

THE LORD'S WORK AT COLOSSE

Colossians 1:1-8

Intro: I don't remember that I ever started the exposition of a book of the Bible when I did not start with chapter 1, verse 1. But if you were here two weeks ago when I introduced our study of Paul's epistle to the Colossians, that I started with verses 15 through 18. I did that because I believe that the last statement of verse 18 is the key to the epistle: "that in all things He," that is, Christ, "might have the preeminence." Before Paul had gotten down to this verse he had shown that Christ is preeminent in salvation (vv. 13-14), that He is preeminent as the revelation of God (v. 15), that He is preeminent in creation (vv. 16-17), and that He is preeminent in the Church (v. 18a).

He is preeminent in salvation because He is the Savior. He is preeminent as the revelation of God because He is the Son of God and in His Deity is equal with God. He is preeminent in creation because He is the Creator. He not only created all things, but He sustains all of creation. And He is preeminent in the church because He is the Head of the Church, and He is the One Who is building the church.

I could have gone on to show that the Lord Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Word. Or to state it another way, He is preeminent in the truth of God. He is preeminent in the teaching of Scripture. He is preeminent in the doctrine of Scripture. And so he has to be preeminent in our preaching and our teaching. Then the last two chapters of Colossians in a special way show that the Lord Jesus Christ is preeminent in the Christian life. But Paul even touched upon that toward the end of the first chapter when he said at the end of verse 20, "Christ in you the hope of glory."

Now the reason that the Apostle Paul wrote this epistle was because even in this new church false teachers had already found them, and they were spreading their pernicious teaching. Notice the warning Paul gave in chapter 2, verse 8. (Read 2:6-10.)

Paul wanted the believers in the church at Colosse to pay attention to what people were saying about the Lord Jesus Christ, if they were saying anything at all. It is impossible for me or anyone else to emphasize this point too strongly. And yet I am sure that millions of church people in our generation are being deceived by what they hear Sunday after Sunday because they are not listening to hear what their pastor is saying about

Jesus Christ. It is not enough to talk about God. God means different things to different people. It mean Allah to a Muslim. There are many “gods.” But we as Christians believe in the God Who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The person who talks about God, but who never makes it clear that he is speaking about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is not talking about the God of the Bible, the God of our salvation. No one can honor God who does not honor Jesus Christ as God’s only begotten Son. Listen to what our Lord said about this. His words are recorded in John 5:22-23:

22 For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

23 That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

The Apostle Paul knew what it meant to think that he was serving God when at the same time he hated the Lord Jesus Christ. But when the Lord met him and saved him, he realized, in a way that he could never forget, that it is impossible to know God except through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Illus: The TV program Lucille and I listened to yesterday honoring a man who has done a lot for children, he was a seminary graduate, an ordained minister, loved by millions. Different people eulogized him. A Psalm was read at the meeting. The service closed with the singing of a hymn that is in our Trinity Hymnal (but that was cut off as the people began to sing). But do you know what Lucille and I noticed? We noticed that though at least one of the speakers said that this man was in heaven, not once did anyone say anything about Jesus Christ! But people will say that we can’t be that strict. Can’t we? That is what the Bible teaches. The Apostle Peter speaking of Christ said, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). And the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 5:12, “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.”

Now let’s notice in the opening eight verses of this letter just who the Apostle Paul was, and who were the people to whom he was writing, and what was it about these people that brought such great joy to the Apostle Paul. As was customary in those days, the writer of the letter gave his name first, not last, as we do today. How did Paul identify himself?

I. “AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST” (Col. 1:1).

We have the following statement about the apostles in Luke 6:12-13:

12 And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.

Paul was not one of the original twelve, but we have a clear statement of his apostleship in 1 Cor. 15:7 where he was relating how the Lord had been seen by the apostles, and then by himself also:

7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me (1 Cor. 15:7-10).

I personally do not believe that Paul was appointed to take Judas' place. That was done by Matthias, as we learn in Acts 1:21-26. But Paul's apostleship was specifically a call to minister to the Gentiles. He recognized this in Rom. 11:13:

13 For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office:

And he testified that it was with the Gentiles that God had been pleased to bless him. We see this in Gal. 2:8:

8 For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles.

But what primarily was an apostle? An apostle is one sent forth from at least one person to another person or persons. So for the Apostle Paul to have been “an apostle of Jesus Christ,” means that he was sent forth as a personal ambassador of Jesus Christ. It was his calling to tell people about Jesus Christ, and it became his passion. And you can see this in all of his epistles. He taught the early churches to judge all teachers by what they had to say about the Lord Jesus Christ. He had this ministry “by the will of God” and Timothy was Paul's brother in the Lord who was being trained to do what Paul was doing, although not as an apostle.

But to whom was Paul writing this epistle?

II. “TO THE SAINTS AND FAITHFUL BRETHREN IN CHRIST WHICH ARE AT COLOSSE” (Col. 1:2).

“Saints and faithful brethren” were those people in Colosse who had heard the Gospel, and by God’s grace had trusted Christ as their Savior, and who had become by virtue of their salvation, “saints and faithful brethren.” As “saints” they had been set apart for God from the world, and as “faithful brethren” they had demonstrated by their lives that they had really been born again and brought into the family of God. There probably were people in Colosse who went to church, but who had not yet been saved. Paul would not have expected the right response from them, but he knew that he had the ears of those who really knew the Lord Jesus as Savior.

