



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 -----

A FAITHFUL REPORT OF LOVE IN THE SPIRIT

“ 1:7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; ⁸ who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.” ^{KJV} (Colossians 1:7-8)

INTRODUCTION

WHAT HAS BEEN SEEN

The opening verses of this Epistle set the stage for sound spiritual thought. They assist us in getting our bearings. They break up the fallow ground of the mind, and clear the way for the reception of the truth. Several key considerations are being made known.

1. The Experience of Saints

While this is a special letter written to a special church, it contains words that pertain to a “*common salvation*” (Jude 1:3). The Spirit speaks in such a manner as to profit all saints. A brief reminder of these things will assist us in obtaining the maximum benefit from the text. The experiences of reference are common to all believers.

Faith. Faith is at the foundational level of spiritual life. It is more of a root than a branch. It is the coinage of the Kingdom with which Divine provisions are appropriated. The very first thing Paul heard about the Colossians pertained to their faith: “*we heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ*” (1:4). This is what provoked them to receive the Gospel, and be faithful to the Lord. With religious men, the adoption of a human creed or theological position identifies them. With those in Christ, faith is the true mark of godly identity.

Love. The love of the brethren is an accomplishment that can only be realized by those who are in Christ Jesus. This was also one of the first things Paul

heard about the Colossians: “*the love which ye have to all the saints.*” Not only are believers knit together in Christ Jesus, the Colossians **knew** it. They saw the people of God as Jesus Himself saw them, and expressed affection for them, and ministry toward them. This is the common experience of all who live by faith and walk in the Spirit.

Hope. When the Colossians heard the Gospel of Christ, they understood it be personal. It was not a sectarian creed, or a lifeless dogma. It enabled them to have an “*anchor*” in heaven, and thus brought stability to them. Therefore Paul reminds them that their faith and love sprang from “*the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the*

OUTLINE

- ▶ YOU LEARNED (1:7a)
- ▶ EPHAPHRAS (1:7b)
- ▶ A DEAR FELLOW SERVANT (1:7c)
- ▶ A FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST (1:7d)
- ▶ HE DECLARED TO US (1:8a)
- ▶ YOUR LOVE IN THE SPIRIT (1:8b)

word of the truth of the gospel" (1:5).

After all is said and done, the ultimate spiritual experiences are faith, love, and hope. Without these, no other experience is of any lasting value. You can cross the Red Sea, but fail to enter the promised land because of a lack of faith. You can profess that you know God, but if you do not love the brethren, you remain in darkness, and do not know God. You can be part of a seemingly thriving church, but if you do not have hope, you will not be able to be saved.

2. The Fellowship of Believers

The love of the brethren is both personal and expressive. It results in a productive fellowship. It is seen in the closeness of Paul and Timothy (1:1). It is confirmed in the forwardness of Paul to bless the Colossian brethren (1:2). The thanksgiving of Paul was an expression of that fellowship (1:3). The Colossians love for all of the saints was such an expression as well.

We live in a time of lifeless religion. Much of "church life" centers in the flesh rather than the Spirit. However, true fellowship is the result of walking in the light, not in fleshly attraction. As it is written, *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (1 John 1:7). This is an indispensable and evidentiary spiritual experience.

3. Divine Provision

Life in Christ Jesus does not consist of lifeless teachings and vain philosophizing. Ours is not a religion of speculation and theorizing. In Christ there is the conscious and satisfying experience of Divine provision. This includes the Gospel itself, which identifies

the hope that is laid up for us in heaven (1:5). Men like Paul, Timothy, and Epaphras are included in these provisions (1:1,7), as well as grace and peace (1:2), and faith and love (1 Tim 1:14).

4. Spiritual Fruit

The life of God is productive, bearing fruit. In Christ, this is a common experience, not an unusual one – even though it is not common in institutionalism. Paul reminded the Colossians that the Gospel was bringing "forth fruit" in them, as it was doing "in all the world" (1:6). There is no such thing as a disciple that does not bear fruit. Fruit is one of the characteristics through which disciples are identified. Jesus said, *"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples"* (John 15:8). Speaking as a man, the lowest percentage of fruit is "thirty-fold" (Matt 13:8).

5. Godly Expectation

Spiritual life is the mother of expectancy – of "good hope." Jeremiah spoke of the marvelous outcome of Divine working as "an expected end" (Jer 29:11). For those in Christ, this is "the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel" (1:5).

As you can see, there is a spirit that pervades the whole of the heavenly kingdom. This spirit, or tone, is found in individual believers themselves and their communication with one another. It is acknowledged in the **emphasis** of their lives, their words, and their deeds. **At no point do believers conduct themselves apart from the Lord Jesus, whether Paul, Timothy, Epaphras, or the Colossian brethren.** I acknowledge this is not common in the American churches. However, that is because the churches are substandard.

NOT TO OURSELVES

No individual believer or

congregation of believers live unto themselves. As is it written, *"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself"* (Rom 14:7), or *"For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone"* ^{NIV} (Rom 14:7). The sense of the text is captured very well in the Basic Bible English Version: *"For every man's life and every man's death has a relation to others as well as to himself."* The New Living Translation also presents an interesting perspective: *"For we are not our own masters when we live or when we die."*

Two perspectives are included in this text. **First**, we are answerable to the Lord Jesus Christ for both our living and our dying. It is our business to live well and die well – to the honor and glory of Christ. **Second**, we are on display in both living and dying. Men behold us, and can either *"glorify our Father in heaven"* for what they behold (Matt 5:16), or *"blaspheme that worthy Name"* by which we are called (James 2:7). Those in Christ are particularly said to be *"a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men"* (1 Cor 4:9). There are reactions in the heavenly realms to what is seen among men. Angels, for example, are noted for their joy *"over one sinner that repenteth"* (Lk 15:10). An angel also *"smote"* Herod to death when *"he gave not God the glory"* (Acts 12:23). No man lives or dies to himself!

In the text before us, the lives of the Colossian saints had been reported to, and duly noted by, Paul. The faithful report had an impact upon his spirit, and he was moved to give thanks for those in whom Divine workings were evident.

His introductory words are not expressions of mere human politeness. They are not a literary formality, or courteous dialog. His words are insightful communication, designed to give God glory and promote spiritual life. They are an expression of spiritual perception.

AT NO POINT DO BELIEVERS CONDUCT THEMSELVES APART FROM THE LORD JESUS, WHETHER PAUL, TIMOTHY, EPAPHRAS, OR THE COLOSSIAN BRETHERN.

YOU LEARNED

“^{7a} *As ye also learned . . .*”

The subject under consideration is **the message** that had produced notable spiritual qualities in the Colossian brethren: “*the word of the truth of the Gospel*” (1:4). It is “*the word of the truth of the Gospel*,” because that is the only means of becoming aware of the fact, nature, and intent of the Gospel. **There**

principalities and powers” (Col 2:15).

- ✚ Jesus was declared to be “*the Son of God with power... by the resurrection from the dead*” (Rom 1:4).
- ✚ Jesus has been exalted “*to give repentance to Israel and the remission of sins*” (Acts 5:31).

curse of the Law,” being “*made a curse for us*” (Gal 13:13).

- ✚ We have been “*made accepted in the Beloved*” (Eph 1:6).
- ✚ We have been “*made nigh*” to God “*by the blood of Christ*” (Eph 2:13).
- ✚ Christ has “*broken down the middle wall of partition*” between Jew and the Gentile (Eph 2:14).
- ✚ Jesus has “*abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances*” (Eph 2:14).
- ✚ When Christ offered Himself to God, it was a “*sweet smelling savor*” to Him (Eph 5:2).

THERE IS NOT ONE PARTICLE OF TANGIBLE EVIDENCE THAT CAN LEAD TO THE CONCLUSIONS PROCLAIMED IN THE GOSPEL. THERE IS NO FORM OF REASONING, LOGIC, OR PHILOSOPHY, THAT CAN CAUSE A PERSON TO CONCLUDE THE REALITIES AFFIRMED IN THE GOSPEL.

is not one particle of tangible evidence that can lead to the conclusions proclaimed in the Gospel. There is no form of reasoning, logic, or philosophy, that can cause a person to conclude the realities affirmed in the Gospel. From the beginning to the ending, these things are “*learned*” from a message – an inspired message revealed from heaven.

Even though I have mentioned some of these things before, it is needful to again rehearse a few of the accomplishments that are made known through “*the truth of the Gospel.*” These are pillars in sound thought.

