



THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

Lesson Number 2



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ESV=English Standard Version (2001), KJV=King James Version (1611), NKJV=New King James Version (1982), NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862).

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

GIVING THANKS FOR THE BRETHREN

“ 1:3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, 5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; 6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” ^{KJV} (Colossians 1:3-6)

INTRODUCTION

There are certain priorities in the Kingdom of God. These are matters that are close to the heart of God, and are thus given more emphasis in His revelation. For example, **what God has done in this day of salvation is greater than all that was done previously.**

- ✦ What the Lord Jesus Christ has done is of greater significance than what God did through Moses (Heb 3:3).
- ✦ The deliverance experienced in Christ (Col 1:13) is greater than what was realized when Israel came out of Egypt (1 Sam 10:18).
- ✦ Baptism into Christ (Gal 3:27) is more significant than baptism into

Moses (1 Cor 10:2), or John's baptism (Acts 19:3-4).

- ✦ The New Covenant is a better covenant, established upon better promises (Heb 8:6).
- ✦ Jesus is greater than Solomon (Matt 12:42).
- ✦ Jesus is greater than Jonah (Matt 12:41).
- ✦ He that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist (Matt 11:11).
- ✦ The new creation (1 Cor 5:17) is greater and more extensive than the

natural creation (2 Cor 4:6).

- ✦ There is a “*greater and more perfect tabernacle*” (Heb 9:11).
- ✦ There is a “*better country*,” which is in heaven, and is associated with an “*enduring substance*” (Heb 10:34).
- ✦ There are “*greater riches*” that are to be sought and preferred above earthly riches (Heb 11:26).

The accentuation of the Gospel in particular, and the Scriptures in general, is placed upon the Son of God – His Person, accomplishments, ministry, and soon coming. All other matters, regardless of

OUTLINE

- ▶ THE GIVING OF THANKS (1:3a)
- ▶ PRAYING ALWAYS (1:3b)
- ▶ WE HEARD OF YOUR FAITH (1:4a)
- ▶ WE HEARD OF YOUR LOVE (1:4b)
- ▶ THE WELL FROM WHICH FAITH AND LOVE SPRING (1:5a)
- ▶ HEARING THE WORD OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL (1:5b)
- ▶ THE GOSPEL CAME TO THEM (1:6a)
- ▶ IN ALL THE WORLD (1:6b)
- ▶ THE GOSPEL BEARS FRUIT (1:6c)
- ▶ HEARING AND KNOWING THE GOSPEL IN TRUTH (1:6d)

their seeming importance, come after Christ, and can only be properly perceived within the light that comes from His Person.

There are also greater matters – things that carry more weight in the Divine economy. This does not nullify lesser things. **The emphasis, however, is placed upon the greater things.**

- ✦ There are “*weightier matters*,” and they are to be emphasized (Matt 23:23).
- ✦ The person who prophesies is “*greater*” than the person who speaks in tongues – unless he interprets (1 Cor 14:5).
- ✦ Of the abiding qualities of faith, hope, and charity, charity is “*the greatest*” (1 Cor 13:13).
- ✦ Glory has a greater weight than suffering (2 Cor 4:17).
- ✦ The witness of God is “*greater*” than the witness of men (1 John 5:9).

Acceptable preaching and teaching majors on the greater and better things. That is where the stress is placed. Appropriate kingdom specialists are preoccupied with these matters. All other purported specialists are only for a season, and will have no relevance in the world to come. Their ministry will be obsolete when the world ends.

If what we emphasize does not transfer into eternity, we have missed the mark. While on earth, treasures are to be accumulated in heaven. This is highly disruptive of a good deal of supposed Christian teaching, but it needs to be stated. When preachers and teachers spend the burden of their time gathering an understanding about temporal things and situations, they have wandered away from the Foundation. What is more, the Christian academic community has not done well in encouraging the development of such knowledge, even though they operate under the banner of Christ.

A CHANGE IN TONE

In this Epistle you will note a change in tone when temporal things are mentioned.

- ✦ Beware lest any man soil you through philosophy and vain deceit – 2:9.
- ✦ Mortify your members that are upon the earth – v 3:5.
- ✦ Forbearing one another in love – 3:13
- ✦ Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands – 3:18
- ✦ Husbands, love your wives and be not bitter against them – 3:19
- ✦ Children, obey your parents in all things – Col 3:20
- ✦ Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged – 3:21.
- ✦ Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh – 3:22
- ✦ Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal – 4:1
- ✦ Walk in wisdom toward them that are without – 4:5.
- ✦ Let your speech be always with grace,

seasoned with salt – 4:6.

✦ Salute the brethren – 4:15.

✦ Say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received, and fulfill it – 4:17.

These are not the heart of the Epistle, nor are they the mere conclusions of the pivotal matters that are declared. These are a consequence of our salvation, but they are not the primary consequence, nor are they the emphasis of Paul’s letter.

POINTS AT WHICH WE INTERSECT WITH THE WORLD

These are points at which our lives intersect with the world – the lower domain in which our adversary exercises his influence. **They are the areas in which we become vulnerable because of their proximity to “*this present evil world*.”** If we are not vigilant and watchful in these areas, the devil and principalities and powers will pull us into the powerless and jeopardous zone of sense and time.

All of these areas occupy the sphere of testing. These are fields in which Satan aggressively attempts to alter our priorities, move our affection away from the things that “*are above*,” and upstage faith with a preoccupation with temporal things.

The Holy Spirit never approaches these matters as though they were fundamental. They are, when compared with heavenly realities, rather elementary. No one obtains kingdom superiority when they excel in any of these social realms. Further, they are not common to all men.

However, this by no means suggests these areas of responsibility may be neglected or approached as though there were no consequences to be realized when they are neglected. **Rather, we**

THEY ARE THE AREAS IN WHICH WE BECOME VULNERABLE BECAUSE OF THEIR PROXIMITY TO “THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD.”

are to see to it that they do not become a place where Divine fellowship is interrupted, and our affection for things above is cooled. All of them will be eliminated when we leave the body – whether in death, or the intrusive appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Without minimizing any of these areas, the giving of thanks never revolves around them. To be sure, moral or spiritual failure in any of these areas is inexcusable. However, they are unsuitable

to become a Kingdom emphasis, for all of them will pass away. **They are successfully and satisfactorily addressed through one's faith and love.** While faith primarily has to do with God, it is not ineffectual in the area of domestic and social involvements. **Once, therefore, faith and love are received and cultured in the heart, an exhortation to fulfill responsibilities among men becomes effective,** for they are always addressed to the new creation, and ordained to be fulfilled in faith and love.

I say these things because of the current trend to major in these lower, but necessary, areas of human responsibility. They are never the Divine focus, and we must not allow them to become ours. **Wherever that emphasis is found, it tends to upstage the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.** Procedure and fleshly practicality thus become main points. This will become abundantly apparent as we proceed through this Epistle. All of these things are all under the canopy of Divine emphasis, but they themselves are never the emphasis.

THE GIVING OF THANKS

“ 1:3a We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . ”

To “give thanks” is to express

Settle it in your heart, you do not give thanks to God for something in which He Himself was not active. **Thanks to God is always for something in which His activity and influence is**

melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:19-20).

THANKS TO GOD IS ALWAYS FOR SOMETHING IN WHICH HIS ACTIVITY AND INFLUENCE IS APPARENT. THE MORE THE WORKING OF GOD IS PERCEIVED THE MORE THANKSGIVING IS EXPRESSED TO HIM.

✚ **WHAT GOD HAS MADE US.** *“Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12).*

✚ **IN THE NAME OF JESUS.** *“And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col 3:17).*

✚ **THE THESSALONIANS.** *“We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father” (1 Thess 1:2-3).*

✚ **GOD'S CHOICE.** *“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess 2:13).*

thanksgiving – to articulate it – to say it with words. This is involved in offering up the “calves” of our lips (Hos 13:2). In this Hosea text, other versions substitute the word “sacrifices,” ^{NKJV} or “fruit.” ^{NASB} However, the Hebrew word (egel) is properly rendered “calf or bull.” ^{STRONG'S} This is a form of offering prefigured by the “sacrifice of thanksgiving” associated with the “peace offerings” under the Law (Lev 7:13). Then they were largely confined to formality. However, **God desired a more personal thanksgiving – one that proceeded from the perception of what the Lord had done.** This is the kind of thanksgiving that is depicted in our text. It is not a rigid formality, but a tender and perceptive expression.

GIVING THANKS TO GOD

apparent. The more the working of God is perceived the more thanksgiving is expressed to Him. Where there is not much thanksgiving, there is not much perception – not much recognition of the gracious hand of the Lord.

Some examples that confirm the role of perception in thanksgiving will suffice to buttress this point.

✚ **FOR THE EPHESIANS.** *“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph 1:15-16).*

✚ **FOR ALL THINGS.** *“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making*

What has prompted Paul to give thanks is nothing less than the recognition of the working of the

Lord among the Colossians. He is not thanking God for their effort, but for what has been accomplished in them by a Divine working. They have been involved in that work, but it is God who has worked in them *“both to will and to do”* (Phil 2:13).

The Necessity of God-Consciousness

Properly seen, thanksgiving is the result of God-consciousness – the awareness of the Lord that is produced by faith. A phrase that includes the idea of God-consciousness is *“the knowledge of God”* (1 Cor 15:34; 1 Cor 10:5; Col 1:10; 2 Pet 1:2).

Wherever God is known, there is an acute awareness of His Person, will, and work. That is part and parcel of knowing the Lord. Where this sentence is not present, there is an inevitable gravitation to sin, and consequent departure from the Lord.

