

THE APOSTLE'S THANKSGIVING

Colossians 1:3-8

Intro: I am not going to ask how many of you have read Paul's letter to the church at Colosse since we last considered it together (which was two weeks ago), but I hope all of you have, and I want to encourage you to do so at least once a week while we are going through this wonderful part of the Word of God. It is a short epistle, but it is a powerful epistle. Paul had not founded the church in Colosse. It does not appear that he had ministered to them before, or even visited them. But from his confinement in Rome he carried such a burden for them that he was constrained by the Holy Spirit to write to them. He knew some of them as we learn from chapter 4. He had rejoiced over the news he had received about the work that the Lord had done in many of their hearts. He prayed faithfully for them. As we are going to learn this morning, he thanked God for them. And yet as we read through the epistle, we understand that he was deeply concerned about the invasion of some false teaching which was inclined to turn them away from Christ. His letter emphasized in many ways that nothing needed to be added to what they had in Christ. In fact, he wanted them to know that nothing could be added to Christ. Look with me for just a moment at verses 8, 9, and 10 in chapter 2 to see how concerned the Apostle Paul was about their understanding of Christ and their relationship with Him.

There is no question but that a great work of God had taken place in Colosse. The church in Colosse was probably not very large numerically, but it was strong spiritually. But we learn from Paul's epistle that where the Lord is at work, the Devil is busy too. A person is not a Christian very long before he learns that he, or she, is involved in spiritual warfare. That is apparent from the first part of Genesis all through the Bible. We can be sure that it was not long after God created Adam and Eve, and put them in the beautiful Garden of Eden, that the Devil showed up. He was at work in Colosse too. And he and his demonic forces are really having a heyday throughout our country and throughout the whole world today. If the expression *heyday* is new to you, it means *a time of superior strength and success*. Revelation 12:12 tells us that the Devil knows that he only has "a short time," and he is doing all that he can to weaken the church and to draw as many people into hell as he can before his time runs out. He can't destroy the church, but he can do a lot of damage if we are not aware of how he hates our Lord Jesus Christ, and that he will do all that he can to turn us away from Him. As I have pointed out to you in

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my first two messages on this epistle, in chapter 1 Paul made it very clear that our Lord is preeminent in salvation. He was and is preeminent in creation, and He is preeminent in the Church. And since you and I who know the Lord are the Church, we need to remember that the Lord is the Head of the Church which means that He is preeminent in the Church. And this letter from Paul to the Church in Colosse indicates that we must keep the Lord preeminent in our lives. And that is where the battle wages for us. Tonight we are going to observe the Lord's Supper again. Why did the Lord institute the Lord's Supper. We do it in remembrance of Him. That is why we need to read our Bibles every day. We can't afford to forget the Lord Jesus Christ and the key place that He has in the life of every child of God. In Paul's letter to the church at Colosse, as in his other epistles, his focus is upon Christ!

Now in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1 we have seen how Paul identified himself, as an apostle of Jesus Christ. We have seen those to whom he was writing. It was not to the city of Colosse, but to "the saints and faithful brethren" who were in that city. And his greeting which was characteristic of Paul, and which was also his prayer for them: "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." And then his next words were words of thanksgiving. But notice that his thanksgiving was not just for them, but it was thanksgiving directed to "God," not some god that the Colossians may have previously worshiped, but it was to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know we often say that we are thankful for this beautiful day. Or we say that we are thankful for the health that we have. We use that word "thankful" for many things. But we need to ask ourselves, thankful to whom?" When we sit down to a meal, we don't just talk about how thankful we are for the food, but we thank God! All of our blessings come from Him, and our thanks need to be directed to Him, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. There have been many who are called gods in this world, but there is only one true God, and to positively identify Him, we say that He is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Thanksgiving is to be a prominent characteristic of us as the people of God, but it has to be thanksgiving to God, the one, true God, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." All of our blessings come from Him, don't they?

Have you noticed in your reading that Paul mentioned thanksgiving again

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in verse 12? (Read.) And then thanksgiving appears again in chapter 2, verse 7. (Read verses 6 and 7.) Look at 3:17. (Read.) And finally, 4:2. (Read.)

Look also at Ephesians 5:20; Philippians 4:6-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:17. And remember that Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians were all written from Rome while Paul was in confinement by the Roman government. One way the Spirit of God has of raising our spirits in times of trouble is for us to think about the many things that we have to be thankful for, and then take the next step and bring our thanks to the our heavenly Father.

Notice another thing about Paul's thanksgiving here: he expressed his thanksgiving to the Lord in prayer. And it was not just one prayer, but it was continual, repeated prayer.

What in particular was he thankful for?

That question can be answered with three words: faith, love, and hope.

Now it was not that some showed faith, others showed love, and still others, hope. Nor was it that some showed two out of the three, and others possibly another two like faith and love, or faith and hope, or love and hope. But from what Paul had heard about them it was generally true of everyone in the church that the church was characterized by faith and love and hope.