- ✚ Jesus “*put away sin*” (Heb 9:26).
- ✚ We “*were reconciled to God by the death of His Son*” (Rom 5:10).
- ✚ Jesus “*made peace*” through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- ✚ God “*saw the travail*” of Christ’s soul, and was “*satisfied*” (Isa 53:11).
- ✚ Through death, Jesus “*destroyed*” the devil (Heb 2:14).
- ✚ In the cross, Jesus “*spoiled*

- ✚ The church has been purchased with Christ’s blood (Acts 20:28).
- ✚ We are “*justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*” (Rom 3:24).
- ✚ Jesus was “*raised for our justification*” (Rom 4:25).
- ✚ God “*condemned sin*” in the flesh of Christ (Rom 8:3).
- ✚ Christ is “*at the right hand of God,*” and “*also maketh intercession for us*” (Rom 8:34).
- ✚ Christ is Lord of the living and the dead (Rom 14:9).
- ✚ We have been “*bought with a price*” (1 Cor 6:20).
- ✚ God made Jesus “*to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him*” (2 Cor 5:21).
- ✚ Jesus “*gave Himself for our sins*” to “*deliver us from this present evil world*” (Gal 1:4).
- ✚ Christ has “*redeemed us from the*

- ✚ Jesus has “*delivered us from the wrath to come*” (1 Thess 1:10).
- ✚ Jesus died for us, that whether we live or die, “*we should live together with Him*” (1 Thess 5:10).
- ✚ Christ “*gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity*” (Tit 2:14a).
- ✚ Christ “*gave Himself*” to “*purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (Tit 2:14b).
- ✚ Jesus is presently upholding all things by the word of His power (Heb 1:3).
- ✚ Jesus “*tasted death for every man*” (Heb 2:9).
- ✚ Jesus is “*able to succor them that are tempted*” (Heb 2:18).
- ✚ Jesus ever lives “*to make intercession for us*” (Heb 7:25).
- ✚ Christ has “*obtained eternal redemption for us*” (Heb 9:12).
- ✚ The blood of Christ can “*purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God*” (Heb 9:14).

- ✚ We have been called to “*receive the promise of eternal inheritance*” (Heb 9:15).
- ✚ “*By one offering,*” Jesus has “*perfected forever them that are sanctified*” (Heb 10:14).
- ✚ In Christ we “*have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus*” (Heb 10:19).
- ✚ Through His flesh, Christ has “*consecrated*” a “*new and a living way*” for us (Heb 10:20).
- ✚ Jesus is “*the Mediator of the New Covenant*” (Heb 12:24).
- ✚ The “*precious blood of Christ*” has redeemed us from the “*vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers*” (1 Pet 1:18).
- ✚ Jesus “*bore our sins in His body on the tree*” (1 Pet 2:24).
- ✚ Jesus “*is the propitiation for our sins,*” and for “*the whole world*” as well (1 John 2:2).
- ✚ Jesus has “*washed us from our sins,*” and made us “*kings and priests unto God*” (Rev 1:5-6; 5:10).

SOME OBSERVATIONS

There are forty-two Gospel realities – and they are only a sampling. Which one of them (to say nothing of all of them) would any mortal ever have known if it was not declared? **Where can such glorious realities be learned apart from the Gospel of Christ?** What astute thinker or logician has ever concluded them?

Allow me to press this point, for it is a foundational one. Can a single one of these verities be drawn from the well of human wisdom – in any of its varied forms? Will science testify to these things? If we linger at the pool of psychiatry, will we be able to learn of them? What verb tense or etymological mood can yield such conclusions? Can the financial world shed any light on them? How about human history? Dip into the shallow well of motivation and organization and see if you can cause a single one of these declarations to be more clear!

What man or woman is there who has learned these things independently of the “*glorious Gospel of the blessed God*” (1 Tim 1:11? If the Gospel had not been preached “*with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven*” (1 Pet 1:12), would such lofty truths ever have found their way into any creed, doctrinal statement, or writings of men?

You may even consider the three foundations of the Gospel: the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:3-4). If they had not been declared, how would you have known of them? Could you have studied the writings of Moses and surmised them? Could you have derived such facts from the Psalms,

- ✚ “*It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me*” (John 6:45).
- ✚ “*But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*” (Mat 9:13)
- ✚ “*Take my yoke upon you, and learn of [from] Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls*” (Mat 11:29).
- ✚ “*Who being past feeling have given*

IF THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL DID NOT SHED ITS RAYS UPON MOSES, THE PROPHETS, AND THE PSALMS, WE WOULD HAVE REMAINED AS ABYSMALLY IGNORANT OF FACTS AND IMPLICATIONS CONCERNING THE MESSIAH AS THE GENERATIONS BEFORE US!

or Proverbs, or the writings of the Prophets? **If the light of the Gospel did not shed its rays upon Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms, we would have remained as abysmally ignorant of facts and implications concerning the Messiah as the generations before us!** That is involved in the Spirit’s word, “*Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints*” (Col 1:26). And how is it “*made manifest?*” It is by declaration – by the heralding of a message!

THE COLOSSIANS LEARNED

To “*learn*” is to come to an understanding of something. It is not like “*learning*” mathematical tables, or a mere routine. Such things can be learned by rote, with no real comprehension of what is involved in them.

The way “*learn*” is used in the Scriptures confirms it is not speaking of an academic learning.

- themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus*” (Eph 4:19-21).
- ✚ “*Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content*” (Phil 4:11).
- ✚ “*And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful*” (Titus 3:14)
- ✚ “*Though he were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which he suffered*” (Heb 5:8).

In particular, these brethren had learned “*of the hope*” that was “*laid up in heaven*” for them. That is what motivated them to have faith in Christ and a love for all the saints (1:4). They had understood the Gospel, and therefore it bore fruit in

them.

The Gospel Must Be Understood

The Gospel bears no fruit where it is not understood. Jesus confirmed this in His explanation of the parable of the sower who cast his seed on various soils. One area that received that

of the religious conditions that characterize our time. The “*word of the kingdom*” is not the law of Moses. It is not the Ten Commandments. It is not the book of Proverbs, or the various Divine statements concerning human behavior and interpersonal relationships. It is not the word concerning the church, its

not long endure such a circumstance. **He will not stop Satan from snatching the powerful word of the Gospel out of disinterested and casual hearts – for they are the only ones who do not understand.**

It ought to be noted that the Word must first be proclaimed before such a judgment will be put upon way-side-hearers – whose name is “Legion.” I fear this marvelous Word has been supplanted by a sort of social Gospel that sways too and fro to the rhythm and cadence of the world. These days people are not hearing much about the Lord Jesus, and the “*wonderful works of God.*” The result is an unparalleled level of ignorance concerning what the Lord has done. In many circles, the death of Christ is the sole fact that is known, with little or no understanding of its implications.

Such knowledge cannot produce the fruit found in the Colossians, which is the staple fruit of the kingdom (Gal 5:22-23). **Shallow understanding cannot develop spiritually productive lives.**

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

All of this may appear to be a meaningless excursion. Our religious environment, however, demands that these things be affirmed, for they are not generally known. It was a message that brought such favorable results among the Colossians. They heard a word that had power. Therefore, when they embraced it, powerful results were found in their lives.

When what is preached is embraced, yet change is not apparent, a kingdom abnormality has occurred. **Languid lives are the unavoidable result of powerless preaching.** I will wax bold and suggest that the level of division, disinterest, and lack of stability that are found in the average church may very well be the result of a deficient spiritual diet.

When men spend an **inordinate** amount of time solving problems, they are actually encroaching on Divine prerogatives. **When problems tend to increase, and resolutions are more to be desired than the blessings of God, unbelief is lurking in the corners of life.** That is simply not what the Gospel produces.

IN THIS DAY OF RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION, SHOULD AN IGNORANCE OF THE GOSPEL BE TOLERATED WITHIN THE CHURCH?

seed is described as “*the way side,*” or “*the path*”^{NIV} “*beside the road.*”^{NASB} It is said of that seed, “*it was trodden down,*” or “*trampled down.*”^{NKJV} Men walked upon it as though it was nothing. Consequently “*the fowls of the air devoured it*” (Lk 8:5). Jesus did not tell the multitudes the meaning of this parable. So far as they were concerned, it was an agricultural lesson.

The disciples of Jesus were not content to remain in the dark. They asked, “*What might this parable be?*” Confirming that understanding is not the result of mere human reasoning, Jesus responded, “*Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God*” (Luke 8:10). Others, however, only received the parable, and thus could not see and could not understand. He then made the meaning known to them, and they “*learned*” it.

