

This morning we will look at one very long sentence that speaks of believers living a life of faith and love based on the hope they have in Christ.

Read Colossians 1:1-3

v3

We give thanks to God,

First Paul gives thanks—and note: he does not thank *them*, the Colossians, but God. After all, wouldn't that sound a bit weird: *We thank you for your faith...?* That makes it sound as if Paul has inserted himself between God and man.

Remember what Paul wrote in Romans 11.

Read Romans 11:33-36.

For believers, God is both the source and the recipient of everything we are and hope to be. Our thanksgiving and praise go to Him in all things, for God is responsible for anything due that response.

Then there are two rather unique (for Paul) aspects of this expression of thanksgiving in v2-3. Neither are accidental, but are used by Paul to continue toward his main thesis on the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ Jesus.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

Every letter of Paul's contains in its greeting his standard formula of "grace and peace," which we discussed last week (v2). And in every other instance he expresses grace and peace "from God our Father **and** the Lord Jesus Christ." That is, from both God the Father *and* God the Son. Only in Colossians does he say "from God our Father"—leaving out Jesus Christ.

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

In v3 Paul, only here, gives thanks not to God *our* Father, nor to God the Father *and* Jesus Christ, but to God alone, who is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Only in Colossians does he state it this way.

This leaves us with the obvious question: Why? We might think that if his purpose is to exalt Christ, to declare His sufficiency, His preeminence, then shouldn't he be mentioning Jesus at every opportunity, rather than marginalizing Him, as Paul seems to be doing here? Well, the apostle Paul is nothing if not systematic, and what he is doing here is laying the groundwork for what will follow. To wit: One good way to defend the debatable is to associate the debatable with that which is *not* debatable (certainly no one on the other side of the argument questions the existence of God).

Paul's argument will be against those who seek to demote Jesus Christ. The best way to ensure Jesus remains where He should be in their minds is to associate Him with God the Father. He begins this at the end of v2—*your grace and peace come from God our (mutual) Father*. No argument there; no disagreement. *All right, if that is true, then what makes Him our Father? "Your faith in Christ Jesus" (v4). And who is Jesus? God the Father's Son.*

So, again, in an almost ordinary greeting and initial expression of thanksgiving, Paul remains on-track toward his thesis: the sufficiency of Christ Jesus.

V3 is the first bookend of prayer; the closing bookend is v9. In the space between the bookends Paul speaks of the content and reason for his prayers.

In v3 the word “always” moves about, depending on your translation, without changing the essential meaning of the verse. In some it modifies his “thanks to God,” in others it modifies “praying.” I favor the ESV and NIV:

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,

Even though Paul did not start this church, and had never met these people, he writes, *Every time we pray for you* (and v9 makes it clear that that is repeatedly) *we thank God for you.*

Application

What a very personal, even intimate and warm thought. Do you do that? When you pray for someone by name, do you give thanks to God for them? It is not just a cliché that “there is power in prayer.” Is there someone you dislike, or have problems with? Pray for them. Earnestly, genuinely pray for them and thank God for them—and just see how your feelings change.

v4-5

The paragraph of vs3-8 is one, long-winded sentence. Some translations [ESV, NIV, KJV] begin a new sentence around v7, and that does make it easier to read. Nevertheless, we must break up this long sentence into manageable chunks for study.

Read Colossians 1:3-8.

Just the way that long sentence is constructed can make it a challenge to digest what he is saying. I think the best way to understand this paragraph is to slightly paraphrase it with a *re-ordering* of the words: [\[refer to handout\]](#)

Ever since we received the report of your faith in Christ Jesus, and the love which you have for all the saints, we have been praying for you, and always thanking God—the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ—for you. All of this—your faith and love for the saints—has come about because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You learned of this hope from the word of truth—that is, the gospel—which you learned from Epaphras your teacher, our beloved fellow bond-servant and faithful servant of Christ, who has also informed us of your love in the Spirit. This same gospel is constantly bearing fruit and increasing in all the world, even as it has been doing in you since the day you first heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth.

