



# CAPITOL COMMISSION

## The Work of Gospel Truth (Colossians 1:1-8)

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*We plan to examine the book of Colossians during this 2010 legislative session. Our Bible studies for legislators and all capitol staff will be each Tuesday at 7am in Hearing Room #5. A second study for legislators will take place again on Tuesday Evenings at 8:30pm in Room #134. All Senators and House Members, all Democrats and all Republicans, are invited to join us for a time of study and prayer. This is a non-partisan and non-denominational study.*

Many have heard the old statement “it’s the gospel-truth” by someone who is trying to emphasize the “truth” of their statement. Even though we may raise an eyebrow of skepticism when someone makes that flippant comment, there *is* something known as “the gospel-truth.” The word translated “gospel” in the Bible comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, which literally means “good news.” It was often used in Greek literature as a reference to a battle victory report. In Scripture, it is the term used to describe the good news of Jesus Christ, who defeated sin, death and Satan. And it is good news that because of Jesus’ victory, His people can also triumph over these enemies.

Paul’s introductory words in his letter to the church at Colossae are centered on the work of the gospel in the lives of those believers. It is the truth of the gospel that changes hopeless lives; that draws out true love for one another; that continues throughout the ages and that produces fruit in people that please God.

### INTRODUCTION

**Colossians 1:1-8** Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, <sup>2</sup>To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. <sup>3</sup>We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; <sup>7</sup>just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, <sup>8</sup>and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.

The church in the town of Colossae was not started by the Apostle Paul did not start. But after hearing a great report on the life and love of this church from one of their leaders, Epaphras (v. 8), Paul wrote this letter of encouragement, warning and instruction.

He starts by introducing himself and his credentials as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” (v. 1). He also mentions his ministry partner, Timothy. He then addresses the church as “saints and faithful brethren in Christ” (v. 2). The title “saints” comes from the word *hagios*, which refers to those who have been made holy, separated from sin and set apart to the Father. All believers are saints and it is not a designation for those who are better than others. It is not a position on which people vote. It is a title given, by God not by men, to all believers for God is the One who sets one apart and makes one holy.

Paul and his missionary team, and possibly the church that gathered with them in Rome, always gave thanks in their prayers for the Colossian church. Paul prayed for many churches—Philippi, Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica; indicating the truth of his comment, *Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches* (2 Cor. 11:28).

Paul blesses them with grace and peace and proceeds to tell them of the things he has heard about them.

Make note that Paul does not pat them on the back for the things which he is about to write. Instead, he gives thanks to God, for God is the one who is the giver of faith (Eph. 2:8-9), the origin of love (1 John 4:7-8) and the One in whom hope is found (Jer. 29:11; 1 Tim. 1:1).

### HE GIVES THANKS TO GOD...

#### ... BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITH IN CHRIST (1:4)

“*Pistis* (faith) means to be persuaded that something is true and to trust in it.”<sup>1</sup> It is “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1). It is a persuasion that moves one toward obedience and good works (James 2:17-26).

It is so much more than intellectual assent. If one believed in the truth statements of the gospel but ignored the implications of such truth, he or she would be foolish. Yet, we live in a society which practices this

### CAPITOL COMMISSION BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS & STAFF: TUESDAYS @ 7AM, HEARING ROOM #5

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS @ 8:30PM, ROOM #134

ATTORNEY GENERAL’S OFFICE: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, BROADWAY BUILDING 3<sup>RD</sup> FLOOR CAFETERIA

PROCLAIMING THE GREATNESS AND GLORY OF GOD IN THE MISSOURI STATE CAPITOL

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foolishness. Surveys show that the vast majority of people (some say near 95%) in the U.S.A. believe in God and a majority of these have some type of belief in Jesus. But this belief is not biblical faith for it has not moved the person who “holds the belief” to trust and obedience. Many are deceived thinking they are right with God; when in reality, there is no faith to be found.

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**FAITH RESTS ON THE PAST; LOVE WORKS IN THE PRESENT; HOPE LOOKS TO THE FUTURE.**

**--J.B. LIGHTFOOT**

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Faith is also incomplete without the proper object of faith. The faith that Paul gives thanks for is a faith that is in Jesus Christ. Jesus is the proper foundation of a faith that saves. The earnestness of one’s faith is not the issue; the issue is to what one’s faith is tied. A person who repels off the side of a cliff may be totally convinced that the pebble his rope is attached to will hold him. But regardless of the earnestness of the belief in the pebble, the person will fall for the pebble will not hold. Saving faith is a faith anchored in Jesus; and Jesus alone. No other object of trust and belief--traditions, religions, good works, legalism--will save and redeem.