The seed, Jesus affirmed, “*is the word of God.*” This is essentially the Gospel, for Jesus announced the Spirit was upon Him to “*preach the Gospel*” (Lk 4:18). The “*word of the kingdom*” is the message of the “*day of salvation.*” It is the means through which Divine purposes are realized in the hearts and lives of people. Only the Gospel is “*the power of God unto salvation*” – not salvation initially, but salvation in its entirety (Rom 1:16). **As soon as the Gospel ceases to be proclaimed and expounded, the power of God ceases to work “unto salvation.”**

This circumstance explains many

pattern, and its activities. There are certainly Divine utterances on all of these matters, and they are to be believed and embraced without hesitation. But they are not the “*word of the kingdom.*” They are not the essential message. They contain implications of the Gospel, but they are not the Gospel itself. Radical changes in human behavior do not come from sociological tips, but from the belief of, and obedience to, the Gospel of Christ.

The “*way side*” depicted a certain class of people – those who were exposed to the word of the kingdom, the Gospel. Matthew adds they were people who heard “*the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not*” (Matt 13:19). They walked about on the seed, totally oblivious of its nature and power. However, that was not the end of the matter. Jesus said, “*then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved*” (Luke 8:12). Matthew said, “*then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart*” (Mat 13:19). Mark says, “*but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts*” (Mark 4:15). **They did not learn, for learning is understanding!**

Should A Lack of Understanding Be Tolerated?

In this day of religious accommodation, should an ignorance of the Gospel be tolerated within the church? Whatever your answer, this is a condition that **does** exist, and in most alarming measures. However, God will

It was not so among the Colossians. Their faith in Jesus and love toward all saints grew out of their

embrace of “*the word of the truth of the Gospel.*” Once known, the truth made them free (John 8:32). It will do no less in

day! The unquestionable challenge of our time is the dearth of truth, and a love for it, in the land.

EPAPHRAS

“^{7b} . . . of *Epaphras* . . .” The name “*Epaphras*” means “lovely.” ^{STRONG’S} It was a most suitable name for this dear saint, for he had a beautiful spirit and demeanor. Some consider this name to be a contraction of Epaphroditus, and therefore the person of reference to be the same man mentioned in Philippians 2:25 and 4:18. However, there is no etymological or doctrinal evidence that this is the case. I will consider this to be a unique person. Epaphroditus was associated with the church at Philippi (Phil 4:18), and Epaphras with the church at Colossae (Col 4:12). That is evidence enough that they are not the same person.

Epaphras is also mentioned in the book of Philemon, where he is called Paul’s “*fellow prisoner*” (Phile 1:23). We know from Colossians and Philemon of others who were associated with the church at Colossae. Onesimus was one of the Colossians (4:9), and a former slave of Philemon (Phil 1:10-12). Archippus was one of the Colossian brethren, and is also mentioned in Philemon (Col 4:17; Phile 1:2). Philemon himself was apparently among the Colossians. In fact, there is strong evidence that these brethren met in Philemon’s own house (Phile 1:2). The Colossians were no doubt the saints that were often “*refreshed*” by Philemon (Phile 1:7). All of this strongly suggests that the Colossians were not a “large” group of brethren, but were a smaller number of saints who gathered regularly in the house of Philemon – a “*house*” church (Phile 1:2).

Epaphras was the one through whom the Colossians had heard the truth of the Gospel: “*the word of truth, the Gospel . . . and knew the grace of God in truth which has come to you . . . just as you learned it from Epaphras*” ^{NASB} (1:5-7). This suggests Epaphras founded the church at Colossae – although he appears to have been a relatively unknown child of the King. Nevertheless, God does not look upon appearance, but on the heart.

Because Onesimus was sent to both the Colossians and Philemon (Col 4:9; Phile 1:10), we conclude that the letters addressed to them were written about the same time. From that supposition we may draw at least two conclusions.

- ✦ Onesimus had been in prison with Paul, and was converted through

of God” (4:12).

- ✦ He had a great zeal for the Colossians, and those who were in Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:13).

- ✦ He was imprisoned for Christ (Phile 1:23).

HIS MANNER OF COMMUNICATION
Consider the manner of Epaphras’

THERE IS NO RECORD OF HIM SPEAKING WITH PAUL ABOUT THE DEPLORABLE CONDITIONS IN THE PRISON. NOR, INDEED, DID HE MAJOR ON THE INJUSTICE THEY HAD EXPERIENCED WHEN IMPRISONED. THE POLITICAL CLIMATE WAS NOT THE THEME OF HIS CONVERSATION, NOR WERE THE MORAL CONDITIONS OR SOCIAL CUSTOMS THAT EXISTED AT THAT TIME.

Paul at that time (Phile 1:10).

- ✦ Epaphras suffered “*for righteousness sake,*” being in prison with Paul at the time of the writing of both letters (Col 4:12; Phile 1:23).

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT EPAPHRAS

The facts we know concerning Epaphras are few, but powerful. They reveal that he was a man of faith.

- ✦ He served with Paul (1:7a).
- ✦ He was a minister of Christ to the Colossians (1:7b).
- ✦ He preached the Gospel in such a way as to accentuate the grace of God and the hope of believers (1:5-7).
- ✦ He gave a faithful report of the condition of brethren (1:4,8).
- ✦ He labored fervently in prayer for the Colossians, that they might stand “*perfect and complete in all the will*

communication – what he talked about. When imprisoned with Paul, he related the good spiritual status of the Colossian brethren – their “*faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love*” they had “*toward all saints*” (1:4). Our text declares he also reported the “*love in the Spirit*” that was prevalent among the Colossians. While in prison, he prayed for the spiritual stability of his brethren, and those in Laodicea and Hierapolis (4:12-13).

There is no record of him speaking with Paul about the deplorable conditions in the prison. Nor, indeed, did he major on the injustice they had experienced when imprisoned. The political climate was not the theme of his conversation, nor were the moral conditions or social customs that existed at that time.

While I do not doubt that other matters filtered into conversations between Paul and Philemon, the things of the Kingdom dominated their conversation. The fact that Paul begat Onesimus when he was in bonds also

confirms this to be the case.

FAITH EFFECTS SPEECH

Faith does effect what people talk about. This is confirmed in the conversations reported between Paul and Epaphras. Those whose conversation rarely centers in things pertaining to life and godliness are revealing very much about themselves – whether they want to or not. When God gives people “one heart and one way,” as He promised (Jer 32:39), it will erupt in a “pure language,” as He also promised (Zech 3:9).

Just as the Prophets foretold the manner of the Messiah, and the glory of His salvation, so they also revealed the manner of those who would embrace that Messiah and His salvation. One of the prominent things among the saved would be this: “They shall speak of the glory of Thy kingdom, and talk of Thy power” (Psa 145:11).

The above prophecy is as precise as those concerning the Messiah Himself. What would we think of a Savior who did

within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:26-27).

✦ *“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert” (Isa 35:5-6).*

✦ *“Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation. And in that day shall ye say, Praise the LORD, call upon His name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted” (Isa 12:3-4).*

✦ *“One generation shall praise Thy works to another, and shall declare Thy mighty acts. I will speak of the glorious honor of Thy majesty, and of Thy wondrous works. And men shall speak of the might of Thy terrible*

the Lord is not in such a place at all. **How can He reside in an environment that contradicts what He Himself said would result from His salvation?**

It may appear as though this has nothing whatsoever to do with our text. However, there is a spirit in this text – the very life of God is revealed in it. **The circumstances that surround this Epistle evince the very nature of spiritual life.** If we are to realize any profit from what is said, we must be able to see this.

COMPARED WITH OUR DAY

None of the things for which Epaphras was commended rank high in the institutional church! They would be totally unacceptable in the average ministerial resume, and viewed as though they were irrelevant. Contemporary Christianity does not provide such assessments, or place a high value upon them. We are living in a time when a report of “large numbers” tend to place the stamp of approval on church leaders. I cannot conceive of Epaphras being asked to speak at a national Christian convention, or asked to write in the brotherhood oracle.

Modern “churchdom” has dignified mediocre preachers, and religious leaders with only a modicum of spiritual understanding. Spiritual midgets have been vaunted to places of prominence and fame within the Christian entertainment industry (if, indeed, there is such a thing). Those with a minuscule perception of the “*mysteries of God*” (1 Cor 4:1) are sanctioned and applauded because of the numbers who follow and approve of them.

These are “*perilous times*,” when the church allows identity with Christ without the fruit of the Spirit, or any evidence of spiritual life. The modern church caters to the flesh, courts the world, and leaves the people without an acute awareness of the Lord Himself, His works, and His purpose. The whole condition has lulled many souls to sleep.