That helps us understand the flow of Paul's thoughts in the entire paragraph—but, of course, our study will be of the actual text.

since we heard of...

We can safely assume that Paul “heard of” their faith and love from Epaphras—which would commend the character of their leader—but it is also quite possible that Paul had received reports from others through the grapevine of The Way.

Vs4-5 contain the familiar triad of **faith, love** and **hope** used in a slightly different way—i.e., their faith and love are *because of* their hope.

faith

Last week I landed pretty heavy on the word “in” (from v2), and I need to return to it for a moment. The Greek in this passage for “faith in Christ Jesus” makes it clear [for most scholars] that Paul is not speaking of their faith in the person Jesus—i.e., their belief in Him, their trust placed in Him as Son of God—but (as referenced last week) their life of mutual indwelling with Him.

Curtis Vaughn: ...Christ as the sphere in which faith operates

Bruce: ...He is the living environment within which their faith is exercised.

It is the difference between simple faith that Jesus is the Son of God, and the sort of faith described in Galatians 2:20—

...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God,

That is the brand of faith the Colossians possessed, as reported to Paul.

love

agape: the highest form of love; “caring love, the love that counts no sacrifice too great for the one loved” (Vaughn)

One might expect to see *philadelphia* (fil-ad-el-fee'-ah)—brotherly love, fraternal love—here, but no, it is *agape*. This is the sort of love the Colossians had for and demonstrated toward *all* believers.

hope

The depth of their existence in Christ Jesus, and their deep love for all the saints, were both products of their hope.

Moo: Paul often uses “hope” to refer to the *attitude* of hope [as seen in the definition of the Greek word:

hope = *elpis* (el-peece') = from a primary *elpo* (to *anticipate*, usually with pleasure); **expectation** (abstract or concrete) or **confidence** :- faith, hope.]

Here, however, it pretty clearly denotes that which Christians hope for: “the totality of blessing that awaits the Christian in the life to come.”

That is, not the *emotion* of hope, but *the thing hoped for*. This hope—eternal life, the presence of God the Father and Christ Jesus, et al—was “laid up for [them] in heaven.”

laid up, stored up^{nv} = from <G575> (apo) and <G2749> (keimai); to **be reserved**; figurative to *await* :- be appointed, (be) laid up.

[Used, for example, of a coin put away for safekeeping (Luke 19:20), and the reward (award) of “the crown of righteousness” (2 Timothy 4:8).]

vs6-8

From where did they get this?

v5: ...of which you previously heard in the word of truth

that is,

v5b-6: ...the gospel which has come to you

Who brought that gospel to them?

v7...just as you learned it from Epaphras...

This is the same gospel that is being carried, is spreading, and is bearing fruit all around the (known) world (v6). Here Paul emphasizes the universality of the gospel. Soon he will be taking up the battle against the false teaching taking place in Colossae—spurious, deceitful teachings meant to weaken the gospel of Christ. Here, with an opening volley, he establishes in the minds of the church the strength, the growth, the ever-expanding, far-reaching impact of the world-wide gospel of Christ. It is as if he is already saying in these early verses, *How can you compare those silly myths and irrelevant regulations to this “grace of God in truth”?*

So when we put all this together, the bottom line is that for the Colossians there was a tangible, practical effect from their hope. It wasn't just some ephemeral state of bliss that warmed them on cold nights. It literally changed them into loving, caring, other-worldly human beings who were displaying Christ to each other and people around them.

Application

- Is that what your hope has done for you?
- Does this report of the Colossians accurately describe *your* life?
- Has your hope matured into a mystical but very real life of faith in Christ, evidenced by the love you have and show to all the saints?
- That is how Paul ends this paragraph, this very long sentence: “and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.” Does that describe your relationship with “all the saints”?

Let's close by reading a passage from Romans that summarizes the points in this Colossians passage from a slightly different perspective, but also closes in much the same way.

Read Romans 5:1-5.