It is not possible to sin while experiencing a lively cognizance of the Living God. When Israel was at Mount Sinai, they did not indulge their lusts while the Law was being thundered from heaven, and the presence of the Lord was very obvious to them. But when the visible evidences of the Lord subsided, and Moses was away from them for a long time, they gratified their sinful lusts worshiped a golden calf, ate and drank, and indulged in pagan revelry and fornication (Ex 32:6; 1 Cor 10:7-8).

Religious men have often wondered why seemingly godly people drop off into deep sin. The reason for such departure from purity is evident. It is because *“God is not in all his thoughts”* (Psa 10:4). **They lost their sensitivity to, and awareness of, the living God.** As a result, the protection of the *“knowledge of God”* was lost, and Satan gained access to them, bringing them down.

The Role of the Assembly

One of the indispensable roles of the assembly of the saints is to culture an acute awareness of the Lord – to nurture the *“knowledge of God.”* The power of such an awareness is confirmed in Paul’s word to the Corinthians. *“But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is*

*convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that **God is in you of a truth**”* (1 Cor 14:24-25).

Much purported Christian activity does not produce this kind of perception. It leaves the people too close to the world, and thus too far from God. In this regard, we are to pursue the example of our blessed Lord, who always left people keenly aware of His Father in heaven, His will, and His good pleasure.

Concluding Thoughts

WHEREVER GOD IS KNOWN, THERE IS AN ACUTE AWARENESS OF HIS PERSON, WILL, AND WORK. THAT IS PART AND PARCEL OF KNOWING THE LORD. WHERE THIS SENTIENCE IS NOT PRESENT, THERE IS AN INEVITABLE GRAVITATION TO SIN, AND CONSEQUENT DEPARTURE FROM THE LORD.

The thanksgiving of Paul, therefore, reveals these two marvelous realities.

- ✦ He was keenly aware of the presence and activity of the Living God.
- ✦ He recognized what God had done in and among the Colossian brethren.

The people of God are themselves the product of Divine working. They are *“His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them”* (Eph 2:10). They may confess with the Psalmist, *“Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture”* (Psa 100:3).

If this were not the case, thanks could not properly be given to God for His people.

THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

Paul does not refer to God in vague generalities. He does not speak of a “higher power,” or a basically *“unknown*

God” (Acts 17:23). There is only *“one God”* (Mal 2:10; Rom 3:20; 1 Cor 8:6; Eph 4:6; 1 Tim 2:5). Now Paul identifies who He is – the One to whom He gives thanks.

God is frequently referred to as *“the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 1:3; 11:31; Eph 1:3; 3:14; Col 1:3; 1 Pet 1:3). **This particularly refers to God in a redemptive sense** – the *“God of salvation”* (Psa 68:20). God is also known in relation to the creation (Mk 13:19), the kings of the earth (Psa 76:12), and the whole of human activity (Jer 32:27). There are aspects of His nature that are

“understood by the things that are made” (Rom 1:20). There are also facets of His Person that are seen in His dealings with kings and princes, like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belshazzar (Ex 9:16; Dan 4:30-32; 5:22-23). Something of God’s nature is perceived in His dealings with groups of people, like Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 1:7), the Amalekites (Deut 25:19), and Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-38).

But never is God seen more clearly and extensively revealed than in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Jesus Himself is the *“express image of His Person”* (Heb 1:3), and *“the fulness of the Godhead”* dwells in Him *“bodily”* (Col 2:9). The loftiest and most complete revelation of God is found in the Person of Christ – including His accomplishments, words, and activities.

The Father

God is exclusively referred to as *“Father”* in relation to the Lord Jesus. He is rarely referred to as *“Father”* in Moses and the Prophets. In the Old Covenant Scriptures, of the fifteen references to God as *“Father,”* most of them refer to Him being the Father of, or One who

begat, the nation of Israel (Deut 32:6; 1 Chron 29:10; Isa 63:16; 64:8; Jer 3:19; 31:9; Mal 1:6; 2:10). The Lord referred to Himself as the father of Solomon, who would build His house (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 17:13; 1 Chron 22:10; 28:6). He is also called "Father" in relation to the coming Messiah (Psa 89:26; Isa 9:6).

By way of comparison, God is

answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). Although those in Christ are "the sons of God" (1 John 3:1-2), and have the same Father (Heb 2:11), yet Jesus is **the** Son of God in a unique way. In fact, our sonship is

JESUS INDUCTED AN ERA IN WHICH MEN WOULD REALIZE A CLOSER AND MORE INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GOD OF HEAVEN.

referred to as "Father" two hundred and fifty-nine times in the New Covenant Scriptures. One hundred and eighty times, Jesus speaks of the "Father." Forty-eight times He referred to "My Father." Seventy-three times He referred to "the Father," associating Him with the redemption He would accomplish in and through the Son. **Jesus inducted an era in which men would realize a closer and more intimate relationship with the God of heaven.**

He Begat the Son

The Lord Jesus Christ is referred to as "the only **begotten** of the Father" (John 1:14). He is also called "the only **begotten** Son, which was in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18), "His only **begotten** Son" (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9), and "the only **begotten** Son of God" (John 3:18).

In the book of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit makes much of this point – namely, that the Son was begotten of the Father. "For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I **begotten** Thee? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son (2 Sam 7:14)? And again, when He bringeth in the **firstbegotten** into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him" (Heb 1:5-6).

Because of His unique begetting, the Lord Jesus is uniquely **the** Son of God. Mary, the mother of our Lord, was informed of this fact. "And the angel

wholly dependent upon His, so that **if He was not THE Son of God, it would not be possible for us to be God's sons.**

Prophetically, the Psalmist spoke of the coming Messiah as one who would be begotten of God: "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I **begotten** thee" (Psa 2:7). In his review of God's dealings with the Jews, Paul confirmed this was speaking of Christ Jesus. He applied the statement particularly to the resurrection of Christ Jesus. "God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I **begotten** Thee" (Acts 13:33). In this sense, He was "the **Firstbegotten** from the dead" (Rev 1:5).

The begetting of Christ Jesus by the Father is also related to His high priesthood, in which He makes continual intercession for His people. "So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to day have I **begotten** Thee" (Heb 5:5).

God is the Father of the Lord Jesus in a sense that can be said of no one else. This circumstance has wholly to do with redemption. **Apart from the salvation of God, there was no need for the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us** (John 1:14).

He Sent the Son

In regards to the Lord Jesus, the Fatherhood of God is related to Jesus being "sent" into the world. It was the Father's mission that brought Him, not the need of humanity. As it is written, "And we have seen and do testify that the **Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world**" (1 John 4:14). Jesus repeatedly referred to the Father sending Him into the world: "the Father which hath **sent** Me" (John 5:23,30,37; 6:44), "the Father hath **sent** Me" (John 5:36; 20:21), "the living Father hath **sent** Me" (John 6:57), "the Father that **sent** Me" (John 8:16,18), "He **sent** Me" (John 8:42), "the Father hath sanctified and **sent** into the world" (John 10:36), "the Father which **sent** Me" (John 12:49), "Thou hast **sent** Me" (John 17:21,25).

The sole mission of Jesus was to fulfill the Father's agenda – to do His will (Heb 10:5-9). Further, the Father sent the Son into the world because there was no other alternative if men were to be saved. The Law was "weak through the flesh," and thus was thoroughly incapable of saving men. Men could not be saved by a code, or moral law, for sin had completely debilitated them, rendering them incapable of saving themselves – even if the living God outlined detailed procedures concerning human conduct and behavior.

He Sustained the Son

While the Son was in the world, the Father sustained Him. He was in the enemy's camp, so to speak, and, as a Man, was vulnerable. Therefore, when yet an infant, the angel of the Lord directed Joseph to protect the "holy Child," taking precautionary measures to ensure His safety (Matt 2:13-19).

While Jesus grew into manhood, "the grace of God was upon Him" (Luke 2:40), ensuring that He would come into manhood, and "give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

Jesus said He did nothing of Himself, or on His own initiative, but acted in strict accord as He was "taught" by His Father (John 8:28). He declared that He was "loved" by His Father, referring to His sustaining and empowering love (John 10:17). This is what carried Him through His ministry.

The prophet Isaiah foretold of the Father sustaining the Son, and did so in a most unique manner. *“For I the LORD Thy God will hold Thy right hand, saying unto Thee, Fear not; I will help Thee”* (Isa 41:13). *“Behold My Servant, whom I uphold; Mine Elect, in whom My soul delighteth; I have put My spirit upon Him: He shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles”* (Isa 42:1). And again, *“I the LORD have called Thee in righteousness, and will hold Thine hand, and will keep Thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles”* (Isa 42:6).

Jesus summarized these promises during the evening in which He was betrayed, confirming He was being sustained by the Father: *“Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave Me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me”* (John 16:32).

He Exalted the Son

As *“the Father,”* God exalted the Son in order that, through His intercession and mediatorship, He might bring the sons home to glory. Thus, on the day of Pentecost, Peter declared *“Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear”* (Acts 2:33). God has *“highly exalted Him,”* giving Him a name that is above every name, and making all things subject to Him (Phil 2:9; Eph 1:20-

22; 1 Cor 15:27).