FLAWED PREACHING PRODUCES FLAWED DISCIPLES

Just as surely as “*sound doctrine*” produced good fruit among the Colossians,

JUST AS THE PROPHETS FORETOLD THE MANNER OF THE MESSIAH, AND THE GLORY OF HIS SALVATION, SO THEY ALSO REVEALED THE MANNER OF THOSE WHO WOULD EMBRACE THAT MESSIAH AND HIS SALVATION.

not fulfill the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah? What would be our response to a Savior who was not born in Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), or whose mother was not a virgin (Isa 7:14)? Yet, throughout Christendom people are accepted as “Christians” who bear no resemblance to the kind of people foretold by the Prophets.

✦ *“They shall all know Me, from the least to the greatest” (Jer 31:34).*

✦ *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit*

acts: and I will declare Thy greatness. They shall abundantly utter the memory of Thy great goodness, and shall sing of Thy righteousness” (Psa 145:5-7).

This is the kind of dialog that was going on between Paul and Epaphras. They were speaking of the Lord’s doing, praising Him for His works, and speaking of His glory and majesty. They were declaring His doings and making mention of His name.

Where such things do not take place, in the very best view, a serious deficiency exists. It may very well be that

flawed preaching produces flawed disciples. This is a circumstance that cannot be avoided. **God will not empower messages that did not come from Him!** A social Gospel cannot be *“the power of God unto salvation.”* That is an absolute impossibility.

This circumstance is one of the reasons Paul admonished young preachers, *“Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus”* (2 Tim 1:13). *“But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine”* (Titus 2:1).

The strength with which Paul addresses this subject is to be duly noted. *“If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;*

ONLY THE TRUTH LIBERATES THE SOUL. ONLY THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS “THE POWER OF GOD UNTO SALVATION.” ONLY WHEN THE GRACE OF GOD IS KNOWN “IN TRUTH” WILL IT PRODUCE THE SPIRITUAL FRUITAGE FOUND IN THE BRETHREN AT COLOSSAE.

*he is proud, knowing nothing, but dotting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: **from such withdraw thyself**”* (1 Tim 6:3-5).

Only the truth liberates the soul (John 8:32). **Only** the Gospel of Christ is *“the power of God unto salvation”* (Rom 1:16). **Only** when the grace of God is

known *“in truth”* will it produce the spiritual fruitage found in the brethren at Colossae. This is fruit that cannot be emulated.

Our senses must be exercised to recognize these things (Heb 5:14), and to respond to them immediately and appropriately. The salvation of God is not to be taken lightly, nor are the fruits of its presence to be ignored. When God works, it is our business to recognize it.

A DEAR FELLOW SERVANT

“^{7c} . . . our dear fellowservant . . .” Other versions read, *“our beloved fellow bond-servant,”*^{NASB} *“our well-loved helper,”*^{BBE} *“our beloved fellow-bondman,”*^{DARBY} *“our beloved fellow slave,”*^{NAB} and *“our very dear fellow-worker.”*^{NJB}

“OUR”

“OUR dear fellowservant.” By saying *“our,”* Paul confirms he is relating the personal evaluation of himself and all who truly know Epaphras. The qualities that he will mention are not mere professional credentials. They have not been lifted from a resume, or a brotherhood journal. This perception has been forged in the crucible of Kingdom experience, as men were involved in the work of the Lord. He has **“heard”** of the faith and love of the Colossians, but he has **seen** the faith and love of Epaphras. That is why Paul took his report concerning the Colossians to be the truth. **He did not seek the verification of**

Epaphras’ testimony, but proceeded to address the Colossians, knowing it was the truth.

DEAR

*“Our **DEAR** fellowservant.”* The word *“dear”* is an especially affectionate one, meaning “well-beloved, esteemed, favorite, and worthy of love.”^{STRONG’S} It also carries the idea of “dearest,”^{BARCLAY-NEWMAN} This describes a person who is particularly close and precious.

While those who are born of God love all of the brethren, they do not love them in the same measure.

I understand that some in their simplicity object to such a statement, affirming that this reveals a respect of persons. However, this is a foolish postulate, for it would make God a respecter of persons. God does not love all of His children in the same measure or with the same intensiveness. Ponder some of the distinguishing things that are said of

those who were loved by God and Christ.

✚ **DAVID.** *“And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after **Mine own heart**, which shall fulfil all My will”* (Acts 13:22).

✚ **ABRAHAM.** *“And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called **the Friend of God**”* (James 2:23).

✚ **DANIEL.** *“And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding. At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; **for thou art greatly beloved**: therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision”* (Dan 9:22-23).

✚ **JOHN THE APOSTLE.** *“Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, **whom Jesus loved**”* (John 13:23).

WHILE THOSE WHO ARE BORN OF GOD LOVE ALL OF THE BRETHREN, THEY DO NOT LOVE THEM IN THE SAME MEASURE.

✦ **ASPIRE TO BE DEAR TO GOD.** *“Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children”* (Eph 5:1).

Those who walk closest to the Lord get the most from Him. Those who choose to linger in the peripheral areas will not receive an abundance from the Lord. That is because **the further you are from God, the closer you are to the world.** The less aware you are of the world to come, the more you are aware of *“this present evil world”* (Gal 1:4).

There were people who were NOT dear to Paul – those of whom he did not speak favorably. These were people connected with the work of the Lord. For example:

✦ **DEMAS.** *“For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world”* (2 Tim 4:10).

✦ **HYMENAEUS AND PHILETUS.** *“And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some”* (2 Tim 2:17-18).

✦ **PHYGELLUS AND HERMOGENES.** *“This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes”* (2 Tim 1:15).

✦ **HYENAEUS AND ALEXANDER.** *“Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme”* (1 Tim 1:19-20).

✦ **ALEXANDER.** *“Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works: of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words”* (2 Tim 4:15).

✦ **THE GALATIANS.** *“I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain”* (Gal 4:11).

Those who walk at a distance from the Lord should not expect those who walk in the light to lavish affection upon them. God does not do such things, and does not ask His children

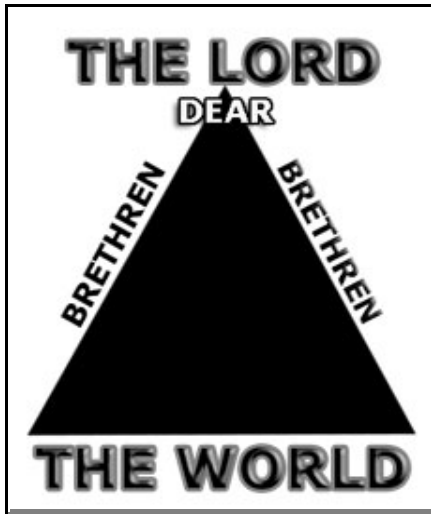
moral and spiritual pits, for *“If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world”* (John 11:9). These are people who are walking *“in the Spirit,”* and therefore do

THOSE WHO WALK AT A DISTANCE FROM THE LORD SHOULD NOT EXPECT THOSE WHO WALK IN THE LIGHT TO LAVISH AFFECTION UPON THEM. GOD DOES NOT DO SUCH THINGS, AND DOES NOT ASK HIS CHILDREN TO DO SO.

to do so.

The Reason for this Condition

There is a reason for the differing levels of brother love. These are not levels that reflect fleshly discrimination, for those who are living by faith *“know no man after the flesh”* (2 Cor 5:16). This is not an institutional love, where denominational camaraderie prevails.



As we draw closer to the Lord, we also become closer to those who themselves are especially near to the Lord. By *“near,”* I mean they are more aware of the Lord – more conscious of His presence and power. Such individuals are walking *“in the light as He is in the light”* (1 John 1:7). They are not stumbling about in life, falling into all manner of

“not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). They *“live by faith,”* and thus confess they are strangers and pilgrims in this world (Heb 10:38; 11:13). These are the people who are looking *“for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God”* (Heb 11:10).

Such brethren are obviously *“laborers together with God”* (1 Cor 3:9), and give forth evidence that they are enjoying the fellowship of God’s Son, into which they have been called (1 Cor 1:9). These people have their hand on the plow, and are not looking back (Luke 9:62). Like true disciples, they have *“forsaken all”* to follow Jesus (Luke 14:33). Their *“affection”* is set *“on things above, and not on things on the earth”* (Col 3:2). They are mortifying their members *“that are upon the earth”* (Col 3:5), and *“have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts”* (Gal 5:24).

