossian church was filled with people who had believed in Jesus Christ. They specifically believed that faith in Christ Jesus would save them. These believers had a true Biblical, Grace Age faith that was focused on Jesus Christ.

The noun “faith” has an article, literally “the faith.” Paul is thankful that they have a specific kind of faith. The specific kind of faith they had was that faith in Jesus Christ alone saves them. They did not have faith in their works, their education, or their religion. Their faith was in Jesus Christ and that is why Paul could thank God.

Faith in Jesus Christ is not some “leap in the dark” neverland kind of faith. It is based on truth and facts (**1:5, 6**). Paul could thank God that the people in this church were well grounded in the faith system. They believed they were saved by the grace of God found in Jesus Christ.

Specific Reason #2 - His thanksgiving prayer was because he had heard of the Colossians love.

1:4b

As we mentioned, Colossae was located on a major trade route and many people travelled by this little town. Paul could thank God because he had heard they were developing in Biblical love at the highest level. They had a love for God and a love for “all the saints.”

Now the noun “saints” has an article, so what that means is they had a love for other believers who believed in Jesus Christ and the grace of God. This church had a love for those who trusted in Jesus Christ, as they had.

This was not an ecumenical love that loved all religious people. This church loved those who were saints by faith in Jesus Christ. That is what made Paul so thankful. He will specifically tell these Colossians not to love deceptive, religious, philosophical teachers (2:4, 8). He not only didn't want them not loving them, he didn't want them even listening to them (2:16).

Now the kind of love to which Paul is referring is not an anything goes kind of love. In fact, there are times when doctrinal and personal separation is required from certain people and certain worldly practices (I Cor. 10:20-21; Rom. 16:17; I Cor. 5:11; II Thess. 3:14).

Biblical love is always based on truth. One does not love right if one is not truthful. Paul learned that this Colossian church was a loving and caring church focused on God's Grace and they loved others with the same focus. That made him happy.

Specific Reason #3 - His thanksgiving prayer was because he had heard of the Colossians hope.
1:5a

Understand this point because this is what Paul is stressing. Our hope of going to heaven is not the O.T. law. It is not the Sabbath day mandates. It is not our works. It is not our traditions. It is not our man-made rules. **Our hope of going to heaven is One Person—Jesus Christ. It is faith in Jesus Christ alone that is our only hope of going to heaven.**

These believers kept their sights and hope fixed on heaven. Now the Gospel and the truth they believed was that faith in Jesus Christ would be that which would take them to heaven. They had believed in Jesus Christ, and as a result, they had the hope that they would go to heaven.

What we have here is the great Christian trilogy that was in this church—Faith, Love, Hope. Faith looks backward to the cross of Christ that enables one to look upward to God. Love looks presently to others with the same faith. Hope looks forward to the future and to heaven.

Paul was thankful for what he was hearing about this church and the people in this church. They had a solid faith. They were not fickle people. This was a church filled with “faithful brethren” (1:2) and he could thank God for them.

PRAYER POINT #3 – This thanksgiving prayer was for the impact of the true Grace Gospel.
1:5b-8

There is one true grace gospel, and the true grace gospel is that faith alone in Jesus Christ will save you from all of your sins and take you to heaven.

There are six grace gospel realities that Paul presents here:

Gospel Reality #1 - The Grace Gospel specifically has come to them. **1:6a**

Literally the Grace Gospel has come “into” them. It is a present tense participle which means it is continually come to you. The grace gospel must be continually proclaimed and if you are one who gets it and understands it, you are one in which God has authorized this gospel to come to you.

Gospel Reality #2 - The Grace Gospel had specifically gone to the entire world. **1:6b**

The grace Gospel is what needs to be heard all over the world. As of right now in the month of December, looking at our web site down loads, the Grace gospel has gone out from this church to 67 nations of the world. This is what the world needs to know. Religion will not save you, only Jesus Christ will save you from your sins.

Gospel Reality #3 - The Grace Gospel constantly bears fruit and increases. **1:6c**

Do you see what Paul is saying here? The grace gospel will always, continually and constantly, bear fruit. It will always continually pull people out of their sin and guilt and depression and bring them to God.

Gospel Reality #4 - The Grace Gospel must be heard. **1:6d**

People need to actually hear the grace gospel. Here is the big problem. Most people in the world aren't hearing the true grace gospel. Neither are most people in the United States, Michigan or Kalamazoo.

They are hearing anything but an accurate presentation of the grace gospel. Just listen to people. Ask them what they think you have to do to go to heaven and listen to the answers you will get.

Gospel Reality #5 - The Grace Gospel must be understood in truth. **1:6e**

This is a very critical point. The verb “understood” is a verb that means there must be some point in time when one gains deep knowledge of the truth of the gospel. This is not some shallow level of understanding. This is a knowledge-upon-knowledge level of understanding.

In order for God to truly save people, they need an accurate presentation of Truth.

Gospel Reality #6 - The Grace Gospel was learned from Epaphras. **1:7**

God does not permit a person to learn deep things of grace on their own. God does not use angels to communicate the truth of God's word that will take people deep. He uses men. These men are men who have been taught and they are faithful and Epaphras was one of those men. He had been taught by Paul and they learned from him.

The verb “learn” means that Epaphras was the one who presented the Pauline grace truth to them and they were able to understand and ascertain and learn it (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 277). The preposition “from” means that Epaphras was the person from whom this grace truth came. They knew much about religion and they knew much about works. They did not know about grace.

Understanding the grace gospel does not come by osmosis. It comes by being taught by someone who knows it. This is how it works. The Holy Spirit uses men who know Grace truth to communicate it to others so they can learn it (II Tim. 2:2).

Understand this about the gospel. The gospel is not a feeling. It is not a philosophy. It is not a psychology. It is not a theory. It is not instruction on religion. The Gospel is a truth revelation of God that unravels the grace of God.

It must be learned and in order for it to be learned, it must be taught. Epaphras learned the grace gospel from Paul. By God’s grace, I learned it from John Miles. John Miles learned it from Lewis Sperry Chafer. Lewis Sperry Chafer learned it from C. I. Scofield. This is the way it works.

Paul brings out two facts about Epaphras.

(Fact #1) - Epaphras is Paul’s beloved fellow servant (sundoulou). **1:7a**

Paul says I love this guy and he is a fellow worker with me in serving God.

(Fact #2) - Epaphras is a faithful servant (diakinos) of Christ on Paul’s behalf. **1:7b**

The word “servant” is different than the previous one. This one means Paul considered him to hold a special, sacred ministerial role in this grace Gospel.

They had not learned about the grace Gospel from just anyone. They had learned it from a very faithful man of God.

PRAYER POINT #4 – The prayer was for Epaphras’ report of the Spirit’s work. **1:8**

The work of God in the church and the work of God through Epaphras was the work of the Holy Spirit. This is the only place in the book of Colossians where Paul mentions the work of the Holy Spirit. The reason for this is that this is a book that is designed to exalt Jesus Christ.

But Paul wanted people to know that it is the Holy Spirit that takes the truth of the grace gospel and produces salvation, love and unity.

Now what Paul will develop is that everything you need for salvation to go to heaven and everything you need to grow deep in your relationship with God is found in Jesus Christ and the written Scriptures.

Jesus Christ is God’s grace gift of salvation. He is not “a way” to salvation; He is “the only way” to salvation. Believe on Him and the hope of heaven will be your hope.