Summation

It may appear that all of these things are obvious – but they are not. While the human intellect can take these facts in, and process them in a cursory manner, they are not easily apprehended by the heart. At some point, men must be brought to think of *“the God and the*

His ministry, raise Him from the dead, and exalt Him to the Father’s right hand. All of these are essential to our salvation. If men really do save themselves from sin, then they must personally do these things. This is the meaning of the Spirit’s words in Romans 10:6-7. *“But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring*

AT SOME POINT, MEN MUST BE BROUGHT TO THINK OF “THE GOD AND THE FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST” IN RELATION TO THEIR SALVATION. THEY MUST THRUST FROM THEMSELVES ANY NOTION THAT GOD ENTERTAINS A PRODUCTIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THEM INDEPENDENTLY OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.

Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” in relation to their salvation. **They must thrust from themselves any notion that God entertains a productive relationship with them independently of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

There is yet another aspect to this matter that must be considered. **If salvation is of works, men are required to accomplish all of the things relating to Christ, and do so independently of God.** That is, they must bring Jesus down, sustain Him in

Christ down from above:.) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead)” (Rom 10:7).

Let it be clear, if men cannot do this, then they cannot save themselves, or bring salvation by their works. Jesus must, in such a case, assume a primary relationship to them rather than the Father. Such a thought is obviously preposterous. It is imperative to see that it is just as absurd to affirm that men can take hammer and chisel in hand and fashion their own salvation.

PRAYING ALWAYS

“^{3b} . . . praying always for you . . . ”

Paul prayed for those for whom He gave thanks. He knew their need of Divine care, protection, and intervention. He was aware that *“Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain”* (Psa 127:1). He knew the meaning of our Lord’s words, *“without Me ye can do*

nothing” (John 15:5).

DIVINE INVOLVEMENT REQUIRED

If it is true that salvation is *“not of yourselves”* (Eph 2:8), then we are unquestionably dependent upon the Lord, who *“hath begun a good work,”* to *“perform it until the day of Christ”* (Phil 1:6). Holy men were acutely aware of the need of Divine involvement in the lives of the saved. This is reflected in the intercession of both the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

- ✦ Jesus prayed for His disciples (John 17:9,15,20-21).
- ✦ The Holy Spirit intercedes for us (Rom 8:26).
- ✦ Jesus ever lives to intercede for us (Heb 7:25).

THE CONTENT OF PRAYER

The critical need of the saints for Divine involvement ought to be apparent from the present activity of both the Lord

Jesus and the Holy Spirit. **Salvation does not make people self-sufficient.** Neither, indeed, does it place people in some kind of automatic cycle that obviates the need for further work. This is seen in the nature of Apostolic prayers for those who are in Christ Jesus, and are living by faith.

- ✚ That the Father would give the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Himself (Eph 1:17).
- ✚ That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to perceive the hope of God's calling – the intent for which we have been called (Eph 1:18a).
- ✚ That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to see the riches of God's glorious inheritance in the saints (Eph 1:18b).

- ✚ That saints might *"approve things that are excellent"* (Phil 1:10a).
- ✚ That saints might *"be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ"* (Phil 1:10b).
- ✚ That they might be *"filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Christ Jesus"* (Phil 1:11).
- ✚ That believers might be *"filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"* (Col 1:9).
- ✚ That saints would *"walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing"* (Col 1:10a).
- ✚ That they would be *"fruitful in every good work"* (Col 1:10b).

1:11).

- ✚ That God would *"fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power"* in the saints (2 Thess 1:11).
- ✚ That the *"name of our Lord Jesus Christ"* would be *"glorified"* in believers (2 Thess 1:12).
- ✚ That God would cause the *"communication of thy faith"* to *"become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus"* (Phile 1:6).
- ✚ That God would make the saints *"perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever"* (Heb 13:21).

CURRENT CONDITIONS

Such prayers are rarely heard in our time. The very sound of them conflicts with many religious emphases. But this reflects the very manner of the Kingdom of Christ. **It provides an inspired commentary on what is involved in the salvation of God.** A religion that makes it difficult to see these necessities, or removes the inclination to pray for them, is not simply wrong, it is dangerous beyond all description. **Where God is not working, people are not, in fact, being saved.** Furthermore, a significant amount of this work is being accomplished through the involvement of His people.

PERCEPTIVE PRAYER

The prayers of Paul were not prompted by His Apostleship, but by His perception of the nature of salvation. After he had preached to the people, and they had believed, he commenced to pray for them. He did so because he knew they were being hounded by a fierce and cunning adversary 1 Pet 5:8-9; Rev 12:17). They were in hostile surroundings (John 15:19), and were running a race that led them through treacherous territory (Heb 12:2). They carried about in themselves a contrary and competitive law (Rom 7:23), and were housed in frail tabernacles of clay (2 Cor 4:7). The saints have within themselves an *"old man"* as well as a

SALVATION DOES NOT MAKE PEOPLE SELF-SUFFICIENT. NEITHER, INDEED, DOES IT PLACE PEOPLE IN SOME KIND OF AUTOMATIC CYCLE THAT OBTIATES THE NEED FOR FURTHER WORK.

- ✚ That the eyes of the understanding might be opened to see the exceeding greatness of the power that is toward those who believe (Eph 1:19).
- ✚ That God would grant believers to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man (Eph 3:16).
- ✚ That Christ would dwell in their hearts by faith (Eph 3:17).
- ✚ That, being rooted and grounded in love, the saints might be able to comprehend *"what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God"* (Eph 3:18-19).
- ✚ That the love of the saints might *"abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment"* (Phil 1:9).

- ✚ That those in Christ would be found *"increasing in the knowledge of God"* (Col 1:10c).
- ✚ That they would be *"strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power"* (Col 1:11a).
- ✚ That Divine power in them would result in *"all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness"* (Col 1:11b).
- ✚ That believers would *"stand perfect and complete in all the will of God"* (Col 4:12).
- ✚ That God would *"sanctify you wholly . . . your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thess 5:23).
- ✚ That saints would be counted *"worthy of this calling"* (2 Thess

“new man” (Eph 4:22-24), the “flesh” as well as the Spirit (Gal 5:16-17), and a conflicting and contrary law as well as the new “inward man” (Rom 7:22-23).

The “saved of the Lord” presently have the remnants of Adam as well as the nature of Christ. That circumstance creates a serious liability. It requires

sobriety (1 Thess 5:6), vigilance (1 Pet 5:8), and perseverance (Heb 10:36). If life in Christ is not properly addressed, it is possible to run “in vain” (Gal 2:2; Phil 2:16). This is a climate in which one can “draw back to perdition” (Heb 10:39). If one does not live by faith and walk in the Spirit, a departure from the faith will occur, and damning attention will be

given to “seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim 4:1).

It is the awareness of these things that compelled Paul to pray “always” for the saints at Colossae. **Such a perception will work no differently in believers today. It will move them to pray insightfully.**

WE HEARD OF YOUR FAITH

“^{4a} Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus,”^{ASV} “because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus,”^{NIV} and “for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus,”^{NRSV} and “after hearing of your faith in Christ Jesus.”^{BBE}

The hearing of reference is what prompted Paul’s prayers for the Colossians. Remember, he had not been there, and they had not seen his face (2:1).

SINCE WE HEARD

The phrase “since we heard” is translated from a single Greek word: ἀκούσαντες. It means to have received news, or to have heard a report. In this case, the immediate report was made by Epaphras. Paul made this clear when he wrote, “As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellow-servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit” (Col 1:7-8).

THE FAITH OF THE EPHESIANS

Paul had also “heard” of the faith of the Ephesians. “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus” (Eph 1:15). The faith of the Roman brethren had been heard of throughout the whole world. “your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8). The same was true of the faith of the Thessalonian brethren: “in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad,” or “become known everywhere”^{NIV} (1 Thess 1:8).

THE FAITH OF THE THESSALONIANS

The faith of the Thessalonians was

reported in this manner: “ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:9-10).

HEARING ABOUT FAITH

It is important to underscore what was heard about the Colossians. Paul did

faith is one that tells of a people walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), living by faith (Gal 3:11), confessing they are strangers and pilgrims in the earth (Heb 11:13).

How is it that we can “hear” of someone’s faith? The very sound of the words is strange in the church culture of our land. Reports are given of size of certain churches, well known preachers

THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER IS THAT WE ARE SURROUNDED BY A RELIGIOUS CULTURE THAT DIFFERS VASTLY FROM THAT OF THE COLOSSIAN BRETHREN. PARTICULARLY FOR THIS REASON, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT WE CONSIDER THE WORDS OF THIS TEXT.

not receive word about their attendance, the building in which they met, or their various positions on the issues of the day. The thing that aroused his interest was not their youth program, the way they reached out to the local community, or their worship service. Rather, it was their faith in Jesus Christ.

Since faith is “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), a report of faith is one that speaks of persuasion, conviction, confidence, and assurance. It is a report of a people who have forsaken competing interests and are focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. They are rejoicing in the Lord, and waiting for His Son to return and take them unto Himself. A report of

among them, and other such matters. But when was the last time you heard of the faith of a congregation? And if their faith is not known, how could they possibly be of any great significance before God?

The truth of the matter is that we are surrounded by a religious culture that differs vastly from that of the Colossian brethren. Particularly for this reason, it is essential that we consider the words of this text. It speaks of a certain Kingdom manner. Here is how God looks upon churches. This is what He looks for, and represents a condition that brings proper glory to Him through Christ Jesus. This is evidence of Jesus building His church, as He said He would (Matt 16:18). Where faith is not found, the Lord is not

working, for He alone is said to **“fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power”** (2 Thess 1:11)!

