

Thanksgiving of the Gospel
Colossians 1:1-8
December 11, 2011

Introduction

Colossians is a letter that Paul writes to the church at Colossae. He writes in response to Epaphras' report of the church...the positives and concerns. Note that Paul has never met the people at the church, but he takes the time to write to them to ensure that they understand that the gospel they heard from Epaphras is indeed the word of truth...the gospel as Paul himself preached.

Colossians 1:1-8

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father. ³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints- ⁵the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Paul begins the letter with a greeting. He introduces himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." This is an important because Paul is asserting his apostolic authority to the church, so they will know that what he writes is from God Himself. Furthermore, Paul states that his authority as an apostle is given to him by God. We know that in the book of Acts, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him and commissioned him to be His minister to the Gentiles. Not only does he introduce himself, but he also places Timothy with him in the letter. Timothy at this point of Paul's life in Rome is a constant companion to Paul. So close to Paul is Timothy that Paul calls him his true son in the faith.

This is a very warm letter which Paul shows his pastoral heart as he writes out his thanksgiving and his encouragement. He takes the time to shepherd the church whom he has never seen. Note how Paul describes the Christians at the Colossian church: "holy and faithful brothers in Christ." He is pointing out their place in Christ as part of the true church. Paul then tells the church that at every time he prays for them, he always thank God for the gospel presented to them.

I. Thanks to God for the Gospel (3)

- Gospel
 - *Euangelion*—Gk, meaning good news

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you--unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.*

Note: Paul always preached Christ and Him crucified. In verses 3-8, Paul mentions the gospel 3 times (Gospel, God's grace, word of truth), so for him, the gospel is everything in his ministry. He recognizes that the gospel only comes from God Himself, and he thanks God each time in his prayers.

- God the Father

Note: Scripture never gives thanks to men for the gospel, only to God. Jesus says that the growth of the gospel seeds in the heart of men is from God alone. Paul says even though he plants the seeds and Apollos waters it, it is God who grows the gospel seed in men's hearts.

- God changes people

Jonah 2:9 *Salvation is of the Lord.*

- God grows the church

Acts 2:47 *And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

- God sends messengers

Matthew 28:19 *Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.*

Note: It is only through God that the gospel can change the hearts of men. God is sovereign in every situation, from the word of truth preached by messengers to the hearers to the heart, and He will complete every good work He started.

II. Thanks to God for the Power of the Gospel (4-6)

Note: Paul is thankful to God for the power of the gospel to change lives.

Romans 1:16 *For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.*

- Individual impact
 - Hope stored in heaven

1 Peter 1:4 *to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*

Hebrews 6:18-19 *that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. 19 This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,*

Hebrews 11:24-27 *By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. 27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.*

Note: We live in light of eternity—looking to heaven because there is our home. Our reward is never grounded to the now, but in the future with God Himself. In fact, it is anchored to our souls. How else can we explain Moses? He had the wealth of Egypt at his disposal, yet he forsook all to follow God. Why? He understood that his home was not here, but in heaven. Thus Paul says the reason for such faith—unwavering faith in Christ Jesus—and love for others is that their hope is stored in heaven, and they want to please God instead of men.

- Faith in Christ

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Note: Paul is thankful that the Colossians are not like the church in Galatia where they abandoned the gospel for another. Their faith never wavered.

Galatians 1:6-7 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— **7** which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

- Love for saints

1 John 2:10 Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble.

1 John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. **17** If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? **18** Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

- Worldwide impact

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

1 Thessalonians 1:8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia— your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it,

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. **10** And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

III. Thanks to God for the Messenger of the Gospel (7-8)

Romans 10:14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?

Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

1 Corinthians 1:21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

- Epaphras
 - He taught the truth
 - He taught it faithfully
 - He reported it to Paul