What This Does NOT Mean

These are the kind of people that are *“dear,” “dearly beloved,” “well-loved,”* and *“precious.” Your own experience will testify to you of the fewness of such people among professed believers.* This by no means justifies a condemning attitude, or setting ourselves up to be the judges of all who wear the name of Jesus. Jesus did not do this, the Apostles did not do it, and neither are we to appoint ourselves as the official evaluators of the profession of others.

What It Does Mean

This does mean that the closest

and most endearing brethren are those who are the most serious about, and devoted to, our Lord. **If people choose to walk at a distance from the Lord, they will also experience a distance from His people.** If they walk in the light as He is in the light, they will enjoy a close and productive fellowship with others who are walking in the light (1 John 1:7).

Those who have “left all” to follow Jesus invariably experience a certain loneliness among men – even religious men. **Faith does distance us from even the smallest amount of unbelief.** However, the sharpening countenance of a faithful brother, and a comforting word from a fellow-laborer compensates for the rejection and

special relationship to God and to Christ.

I urge you to make it your aim to be a blessing to the saints of God – to be a source of encouragement to them. This will invariably be the result of walking close to the Lord, ridding yourself of all distracting and debilitating influences.

FELLOWSERVANT

“Our dear **FELLOWSERVANT.**”

A **fellow**servant is who is sharing in a common work – working side by side with others. A **fellow**servant is one devoted to the accomplishment of someone else’s agenda – in this case, the Lord’s agenda, or purpose.

It does not appear that Paul knew Epaphras for a lengthy time, but that

“servant” implies carrying out the will of a master, to which the servant is subject. The word “fellow” denotes partnership, or fellowship, that is of a closer nature.

In this text, a “*fellow servant,*” therefore, is **one who is active in doing the will of the Lord, working together with God.** It is also one who is closely aligned with other servants of the one Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. A “*dear fellow*servant” is one who excels in these qualities, and is faithful in doing so.

AN OBSERVATION

Particularly in the Western world, I am impressed with how very few of this kind of laborers are prominent. With all of the religious activity going on, very little is focused on the revealed Divine agenda. We have specialists in youth, music, worship, and motivation. There are ministers of education, interpersonal relationships, seniors, singles, and counseling.

I do not deny that some speck of goodness may be found in many of these things, but it is certainly marginal. It is much like a jewel in a swine’s snout (Prov 11:22). The reason is that they are largely driven by humanly-conceived agendas. They do not blend well with the intercession of Jesus, the administration of the Holy Spirit, or the “*whole counsel of God.*” Many of them do not require Divine empowerment, spiritual understanding, or fellowship with Jesus Christ. Further, when the “*eternal purpose*” of God is chosen as the heart of thought, such things lose their preeminence. That is precisely why those who major on such things speak rarely of Divine objectives and provisions.

Of course, these things are not unique to the twentieth century. There have always been those who preferred their own agenda to that of the Lord.

The point to be seen in this text is that Epaphras excelled in the area, where God expects men to excel. He was a strong encouragement to those who were laboring for, and pleasing, the Lord. It is no wonder that Paul spoke so well of him. He had become proficient in an arena that absolutely required the presence and blessing of the Lord.

IF PEOPLE CHOOSE TO WALK AT A DISTANCE FROM THE LORD, THEY WILL ALSO EXPERIENCE A DISTANCE FROM HIS PEOPLE. IF THEY WALK IN THE LIGHT AS HE IS IN THE LIGHT, THEY WILL ENJOY A CLOSE AND PRODUCTIVE FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHERS WHO ARE WALKING IN THE LIGHT.

coolness of all other religious peers. One Epaphras makes up for a multitude of Demas’, Hymanaeus’, Philetus’, Hermogenes, Pylollugus’, and the likes!

A mere glance from a fellow pilgrim and stranger brings more refreshment to the child of God than a lengthy theological discourse by someone who is half-hearted. That is because such a person is “*dear.*” The heart of these people has been knit to our own, and we are more experientially “*members one of another*” (Eph 4:25).

Thus Paul speaks of Epaphras as one who has been knit to his heart. He is special because of his special ministry, and his special ministry is owing to his

their acquaintance was forged while Paul was in prison. Yet, it became apparent to Paul that they were both laboring for the same Lord and the same cause.

The term “*fellow*servant” reveals the level at which “*fellowship*” takes place. It is not at the point of profession, but in the crucible of involvement. **I do not know that spiritual fellowship can exist independently of godly activity.**

This word is not used frequently in Scripture. It comes from the Greek word *συνδούλου* “a fellowservant, one who serves the same master with another.” ^{THAYER} The word

A FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST

“^{7d} . . . **who is for you a faithful minister of Christ . . .**” Other versions read, “*who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf*,”^{ASV} “*who is a true servant of Christ for us*,”^{BBE} “*who is a faithful minister of Christ for you*,”^{DARBY} “*he is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf*,”^{ESV} “*a trustworthy deputy for us as Christ’s servant*,”^{NJB} “*He is Christ’s faithful servant, and he is helping us in your place*,”^{NLT} and “*who is for you a faithful ministrant of the Christ*.”^{YLT}

FOR YOU

“ . . . *who is for you . . .* ” On the surface, the different versions appear somewhat confusing. Some represent Epaphras as a faithful minister for the Colossians: “*for you*,” “*on your behalf*” and “*in your place*.” Others represent him as being a faithful minister for Paul and those with him: “*on our behalf*,” and “*for us*.” Thus he is seen as either a minister of Paul to the Colossians, or as a minister of the Colossians to Paul. Either he was helping the Colossians, or he was helping Paul. For whatever it is worth the textual evidence is divided, with older Greek copies adopting the “*on our*” view, while the ancient versions adopted the “*your behalf*” view. The critical editors of the text are also divided on the meaning, as well as the commentators. **From this, it is clear that the meaning cannot be derived from the language itself.** We must look at the context of the passage, and the intent of the book to obtain a satisfactory understanding of the text.

Consideration #1

Paul is writing in response to the report given to him by Epaphras. It was a good report, declaring a faith and love than sprang from the hope generated by the Gospel they had heard (1:4-5). That Gospel had been delivered to them by Epaphras (1:7). Therefore, the ministry of this brother had been “*for*,” of to, them, and they had realized the ultimate benefit from it.

Consideration #2

It is possible that Epaphras had ministered to Paul himself in the behalf of the Colossian brethren. This would be the kind of ministry Epaphroditus had to Paul on the behalf of the Philippians (Phil

2:25; 4:18). There is no evidence of such a ministry in Scripture. Paul’s does not speak of Epaphras ministering to him as he did of Epaphroditus.

Consideration #3

It is possible that Epaphras was Paul’s own convert and disciple, and that he had ministered to the Colossians in the behalf of Paul. Thus, the Gospel he preached to the Colossians would have been learned from Paul himself. There is also no evidence of this in Scripture. Paul makes no reference to Epaphras being his convert, or that he had sent him initially to Colossae to preach the Gospel.

Conclusion

In view of the above considerations, I take it that **Paul is commending Epaphras for the unvarnished Gospel that he had**

✚ The worshiping of angels (2:18b).

It was therefore imperative that the Colossians be assured of the validity of the Gospel that had produced spiritual fruit within them. The accent of Paul’s commendation is not what Epaphras had ministered to himself, but that he had faithfully ministered to the Colossians. Any ministrations to Paul is secondary to that. The remainder of this Epistle will confirm this is the thrust of the comment.

I feel compelled to note that the proper emphasis of a minister is noted in this text. It is not an institutional thrust – building an organization, stuffing a structure with people, and obtaining a name in the community and brotherhood. A valid ministry has a spiritual focus that produces spiritual fruit.

IT IS NOT AN INSTITUTIONAL THRUST – BUILDING AN ORGANIZATION, STUFFING A STRUCTURE WITH PEOPLE, AND OBTAINING A NAME IN THE COMMUNITY AND BROTHERHOOD. A VALID MINISTRY HAS A SPIRITUAL FOCUS THAT PRODUCES SPIRITUAL FRUIT.

faithfully ministered among the Colossians.

In the second chapter, Paul will address some doctrinal encroachments that were taking place in Colossae. The people were being challenged concerning the following dangers. He will rely on the truth of the Gospel to address these, and provoke a resistance of the wicked one.

- ✚ Philosophy and vain deceit (2:8a).
- ✚ The tradition of men (2:8b).
- ✚ The rudiments of the world (2:8c).
- ✚ Meats and drinks (2:16a).
- ✚ Holy days, new moons, and Sabbaths (2:16b).
- ✚ Voluntary humility (2:18a).

FAITHFUL MINISTER

A “*faithful*” minister is one who is trustworthy and true in his stewardship of the truth. This is the preeminent requirement of a steward. As it is written, “*Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful*” (1 Cor 4:2).

