

Lesson 2
THANKSGIVING
Col. 1:1-8

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul was a letter writer. Demetrius, a Greek literary wrote, “Everyone reveals his own soul in his letters . . .” The Apostle Paul reveals his own soul in the Letter to the Colossians. In this letter, he opens up his heart and mind to the folks he loves so much, even though he had never met most of the Christians at Colosse.

It is a shame Paul’s letters were called “epistles.” They are nothing more and nothing less than personal letters following the form of first century letter writing style. Sometimes when we read how Paul thanks God for people and prays for them in the beginning of his letters that his is some spiritual, mystical kind of a letter. Paul adopts the ancient form of writing letters and gives it a Christian content.

As an example of an ancient letter, there is a letter from a soldier, called Apion, to his father Epimachus. He is writing from Misenun to tell his father that he has arrived safely after a stormy passage.

“Apion sends heartiest greeting to his father and lord Epimachus. I pray above all that you are well and fit; and that things are going well with you and my sister and her daughter and my brother. I thank my lord Serapis (his god) that he kept me safe when I was in peril on the sea. As soon as I got to Misenun I got my journey money from Caesar-three gold pieces. And things are going fine with me. So I beg you, my dear father, send me a line, first to let me know how you are, and then about my brothers, and thirdly, that I may kiss your hand, because you brought me up well, and because of that I hope, God willing, soon to be promoted. Give Capito my heartiest greetings, and my brothers and Serenilla and my friends. I sent you a little picture of myself painted by Euctemon. My military name is Antonius Maxinus. I pray for your good health. Serenus sends good wishes. Agathos Daimon’s boy, and Turbo Gallonius’s son.”

From this ancient letter we see (1) there is a greeting; (2) there is a prayer for the health of the recipients; (3) there is thanksgiving to the gods; (4) there is the special contents, and (5) there are special salutations and greetings. The form of Paul’s letter was the form all writers of letters among the ancients used. The content, however, is decidedly Christian in Colossians.

Paul did not write his own letter. He used a secretary or a scribe. Picture Paul pacing back and forth, giving out words, sentences and paragraphs at random sometimes. The secretary would feverishly put down what was written, perhaps it was taken in Greek shorthand. When Paul was finished dictating, then he would pick up the pen and sing his own greeting, as he did in Colossians: ***“I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with***

you” (Col. 4:18). This is why Paul is hard to understand at times. Sentences begin and never end. Grammar at times breaks down. Yet, by inspiration, God got down on a piece of paper exactly what He wanted to say. This is a miracle! Letter writing in the early church was important. The New Testament contains no less than 20 of them, and more than half were written by Paul.

God used letters to communicate truth to human minds. I wonder why it is not done more by Christians as a means of witnessing or encouraging believers. Shy folk who find it difficult to speak of the things of God could sit down and tactfully write a letter bearing their souls concerning Christ.

Christian friend, when was the last time you wrote a letter about Christ to another person? It could be a great ministry for you.

SALUTATION

The Writer: Paul, an apostle of *Christ Jesus by the will of God*, and Timothy our brother.

Paul was definitely the writer of this letter. He identifies himself as an apostle by the will of Christ, not men or organizations. Paul is asserting his authority here to make sure the false teachers at Colosse recognize his position as a God-ordained apostle.

Paul also mentions Timothy who was with him in Rome and was probably known by most of the people in Colosse at least by name. In calling Timothy his brother, Paul is acknowledging the true brotherhood of all Christians. Timothy was not only a fellow servant with Paul, loyal to Paul, suffered with Paul but he was Paul’s brother in Christ, which is the closest relationship two people can have that saints should act saint-like. But Paul’s point is that every Christian is a saint by God’s sovereign calling. This means that in this church we have Saint Jack, Saint Bill Saint Sue, Saint Jay, and Saint Becky. All of us are saints.

The Colossian Christians are called “faithful.” A few in the congregation were teaching false doctrine but Paul recognizes that the majority were faithful and not defecting from the Faith. They were loyal to Christ and not defecting to the Gnostic heresy infecting that little church.

How faithful are we to Christ? Are we loyal to Him when unbelievers attack Christ? Are we steadfast in our beliefs even though friends, family, and loved ones deny Him? Will Christ be able to call you “faithful” at the Judgment Seat?

Again Paul calls these Colossians “brothers.” This is a true brotherhood as Christians are united in Christ. The early church made an impact upon Roman society because their churches were composed of masters and slaves, rich and poor, Greeks and barbarians, educated and uneducated, white, black, brown and yellow in race; yet, all these members recognized themselves as forming an actual brotherhood, a spiritual family, the household of God.

Notice these Colossian Christians were “in Christ” and “at Colosse.” The Christians there had two spheres of existence. They lived in the City of Colosse; yet, they lived in Christ. They were “in the world” but also “in Christ.” They breathed the air of this pagan city but they also breathed the spiritual air of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. They moved about Colosse in the Lord. They worked, served, kept house, conducted business, met their neighbors and suffered and rejoiced as citizens of Colosse. Yet, they carried about with them a private atmosphere which was not of this world but of heaven. Christ was the atmosphere which kept them alive spiritually in a decadent world. Christ was their resting place, their city of refuge and their power house to push on in the faith.