### ...BECAUSE OF THEIR LOVE FOR THE SAINTS (1:4)

Paul also gave thanks to God for the love that was found among the church in Colossae (Col. 1:4b). Love was a true outward expression of the inward faith in the lives of those saints. On the night before He died, Jesus made this statement:

**John 13:34-35** *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

The Apostle John continues this theme as he discusses that the one who hates his brother is still in darkness (1 John 2:9-11), is a child of the devil (3:10), is still in death and is a murderer (3:14-15), and is a liar (4:20). One simply cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus Christ and have a hatred for fellow followers.

True disciples and faithful churches are recognized, first and foremost, by their love for each other. Not because of their stands against sin, not

because of their political ties and efforts, not because of their evangelistic events, not because they have good music, superb preaching and a large building, but because they have a love—an affectionate care and concern—for each other (1 Cor. 13:1-8a; John 15:12-17).

The love for which Paul is giving thanks is love defined as *agape*. It is the type of love motivated by a person’s will and is seen in his or her action. It is a love that is a conscious decision to care for and to look out for the interests and needs of others. This love for one another is visible when one considers others better than him or herself (Phil. 2:1-8) and when the needs of another are being met (Luke 10:15-37).

The importance of love in a believer’s life is found throughout Scripture. The Jewish *Shema* prayer stated *Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might* (Deut. 6:4-5). Also found in the Mosaic Law is the command “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). These were later quoted by Jesus as the two greatest commandments (Mark 12:28-31).

The Apostle Paul prayed for the church in Philippi that their “love may abound still more” (1:9a). And he continues with this thought in the midst of his teaching concerning spiritual gifts in First Corinthians. He teaches in chapter 13 that even if he could speak in mighty ways or have great knowledge or even give up his life for his faith, it would be useless—if he did not love (13:1-3). He concludes the chapter by stating that love is the greatest of all things (13:13).

### ...BECAUSE OF THEIR HOPE IN HEAVEN (1:5)

The third item for which Paul gives thanks to God is the hope of the believers in Colossae (1:5). Hope can be understood in a couple of ways. One it can be the anticipation that something could happen. I can say “I hope the Royals win the World Series.” In the back of my mind, though, I know the chances are very slim--although there is a chance; the situation is not “hopeless” (as some might say).

“Hope” can also be the eager anticipation of something that will happen; and this is the correct biblical understanding. Paul gives thanks to God for their hope, reserved for them (and for all believers) in heaven.

The believer has been promised by God, whom the Scripture says cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), that one day, Jesus Christ will return (Acts 1:11), the dead

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in Christ shall be raised (1 Thess. 4:13-18) and he or she will take on a new body which will never die (1 Cor. 15:50-58), and will dwell forever in glory with God and His Son (Revelation 21 & 22). The eager anticipation that these marvelous things will happen is the anchor for the soul of the believer (Heb. 6:18-19).

Because the follower of Jesus knows these things will happen, he or she is "...willing to forsake the present glory, comfort and satisfaction of this present world for the future glory that is his in Christ."<sup>2</sup> The believer knows that this world is filled with "light and momentary afflictions" which cannot come close to the heavy weight of glory that awaits the faithful (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

Before moving on, please make the connection to the familiar words of the Apostle Paul, *But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love* (1 Cor. 13:13). After discussing the facts that one day temporal things like prophecy and knowledge will pass away and tongues will cease (1 Cor. 13:8-10), Paul reminds the Corinthian church that faith, hope and love will always remain. While preaching and knowledge are very important and tongues had its time and place, the eternal virtues are faith, hope and love. These grow as one grows in knowledge and understanding, but when the eternal kingdom of God, with Christ as its King, is finally fulfilled and established, faith, hope and love will continued to be practiced and honored.

Now why does Paul give thanks to God for these qualities which seem to be good actions by the church in Colossae? These are manifested in their lives because of the gospel truth which has been at work in their hearts. And this gospel truth is based upon the amazing grace of God.