Before Jesus returned to heaven, He asked a probing question: *“Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?”* (Luke 18:8). You may rest assured that where **faith** is not found, Jesus will not be welcomed, nor will it go well with those in whom faith is lacking.

Those who have faith in Christ have fallen upon the Stone, abandoning all other hopes of obtaining favor with God. Jesus put it this way, *“The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? Whosoever shall fall upon **that Stone** shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder”* (Luke 20:17-18).

The Word of God contains

✚ Sarah *“judged Him faithful that promised,”* and therefore conceived strength in her old age – 11:11.

✚ Believers prior to Christ were persuaded of the promises of God, embraced them, and confessed they were *“strangers and pilgrims on the earth”* – 11:13.

✚ When he was tried, Abraham set out to offer up Isaac, just as he was told to do, reasoning that God was able to raise him from the dead – 11:17-19.

✚ Believing God’s promises, Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come – 11:20.

✚ Believing God’s promise, Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph while he was dying – 11:21.

✚ Believing Israel would enter the promised land as God promised, Joseph gave the commandment to

commanded, and they *“fell down”* – 11:30.

✚ Rahab the harlot did not perish with the citizens of Jericho because she believed God was with the Israelites – 11:31.

In all of these instances, the people relied implicitly upon the word of the Lord. **They shaped their lives by what the Lord had said and done. That is what faith does.** We hear about someone’s faith when they alter their conduct to be in harmony with what God has declared or promised. We hear of their faith when they conform their lives to the revealed will of God.

The Thessalonian’s faith moved then to quit worshiping and serving idols. It moved them to engage in serving the Lord. It constrained them to wait for His Son from heaven, anticipating His return (1 Thess 1:9-10). They became followers of the Lord, receiving the Word in much affliction, and refusing to be deterred by that affliction (1 Thess 1:6). The Hebrew believers were noted for their initial faith because they *“took joyfully the spoiling”* of their goods, *“knowing”* in themselves that they had *“in heaven a better and an enduring substance”* (Heb 10:34). The faith of the Ephesian brethren was made known when *“many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men”* (Acts 19:19).

Faith moves those who possess it to respond joyfully to the word and will of the Lord. The fear of man, which brings a snare (Prov 29:25), no longer intimidates. The world no longer has an attraction to those with faith. Heaven becomes the preeminent place, the Lord Jesus becomes the preeminent Person, and the will of God becomes the preeminent will.

We are living in a time and place when such traits are exceedingly rare. **Of course, throughout the history of the world, such qualities have always been the exception. That is precisely why a report was made of them wherever they were found.** Having heard of the faith of the Colossians, therefore, Paul gives thanks, and is moved to minister to them.

YOU MAY REST ASSURED THAT WHERE FAITH IS NOT FOUND, JESUS WILL NOT BE WELCOMED, NOR WILL IT GO WELL WITH THOSE IN WHOM FAITH IS LACKING.

examples of faith being reported. Perhaps the most notable example is the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The following is the manner of the report.

✚ By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain – 11:4.

✚ Enoch pleased God – 11:5-6.

✚ Noah, being warned of the impending flood, built an ark as he was told to do – 11:7.

✚ Abraham left his home, obeying the word of the Lord, and *“went out, not knowing whether he went”* – 11:8.

✚ Abraham *“sojourned”* in the land of promise, looking for a city that has foundations, *“whose Builder and Maker is God”* – 11:10.

carry his bones there – 11:22.

✚ Perceiving that Moses *“was a proper child,”* his parents hid him three months, refusing to be afraid of the king’s commandment to kill all male babies – 11:23.

✚ Moses chose to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than to enjoy Egyptian pleasures for a season – 11:24-27.

✚ Moses kept the Passover, moving all Israel to do so also, *“lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them”* – 11:28.

✚ By faith Israel *“passed through the Red Sea as by dry ground”* – 11:29.

✚ By faith Israel walked around the walls of Jericho as they were

WE HEARD OF YOUR LOVE

“^{4b} . . . and of the love which ye have to all the saints . . . ”

Other versions read, “love **for** all saints.” The word “for” accents the ones receiving the love. The word “to” stresses the intent of the ones exhibiting the love. Both views are technically correct. However, I personally prefer the word “to,” for it has, in my judgment, a fuller meaning. The idea is that the love is being directed **toward** all the saints – that is, it is an **active** love, one that **does** something. There is a personal interest in the saints – even a preference for them. This includes an interest in their welfare.

This is the manner of spiritual love. It does not say to needy brethren, “Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled,” but gives the things “*which are needful for the body*” (James 2:16). Just as we “perceive” the love of God by what He did (1 John 3:16), **so love directed toward the saints is ascertained by what it does.**

“THE LOVE”

The love of reference is not a natural love. It springs from one’s love of the Lord Himself. It is an extension of loving God with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is the love that fulfills this word: “*And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also*” (1 John 4:21). The fulfillment comes from the heart, and is the very real expression of the people themselves.

This is “*the love of the brethren,*” in which the Holy Spirit Himself is active. As it is written, “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren*” (1 Pet 1:22). This love, therefore, is a spring of purity that is the result of “*obeying the truth.*” That purity expresses itself in a sincere and unpretentious love of the people of God. **Where such a love is not found, purity of soul is not found either.**

Jesus’ Attitude Toward His Disciples

Jesus placed a great emphasis on

the love of the brethren. “*By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another*” (John 13:35). The Lord Jesus had a high regard for His disciples, preferring their company above all others. There were times when He withdrew from the multitudes to be with His disciples (Mk 3:7; 8:10; John 6:3). When He went to pray, He took His disciples with Him (John 18:1-2). When He sought to communicate the precious things of God, He did so to His disciples (Mk 4:10-11). On the night of His betrayal, He “*desired*” to eat the Passover with His disciples (Lk 22:15). When He prayed in Gethsemane, He did not pray for the world, but for His disciples (John 17:9). His love for the

abides in the light, and there is no occasion for offense in him. “*He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him*” (1 John 2:10).

✚ **The one who lacks this love abides in darkness, walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going.** “*But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes*” (1 John 2:11).

✚ **The person who loves the brethren is a child of God. The one who does not is a child of the**

THE LOVE OF REFERENCE IS NOT A NATURAL LOVE. IT SPRINGS FROM ONE’S LOVE OF THE LORD HIMSELF. IT IS AN EXTENSION OF LOVING GOD WITH ALL OF THE HEART, SOUL, MIND, AND STRENGTH.

disciples is said to have been “*unto the end*” (John 13:1). While it is true that Jesus died “*for the ungodly*” (Rom 5:6), it is more specifically stated, “*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it*” (Eph 5:25).

It is inconceivable that any individual could be in fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and **not** love His brethren! Christ does **not** dwell within the individual who does not love those who are called God’s “*sons*” and “*daughters*” (2 Cor 6:18).

The glory of hearing that a congregation has love toward the saints is substantiated by what the Spirit affirms concerning such love. These particular affirmations are found in the Epistle of First John. The potency of these statements will be very apparent.

✚ **The one who loves the brethren**

devil. “*In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother*” (1 John 3:10).

✚ **The love of the brethren proves one has passed from death to life.** “*We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren*” (1 John 3:14a).

✚ **The one who does not love the brethren is dead.** “*He that loveth not his brother abideth in death*” (1 John 3:14b).

✚ **The one who does not love the brethren is a murderer, and does not have eternal life.** “*Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him*” (1 John 3:15).

✚ **The love of the brethren is a God-kind of love.** *“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because He laid down His life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren”* (1 John 3:16).

✚ **The one who does not love the brethren is disobedient.** *“And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment”* (1 John 3:23).

✚ **The one who loves the brethren is born of God and knows God.** *“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth*

brother, is a liar. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” (1 John 4:20).

✚ **The love of the brethren is inextricably linked to loving God.** *“And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also”* (1 John 4:21).

✚ **The one who really loves God, who begets the brethren, also loves the brethren He has begotten.** *“Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth Him that begeth*

or congregation is made known by either one.

“TO ALL THE SAINTS”

The love of the Colossian brethren was not discriminatory. It was toward *“all the saints.”* They did not simply love those of their own assembly, but found a preference and care for *all the saints* in their hearts. We do not know precisely how this love was displayed. They did, however, appear to have a remarkable love for all who had believed on the Son of God. Considering how ardently the Lord Jesus *“loved the church,”* giving Himself for it, it is evident that a similar love found in His people is most noteworthy.

Philemon was also noted for this kind of love. Paul said of him, *“Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints”* (Phile 1:5). The Ephesian brethren were also noted for this. *“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints”* (Eph 1:15).

This kind of love was exhibited by the Jewish believers to whom the book of Hebrews was written. It was said of them, *“For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister”* (Heb 6:10).

The love of the brethren is seen in the Malachi’s holy cluster, who feared the Lord and continued to speak frequently to one another during spiritually sterile times. It is said of them, *“Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be Mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him”* (Mal 3:16).

Those who have a high regard for the children of God are themselves held in high regard by the Lord. Jesus declared that acts of mercy directed toward His *“brethren”* were actually bestowed upon Him. *“Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of*

EITHER THE SAINTS OF GOD ARE LOVED, OR THEY ARE HATED - AND THE TRUE CONDITION OF AN INDIVIDUAL OR CONGREGATION IS MADE KNOWN BY EITHER ONE.

God” (1 John 4:7).

✚ **The one who does not love the brethren does not know God.** *“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love”* (1 John 4:8).

✚ **If we love the brethren, God dwells in us and His love is brought to maturity in us.** *“Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us”* (1 John 4:11-12).

