

Colossians Lesson 1 - The Christian Virtues

HOMEWORK FOR NEXT WEEK: Read Colossians 1:9-14

TEXT

As a group watch The Bible Project's YouTube Video on the Book of Colossians through the 1:30 mark:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTXIDxQsvc>

Key Question: What does giving regular thanks to God do for your faith and your relationship with God?

Read Colossians 1:1-8

Greeting

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Thanksgiving and Prayer

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, 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 servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

COMMENTS

Paul likely never visited Colossae, but he has been informed while in prison by Epaphras about the status of the church in Colossae. Epaphras conveyed the great faith and love exhibited by the Colossians, but also warned Paul about a false teaching that had taken root in Colossae. Paul was writing this letter to remind the Colossians of the primacy of the gospel and its availability to all Christ-confessing Christians.

Paul's opening in verses 1 and 2, asking for God's grace and peace, is a theme we see throughout most of his letters. The concept of God's peace implies more than just simply getting along. It conveys wholeness, order, and being in the right relationship with God. Christians have unimpeded access to God's peace and Paul wishes for them to be reminded of the gospel.

In verses 3 through 5 Paul gives thanks for three key virtues he recognizes in the Colossians: their faith, their love, and their hope in heaven. From Paul's perspective their faith and love derive from their hope of engaging in God's everlasting kingdom. So the hope of God's future promise fuels their present faith and love.

Verses 5 and 6 are critical to understanding the fruit of gospel ministry. He affirms here that the "gospel of the grace of God" and the "gospel of truth" has come to them and is bearing fruit and increasing their numbers, as it is throughout the world. The gospel of the grace of God is the loving and undeserved mission God launched through Christ to save the world from sin and false worldviews. The gospel of truth grinds against our secular worldview that there is no absolute truth or that truth is relative. The gospel of truth is all the Colossians need to understand and access God. In our society, when we succumb to the idol of works righteousness or licentiousness we run the risk of neither loving God nor our neighbor. Such idols deceive us into thinking that only our truth matters and that our truth takes precedence over God's truth.

The key theme in the opening of the book of Colossians is giving thanks. Paul is giving thanks for all the progress that is happening in Colossae. Paul's thanksgiving for the Colossians affirms them for their dependence on God and the primacy of God in all that they do. Thanksgiving is fundamental to Christianity and it is something that we as Christians ought to engage in regularly. It reminds us of all God has done for us and all he will do for us.

STUDY

1. READ

- a. What are three elements that Paul identifies (v. 3-5) that he is grateful for in the Christians in Colossae?

- b. What does the passage indicate in verses 5 and 6 came to the Colossians to help them bear fruit and increase?

- c. Who is identified in verses 7 and 8 as a Christian teacher, leader, and minister who brought Christianity to the Colossians? What attributes does Paul ascribe to this teacher?

2. MEANING

- a. How does hope for heaven build faith in Jesus Christ and motivate Christians to love one another?

- b. What does it mean to put our faith in Jesus, to love on another, and to have hope laid up for us in heaven?
- c. Why is the word of God and the gospel so important to help Christianity grow in a small community like Colossae?

3. APPLY

- a. Faith, hope, and love: Which of these three areas of Christian believing and living do you think you are strongest in? Why might that be?
- b. What does placing your trust in God look like practically?
- c. What are some practical ways we can more fully put our faith in Christ Jesus, love the saints, and hope for what is laid up for us in heaven?
- d. How does Paul's thanksgiving in Colossians 1: 3-8 help point the Colossians and us to our dependence on God and the centrality of the gospel?

NOTES

v 1 - It is unlikely **Paul** visited Colossae, yet he feels responsible for pastoral care of the church. He wrote this letter to help the Colossians address the problem of a potentially dangerous teaching that was threatening the health of the church. Paul wrote this letter from a prison in Rome. **Timothy** is mentioned and likely serves as Paul's secretary. Some interpret this as Timothy being a coauthor of the book, although Paul might mention Timothy as a way to emphasize the value he places on serving together with others for Christ.

v 2 - **Colossae** is a city in Phrygia, in the Roman province of Asia, about 100 miles east of Ephesus. It was not an influential city, although it likely served as a trading center, thereby being exposed to a range of different ideas and religions. Some artifacts collected from Colossae suggest that official worship focused on Roman deities. There might have been mystery cults present in Colossae and a strong Jewish presence in the Lycus Valley nearby.

v 3 - Paul places significant emphasis throughout the letter on the lordship of Jesus Christ and the close relationship between Jesus and God the Father.

v 4-5 - Paul emphasizes here the importance of three Christian virtues: **faith, love, and hope**. Here, Paul emphasizes that two of the virtues (faith and love) are based on hope **laid up in heaven** that no person or power can rob believers of. It is likely that Paul was writing this letter to address a heresy similar to *Gnosticism*, which suggests that it took some kind of special knowledge to be accepted by God. *Gnosticism* is not consistent with the gospel. It is not *what* we know that brings about our salvation, but *whom* we know.

v 5 - **the word of truth** contrasts with the false teaching that Paul will describe later in the book. The emphasis here on the gospel is key to understanding Paul's approach throughout the remainder of the book. God's word is transformational for those who hear it and believe. A believer has a new purpose and calling, which impacts their behavior towards others. They are no longer serving themselves, but are instead serving God and thereby bearing fruit.

v 6 - At this point in time it's been about 20 years since Christ's resurrection. The gospel had already spread from Jerusalem into Asia Minor, parts of Europe, and North Africa. Eventually the gospel will spread to today, covering 2.2 billion people or about 32% of the world's population.

v 7 - The reference to Epaphras here indicates that Paul did not plant the church in Colossae. Epaphras was an assistant to Paul, as well as a student of his, who brought the gospel to Colossae. The gospel involves instructions on how to live every day as a faithful Christian. Epaphras likely served as a faithful ambassador on behalf of Paul to the people in Colossae. Epaphras also likely visited Paul in Rome and told him about the problem in Colossae, which prompted Paul to write this letter to the Christians there.

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