### ...WHICH COME FROM THE GOSPEL TRUTH

Twice in the next two verses, the Apostle refers to "truth" (Col. 1:5-6). It seems that Paul is setting the table for the reliability of the gospel and Christ in contrast to errors that have been spread by others. In fact, Paul emphasizes this in his letter to the Ephesians when he refers to "the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (Eph. 1:13). "In Christian idiom, indeed, "the truth" and "the gospel" are interchangeable terms: obeying the truth (Rom. 2:8; Gal. 5:7) and obeying the gospel (Rom. 10:16) are identical."<sup>3</sup> False teaching cannot inspire hope nor encourage true faith and love. Only the gospel truth can bring about these qualities in a person's life.

Paul notes a number of qualities concerning this gospel truth.

### THE GOSPEL TRUTH REACHES THE WORLD (1:6)

When Paul notes that the gospel which gave faith, love and hope to the church in Colossae is doing the same all over the world, he seems to be simply referring to it's universal aspect. Christianity was not simply a local native religious belief system that should be added to all the others. It is not solely good news for the Colossians, the Jews or the Roman Empire. Rather it was and is good news that "transcends all ethnic, geographic, cultural and political boundaries."<sup>4</sup>

Even though the universal nature of the gospel is taught throughout Scripture (Mt. 24:14; John 8:12; Rom. 1:8, 16; 10:18; 1 Thess. 1:8), it is highlighted in the Apostle John's vision of the last days:

**Revelation 7:9-10** *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

### THE GOSPEL TRUTH BEARS FRUIT (1:6)

While the gospel truth has a universal element, it also affects the individual. Where the gospel penetrates an individual's heart, it is seen by the changes in that person's life and in the new fruit that he or she bears. It is not another dead system of rules, rituals and regulations; but rather, it is alive and works to change hearts.

The fruit visible in a believer's life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control (Gal. 5:22-23). It is seen in his or her humility toward one another (Phil. 2:1-8) and in the hope they have as one awaits the coming of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-14).

### THE GOSPEL TRUTH IS GRACE (1:6)

John MacArthur writes, "Grace is the very heart of the gospel. It is God's freely giving us the forgiveness of sin and eternal life, which we do not deserve and cannot earn."<sup>5</sup>

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The truth that God allows us to live after we sin is grace. The truth that God gives good gifts to all men is grace. The truth that God became a man in the form of His Son is grace. The truth that He died on our behalf is grace. The truth that God raised Him from the dead is grace. The truth that God hears the prayer of the repentant is grace. The truth that God grants a home in heaven for those who are His is nothing less than His amazing grace.

We can do nothing to bridge the great gulf that stands between our sinful selves and His holy purity. It is only by His grace that we can be saved. The very existence of any “gospel truth” is attributed to the grace of God.

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,  
grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!  
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,  
there where the blood of the Lamb was spilt.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,  
freely bestowed on all who believe!  
You that are longing to see his face,  
will you this moment his grace receive?

Grace, grace, God's grace,  
grace that will pardon and cleanse within;  
grace, grace, God's grace,  
grace that is greater than all our sin!<sup>6</sup>

Although salvation is accredited solely by the amazing grace of God, He uses people to promote and proclaim that message (Rom. 10:14). Not much is known about Epaphras, the pastor/leader of the church of Colossae. But Paul notes that this word of truth, the gospel was taught to them by this “fellow bond-servant” (1:7-8). It was also through this bond-servant that Paul hears of the faith, love and hope of the Colossae Christians which spurred him to give thanks to God for the gracious gospel work in their lives.

### CONCLUSION

I have heard the following refrain used many times: “The truth shall set you free.” That which I have not heard, though, is the full statement: “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31b-32). These were words given by Jesus to those who were following Him.

It is true that the truth will set or make one free, but it has to be the “gospel truth”: the truth that proclaims the life, death and resurrection of

Jesus Christ which removes the sin, guilt and punishment of people who repent and believe.

It is this truth, friend, which frees people. All other “truth” keeps one enslaved to their sin and the debt owed for their sin. The “gospel truth” can produce a faith and love and give a hope that one cannot find anywhere else. There is only one place to find the truth that frees; and that is in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

God can forgive your sins; are you interested?

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<sup>1</sup> John F. MacArthur, *Colossians & Philemon* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>3</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 42.

<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, 21.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Verses from the hymn, “Grace Greater Than Our Sin” Text: Julia H. Johnston; Music: Daniel B. Towner.