The word “*faithful*” means trustworthy, reliable, believing, true, unflinching, and sure.

All the Counsel of God

This is a person who delivers the full counsel of God. It is the one who can say with Paul, “*For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God*” (Acts 20:27). Here, the word “*counsel*” refers to the will of the Lord in particular: “*the counsel of His will*” (Eph 1:11). Thus the NASB reads, “*I did not shrink from declaring unto you the whole purpose*

of God.”

Strictly speaking, the phrase “*all the counsel of God*” does not mean all of the Bible – although such teaching will be found where all of God’s counsel is declared. This deals more with Divine perspective than with detailed instructions. **It is not the proclamation of a system, but of revealed Divine intent.** Our text is speaking of the faithful ministration of Divine purpose – what God is doing through Christ Jesus. This is a vital point that is lost in much of today’s trendy preaching. A few examples of such declarations is in order. These are summations of “*all the counsel of God.*”

✦ “*Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities*” (Acts 3:26).

✦ “*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).

✦ “*For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit*” (1 Pet 3:18).

✦ “*For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*” (Heb 2:10).

✦ “*For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified*” (Rom 8:29-30).

✦ “*And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now*

unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:9-11).

✦ “*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, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” (1 Pet 1:3-5).

✦ “*Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*” (Titus 2:14).

In each of these texts, the panorama of Divine purpose is placed before us. The objective of salvation is declared, as well as the benefits that “*accompany salvation*” (Heb 6:9).

they are not ready to make the transition from time to eternity, and from earth to glory, their whole life has been spent in vain. If, when Jesus comes, He does not find them with faith, He will look for nothing else, and they themselves will be rejected. If people are not being “*changed from glory unto glory*” (2 Cor 3:18), and being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29), all of their religious activity is fruitless and pointless.

A “*faithful minister*” prepares people for the end of the world, the coming of Christ, the day of judgment, and the reception of rewards. This is a minister who clarifies the nature and content of the Gospel, and opens up the purpose of God to the minds of the people. He brings the people into “*fellowship*” with the Son of God, into which God has called them (1 Cor 1:9). He prepares people for the Divine appointments of death and judgment (Heb 9:27).

The “*faithful minister*” has not been called to solve people’s problems, but to declare and expound God’s resolution to the sin problem. When he addresses distracting issues, and words and deeds that jeopardize the state of the people, he

IT IS NOT AN INSTITUTIONAL THRUST – BUILDING AN ORGANIZATION, STUFFING A STRUCTURE WITH PEOPLE, AND OBTAINING A NAME IN THE COMMUNITY AND BROTHERHOOD. A VALID MINISTRY HAS A SPIRITUAL FOCUS THAT PRODUCES SPIRITUAL FRUIT.

A “*faithful minister*” teaches with such things in mind. He refuses to get caught up in temporal things – matters that will eventually pass away. When addressing things pertaining to life in this world, it is always for the purpose of getting the people into the posture of blessing – within the circumference of spiritual hearing and seeing.

If men and women are not prepared for the coming of the Lord, it really makes no difference what else they may have accomplished. If

does so with God’s objective in mind. “*All the counsel of God*” sets before the people what God has done, what He is doing, and what He has determined will be done. All practical teaching and application are set within that framework.

A “*faithful minister*” presents God’s will as superior to man’s will. He teaches in such a way as to make heaven more dominant than earth. He sets forth eternal life as preeminent over life in this world, and pleasing God more to be preferred than pleasing men. While his teaching will enable men to live godly

lives in this world, it will also, prepare them to separate from this world now, and prepare to leave it at God's appointed time. A faithful minister will shine the jewel of hope, and promote a longing for "a better country, that is, an heavenly" (Heb 11:16).

Paul says Epaphras is a "faithful minister of Christ." The word "of" is a literary expression that provides focus. It is like an arrow that points to the primary Object. A minister is a "servant" – one who carries out the agenda of another. The master sets the agenda, and the

taught.

A "minister of Christ" clarifies the Person, accomplishments, and ministry of the Lord Jesus. He is not hawking a system, but proclaiming a Person. He is a slave of Jesus – a willing slave. He has chosen to replace his own will with Christ's will. His affection is set above, where Jesus is enthroned at God's right hand (Col 3:3). His quest is to "know" Christ, and be "found in Him" (Phil 3:9-10), and he has counted "all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:8). This is not an option, but a necessity.

A "faithful minister of Christ" brings Christ closer to the people, and the people closer to Christ. He declares a gospel that accentuates Christ, who He is, what He has accomplished, what He is doing, and that He is coming again. He himself is close to Christ, and preoccupied with His revealed agenda. Christ works through such a "minister," or servant, bring benefit to His people.

A "FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST" BRINGS CHRIST CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE, AND THE PEOPLE CLOSER TO CHRIST. HE DECLARES A GOSPEL THAT ACCENTUATES CHRIST, WHO HE IS, WHAT HE HAS ACCOMPLISHED, WHAT HE IS DOING, AND THAT HE IS COMING AGAIN.

A "faithful minister" is not a super-minister. He is the only kind God will accept. Consequently, he is to be the only kind men accept. A minister who is not "faithful" is really no minister at all. He is an imposter of the worst sort, for God is not working through him.

OF CHRIST

servant carries it out.

In this case, Epaphras was a "minister of Christ" – that is, he was carrying out Christ's agenda. He was doing for the people what Christ wanted done. He was bringing them where Christ wanted them brought. He was teaching that what Christ wanted them to be

HE DECLARED TO US

^{8a} **Who also declared unto us . . .** " Other versions read, "he also informed us,"^{NASB} "who also told us,"^{NIV} "he has made known to us,"^{NRSV} "made clear to us,"^{BBE} and "manifested to us."^{DARBY}

The word "declared" means to "make manifest," or "make clear and plain."^{THAYER} The idea is that Epaphras made known the real circumstance among the Colossians. **He did not give his personal assessment of their condition, but, through spiritual perception, unveiled their real condition.** Therefore, Paul did not write to find out if the appraisal of the Colossians reported by Epaphras was correct. He knew it was correct, and therefore gave God thanks, and wrote to the brethren with words of commendation and praise.

A SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT

There is a spiritual environment in which acceptable communication takes place. It should be obvious that this

surrounding should be closer to heaven than to earth, and dominated by faith rather than feeling. The wisdom of men is not allowed in such an environment, and it contributes to edification. The Gospel of Christ plays a key role in these environs, and the will of the Lord is fundamental. The Scriptures provide the nomenclature that is employed, and the priorities that are embraced.

Now, all of this is easy enough to say. **However, to find such an environment can prove to be quite challenging.** Nevertheless, this is the spiritual surrounding in which Epaphras and Paul had their communications. We know this is the case because they did not speak of the political or social culture in the city of Colossae. Nor, indeed, were they occupied with the status of the Colossian church in the community, or with the ratios of the old and young, male and female, and the likes. They did not rate their families, analyze their young people, or assess their academic achievements.

Because of the spiritual environment they were occupying, these men spoke of "saints and faithful brethren in Christ" (1:1). When desiring something for the brethren there, "grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" came to mind (1:2). What had been reported concerning the Colossians was their "faith in Christ Jesus," and the love they had "toward all saints" (1:4). The "hope" generated by the Gospel came to their minds, together with "fruit" to God, and "the grace of God in truth" (1:5-6). This was the framework within which Paul had learned of the brethren at Colossae.

Since the church has been captured by the psychologists and opportunists of the land, this kind of environment is unusually rare. These days churches are assessed according to their youth program, ministry to singles and seniors, recovery programs, public education, and praise and worship. In order for such assessments to take place, one has to be unusually close to the world.

That, of course, means that such a person is correspondingly far from God, for close to the world equals far from God.

What believers talk about when they are together reveals where they are living. Those who inhabit the higher realms find it difficult to speak of things occurring in the lower realms. Such things contradict⁶ their manner of life. Conversely, those who are dwelling in low places cannot speak of things in “heavenly places.”

It is not by coincidence that we are admonished, “*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth*” (Col 3:1-2). And again, “*Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these*

things” (Phil 4:8).

Faithfulness in these matters impact the way we speak to one another, and what we speak about. It will also promote proper appraisals of the brethren, and thanksgiving for the godly virtues that are found in them. That will yield a crop of comfort and strength. It is good for individuals and churches to ponder what kind of report might be given by godly people concerning them. Would be as favorable as that of Epaphras?