✚ **He that dwells in love dwells in God, and God dwells in him.** *“And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him”* (1 John 4:16).

✚ **The person who says he loves God, yet does not love His**

loveth him also that is begotten of Him” (1 John 5:1).

✚ **The love of the brethren is linked to loving God and keeping His commandments. That is the personal evidence that we love the brethren.** *“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous”* (1 John 5:2-3).

It is difficult to conceive of anything having any more implications than the love of the brethren. **This is an area where deficiency is simply not allowed.** You will note from the above references that there are only two attitudes toward the people of God – love or hate. There is nothing between these expressions. **Either the saints of God are loved, or they are hated – and the true condition of an individual**

the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt 25:40). The response of Jesus to their thoughtfulness of His “brethren” was, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Mat 25:34). **There is a sense, therefore, in which our eternal destiny hinges upon our conduct and attitude toward the people of God.**

It is no wonder, therefore, that Paul gives thanks to God for the report of

the love the Colossians had toward “all the saints.”

A SUMMARY THOUGHT

When the love of God fills the heart of a believer, the love of the brethren immediately evidences itself. The love of God permeates our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit. As it is written, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Rom 5:5).

The phrase “love of God” has at least two perspectives. It is **God’s own love** that is poured into our hearts, so that we love in the same way that He loves, though not to the same degree. It is also **God’s love for us. When that is poured into our hearts we are filled with an awareness of His great love, and convinced we are precious in His sight.** The result of this work is our deep and abiding love for God Himself (1 John 4:19), and a consistent and productive love for His children (1 John 5:1).

TWO SPIRITUAL HEMISPHERES

“... faith in Christ Jesus” and “love ... to all the saints.”

New life in Christ Jesus can be summarized in this expressive couplet: “faith in Jesus Christ, and love toward all saints.” How frequently this summation is given. “. . . your **faith** in the Lord Jesus, and **love** unto all saints” (Eph 1:15). “Hearing of thy **love and faith**, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints” (Phile 1:5). Timotheus brought tidings to Paul of the Thessalonian’s “**faith and charity**” (1 Thess 3:6). Their **faith** was “growing exceedingly,” and their **love** toward each other was “abounding” (2 Thess 1:3).

Ponder how these two virtues are found together. They are two-thirds of the abiding triad, “**faith, hope, and charity**” (1 Cor 13:13).

- ✚ The objective of the commandment is “**charity out of a pure heart . . . and of faith unfeigned**” (1 Tim 1:5).
- ✚ Christ dwells in our hearts “**by faith**,” and we are “**rooted and grounded in love**” (Eph 3:17).
- ✚ It is written that “**love with faith**” come to us “**from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**” (Eph 6:23).
- ✚ Two of the things Paul held in constant remembrance were the “**work of faith**” and “**labor of love**” (1 Thess 1:3).

- ✚ A protective piece of the armor of God is “**the breastplate of faith and love**” (1 Thess 5:8).
- ✚ The grace of God comes to us “**exceeding abundant with faith and love**” (1 Tim 1:14).
- ✚ The “**form of sound words**” is

or whose members have seen these qualities in one another. **Rather, these were qualities reported to Paul by faithful Epaphras.** It is evident that he saw these as primary traits among the Colossian brethren, and things for which they ought to be known. This also reveals that He had the mind of Christ.

OUR TEXT DOES NOT ASSIGN THESE QUALITIES TO AN INDIVIDUAL, BUT TO A CONGREGATION. THAT IS WHAT MAKES THE COMMENDATION SO REMARKABLE. IN A HIGHLY PROFESSIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL RELIGIOUS WORLD, FAITH AND LOVE RANK VERY LOW – IF, IN FACT, THEY RANK AT ALL.

possessed “**in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus**” (2 Tim 1:13).

Here are two glorious qualities that have their origin in both the Father and the Son. They are fueled by grace, bring spiritual stability, and erupt in ministry to the sons and daughters of the Most High God. It should not surprise us, therefore, that Paul gives thanks for the report of faith and love among the brethren in Colossae.

These were not virtues that were merely reported among the Colossians themselves. There are no doubt many congregations who say this of themselves,

THE ESSENCE SPIRITUAL LIFE

The presence of faith and love are like the encapsulation of spiritual life. Heavenward, that life is summarized in “**faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.**” In the world, it is epitomized in “**love toward all the saints.**” **Where these are found, a claim to affiliation with God is justified.** Where they are absent all such claims are pretentious, and there is no truth in them.

Our text does not assign these qualities to an individual, but to a congregation. That is what makes the commendation so remarkable. In a highly professional and institutional religious

world, faith and love rank very low – if, in fact, they rank at all. They are conveniently upstaged by numbers, programs, and institutional fervor. Proportionately speaking, there appear to be very few congregations that are noted for these virtues.

This is largely owing to the sectarian thrust that presently dominates the Western Christian world. People have been brought to associate the love of the

brethren with denominational camaraderie. Believers have grown accustomed to living with divisions – it is just a way of religious life. The professed body of Christ is divided over everything from names to humanly devised theological systems. **However, Christ is not divided, and divisions are an evidence of the carnal mind, which is enmity against God** (1 Cor 1:13; 3:1-4; Rom 8:7). Make no mistake about this, *“they that are in the flesh cannot please*

God” (Rom 8:8).

The seriousness of the condition is seen in the fact that God Himself is not present where faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and love to all the saints are missing. **In view of these, and other, considerations, it is good for a congregation to determine to be known for its faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love toward all saints.** Such reports bring glory to God.

THE WELL FROM WHICH FAITH AND LOVE SPRANG

“^{5a} For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven . . . ” Other versions read, *“because of the hope,”* NKJV/NASB *“the faith and hope that spring from the hope,”* NIV *“Through the hope,”* BBE *“on account of the hope,”* DARBY and *“You do this because you are looking*

person to keep the Law, hope will not come from such efforts. Rather, a sense of guilt will pervade the heart and mind, and all hope of being saved by the Law will vanish. Therefore it is written, *“the law entered, that the offence might abound”* (Rom 5:20). The Law itself was not

Here is an aspect of the Gospel being *“the power of God unto salvation”* (Rom 1:16). Hope is referred to as *“the hope of the Gospel”* (Col 1:23); i.e., the hope *“held out”* in the Gospel, NIV and realized when it is believed. I will develop this aspect of hope in the next section.

IN CHRIST A NEW AND REFRESHING CIRCUMSTANCE HAS APPEARED. NOW MEN CAN POSSESS HOPE, OWNING IT FOR THEMSELVES. HOPE IS LIKE AN AGGRESSIVE WORKMAN THAN SETS OUT TO PRODUCE ALL MANNER OF FRUIT IN THE ONE POSSESSING IT.

Hope is the Result of the Spirit's Work

Hope is caused to abound in the heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. As it is written, *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”* (Rom 15:13). An abounding hope is an overflowing one that goes beyond humanly devised theological borders. It convinces its possessor of the reality of an *“eternal inheritance,”* even when the circumstances of life appear to contradict that fact.

forward to the joys of heaven.” NLT

A STATEMENT OF THE CASE

The faith and love credited to the Colossians were not the result fulfilling the obligations of law. They were not the fulfillment of certain requirements passed along to them by more knowledgeable brethren. The faith and love of the Colossians sprang out of their hope – their confidence of an *“eternal inheritance”* that was laid up for them *“in heaven.”*

THE PRODUCTIVITY OF HOPE

The *“hope”* that is spawned by the Gospel is spiritually productive. **It accomplishes things that cannot come from keeping the Law.** Even if an individual exerts every aspect of their

calculated to produce hope, and contained no promises of good things to come. For this reason it is written, *“the strength of sin is the law”* (1 Cor 15:56). **That is, the Law pointed out the condition created by sin, as well as the guilt of sin itself.** When its message was received, all confidence in self was destroyed, and the need of a Savior was brought home to the heart.

In Christ a new and refreshing circumstance has appeared. Now men can possess hope, owning it for themselves. **Hope is like an aggressive workman than sets out to produce all manner of fruit in the one possessing it.** This is owing to at least two circumstances.

Hope Is Brought through the Gospel

Those who are abounding in hope are willing to give up this world's goods in the prospect of good things to come. The writer of Hebrews, whom I believe to be Paul, commended the Hebrew believers for their unselfish spirit. Two circumstances revealed this condition. *“For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance”* (Heb 10:34). During hardship, these brethren did something for an imprisoned brother. In addition, they experienced the plundering of their goods, or confiscation of their property,

doing so with joy. The reason for this remarkable attitude is given: *“knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven.”*^{NKJV} That is the power of hope! It can move people to do good to their brethren during their own duress, and experience the loss of earthly goods with sustaining joy.

Hope is not flimsy or uncertain. It is appropriately described as *“an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil”* (Heb 6:19). It exercises a stabilizing influence upon the soul, issuing forth in confidence and assurance that liberates the soul to be forward to trust God and love His children.

WHEN HOPE IS ABSENT

Prior to being in Christ, we were characterized as *“having no hope”* (Eph 2:12). Those who are presently outside of Christ are described as *“others which have no hope”* (1 Thess 4:13). That condition is tragic, yet understandable.