Now what do faith and love and hope add up to? We all could answer that question with one word: S-A-L-V-A-T-I-O-N!

But now let me ask another question: *Why would Paul give thanks to God for their faith and love and hope? Wouldn't it be because God had given them their faith and love and hope? Instead of thanking God, why did Paul not congratulate the Colossian believers for their faith and love and hope?*

You see, Paul knew that salvation from start to finish is a work of God. Salvation is not a reward that God gives us for what we have done to deserve salvation. Even our faith is a gift from God. Paul wrote to the church at Ephesus those very familiar words;

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of

yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10).

In Hebrews 12:2 the Lord Jesus Christ is described as “the Author and Finisher of our faith.” And in Romans 10:17 we learn that “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.” Faith is not something that we generate within ourselves. It is a gift from God.

What about “love”? And how did Paul describe the love that he was referring to? He said that it was “the love which ye have to all the saints.” So Paul was speaking about the love that was given to the Colossian Christians when they trusted in Christ. The Apostle John described it this way in 1 John 3:14:

14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

But do we produce that love? No. Paul wrote in Romans 5:5 that “the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.” When was the Holy Spirit given to us? He was given to us when we were first saved. So when Paul heard about the love that those Colossian Christians had for each other, he knew that was one of the first evidences that a person has really been saved.

Well, we have talked about faith, and love; what about hope? Hope is the word that is used in used in the Bible to refer to the goal of our salvation. You and I didn’t design salvation. The Apostle Paul did not design salvation. God designed it. Those who have faith in Christ have the hope, not something uncertain, but a prospect guaranteed by God Himself, not only that we will be in heaven, but that we will be like Christ. This is how the Apostle John expressed our hope. I am reading now from 1 John 3, the first three verses:

1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (John 3:1-3)

When the Apostle Paul spoke of “the hope which is laid up for you in

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heaven,” as he did in Colossians 1:5, he was not speaking of something that may or may not happen (as we use the word “hope” sometimes), but he was speaking of the certain completion of the work of salvation when we will see the Lord, and experience the completion of our salvation. Paul explained it this way in Romans 8:24-25:

24 For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

25 But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Now, as we read in our text in verse 5 of Colossians 1, all of this is a part of “the word of the truth of the Gospel.” The Gospel is the good news of salvation. It is not a work that we do for God, but it is entirely a work that God does for us. And it is all based upon the work of Christ on the Cross where He died for all who would ever be given the gift of faith

Now look at verse 6.

Paul was here continuing to speak of the Gospel. I think that “the world” that Paul was speaking of in this verse was the Roman world, the world of the Roman Empire, a predominantly Gentile world. The Gospel was given to the Jews first, but then it was for the Gentiles also. And wherever the Gospel has gone since then, it brings forth fruit, meaning people are being saved. Furthermore, this is the only Gospel that there is. People who are going to be saved, whether Jews or Gentiles, can only be saved by Christ. He is the only Savior.

In verse 7 Paul recognized that they had heard this truth from Epaphras who had been the instrument that God had used to take the Gospel of the city of Colosse. And he, had confirmed to the Apostle Paul their salvation by the manifestation of their love for the Apostle Paul, which he called, “your love in the Spirit.”

Now let me go back to verse 6 to pick up a phrase which the Apostle Paul used as a synonym for the Gospel. Paul called it, “the grace of God in truth.”

This emphasizes that no one deserves to be saved. Paul did not deserve to be saved. The Colossians did not deserve to be saved. Epaphras did not deserve to be saved. I did not deserve salvation. You did not deserve salvation. We all deserved hell, But as Jerry Bridges has reminded us in

past days, grace emphasizes two aspects of salvation. Grace means that God will not give me what I deserve, but He does give me what I could never deserve. We all deserve hell; Christ died for our sins to deliver us from an eternal hell, and to secure our place in heaven, not as we are, but transformed by grace and made like the Lord Jesus Himself.

None of us even deserved to hear the Gospel. There is a story to be told concerning all of us, and how the message of the Gospel not only reached our ears, but reached our hearts. And through the mighty work of the Holy Spirit the Gospel reached us, reached us through human instruments, sent by God to tell us about Christ.

Concl: God alone is to be thanked for the salvation of every person who today is trusting the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. He is to be thanked for the salvation of every person who has ever been saved, or ever will be saved. None of the glory comes to any of us. God is the One Who saves us. Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins. The Holy Spirit sought us. He drew us to Christ. We have been saved. The Lord keeps us, and one day will present all of us faultless before the very presence of God. Then we will thank Him as we are not able to now because then we will see how miraculous the grace of God is. But let begin by thanking Him now.

Remember the words: faith, love, and hope. They cover the whole scope of our salvation.