

Sermon NOTES

Colossians, A Study, pt.5

verses (1:5–8)

We will continue in our study of the letter to the Colossians.

As you know we are doing what I have called a demonstrative bible study.

And what we have been doing is seeking to rightly handle the word of the truth! I trust this has been a blessing to you.

(So, if you have your copy of God's word, turn with me to the letter written to the Colossians. As has been our custom, we will read the entirety of Chapter 1, but we focus our attention on vv. 3–8.

READ CHAPTER 1)

The last time we were together, we looked at vv. 3, 4 and part of 5.

There we discovered the fact that Paul was exceedingly thankful for these saints because of the work of God done in and through.

Specifically, vv. 3–4, tells us that Paul was thankful for their faith in Christ and of their love for the saints!

And the reason they had this love, according to v. 5 is “because of the hope laid up for them in heaven.”

Remember we made the incredibly important application that we need to hear again: Your love for ALL the saints should be motivated by the fact that you have an inheritance with God!

When you realize that you have a future inheritance; that God, in, by and through grace has made you beneficiary of future glory...that fact should be the fuel that enables you to love all the saints.

And this “love”, a word that you may be familiar with is agape, which is an unconditional love, is the love one should have for the brethren!

Now, as we press on, we will examine the rest of this paragraph, vv. 5–8. (I will vv.

3–8, to put it before you again. READ)

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,
The word “this” is a reference to the phrase “the hope laid up for you in heaven.”

Paul says that they heard of this before.

Where? Where did they hear of this hope in heaven?

Paul tells us, “in the word of truth, [which it tells us is] the gospel.”

They heard of the hope of heaven in the gospel.

There is something important to notice about this.

Notice the connection Paul makes with this statement to the gospel. (Read text again.)

This may be obvious but it needs to be stated plainly:

The important connection to make is that part of the proclamation of the gospel includes the glorious reality of life with God in heaven.

This is crucial to catch because the proclamation of the gospel is not just a warning concerning the threat of eternal hell, but it is at the same time a message of the hope of heaven.

The gospel is not just a message of what God saved us from, but what He saves us to!

The reason I tease this nuance out is because if you are not careful we can have a lopsided gospel, where it is either all about threatings, warnings of hell!

(To be sure, we must include warnings of hell, but we must not neglect to speak about the glories of heaven!

Many people (and myself included) can sometimes attempt to share the gospel without ever mentioning the hope of heaven secured by Christ.

The clearest example of this sort of thing is what is known as “fire and brimstone” preaching.

Men who speak so much on the wrath of and judgment of God, that they hardly proclaim the hope of heaven.

These sort of preachers answers the question of what God saves from, but they unintentionally forget to answer the question of “what God saves to”

And some may respond that Jesus spoke more about Hell, than He did about Heaven. To this argument, I would say that that claim is debatable.

So, it is important in our proclamation of the gospel that there is an emphasis on the glory of heaven and having eternal life with God through Christ!!

Because the gospel, after all, is *GOOD NEWS!!*

It is the good news that God, through Christ, has done the ultimate!

- He has taken us, who were once hell bound rebels and made us heaven bound children!
- He has taken us, who were hell deserving-sinners and made us heaven undeserving-saints!
- He has taken us, who by nature were children of wrath, and made us citizens of heaven!

This hope of heaven, which is granted through Christ’s life, death and resurrection is the good news of the gospel!

God has determined not to deal with us according to our sins!

And this is the word of truth that came to the saints! (and the same is true of us!)...which Paul makes clear in the next phrase.

6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you

Paul then describes the coming of the gospel with the phrase, “which has come to you”

This is a phrase that indicates the gospel was brought to them.

And this is always the case. The gospel is something that always has to arrive (or brought.)

The reason this is the case is because the gospel originates with God and is from God!

In other words, the gospel is not of this world and because of this it has to be brought to everyone!

The gospel has to come to a person! The

gospel has to be brought to a people!

And notice Paul says to the saints that this gospel has not only reached them, but it has reached others.

We see this when he says, “as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—”

This is a description of what was taking place at the time Paul wrote this letter.

At the time, the gospel was going forth with great power and effectiveness!

The Lord was using His word to accomplish His work of salvation!

This a great reminder of the effectiveness of the gospel when God sends it out to accomplish His work of saving!

When God sends the gospel out to save, it saves! It bears fruit and increases!

A point of application could be: The gospel of God never returns void; it accomplishes ALL that it has set out to do!

We must trust the God of the word, that He will use His truth to accomplish His purposes.

Now, just remember the context, Paul is simply telling them why he is praying for them and how they received the hope of heaven.

He now reminds them of the fruitfulness of gospel among them and how they came to receive the gospel. (He says...read the text starting with v. 6...)

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...

The message of the gospel bore fruit among them and was brought to them by a brother named Epaphras.

Remember how I said that the gospel must always come?

This proves the point!

The gospel was first brought to Epaphras and then Epaphras took the gospel to the Colossians.

This is the way it works!

The gospel must always be delivered!

This is why Paul says, in Romans 10:14–15

“14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Our brother Epaphras has beautiful feet!

He took the gospel to the Colossians.

And Paul recounts this fact!

Paul, gives a brief description of our brother Epaphras (AND O! HOW I LONG TO BE LIKE EPAPHRAS!)

Paul says...