But what of the absence of hope within the professed church? What kind of condition leads professed believers to NOT know in themselves they have *“in heaven a better and an enduring substance?”* What of individuals who cannot confidently say, *“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made*

FIRST, SUCH A CONDITION MAY EXIST AMONG PROFESSED CHRISTIANS, BUT IT IS CONTRARY TO THE MANNER OF THE KINGDOM. IT IS OPPOSED TO THE NEW BIRTH AND NEWNESS OF LIFE. IT IS A DEFICIENCY THAT IS NOT NECESSARY. IT IS A SPIRITUAL ABNORMALITY, A KIND OF DISEASE OF THE SOUL THAT WILL BE LETHAL IF NOT CORRECTED.

with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1)?

First, such a condition may exist among professed Christians, but it is contrary to the manner of the Kingdom. It is opposed to the new birth and newness of life. It is a deficiency that is not necessary. It is a spiritual abnormality, a kind of disease of the soul that will be lethal if not corrected. **If we are “saved by hope,” it is certain we cannot linger long without it.**

Second, where hope is not found, faith and love will, at the very best, be very meager, if, indeed, they are found at all – for they spring from hope. I can tell you that if you engaged in a quest to find people who were assured of an *“eternal inheritance,”* knowing in themselves that they had in heaven *“a better and an enduring substance,”* **you would be shocked at the fewness of the number.** You would

likely hear expressions like, “I am doing the best I can,” or “I hope I will be in heaven,” or “I hope I make it.” Rarely will you hear an expression of faith that would be described as an *“anchor for the soul, both steadfast and sure.”*

It is for this precise reason that such people are not noted for faith in Christ and love for all saints. **The feebleness of their hope will simply not allow for strong faith and robust love.** Such poor souls are actually spiritually restricted because of their lack of hope. Neither faith in Christ nor the love of the brethren can flourish when hope is absent, or remains feeble.

This circumstance accounts for the condemning spirit that tends to exist among those with a harsh and lifeless legalistic propensity. Their religion is the product of their anaemic hope, and is consequently worthless.

HEARING THE WORD OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

“^{5b} . . . whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel . . .” Other versions read, *“of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel,”*^{NASB} *“you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel,”*^{NIV} *“because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel,”*^{NRSV} **“knowledge of which was given to you before in the true word of the good news,”**^{BBE} and **“News of this hope reached you not long ago through the word of truth,**

the gospel.”^{NJB}

“Good hope” does not spring from good works, however notable they may appear. It is not the result of hearty effort, or even of disciplined and faithful obedience. **Hope grows out of believing the Gospel, which reveals it.** The Gospel of Christ speaks of the Object of hope, which is *“Christ in you”* (Col 1:27). It also reveals the reality of the hope, which is the *“things God has prepared for them that love Him”* (1 Cor 2:9). The Gospel contains words that speak of the *“the promise of eternal*

inheritance” (Heb 9:15), which is one of the *“better promises”* upon which the New Covenant is *“established”* (Heb 8:6).

The salvation of God is an *“eternal salvation”* (Heb 5:9), and one that is *“with eternal glory”* (2 Tim 2:10). An *“eternal inheritance,”* *“eternal salvation,”* and *“eternal glory”* postulate continuance beyond this time and this world. **Salvation does not reach its maturity or culmination in this world.** Consequently, at least two perceptions are required.

- ✦ **First, our religion must not anchor us to this world**, leaving us to imagine that it is the primary world, and that the present time is the most important time.
- ✦ **Second, there must be a productive and conscious connection with “the world to come.”** This is where our Lord and our inheritance reside. Our consciousness of that “world to come” will yield a confidence that enables us to resist the devil and cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart.

Hope satisfactorily answers both of these requirements. It anchors our souls “*within the veil*,” where Christ is presently mediating the New Covenant and interceding for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 6:19; Heb 7:25; 9:15).

However, that is only half of the equation of salvation.

The fulness of the Gospel can be seen in the commission given to Paul. This came from the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. “*To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me*” (Acts 26:18). **Here the multi-dimensional nature of salvation is seen.** It includes:

- ✦ Illumination: “*to open their eyes.*”
- ✦ A change of environment: “*to turn them from darkness to light.*”
- ✦ Deliverance **from** Satan’s dominion:

world. It is not something that can be seen or touched with natural senses. It is an “*eternal inheritance*” (Heb 9:15), and, while we are in this world, can only be grasped by hope. This is frequently declared in the Apostolic exposition of the Gospel.

- ✦ “*In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory*” (Eph 1:13-14).
- ✦ “*Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son*” (Col 1:12-13).
- ✦ “*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ*” (Col 3:23-24).

- ✦ “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you*” (1 Pet 1:3-4).

This is why we read of inheriting “*the earth*” (Matt 5:5), “*everlasting life*” (Matt 19:29), “*the promises*” (Heb 6:12), “*the kingdom*” (Matt 25:34; 1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:21), and “*all things*” (Rev 21:7). **It is because the bulk of our salvation is ahead of us, and will be fully revealed only after the passing of the temporal order.** Thus it is written, “*And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain*” (Heb 12:27).

The things that “*cannot be*

SOME PREACH A GOSPEL THAT ONLY ANNOUNCES THE REMISSION OF SINS. IN SUCH CASES, SALVATION IS EXCLUSIVELY ASSOCIATED WITH A RETRIEVAL FROM THE GUILT AND POWER OF SIN.

HEARING

When the Colossians “*heard*” the Gospel, **they were, through that Gospel, apprised of the hope from which their faith and love sprang.** That means this “*hope*” is actually integral to the Gospel. It is an effect of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. **However, it is a declared effect, not one that is derived by the reasoning of the hearer.**

Some preach a Gospel that only announces the remission of sins. In such cases, salvation is exclusively associated with a retrieval from the guilt and power of sin. Others relate salvation wholly with matters pertaining to this world. Such do not limit it to the matter of forgiveness, but declare it is related to health and prosperity in the body. **In both of these cases, the hearers are left thinking God’s “great salvation”** (Heb 2:3) **majors on the consequence of sin.**

“*to turn them . . . from the power of Satan.*”

- ✦ Deliverance **to** the beneficent care of God: “*turn them . . . unto God.*”
- ✦ The purpose of this illumination, change, and deliverance is carefully delineated: “*that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance.*”
- ✦ The society in which these things will take place is identified, together with the means of preparation: “*among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.*”

Notice, the purpose for opening our eyes, moving us from darkness to light, and turning us toward God is twofold: (1) That we may receive forgiveness of sins. (2) That we may receive the appointed inheritance.

The “*inheritance*” is not of this

shaken” include our inheritance. They include a *“better and an enduring substance”* (Heb 10:34), and a *“house not made with hands”* (2 Cor 5:1). A *“better country”* is involved, and the *“city”* God has prepared for those who desire that country (Heb 11:16).

All of these things, and more, are involved in hearing about the hope – the hope by which faith in Christ and the love of all saints are fueled.

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

The phrase *“the word of the truth of the Gospel”* is most significant. Other versions read, *“the word of truth, the Gospel,”* ^{NASB/NIV} That is, truth is not an aspect of the Gospel, but the Gospel is itself the truth of God. **It is as though Paul declares the Gospel is “the word of truth.”** This is precisely what he wrote to the Ephesians: *“In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise”* (Eph 1:13). In referring to believers being begotten by the Gospel, James also refers to *“the word of truth”* (James 1:18).

THE WORD

By using the expression *“word,”* the Spirit emphasizes that the Gospel is an **articulation**, not a human conclusion. It is an **affirmation**, not a statement of sundry facts from which men construct a theological view. It is God’s manner to proclaim work through assertion. Both the Gospel of Christ and the promises of God are assertions, declarations, or announcements. **They declare existing provisions.**

The Gospel of Christ is the *announcement* of amnesty, the *report* of reconciliation, the *proclamation* of propitiation, and the *news* of nearness. It is the *announcement* of atonement, the *tidings* of triumph, and the *promulgation* of peace. **The Gospel is essentially a message – a good message of things that have been accomplished, and realities that are now accessible to those who will “believe the report”** (Rom 10:16).

The Gospel is not a system. It is not the outline of a procedure, or the

delineation of a routine or discipline. It is not the declaration of a way of life. The Gospel is, in fact, a report of *“the wonderful works of God”* (Acts 2:11). When Jesus declared His manifesto in that Nazarene synagogue, He basically gave some good news. *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord”* (Luke 4:18-19). **This was not a word of what men ought to do, but of what men could now obtain.**

This is the word that begat hope in the Colossians, as well as everyone else who believes it. May the Lord free us from the purveyors of religious systems, and

the blood of His cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:20).

✚ *“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage”* (Heb 2:14-15).

✚ *“And having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it”* (Col 2:15).

✚ *“Therefore let all the house of Israel*

MAY THE LORD FREE US FROM THE PURVEYORS OF RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS, AND BRING TO US THOSE WHO WILL DECLARE WHAT THE LORD HAS DONE.

bring to us those who will declare what the Lord has done. If you have heard such proclamations, I trust you will keep them in constant remembrance. As you recall them, *“hope”* will grow stronger, and faith in Christ and love for the brethren will become more prominent in your life. Here are some of those marvelous announcements.

✚ *“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ . . . God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation”* (2 Cor 5:18-19).

✚ *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ”* (Eph 1:3).

✚ *“And, having made peace through*

know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

✚ *“For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”* (Heb 9:26).

✚ *“For through Him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father”* (Eph 2:18).

✚ *“For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him”* (2 Cor 5:21).

This small sampling of relevant texts shows the marvelous nature of the Gospel. It is a word of affirmation – a message of realities that only faith can grasp.

HEARING THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS THE POINT AT WHICH SALVATION IS BROUGHT WITHIN OUR REACH.

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

The word “truth” means “in reality, or in fact.” It is something that is certain. It cannot possibly be false, understated, or exaggerated, because it is supported by unquestionable realities.

