

A STUDY OF COLOSSIANS

Part Two

Introduction

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 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, 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; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit” (Colossians 1:3-8).

1. In the previous lesson, we learnt something about the city of Colosse, and then we considered: (i) Paul’s authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ, and (ii) the Colossians’ position in Christ.
2. In this lesson, we shall focus on Paul’s prayer for these brethren. It is worth remembering that Paul had not actually met these brethren. The evidence: (i) He says he had “heard of their faith” (1:3), (ii) he speaks of “the gospel which you heard” but does not say it was from himself (1:23), and, (iii) he remarks that they had “not seen my face in the flesh” (2:1).



The Colossians’ Faith In Christ – 1:3-5a

III. THE REASONS FOR PAUL’S THANKFULNESS

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven...” (Colossians 1:3-5a).

1. In these verses Paul offers a prayer of thanksgiving for the Colossians; in particular for their faith, love, and hope.
 - a. The word “we” indicates that both Paul and Timothy thanked God and always prayed for the Colossians, though the content of their prayers is not revealed until verse nine.
 - b. The God to whom they pray is the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. It is because Jesus is our Lord, that God is also our Father, and it is before Him that we bring our petitions as His adopted children (Matthew 6:9; 7:7-11; Romans 8:15-7; Galatians 4:6).
2. The reasons for their continual prayers of thanks for the Colossians:
 - a. Paul and Timothy had heard about their faith, which is foundational to everything else in connection with the life of a Christian. But what is faith? The writer of Hebrews says, “Now faith is the **assurance** of things hoped for, the **conviction** of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). The two sides of faith are conviction, which includes believing that what the scriptures teach is true, and assurance, which comes as a result of trust in God. The faith they had was “in Christ”. This likely refers to Christ as the sphere of their faith. It describes their faith as *the faith of those who are in Christ*. What Paul is describing is their steadfastness (see verse 2). More about their faith, their living faith, will be discussed later.
 - b. Paul and Timothy had heard about their love. The word “love” here is *agape*, and it is this love that they manifested toward “all the saints”. It is this demonstration of love that was at the heart of the report they had received. And this is what really profits: “Faith working by love” (Galatians 5:6). It is such love that is the proof of faith and discipleship (John 13:34-35). It is also by the exercise of love that we “know that we have passed out of death into life” (1 John 3:14).

- c. Just as faith and love were the basis of Paul's thanksgiving, so hope serves as the basis for faith and love: "Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven". These brethren had faith and love because of their hope. The hope they have is "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven". Such a hope is a powerful force in a Christian's life (see **1 John 3:3**). This hope makes our faith in God stronger, and all those with the same hope draw closer together, which results in a greater love for one another. And, of course, the basis of hope is the resurrection of Christ (**1:18-20; Ephesians 1:18-23**).
3. Concerning their hope, Paul was not revealing anything new to them because it was that which they had formerly heard before "in the word of the truth of the gospel", which had been preached to them by Epaphras. The emphasis is not on the *time* but the *source* – "the word of the truth". The term used to describe the source of this teaching appears to draw a contrast between the truth they had received and what was presently being taught by the false teachers. In other words, their hope was not grounded in the words of the false teachers, but in "the word of the truth of the gospel." Without the word of the truth of the gospel, no man can have "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven".

The Power Of The Gospel – 1:5b-8

IV. THE GOSPEL CONTINUALLY BEARS FRUIT

"... of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, 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; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit" (**Colossians 1:5b-8**).

1. The gospel that had been brought to the Colossians is the same gospel that had been brought to the whole world (cp. **Galatians 1:8-9**).
 - a. The church was founded in A.D. 33 and this epistle to the Colossians was written around A.D. 60. So in just under 30 years the gospel had been taken into every country of the world.
 - b. The gospel has an inherent power (**Romans 1:16**) and wherever it is preached, it bears fruit. First, as the gospel enters a good and honest heart (**Luke 8:15**), and then as that person shares it with others (cp. **Acts 8:4**). So the gospel is continually bearing fruit.
2. The founding of the church at Colosse:
 - a. It wasn't Paul that preached the gospel in Colosse, it was Epaphras. Paul describes him as a "fellow-servant" and "servant," his "fellow-prisoner," and a "faithful minister."
 - b. There is a debate among scholars as to whether Epaphras was "our" minister or "your" minister. Having examined this question, I believe the correct understanding is that rendered by the AMP: "You so learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ in our stead and as our representative and yours." Walton Weaver says, "If 'our' is the correct reading it adds force to Paul's commendation. It would mean that Paul not only had confidence in him, but Epaphras was also Paul's official representative in Colosse."
3. We also learn that it was Epaphras that had given Paul and Timothy the report about the church.

Applications

1. Having heard of the Colossians' faith and love, Paul and Timothy offered prayers of thanksgiving for them. (i) Does hearing of the faith and love of other congregations prompt us to offer up prayers of thanksgiving to God? (ii) What do other congregations hear about us?
2. The brethren at Colosse had a "love for all the saints". The exercise of love shows that we are true disciples of Christ and that the love of the Father dwells in us. Let us examine ourselves to see if such a love truly dwells in us because if doesn't, then we have no fellowship with God.

3. If we *really* have hope, then it ought to be a powerful force in our life. It will make our faith in God stronger and result is a greater love for one another. John says, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). Is the proof of hope evident in your life?
4. As we share the gospel with others, we must remember that the gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:16), not us. There are some that zealous preach and preach and preach at people as if their conversion were wholly dependant upon themselves. Such people rob the gospel of its power and actually drive people away!
5. The truth of the gospel had been received by the brethren at Colosse, but there were false teachers seeking to deceive them. As Christians, we must forever be on our guard against false teachers and always be of a mind to “test the spirits” (1 John 4:1). False teachers speak of trust, but are unfaithful. They speak of wisdom, but are devoid of knowledge. All their words are spoken with a view to manipulation.

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