YOUR LOVE IN THE SPIRIT

“^{sb} . . . ***your love in the Spirit.***” Every major translation reads exactly the same way: “*your love in the Spirit.*” The paraphrased New Living Translation reads, “*the great love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.*” I prefer the standard translation.

YOUR

The virtue for which the Colossians were commended was the expression of their own persons: “*your.*” It was not a routine or perfunctory expression. Nor, indeed, was it the outgrowth of group comardarie. This was a love provoked by heavenly influences. The heart of these people had been opened (Acts 16:14), purified (Acts 15:9), and established (1 Thess 3:13). God had sealed them, and given them “*the earnest of the Spirit in*” their “*hearts*” (2 Cor 1:22). God had shined “*into their hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*” (2 Cor 4:6). He had also “*sent forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts crying ‘Abba, Father’*” (Gal 4:6). Christ was dwelling in their hearts “*by faith*” (Eph 3:17), and they were being “*kept by the power of God through faith*”

(1 Pet 1:5).

These circumstances, and more, made the godly expressions of the Colossians their own—in this case, “*YOUR love.*” Their hearts were in the matter. They were not fulfilling a requirement, but what they really desired to do.

LOVE

Note what Paul says: Epaphras “*declared unto us your love.*” He did not declare their religious affiliation, but their love. This love is revealed in at least three ways.

Toward Paul and Timothy

Although the Colossians had not seen Paul face to face (2:1), yet they had a love for him, as made known through Epaphras. Paul frequently expressed thanksgiving for brethren who exhibited love toward him. Some of those expressions are as follows.

✦ “*But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of **your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always,***

desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you” (1 Thess 3:6).

✦ “*Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and **in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also***” (2 Cor 8:7).

✦ “*For I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, **ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me***” (Gal 4:15).

✦ “*But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last **your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity***” (Phil 4:10).

✦ “*And not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us **your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more***” (2 Cor 7:7).

This love was provoked by the rich resources that were realized through the doctrine and personal ministry of the Apostle.

Toward Epaphras

Their love was no doubt extended to Epaphras also, who had declared the Gospel to them. Because that Gospel unveiled the sanctifying hope of glory, it also became the fountain from which their love proceeded. Such love particularly embraces ministers by whom we have believed, “*whom God gave to every man*”

THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, AND MORE, MADE THE GODLY EXPRESSIONS OF THE COLOSSIANS THEIR OWN— IN THIS CASE, “YOUR LOVE.” THEIR HEARTS WERE IN THE MATTER. THEY WERE NOT FULFILLING A REQUIREMENT, BUT WHAT THEY REALLY DESIRED TO DO.

(1 Cor 3:5).

Those in Christ are reminded, “to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess 5:13). There is every reason to believe the Colossians had such a response to Epaphras.

Toward all saints

The love “for all saints” includes those who have particular and refreshing insights into the purpose of God. It also includes those who have personally brought the truth within our reach. That marvelous love also extends to “all saints” everywhere, producing thankfulness for every trophy of Divine grace.

IN THE SPIRIT

“... your love in the Spirit.” The Apostle is careful to identify the kind of love of which he speaks. It is a spiritual love that has its origin in the working of the Holy Spirit.

If you have been subjected to much preaching, you have heard of the different Greek words for “love” found in Scripture. They represent the scope of love, as well as its nature. A brief review of these words will be profitable.

“Agapa” LOVE

ἀγάπη (a-ga-pa). The lexical meaning is “affection, good will, love, and benevolence.” THAYER This word emphasizes judgment and deliberate choice.

Many have affirmed that this is the “God-kind of love.” Indeed, God is said to love with this kind of love – a discretionary love that seeks to do good to the object of the love. This is the love mentioned in John 3:16, where God “so loved the world.” But it is also used in John 3:19, where “men loved darkness rather than light.” It is used in John 3:35, where it is affirmed “the Father loveth the Son.” It is also used in John 12:43, where it is written, “They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” This is the word used in Second Timothy 4:8, where the faithful are said to “love His appearing.” It is also used in Second Timothy 4:10, where it is written,

“Demas hath forsaken me. Having loved this present world.” Peter used this word when he wrote, “Love the brotherhood” (1 Pet 2:17). He also used it when he wrote of those who “loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet 2:15).

“Phileo” LOVE

φιλέω (phil-e-o). The lexical meaning is, “to love; to be friendly to one, delight in, or long for.” THAYER This word emphasizes affection and attachment. This word is used in John 5:20, where Jesus said, “The Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that Himself doeth.”

Perhaps you have heard that this

word.

Commentary

Love involves the attachment of the affection, or heart, to an object. It is accompanied by a fervent desire to please and benefit that object – to promote its welfare, comfort, and interests. It includes desire, an eagerness to serve, and a thorough delight in the company of the object of affection.

There is also a willingness and forwardness to forgive, which pushes away all obstacles to fellowship. There is determination, friendship, and a powerful attraction to the one who is loved. There is a selflessness in love that transcends definition. Consider how the Spirit speaks

LOVE INVOLVES THE ATTACHMENT OF THE AFFECTION, OR HEART, TO AN OBJECT. IT IS ACCOMPANIED BY A FERVENT DESIRE TO PLEASE AND BENEFIT THAT OBJECT – TO PROMOTE ITS WELFARE, COMFORT, AND INTERESTS.

is the human kind of love, as distinguished from Divine love. It is true that men love with this kind of love, but it is not limited to men. Jesus applied this word to those who “loved father or mother more than” Him (Matt 10:37), therefore signifying such love could embrace Him as well as relatives. Jesus used this word when He said the scribes “love greetings in the market” (Luke 20:46). He also used it in John 5:20, where He said, “the Father loveth the Son.” Jesus used this word in John 12:25: “He that loveth his life shall lose it.” He also used it in John 16:27, where He said, “the Father Himself loveth you.” When Jesus asked Peter if he loved Him, he used “agapao” twice, and “phileo” once (John 21:15-17). This is the word Paul used in First Corinthians 16:22. “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha” (1 Cor 16:22). Jesus used it when He said, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten” (Rev 3:19).

It is not comely for the people of God to promote simplistic academic views of spiritual realities.

The truth of the matter is that “love” is too large to be contained in a single Greek

of love in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians. The Authorized Version uses the word “charity,” which I prefer. It is used in that version twenty-eight times, and consistently refers to the kind of love that is received from God.

✚ **Charity suffers long** (13:4a). Some versions read “is patient.” NASB/NIV The idea is that love is forbearing, and able to endure things that are difficult to bear. This is the kind of attitude admonished in Ephesians 4:2: “With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.” **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

✚ **Charity is kind** (13:4b). To be kind is to show oneself useful, or to act benevolently. This manner is urged upon the saints. “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

✚ **Charity does not envy** (13:4c). To be envious is to covet to possess what

others have. It includes the idea of sinful jealousy, and to have feelings against someone. David spoke of being envious of the of the well being of the workers of iniquity (Psa 37:1). Stephen reminded his audience that Joseph's brothers sold him because they were "moved with envy" (Acts 7:9). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

✚ **Charity does not vaunt itself** (13:4d). To vaunt one's self is to

up by God, the Gentile world degenerated into sodomy, "men with men working that which is unseemly" (Rom 1:27). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

✚ **Charity does not seek its own** (13:5b). To seek one's own is to pursue purely self-interests, with no regard for others. Those who so conduct themselves live in a little world all by themselves. Peter spoke of those who walked "after their own

necessary for Jesus to die. Love cannot take delight in evil, or find pleasure in people and things that provoke the Lord of glory. It is said of Balaam that he "loved the wages of iniquity" (2 Pet 2:15). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

✚ **Charity rejoices in the truth** (13:6b). Rejoicing in the truth is the result of receiving "the love of the truth" (2 Thess 2:10). Rejoicing in the truth involves an appetite for it. The Word, in such a case, is "esteemed more" than "necessary food" (Job 23:12). When the Word is found, or properly discerned, it proves to be "the joy and rejoicing" of one's heart (Jer 15:16). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

✚ **Charity bears all things** (13:7a). Other versions read, "has the power to undergo all things,"^{BBE} "is always ready to make allowances,"^{NJB} and "never gives up."^{NLT} To "bear" something is to cover it with silence, enduring patiently.^{STRONG'S} It carries the idea of covering a matter up with silence. It is what Peter referred to when he said, "charity shall cover a multitude of sins" (1 Pet 4:8). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