The Gospel is not the announcement of something that will be, but something that IS. It is not a suggestion of possibilities but a declaration of accomplishments. This is why hope comes to us by means of the Gospel. The hope that saves (Rom 8:24) must be based on realities, not mere human aspirations. Thus we read of “the TRUTH of the Gospel” no less than four times (Gal 2:5,14; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5).

✚ It is what the Spirit wants to continue with us. “To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that **the truth of the gospel might continue with you**” (Gal 2:5).

✚ When Paul rebuked Peter, it was because he was not walking according to the truth of the Gospel. “*But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to **the truth of the gospel**, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?*” (Gal 2:14).

✚ The Ephesians “trusted” in Christ when they heard this Gospel. “*In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard **the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise***” (Eph 1:13).

Hearing the Gospel of Christ is the point at which salvation is brought within our reach. Where the

Gospel is not preached, calling upon the name of the Lord is not possible. The Gospel is not something that can be learned by study – even the study of things that seem very apparent to one who is in Christ.

Remember, our text does not merely refer to a point in time when the Colossians heard the Gospel, repented of their sins, and were baptized into Christ. Indeed, those responses are associated with the Gospel of Christ. In our text, however, Paul is speaking of the sanctified lives of the brethren in Colossae. In particular, he is accounting for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and love for all of the saints. **He affirms these traits were produced by the hope that was made known when they heard the Gospel.**

It is not necessary to spend more time on this matter. However, it does explain why hope is so rare in our day. **It is because the Gospel is not being preached.** A variety of other messages and emphases have supplanted the Gospel. Hope cannot flourish under such conditions. For hope to be strong, the Gospel must be declared and expounded. **If this does not happen, hope withers, and will eventually die.**

THE GOSPEL CAME TO THEM

“^{6a} Which is come unto you.”

The “truth of the Gospel” came to the Colossians. **They did not discover the good news, it was brought to them.** This is the manner in which the Lord works. Every man who believes does so by means of one who ministers the Gospel. The messenger of the Gospel is not the point, but the message that he brings. This is the means through which men are brought to faith. This is why it is written, “*Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as **the Lord gave to every man?***” (1 Cor 3:5).

These messengers are “sent” by God. **Only He can coordinate the meeting of a seeker and a**

proclaimer. For some, this is too difficult to receive. They imagine that men themselves do the sending. While men are certainly involved, the actual sending is done by the Lord Himself.

Thus it is written, “*How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be **sent?** as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!*” (Rom 10:14-15).

Barnabas and Saul

On one occasion, while the brethren in Antioch were fasting and

ministering to the Lord, the Holy Spirit said to them, “*Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.*” After the brethren had “fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” Although the brethren are said to have sent them away, they were secondary participants. The text continues, “*So, **being sent out by the Holy Spirit**, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus*” (Acts 13:4). Ultimately, they were not sent by men, but by God.

Sent to Macedonia

While the Word was spreading and the disciples were increasing, Paul and company came to Mysia. At that time they were forbidden to preach the Word in Asia. We are not told precisely how they

were forbidden. I assume the brethren were sensitive enough to Divine direction to draw proper conclusions about the matter. Following that prohibition, the same brethren tried to go into Bithynia, *“but the Spirit did not permit them”* to do so. Having passed by Mysia, and come down to Troas, a vision appeared to Paul during the night. In that vision there *“stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us”* (Acts 16:9). **“Immediately,”** they *“endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them”* (Acts 16:10). They were sent by God!

The Ethiopian Eunuch

Take, for example, the Ethiopian eunuch. He came to Jerusalem to *“worship”* (Acts 8:27). What is more, he came from Ethiopia, which tells us he was a committed man – no doubt a proselyte. We know from Luke’s narrative that as he

returned to his homeland, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. That provides some indication of the things to which he had been submitted in Jerusalem. The text he was reading is described: *“The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth: In His humiliation His judgment was taken away: and who shall declare His generation? for His life is taken from the earth”* (Acts 8:32-33, ref: Isa 53:7-8). To those who are in Christ – who have heard the Gospel – the meaning of the text may seem quite apparent. But it was not so with the eunuch. When asked by Philip if he understood what he was reading, the eunuch answered, *“How can I, except some man should guide me? . . . I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?”* (Acts 8:31,34).

The eunuch needed to **hear** the

Gospel – to hear it from someone who himself perceived it. That is why Philip was “sent,” being directed by an angel to cease his productive ministry in the villages of the Samaritans, and go into Gaza, which is desert. Upon arriving, his path immediately intersected with the Ethiopian eunuch, and the angel said, *“join thyself to this chariot”* (Acts 8:26-29). **The intersection of the eunuch and Philip was not coincidental. He was sent by God!**

In much the same way, the Gospel had come to the Colossians. It did not come by the hand of Paul, but he knew the messenger was sent by God, for no man can effectively preach unless he is *“sent.”* No child of God should balk at this. It should be very apparent that if it is not in man that walks to direct his own steps (Jer 10:23), it is certainly not in him to direct the affairs of the Kingdom of God. **Jesus is the Head of the body, and He orchestrates its affairs.**

IN ALL THE WORLD

“^{6b} . . . as it is in all the world . . .” Other versions read, *“as it also has in all the world,”*^{NKJV} and *“just as in all the world.”*^{NASB}

Jesus had declared that *“repentance and remission of sins”* were to be preached *“beginning at Jerusalem”* (Lk 24:47). However, it was not to be confined to Jerusalem. The Gospel was also to be preached *“in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). Jesus also commanded, *“preach the Gospel to every creature”* (Mk 16:15), and *“teach (or ‘make disciples of’^{NKJV}) all nations”* (Matt 28:19).

Academically, our Lord’s words are not difficult to understand. However, within the context of contemporary Christianity they sound too challenging. Few people really take them seriously. The brethren of the first century did take them seriously, and the brethren in Colossae are proof of their conviction.

Those who brought the Gospel to the Colossians, whoever they were, had tasted of the hope of the Gospel themselves. That is why such marvelous fruitage could be found in Colossae. The principle of effective

preaching is encapsulated in this statement: *“The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits”* (2 Tim 2:6).

Wherever *“the truth of the Gospel”* is brought, hope is awakened and begins to flourish. **One God** sends forth one Gospel. **One Gospel** proclaims one Lord Jesus Christ. **One Lord Jesus Christ** sends forth one Holy Spirit. **One Holy Spirit** produces one array of spiritual fruit to the glory of God. In the end, that fruit will be found in *“every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”* (Rev 5:9). This is what happened at Colossae.

THE GOSPEL BEARS FRUIT

“^{6c} . . . and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you . . .” Other versions read, *“is bringing forth fruit,”*^{NKJV} *“is constantly bearing fruit and increasing,”*^{NASB} *“is bearing fruit and*

growing,”^{NIV} *“has been bearing fruit among you,”*^{NRSV} *“in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing as it also does among you,”*^{ESV} and *“It is changing lives everywhere, just as it changed yours.”*^{NLT}

Harvesting is an important aspect of the work of the Lord – bringing forth fruit. One of the reasons for our deliverance from the condemning Law is that we might be *“married to another,*

even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should **bring forth fruit unto God**" (Rom 7:4).

MUCH FRUIT

Our heavenly Father is "glorified" when "much fruit" is produced by the disciples of Jesus. This is confirmed by two salient statements of the Savior.

✦ "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth **much fruit**: for without Me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

✦ "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear **much fruit**; so shall ye be My disciples" (John 15:8).

First, Jesus does not refer to some "fruit," but to "**much fruit**." He affirms that this is result from abiding in Him, and He in the individual. **Second**, the Father is glorified when those abiding in Christ bear "much fruit." **Third**, our discipleship is confirmed by the bearing of "much fruit."

It is no wonder, therefore, that Paul gives thanks for the fruit found among the Colossians. It confirmed that they were abiding in Christ, and Christ was abiding in them. Through their fruit the Father was being glorified. Additionally, it substantiated that they were, in fact, disciples, or learners, of the

Lord Jesus Christ.

It should be obvious that **not** bearing fruit – "much fruit" – has some startling implications.

message was heard. **For schism to occur, a carnal shroud must be thrown over the Gospel of Christ. Man himself must become preeminent, Jesus must become**

FOR SCHISM TO OCCUR, A CARNAL SHROUD MUST BE THROWN OVER THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. MAN HIMSELF MUST BECOME PREEMINENT, JESUS MUST BECOME SECONDARY, AND HEAVEN MUST BE THROWN INTO THE BACKGROUND OF HUMAN THOUGHT.

THE BLIGHT OF DIVISION

This circumstance makes division and schism sins of the greatest magnitude. There is nothing about the Gospel of Christ, or the great salvation of God, that promotes controversy or division among those who believe and embrace it – nothing! **Wherever contention and variance are found, "another GOSPEL" has been introduced** (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). Ultimately, it is not interpretations and opinions that divide professed believers, but "*another Gospel*." **Somehow God and Jesus are being seen and understood incorrectly.** An erroneous

secondary, and heaven must be thrown into the background of human thought. Human institutions must upstage the kingdom that God has set up (Dan 2:44), and the theologies of men must be preferred to the Gospel affirmations of the Almighty God.