Our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Paul describes Epaphras in two ways:

- As a, 1. "Our beloved fellow servant"
2. "a faithful minister of Christ"

The first description is that of a slave.

Epaphras was one who committed his life to being a slave to Master Jesus!

Epaphras gave himself to blessed slavery!

This slavery is one that involves the complete, total, full, comprehensive and all-encompassing denial of self to embrace and fully submit to being mastered and governed by Jesus! (2x)

And if you claim Jesus as Lord and Master, then you are a slave!

And what a blessed slavery this is!

And notice that Paul says that Epaphras is a "fellow-slave".

This tells us that Paul counted himself a slave just as much as he counted Epaphras as a slave!

The point being, there are many members in the body of Christ, but we are all SLAVES!

We all have different gifts from God, but at the end of the day, we are all SLAVES!

And the same was true of our brother Paul and Epaphras.

The second description of Epaphras is that of "faith minister of Christ..."

This word faithful, in this context, means someone who is trustworthy.

One who can be relied on as seen as dependable.

SIDENOTE:

Here is a good example of where words have their meaning within a given context. This word faithful has already been used.

In v. 2, Paul called the Colossians “faithful brothers...”

In v. 7, Paul refers to Epaphras as a “faithful minister...”

The greek word here is the same , but I would argue that they have slightly different meanings. (Although there is some overlap.)

In v. 2, I would argue that “faithful” carries more of the idea of one who trusts in Christ. They are faithful in the sense that they are “full of faith.”

They are faithful in the sense of seeking to obey God and live a life of faithfulness.

In v. 7, I would argue that “faithful” carries more of the idea Epaphras being a trustworthy brother (although, of course, Epaphras was too a man full of faith.).

The reason I would make this slight distinction is because of the context.

In v. 2, Paul is describing believers in relationship to Christ.

In v. 7, Paul is describing Epaphras in his relationship to the Colossian church.

Does that make sense?

The context indicates that there is a slight difference between the two.

Now, if you were to give the same definition to v. 2 and v. 7, it is not the end of the world.

But, again, since we are attempting to be as accurate as possible I think the slight distinction is helpful.

Getting back to the text...

Paul calls Epaphras,

“A faithful minister of Christ”

This word, “minister” is the word that is translated as “deacon” in other places in scripture.

It basically means someone who performs a service for another.

So, Epaphras is a trustworthy and reliable slave and servant of Christ.

Now, I would remind you of the fact that this is not the only time Epaphras is mentioned.

He is also mentioned in chapter 4 (v. 12) and we learn that he was a hard working man, who was devoted to praying on behalf of the saints!

I want (and we should all want) to be like Epaphras!

Please notice that all of this is being said about him! (He is not putting himself.)
(This is just an observation.)

Paul is saying this about Epaphras! O! That I could be described as a “faithful minister of Christ!”

What a grace it would be to be known as one who was a trustworthy brother, who regularly and consistently prayed for the people of God!

Paul ends this statement on Epaphras with a phrase of what Epaphras revealed to Paul about them.

Epaphras revealed (or made known) to Paul the Colossians “love in the Spirit.”

This points us back to what we looked at last week in v. 4. (That they had love for the saint.)

But it is important to note the differences between v. 4 and v. 8.

Notice in v. 4 it is, “love for all the saints”

In v. 8 it is, “love in the Spirit”

We have to take these statements together and when we do we understand that the love that Christians have for other saints is sourced in, grounded in and rooted in the Spirit!

That is to say that the locus (or the point of the origination) of love is the Spirit!

To say it another way: You cannot have love for the saints if it is not a love in the Spirit.

And this is the love that these saints had!

A Spirit produced love that was so profound, that when the Apostle Paul thinks and prays for them, he thanks the Lord for their love!

May such love be known among us and all the churches of Christ!

Now, as we draw this paragraph to a close, there is one point to address that I ignored that is helpful to point out.

As we worked our way through this paragraph Paul has made mention several times to the gospel.

And what is important to point out is that the gospel is a message that is to be received by faith and CANNOT be lived out!

I point this out because there is something called “lifestyle evangelism.”

Where people think that living righteously is equivalent to preaching or communicating the gospel, it is not!

There is a quote that goes something like this, “Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary use words!”

This may sound good, but biblically, there is no such thing as preaching the gospel without words!

You may hear people say, “You have to live out the gospel!” Or “Your lifestyle is the only gospel people will see, so you have to live it!”

NEWS FLASH:

The gospel is not something that can be lived out!

The gospel is the message about the life, death, resurrection, ascension and return of the Lord Jesus Christ!

You cannot live that out!

You can only hear that message and receive it by faith!

Your lifestyle will never communicate the gospel.

Yes, your lifestyle can commend the gospel (that is, your lifestyle can show, in part, the transformative power of God), but your lifestyle will never communicate the gospel.

The gospel requires words!

People were saved under the ministry of Paul not because he lived righteously, but because he preached a righteous gospel!

I point this out because our passage clearly makes this point.

Speaking of the gospel Paul says:

v. 5, they “heard” it

v. 5, the gospel is, “the WORD of the truth”

v. 6, the gospel was something that was “heard and understood”

v. 6, the gospel is called, “the grace of God in truth”

v. 7, the gospel was something that was, “learned”

All of this helps us to see the gospel consists of words to be heard, learned and understood, NOT something that is to be lived out.

Let’s pray.