The Christian in Christ can be compared to a water beetle which is able to live in the muddy bed of the pond because it has the gift of weaving around itself a bubble of air. Therefore, it takes its own atmosphere down with it. So the Christian in whatever he does always has the atmosphere of Christ around him.

The Greeting: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

“Grace and peace” is a greeting. Paul first gives the Gentile greeting -“grace.” However, he changes from the unsaved man’s word to the saved man’s word. The usual greeting was the Greek word *chairen* which meant “hail,” or “salute” or “rejoice.” Paul changes it to *charis* which means “grace.” He is saying that may God give you grace to live every day. Grace for forgiving, for living, for witnessing, for praying, for making decisions and even for playing. They were saved by grace and they should experience more grace.

Paul also gives the traditional Hebrew greeting, “Peace.” He wants then to experience the peace of God which passes all human understanding. They can know the peace that can hold the ocean’s depths of a man’s soul at rest when the hurricanes disturb the surface of life.

When was the last time you met a Christian and said to him or her, “Grace and Peace?” This is very biblical. It is too bad that Christians have let the hippie type people take this expression from them.

THANKSGIVING 1:3-8

Thanksgiving for the Spiritual Condition of the Colossians (1:3-5a): *“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,”* -- Paul begins to pray for the Colossians and he begins his prayer with thanksgiving. Before we petition God, we should thank Him for all His mercy and grace to us.

Paul begins this letter by finding good things God is doing for these Colossians. He praises than before he rebukes than which he will do later on in the book. He had tact in dealing with people. Someone said, “You can catch more flies with honey than you can with vinegar.”

Notice how Paul encourages these Colossians. He finds good things in than. He uplifts than. He gives than a positive self image. The ministry of encouragement is vital if the Christian

is going to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. We must learn to build up our fellow Christians and not tear them up.

Paul was a man of prayer. He remembered these Colossian saints again and again before the throne of grace because he loved them. Whenever these dear saints came to his mind, he prayed for them fervently.

Their faith (1:4a): *“Because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus”*

-- Paul thanks God for the Colossian's faith - their initial faith in Christ and their continued faith in Christ. Their faith was living, vital and dynamic. They were trusting Christ; they were laying hold of promises; they were resting in Christ no matter what the circumstances. Their faith was alive and people were talking about it. Hebrews 11:6 says, “Without faith, it is impossible to please God.”

Their love (1:4b): *And of the love you have for all the saints* -- These Colossians didn't talk about love - they loved. They showed their love by their acts of mercy, goodness and kindness to one another. Their love for one another was the “Eleventh Commandment.” Jesus said to all Christians. *“This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you”* (John 15:12). Furthermore, love for Christians is proof that we are truly saved, for the Apostle John says, *“We know we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers”* (1 John. 3:14).

Love is for “all the saints,” not just the rich, the good looking, the powerful, the one's we like, the one's who like us or the one's with whom we do not have personality conflicts. We are to love any, all and every saint.

“These are the two sides of the Christian life. The Christian must have faith; he must know what he believes. But he must also have love for men; he must turn that belief into action. It is not enough simply to have faith, for there can be an orthodoxy which knows no love. It is not enough only to have love for men, for without real belief that love can become mere sentimentality. The Christian has a double commitment—he is committed to Jesus Christ and he is committed to his fellow-men. Faith in Christ and love to men are the twin pillars of the Christian life.”

Their hope (1:5a): *“. . . the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven. . .”*—The “hop” here is our assured confidence that the prize of heaven is ours – our future eternal blessing, our eternal home, our heavenly reward. Knowing that heaven is ours, assured we will see Christ, confident we shall inherit our eternal reward causes us to get our minds on heavenly things so as to make us exercise faith and demonstrate love. Our hope reminds us that we are a heavenly people just passing through this world. Matthew Henry said it well,

“The more we fix our hopes on the recompense of reward in the other world, the more free and liberal shall we be of our earthly treasure upon all occasions of doing good.”

Thanksgiving for the Gospel Received by the Colossians(1:5b-6): *“And that you have already heard about the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is producing 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.”*—This wonderful hope of glory stored up for the Christian was told to these Colossians when they first heard the gospel of Christ. Paul is thanking God for the gospel which marvelously saved these Colossian Christians. From these two verses we learn much about the gospel.

The gospel is good news. . *“the gospel”*: The gospel means “good news.” What is the good news? Jesus Christ died to save sinners, who deserve nothing in order to give them eternal life, free them of guilt due to sin and take them to heaven. That is good news. The gospel tells us God is a friend and lover of the souls of men. The gospel tells us we can know God personally and be rightly related to Him by faith.

The gospel is truth. . *“word of truth”*: The gospel is absolute truth because it is revealed by God. Since it is truth, it can be trusted. All other religions are a lie but the gospel is truth. Christ said to His disciples, *“Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free”* (Jn. 8:32).