FRUIT WILL COME

Wherever the Gospel of Christ is set forth with power and insight, and believed, it **will** bear fruit. Ranking high in that fruit will be faith in Christ Jesus, and the love of all saints. **Where these qualities are missing, profession is empty and spurious.**

HEARING AND KNOWING THE GRACE OF GOD IN TRUTH

"^{6d} . . . since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth." Other versions read, "*since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth,*" ^{NKJV} "*since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth,*" ^{NASB} "*from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God,*" ^{NRSV} and "*ever since you heard about the grace of God and recognized it for what it truly is.*" ^{NJB}

There are four notable things to see in this portion of the verse. **First**, their fruit-bearing response was from the very first. It was not the result of a

lengthy process. **Second**, their fruit commenced when they heard about the grace of God. **Third**, it was the result of knowing, or comprehending the grace of God. **Fourth**, their comprehension was in strict accord with the truth, or reality, of God's grace.

These confirm the insight of the Apostle, and the genuineness of the fruit that was seen in the Colossians.

SINCE THEY HEARD OF IT

" . . . since the day ye heard of it." Through the power and grace of God, the Gospel can produce immediate results. It

did in the Colossians from the day they heard of God's grace. There are other examples of this in Scripture.

✦ On the day of Pentecost, Peter's first enlightened Gospel proclamation produced fruit immediately (Acts 2:37-41).

✦ The city of Samaria immediately responded to the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 8:5-6).

✦ Upon hearing Jesus speak to Him, and hearing the words of Ananias, Saul of Tarsus responded straightway

(Acts 9:5-9, 17-20).

- ✚ The Ethiopian eunuch responded the first time He heard the Gospel insightfully presented (Acts 8:36-39).
- ✚ Cornelius and his household immediately responded to the proclamation of the Gospel (Acts 10:43-48).
- ✚ Lydia responded to first Gospel proclamation she heard (Acts 16:14-15).
- ✚ The Philippian jailor gave an immediate response to the Gospel (Acts 16:29-34).

what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost: so that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia" (1 Thess 1:5-7). "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Th 2:13).

✚ **The Colossians.** "Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and

grace of God." Just as the day one hears the Gospel of the grace of God is an epoch, so the time when it is comprehended, or perceived, is a spiritual milestone. For some, this is a considerable time after their first profession of faith. However, it is glad day when it is realized.

Note, it is the grace of God that is known, or apprehended. It is possible to understand the wrath of God and be motivated to do what is right. It is also possible to realize the meaning of the commandments of God and determine to do them heartily. **But when the grace of God is understood, the individual passes into a fruit-bearing mode.** That fruit shows itself in an increasing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and a fervent love of the brethren – just as it did in Colossae. **But where men remain ignorant of the grace of God, neither faith nor love will flourish.** It seems to me that this is a principle that cannot be contradicted. Those who make little of the grace of God, or even speak against it, guarantee their own spiritual sterility. They will not be able to grow until they recognize the soil in which growth is realized – the grace of God.

THE GRACE OF GOD IS EFFECTIVE ENOUGH TO WORK SUCH A REACTION. THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS CONDUCIVE TO SUCH A RESPONSE. THE HOLY SPIRIT IS CAPABLE OF PRODUCING SUCH FRUIT. WHY, THEN, IS IT NOT ALWAYS FOUND?

- ✚ Certain disciples of John in Ephesus were obedient to the Gospel as soon as they heard it (Acts 19:4-5).

There were also certain congregations that were noted for their consistent response to the Gospel from the very first.

- ✚ **The Philippians.** "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Phil 1:3-5).
- ✚ **The Ephesians.** "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Eph 1:13).
- ✚ **The Thessalonians.** "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know

bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth" (Col 1:6).

Such a marvelous response is not at all common – even though it is quite possible. **The grace of God is effective enough to work such a reaction.** The Gospel of Christ is conducive to such a response. The Holy Spirit is capable of producing such fruit. Why, then, is it not always found?

Without engaging in all manner of fruitless speculations, a lack of appropriate response is owing to at least one of two conditions. Either the Gospel was not really preached, or it was preached but not believed. I am persuaded there is more of the former condition than we dare to imagine. **Valid fruit will not come from a powerless or perverted Gospel.**

SINCE THEY COMPREHENDED IT

"... since the day... ye knew the

ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH

"... since the day ye knew the grace of God in truth." The idea here is that they "understood the truth" about God's grace. ^{NLT} They not only saw its reality, but they perceived what it had accomplished. You might say it "appeared" to them personally (Tit 2:11).

Corruptions

Men have attached other words to grace, thereby modifying its meaning to fit their own theological systems. Considering the extremities of theological persuasion, it is not unusual to hear of "sovereign grace," "cheap grace," and "irresistible grace."

By "sovereign grace," men mean it overrides all conditions by Sovereign decree. The expression "cheap grace" refers to a grace that allows for the individual to continue in sin. "Irresistible grace" means that once God's grace is toward a person, that grace cannot be resisted, spurned, frustrated, or rendered ineffectual. None of these are "the grace of God in truth." They are a misrepresentation of God's grace, and

therefore will not allow for the fruit that comes from the “*true grace of God*”(1 Pet 5:12).

Although the Scriptural word “*grace*” is employed in each of these expressions, the expressions themselves denote an interpretation of grace, and not the grace of God itself. Those interpretations are also substituted for the truth itself. I am persuaded this is a more serious abuse of God’s word than is ordinarily perceived.

Grace Is Not Inferior

Men also wrestle with the notion that somehow the grace of God encourages sin, or that it is not a safe and God-blessed approach to life. Thus it is spoken of with tongue-in-cheek, as though it was actually a liability to men – a sort of inferior approach to living. To this day, there remains a rather large contingency of Christians who think grace suggests fleshly license, opening the

CAN YOU IMAGINE MICHAEL OR GABRIEL INQUIRING ABOUT THEIR STAND ON SPIRITUAL GIFTS, OR WHAT THEY THOUGHT ABOUT THE NUMBER OF CUPS TO BE USED AT THE LORD’S TABLE? WOULD SOME CHERUB OF SERAPH INQUIRE ABOUT WHETHER THEY PREFERRED TRADITIONAL OR CONTEMPORARY WORSHIP SERVICES, OR FAVORED SINGING WITH OR WITHOUT AN INSTRUMENT?

door for all manner of infractions of the Law of God. For this reason, certain religious persuasions speak more about what grace is NOT, than what it is. Such men imagine they are protecting the abuse of the grace of God. This too is not “*the grace of God in truth.*” Those who entertain such notions cannot realize the fruit that comes from knowing “*the true grace of God.*” Their misunderstanding of

the grace of God stunts their growth.

Wherever the true grace of God is comprehended, faith in Christ and love for all saints will be found in some measure. Those expressions will begin to occur as soon as the grace of God is known in truth – perceived and embraced as it really is. Examine your own walk with the Lord, and see if this is not precisely what happened in you.

CONCLUSION

Consider the circumstances of this text. Paul is in prison. From the lower view, he is suffering at the hands of wicked men. From the higher view, he is the “*prisoner of the Lord*”(Eph 4:1). He comes in contact with one named Epaphras, who is imprisoned with him, as

Those with no heart for the Kingdom of God would not be impacted by such a report. Such things might be considered “nice.” However, unless they were more immediately associated with one’s personal congregation or some institutional agenda, they could be easily

the name of their congregation, or what their official stand on the millennium was? And what of the holy angels? Can you imagine Michael or Gabriel inquiring about their stand on spiritual gifts, or what they thought about the number of cups to be used at the Lord’s table? Would some Cherub of Seraph inquire about whether they preferred traditional or contemporary worship services, or favored singing with or without an instrument?

IT IS APPARENT THAT ALL OF THE ABOVE THINGS ARE OF A HEAVENLY ORDER. THEY DO NOT HAVE THE STENCH OF FLESH UPON THEM. THEY ALL REFLECT A HEAVENLY AGENDA. IN FACT, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO CAPITALIZE ON SPIRITUAL FRUIT, OR TO USE THE GRACE OF GOD FOR IGNOBLE PURPOSES.

There is joy in the “*presence of the angels*” over one sinner that repents (Lk 15:10). Jesus will manifest Himself to the person who has His commandments and retains them in his heart and mind (John 14:21). The Father is glorified by “*much fruit*”(John 15:8), and men will know we are Christ’s disciples if we have love one for another (John 13:35).

confirmed by Philemon 1:23. Epaphras, who was a faithful servant of the church at Colossae gives a report of the brethren there, testifying of their faith in Jesus Christ, and love for all saints. Those are the facts in the case.

forgotten. Some might inquire whether or not they were “one of us,” or belong to “our movement.”

Can you conceive of the Lord Jesus asking such questions, or inquiring about

It is apparent that all of the above things are of a heavenly order. They do not have the stench of flesh upon them. They all reflect a heavenly agenda. In fact, it is not possible to capitalize on spiritual fruit, or to use the grace of God for

ignoble purposes.

I exhort you to make it your aim to know the grace of God in truth – to see it in the Gospel of Christ, and to embrace it with your whole heart. It will produce

good and abundant fruit in you just as it did in the Colossians. You will be a cause for thanksgiving and a source of refreshment to other saints. You will also bring joy and rejoicing to both the Father and the Son. It may very well be said of

you, “*The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in his love, He will joy over thee with singing*” (Zeph 3:17). That has a most pleasant sound, doesn't it?

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 8/22/2003. In this session, we will covering verses 3-6 of the first chapter. The title of our lesson is, “**A FAITHFUL REPORT OF LOVE IN THE SPIRIT.**” Paul's acquaintance with the brethren at Colossae came from Epaphras, who was a faithful minister for them. The report given by this brother was one of spiritual insight, and will be profitable for us to consider. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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