To them not only does he give his greeting, but his greeting is a prayer. It is a prayer that they would be supplied continually with God’s grace, His enabling, strengthening grace, and the peace of earth which only God’s people can experience. But notice where it comes from: “from God our Father” [another indication that they were in God’s family] “and the Lord Jesus Christ” – the third time in two verses that he mentioned our Lord. Be sure to notice that grace and peace do not come just from God, but also from “the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now at this point we have down to verse 8:

III. PAUL’S THANKSGIVING TO GOD (Col. 1:3-8).

Now I want to remind you of some things I mentioned a couple of Sundays ago when I gave the first message in this series.

We don’t know how the church was established in Colosse. We know that it was not started by the Apostle Paul. He knew some of the believers in Colosse, but many of them he had never seen face to face. But there is no question but that there was a true church in Colosse. It was probably started by Epaphras who is mentioned in verse 7, and again in 4:12 and 13. And it is thought that he may have heard the Gospel from Paul when Paul was in Ephesus one hundred miles away, and that he came back to Colosse with the Gospel. But notice that verse 3 mentions that Paul was *thanking GOD*, who is “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” for what had happened in Colosse. Even if Paul had said that Epaphras had brought the Gospel to Colosse, he would not have praised Epaphras

for what had happened there. Paul thanked God because only God can change hearts. Only God can forgive sins. God is the One, and the only One, Who gets the thanks whenever and wherever people turn to Christ and are saved. And from the first time that Paul had heard about what God had done, and was doing, in the hearts of some Colossians, he had been thanking God, and praying for the believers in Colosse.

And what was Paul thankful for? Three things, actually four:

- 1) Their faith in Christ Jesus.
- 2) Their love for all of the saints.
- 3) The hope which was “laid up” for them “in heaven.” And notice that at the end of verse 5 that it was in the preaching of the Gospel that those Colossian believers had first heard about heaven.

These are three traits, or characteristics, that you always will find in those who truly know the Lord. They know that they are saved because they are trusting in what Jesus Christ did when He died for sinners on the Cross. A person who does not express faith in Jesus Christ for salvation cannot possibly be a Christian, a child of God. And when a person is saved, one immediate change that will take place is that he wants to be with the Lord’s people. Like the Apostle Paul, they may have hated Christians before their were saved, but after salvation and a part of salvation, they love the people of God.

And then there is a new dimension in a person’s forward look when he comes to Christ, and that is that his hope is transferred from anything in this world to heaven where Christ is. See Col. 3:1-4. (Read.) Paul used this word “hope” two others times in this chapter. See vv. 23 and 27. Heb.11:1 tells us that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Our hope is absolutely certain because it rests upon the promise of God and the oath of God as we are told in Heb. 6:17-18:

17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

18 That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

Paul, in Titus 1:2, wrote about our “hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” Our hope in Christ is more secure than anything that this world has to offer us.

But I said a moment ago that there are four traits, or characteristics, that accompany our salvation. Faith in Christ is first. Love for all the saints is second. Our hope is third. And the fourth is here in verse 6 which Paul wrote with reference to the Gospel. And this is it: “which bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.”

It is through the Gospel that we are given faith in Christ. It is through the Gospel that we have love for one another as members of God’s family and of the body of Christ. It is through the Gospel that we learn about and cherish our hope. But here in verse 6 Paul says that the Gospel continues to bring forth fruit “in you.” Faith becomes more faith. Love becomes more love. Our hope becomes more precious. And it is possible that Paul also had in mind that the fruit that Paul was talking about here is the fruit that is produced when one person is saved, and through that person another person is saved, and so on and on as God continues to work first, in us, and then, through us in the lives of others.

How did they learn all of these wonderful things? From Epaphras. Paul was thankful for Epaphras because he was his “dear fellowservant,” and for the Colossian believers, “a faithful minister of Christ.” You would never fail to hear about Christ if you were under the ministry of Epaphras.

And Paul was delighted that Epaphras who had been to Rome to see him, was able to tell Paul how much the Colossians loved him “in the Spirit.”

Concl: Wouldn’t you have enjoyed visiting the Colossian church? It seems that it was all that you would want a church to be. They were walking by faith in the Lord. They loved each other. They were anticipating being with the Lord. They were growing in the Lord, and they were seeing others coming to Christ. But let me tell you something: that is just where the Devil seeks to cause trouble. And he was already at work in the church at Colosse. Let us pay careful attention to all that the Apostle Paul had to say to them, and see what he advised them to do, because there isn’t anything that the Devil delights to do more than to cause trouble among people who really are trusting the Lord, people who love the Lord and each other, and who want to live to please Him. Please read this little letter as many times as you can each week, and let us continue to learn that which is going to keep the blessing of the Lord coming our way. We are His work, and let us always be thankful to Him for all that He has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.