✚ **Charity believes all things** (13:7b). Other versions read, "always trusts,"^{NIV} "having faith in all things,"^{BBE} "is always ready to trust,"^{NJB} and "never loses faith."^{NLT} This does not refer to believing everything God has said – although that is imperative. It rather refers to attitudes toward men, in particular, fellow believers. **Love expects and is confident of the best things from the people of God.** This attitude is expressed several places in Scripture. "But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak" (Heb 6:9). "I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things" (2 Cor 7:16). "I have confidence in you through the Lord" (Gal 5:10). "And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you" (2 Thess 3:4). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

IT RATHER REFERS TO ATTITUDES TOWARD MEN, IN PARTICULAR, FELLOW BELIEVERS. LOVE EXPECTS AND IS CONFIDENT OF THE BEST THINGS FROM THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

boast, or put one's self forward, before others. It is to display oneself

and extol one's self excessively. God spoke of Israel vaunting themselves against Him – preferring themselves and their will to His (Judges 7:2). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

✚ **Charity is not puffed up** (13:4e). To be puffed up is to be proud – blowing one's self up to be something. It is to be inflated, swelled up, and be lofty in both looks, words, and deeds. Paul admonished the Corinthians **not** to be "puffed up one against another" (1 Cor 4:6). He said that those who did not mourn when serious transgression had occurred failed to do so because they were "puffed up" (1 Cor 5:2). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

✚ **Charity does not behave itself in an unseemly manner** (13:5a). To behave unseemly is to conduct one's self in an unbecoming and reproachful manner. It is to act inconsiderately, and disgracefully, being ill-mannered, rude, and defying social standards. It involves acting indecently. Because they were given

lusts" (2 Pet 3:3). Paul wrote of those who "after their own lusts" accumulated teachers for themselves (2 Tim 4:3). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

✚ **Charity is not easily provoked** (13:5c). To be "easily provoked" is to become angry with very little stimuli – to be made angry quickly, or fly off the handle. This is the opposite of Moses, who was "very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num 12:3). Solomon spoke of a person who was "soon angry," and stated that it provoked foolish actions (Prov 14:17). **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

✚ **Charity thinks no evil** (13:5d). To "think evil" includes the idea of keeping a record of wrongs, being unwilling to forgive.^{NASB} It is to be "resentful."^{NRSV} Love does not "impute evil,"^{DARBY} or take the worst possible view of a person or matter. **This is not what love should not do, but what it does not do.**

✚ **Charity does not rejoice in iniquity** (13:6a). To rejoice in iniquity is to find pleasure in things that oppose the Law of God. It is to be entertained by things that made it

✚ **Charity hopes all things** (13:7c). Other versions read, “*always hopes,*”^{NIV} “*is always ready to hope,*”^{NJB} and “*is always hopeful.*”^{NLT} Because love delights in the blessing of others, it hopes for the best for them. It will hold on to the slightest shred of hope, trusting in the Lord to bring it to pass. John expressed this kind of hope when he wrote to Gaius, “*Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth*” (3 John 1:2). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

✚ **Charity endures all things** (13:7d). Other versions read, “*always perseveres,*”^{NIV} “*is ready to endure whatever comes,*”^{NJB} and “*endures through every circumstance.*”^{NLT} The idea is that love bears up under all manner of persecution, opposition, and trial. It does so without complaining or inflicting injury upon others. This is the kind of love Stephen expressed when he prayed, “*lay not this sin to their charge*” (Acts 7:60). It is what moved Paul to say of those who refused to stand with him, “*I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge*” (2 Tim 4:16). **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

✚ **Charity never fails** (13:8a). Other versions read, “*love never ends,*”^{NRSV} “*love has no end,*”^{BEB} and “*it shall not be done away.*”^{DARBY} Love is adapted to all circumstances in this world, and in the world to come as well. There is no line of demarcation beyond which love cannot go. It has no inherent weakness, and thus cannot deteriorate. It is more closely akin to God Himself, who is love, and therefore cannot pass away. The tender soul cannot take his faith into the world to come, nor his hope. Faith will give way to sight, and hope to fruition. But love will go on. It cannot come to an end, for “*God is love,*” and He is eternal. It never fails. **This is not what love should do, but what it does.**

HOW CAN THESE BE ACHIEVED?

There are sixteen characteristics of love. They are not goals that love can attain, but affirm what love IS. Is there a

person of sound mind who feels these can be accomplished in the flesh, or by natural abilities?

The Spirit’s Ministry

These are too aggressive and too consistent to be accomplished through natural ability! That is why Paul spoke of “*love in the Spirit*” – not in the human spirit, but in the Holy Spirit. **This kind of love is only possible when the love God has for us fills our hearts and permeates our being.** This cannot happen through human discipline and regimentation. It can only happen through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus it is written, “*the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us*” (Rom 5:5). Other versions say this love has been

MARK IT WELL, THERE IS NOT A SINGLE ASPECT OF GOD’S GREAT SALVATION THAT CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED INDEPENDENTLY OF HIM! WERE SUCH A THING POSSIBLE, SALVATION COULD NOT BE ASCRIBED WHOLLY TO HIM

“*poured out in our hearts,*”^{NKJV} “*poured out within our hearts,*”^{NASB} and “*poured into our hearts.*”^{NRSV}

Our “*hearts*” are the most inmost part of our being, even as our bodies are the most external part. This is where “*newness of life*” is implanted (Rom 6:4). It is the place where God and His great salvation are comprehended (Eph 3:16-18), and the eyes of the understanding reside (Eph 1:18). This is where we “*lay hold on eternal life*” (1 Tim 6:12). It is where “*fellowship*” with God’s is experienced (1 Cor 1:9). It is where God has “*sent forth the Spirit of His Son*” (Gal 4:6).

The Holy Spirit is able to pour the love of God into our hearts, filling them with the refreshing and stabilizing influence of Divine affection. When that takes place – and only when it takes place – we are able to “*love in the Spirit.*” Until that time, all effort to be loving is vain, and is only pretense.

Mark it well, **there is not a single aspect of God’s great**

salvation that can be accomplished independently of Him! Were such a thing possible, salvation could not be ascribed wholly to Him (Rev 7:10).

Fruit of the Spirit

Love is in every way included in “*the fruit* [not ‘fruits’] *of the Spirit.*” In a description of this marvelous fruit, or outworking of the Spirit, “*love*” is listed first: “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love*” (Gal; 5:22). “*Love in the Spirit*” is the evidence of this holy fruitage, and is largely toward the brethren. It is true that we are to “*love our enemies*” (Matt 5:44). However, the mark of true discipleship is not the love of our enemies, but the love of one another (John 13:35). We do not know we have passed from death unto life because we love our

enemies, but because we love the brethren (1 John 3:14). The love of the brethren is the preeminent man-to-man love.

Such marvelous things could not be said of a love that was wholly generated by human effort.

Grace Brings Love

The love of which we speak – “*love in the Spirit*” – is brought to us by the grace of God, as well as through the Spirit. Thus it is written, “*And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*” (1 Tim 1:14). What the Spirit sheds abroad in our hearts comes wrapped in the grace of God. The love we have for the brethren is the overflow of the grace of God, as produced by the Holy Spirit of God.

This is a most wonderful commendation – to have the report of loving “*in the Spirit*” – loving the brethren of Jesus. This is an evidence of Divine working, and a prelude to glory. It is a source of great joy to the beholder, and confidence to the possessor.

CONCLUSION

Thus have we seen something of the manner of the Kingdom – the way the Lord works among His people. There is an environment in which the purpose of God is being fulfilled. It is one of faith and love, founded upon hope, and expressed by “*love in the Spirit.*” There is a love of the truth, an intense interest in the things of God, and a burning desire for the betterment of the saints of God. The people of God speak of the God and the things of God. They talk of His power, and speak of His saints. They work together for the Lord, and are precious to each other.

Where these characteristics are found, God the Father is present. The Lord Jesus is alive in the people. The Holy Spirit is also producing His precious fruit within them. Let us be diligent to thank the Lord for such workings, and to encourage their furtherance by both word and deed.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 9/5/2003. In this session, we will covering verses 9-11 of the first chapter. The title of our lesson is, “**A PRAYER FOR THE SAINTS.**” Much can be learned from the prayers recorded in Scripture. They are recorded through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are therefore integral to our understanding of the nature of spiritual life and the needs of the brethren. This prayer will assist us to develop a proper focus concerning life in Christ Jesus. 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.

*The Blakely Family: Given, June, Benjamin, Jonathan, and Eva
406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801*

A place where believers can meet, fellowship, be edified, and express themselves.

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

**Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Jonathan (Jonstalk@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)
Adah Hutchcraft (ALHutchcraft@milligan.edu), Jason Hutchcraft (hutchcraftj@esr.edu)**

WORD OF TRUTH Website: <http://wotruth.com>

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