

Section of Thanksgiving

Colossians 1:3-8

Colossians 1:3-8 - *"We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; 7 as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8 who also declared to us your love in the Spirit."*

Background Notes

Verses 3-8 are known as the "section of thanksgiving" of this letter. Just as we have a format for letters today, so they had a format then. In the typical format of a letter in that day, words of thanksgiving would come after the salutation and greeting. Most of Paul's letters have a section of thanksgiving.

Galatians is a notable exception. In the letter to the Galatians, Paul went right from his salutation into the "meat" of the letter. Why? Because the Galatian churches had fallen into the serious error of mixing law and grace. So right after the greeting, Paul immediately started in with his teaching: *"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ to a different gospel."* Right from the beginning of the letter, by the change of format, the Galatians would have known that something was up. They certainly would have known that Paul was driving at something that was very important.

The fact that the letter to the Colossians has a section of thanksgiving (which was typical of most of Paul's letters) would indicate that the false teaching described by Epaphras had not yet penetrated the church at Colossae.

In this section of thanksgiving, Paul was thankful for three things: the Colossian believers (v3-4), the gospel (v5-6), and Epaphras (v7-8). Remember, Epaphras had come to Rome to tell Paul about how the church at Colossae was doing.

Notice the high marks that Paul gave to Epaphras: *"Our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf"(v7)*. Not just a servant, but also a dear or beloved servant. Could that be said of us? Epaphras was a dear or beloved servant, and he was a faithful servant. He may not have been an upfront preacher or teacher like the apostle Paul, but he was a faithful servant.

Doctrinal Point

The gospel is good news.

The gospel was one of the items for which Paul was very thankful. "Good news" is really a definition for the gospel. In verses 5-6 there are five reasons why the gospel is good news.

1. *The gospel is good news because it is **hope**.*

Verse 5, "*Because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.*" That's where they heard of the hope - in the gospel. The hope of Heaven in the future is in view here. The idea in the word *hope* is not that "you hope it's there" or that "you hope it's true." No! It *is* true! It's just called a "hope" because it's yet in the future.

1 Peter 1:3-4 mentions the hope that we have in the future: "...*He has given us new birth into a living hope.... and an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*" What a great "hope" we have for the future! Certainly the "hope" in the gospel is good news.

2. *The gospel is good news because it is **true**.*

Verse 5: "*the truth of the gospel.*" Other philosophies may be more fun, more exciting, or more acceptable, but ultimately the bottom line question is, *is it true?* Well, the gospel is good news because it is true.

Yes, the Bible does talk about hell. That's not pleasant, but it's part of the truth. The Bible definitely teaches that for those who reject God, there is a hell that awaits them. You ask - how can that be good news? The good news is that you don't have to go to hell!

If you haven't received Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, in the end you will face the judgment of God - the punishment of hell. The Bible teaches that no one is born a Christian; we all are born on our way to hell. But the good news is that you can become a Christian - and you can go to Heaven. You don't become a Christian through working to chalk up merits with God. You become a Christian by simple faith and trust and commitment. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, because He died on the cross for your sins.

Have you trusted Christ as your personal Savior? If not, you can become a Christian right now - simply by recognizing that you're on your way to hell, that you need a Savior, that the Lord Jesus died on the cross for your sins - and trusting in Him for salvation. That's how you become a Christian. The gospel is good news because it is true!

3. *The gospel is good news because it is **universal**.*

Verse 6: the gospel *“has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit.”* The point here was not that the gospel had already spread worldwide. The point was that everywhere the gospel had spread, it was bearing fruit. One translation reads, *“All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing.”*

The gospel works here in Chicago. It works across the Americas, it works in the Middle East, and it works in Russia and Asia. It works for the rich and the poor, and it works for the middle class. It works for the conservative-thinking person, and it works for the radical-thinking person. It works for people who are in prison, and it works for people who could be in prison. It works for children and teenagers and adults. The gospel is universal.

4. *The gospel is good news because it is **productive**.*

Verse 6: the gospel *“is bringing forth fruit.”* All over the world, wherever the gospel is proclaimed, it's bringing forth fruit. The gospel bears fruit - not only the fruit of people getting saved, but also the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of those who are saved. Galatians 5:22-23 we read of the fruit of the Spirit: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”* This is really the “proof of the pudding” – proof that the gospel works! When the fruit of the Spirit is seen in the lives of believers, that's proof that the gospel works.

There's a lot of friction between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, but when you see Christian love between Christian Jews and Christian Arabs, you know the gospel works. For example, Christian Jews and Christian Arabs frequently have conferences together in the city of Haifa. That's proof that the gospel is productive!

5. *The gospel is good news because it is the **grace of God**.*

Verse 6: *“and knew the grace of God in truth.”* The gospel is not like giving swimming instructions to a person who is drowning – it's a life preserver that is given to those who are drowning! All we have to do is “grab onto that life preserver” - by trusting in Jesus. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* The gospel is the grace of God. It is God's unmerited favor towards men. The gospel is good news!

Practical Applications

1. We should have busy prayer lives.

In verse 3 Paul said, *“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.”* Paul had a busy prayer life. He was praying for the Colossians, and he was praying for all the other churches as well.

The apostle Paul is certainly a model for us to follow. He not only wrote letters to these Christians and churches, he always prayed for them. At this point most of us would say, Well, I'm not the apostle Paul - even though I know I *should* have a busy prayer life. You might say that prayer is hard for you, or that you're so busy, and you're not the apostle Paul.

But Paul was a very busy man – and prayer was work for him, too. In 2 Corinthians 11:28 he said, *“the daily pressure of the concern of the churches is upon me.”* It wasn't easy for the apostle Paul to take time out to pray for the Colossians. It's not easy for us, either - but we should have busy prayer lives, praying often throughout the day. Here's an example of finding time to pray: some of you do a lot of driving - you can pray while you're driving. (But keep your eyes open!)

2. We should love **all** the saints!

Verse 4: *“Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints.”* The Colossian believers loved one another. And in verse 8, notice what Epaphras said about the Colossians - they had love for one another in the Spirit. The Colossian believers did not just love their friends, or their favorite people at the church. They had love for **all** the saints - even those they may not (naturally) have liked very much.

Do we love all the saints? What about that brother or sister who always seems to “rub you the wrong way”? What about that brother or sister who you hope will be in a different section of Heaven when you get there? Yes, even those people! We should love **all** the saints!