Do you want to be set free from some habit, from fears, from a depressing lifestyle, from insecurities, from yourself? Then accept the truth of the gospel!

The gospel is to be taken. . *“That has come to you”*: Somebody brought the truth of the gospel to the Colossians. It was probably Epaphras.

It is every Christian’s responsibility to tell and propagate the gospel to the lost world. God has ordained that the Christian should be the instrument in the telling of the truth of Christ and His saving power.

The gospel is universal. . *“all over the world”*: The gospel at the time of the writing of the Letter to the Colossians had already spread all through the then known Roman world. The gospel was reaching out. It was a universal gospel for all kinds and types of people. As far as we can tell, it has been estimated by all kinds and types of people. As far as we can tell, it has been estimated by the close of the Apostolic Period (100 A.D.) the total number of Christians in the Roman Empire was 500,000. Justin Martyr about 150 A.D. said, “There is no people Greek or barbarian, or any other race, by whatever appellation or manners they may be distinguished, however ignorant of arts or agriculture, whether they dwell in tents or wandered in covered wagons, among whom prayers and thanksgivings are not offered in the name of the crucified Jesus to the Father and Creator of all things.” Tertullian around 200 A.D., writing to a Roman dignitary said, “We are but of yesterday, and yet we already fill your cities, islands, camps, your palace, senate and forum. We have left you only your temples.”

The gospel is not confined to any one race or nation or to any one class of people. Very few things in this world are open and free to all men but the gospel is for every and any man, woman or child who wants it.

Somewhere I picked up this quote about early church evangelism: “The early church had none of the elements that the modern day church believes are necessary for success today. They had no numerical prestige. They were just a little flock. They had no financial prestige. The apostle Peter confessed that they had neither silver nor gold. They had no budgets or fund raising campaigns. They never gave a financial report. They had no educational prestige. Their leaders were classified as “ignorant and unlearned men.” Apart from Luke and Paul they were unlettered and untutored men, mostly fishermen from Galilee. They had no theological and ecclesiastical prestige. They possessed no theological or educational institutions. They never had a seminary course. None of them were called “reverend.” They never had a Sunday school or membership campaigns. They had no gyms, recreational programs, or ball teams. They had no cheerleaders. They had no church buildings. They had no choirs or programs of entertainment. They had no seminars or church growth and finances, soul-winning, or how to have a successful marriage and family. They had no advertising or solicitation programs. The Christians who constituted the first church were a plain, simple, ordinary people and few in number. But this church was a force to be reckoned with. It could not be ignored. The influence of the church was not only felt by the common people but also by those in high places insomuch that they were charged with “filling Jerusalem with their doctrine” and “turning the world upside down.” Although the early church did not possess or seek the elements thought to be necessary by today’s modern church, it was a mighty force for God!”

The gospel is an inherent power: *“This gospel is bearing fruit and growing”*: A literal translation of “bearing fruit and growing” is “producing fruit by itself and increasing by itself.” There is an inward energy to the gospel to save men. This is what Paul meant in Romans 1:16 when he said, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes . . .”* The gospel is God’s power. It has an innate power to save as it is applied to the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit. The gospel also has outward growth - it is growing, increasing, multiplying as men receive the truth of the gospel and propagate it to others. The gospel is unstoppable because it is the power of God.

When witnessing we do not need gimmicks, eloquent oratory or logical appeals, we only need to share the gospel in love

If you have a lion in a cage, you don’t need to explain to the crowds looking on how ferocious, how dangerous and how mean this animal is. All we have to do is open the cage and let the lion out. All we have to do is get the gospel out to men. The gospel has the innate power to change individuals and even society.

The gospel is personal . . . *“since the day you heard it and understood.”* The gospel must be received. It must be believed. It must be applied to one’s life. It must be personal. One must understand the gospel and commit to it, or it will not save. A person must say, “I believe I’m a sinner and headed for judgment. I believe Christ died for me to forgive my sins, deliver me from guilt, grant me eternal life and take me to heaven. I now believe and commit my life to Christ.” This makes it personal.

The gospel is based on grace: “ *God’s grace in all its truth.*” The gospel does not stress what God demands, but what He freely offers. He offers salvation as all anyone has to do is receive it. And it is the grace of God to receive it. We cannot buy salvation, work for salvation, beg or inherit salvation. Salvation is a free gift bestowed on us by God’s sovereign, loving grace: “*For it is by grace you have been saved through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works so that no one can boast*” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Thanksgiving for Epaphras Who Brought the Gospel to the Colossians (1:7-8): *You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*” -- Paul lastly is thankful to Epaphras, the pastor-teacher of the Church in Colosse who brought him news about what was happening in that church.

CONCLUSION

The gospel is the truth that God saves sinners from judgment through the death of Christ and gives forgiveness of sins, eternal life, freedom from guilt and assures one of heaven. This is certainly good news!

To be saved you must believe the truth of the gospel and received Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Salvation is a free gift which God gives to all who receive Christ into their lives. Once a man asked in the Bible, “How can I be saved?” The answer came back, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.”