

BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

“The Evidence of True Christianity”

Colossians 1:3-8

2004

Introduction

In contrast to the false teachers and so-called “super spiritual” believers infiltrating the Colossian church, Paul, in his opening greetings give us some wonderful authenticating characteristics of true Christianity.

I A Pattern of Thanksgiving and Prayer

A. Paul made it a practice to be thankful [Verse 3a]

He had a consistent pattern of thinking about and focusing on others:

Rom 1:8 “I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you ...”

Eph 1:16 “I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.”

1 Thess 1:2 “We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers.”

Philem 4-5 “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers ...”

Phil 1:3-5 “I thank my God every time I remember you. In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now ...”

Paul’s words and love are all the more remarkable considering he could have easily been consumed with his own problems:

He was frequently in prison - 2 Cor 11:23

He had been flogged five times - 2 Cor 11:24

He was shipwrecked three times - 2 Cor 11:25

He was beaten with rods three times and stoned once - 2 Cor 11:25

He was constantly in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers - 2 Cor 11:26

He was homeless and often went without sleep and food - 2 Cor 11:27

And even as he wrote this letter to the Colossian church he was imprisoned. He could have been bitter, confused, angry with God, even depressed. Instead, he chose to live and model a life of gratitude to God!

Application:

What does it take for you to strip you of a heart of thanksgiving?

An insensitive comment. An oversight by a co-worker. A physical ailment. A whining child. Kapaa traffic!

Hardship and injustice are a part of the human experience. But a heart of thanksgiving is divine -- a beautiful fruit of true Christianity!

B. Paul made it a practice to **pray** for others [Verse 3c]

The word “pray” is in the present continuous tense in the Greek, meaning that Paul’s prayer life was regular, persistent, and faithful.

Application:

When we should pray?

1. Alone at scheduled times:
 - a. Early in the morning - Ps. 5:1-5
 - b. At night - Luke 6:12
 - c. Three times a day - Dan 6:10
2. Spontaneously - Neh. 2:4
3. Corporately - Acts 1:14; 2:42
4. Continually - 1 Thess 5:17

For whom should we pray?

- 1 Tim 2:1 “I urge, then, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone ...”

II A Heart of Faith and Love

A. The inspiration for Paul’s thanksgiving: [Verse 4]

1. The report of the Colossians’ **faith** in Christ Jesus

What does it mean to have “faith”?

It means to believe God, to depend on Him and to follow Him. It means to believe what He says about Himself, about salvation, about ourselves.

It means to “lean your whole weight upon” upon the truth of God’s Word and the finished work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

- a. It includes their ***past initial act*** of trust in Christ

1. Faith in His life and teaching
2. Faith in His death on the cross
3. Faith in His resurrection from the dead

1 Peter 1:21 “Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”

- b. It includes their ***present lifestyle*** of trusting in Christ

1. Faith in His continuous care, intercession and love
 2. Faith in His Word, His sovereignty, and His power
- 2 Thess 1:3 “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.”

How can we grow in faith?

Rom 10:17 “... faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

2. The reports of the Colossians' **love** for all the saints

The Bible teaches that genuine **faith** in Jesus will always produce a Christ-like **love** for God's people. It is the fruit and evidence of authentic Christianity.

Gal 5:6 "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

The Colossians showed the reality of their faith because they not only professed faith ... they evidenced love. And notice, their love was not selective. It was evidenced for "all the saints", not just the ones they liked.

Application:

The exhortation to love is not a suggestion – it is a command!

John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another ... By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

1 John 3:23 "And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us."

The Bible makes no exceptions – not for our personality, our upbringing, or our environment. The true Christian will be marked by an increasing, obvious, demonstrated and communicated love for others.

B. The source of the Colossians' faith and love: **[Verse 5a]**

1. The **hope** that is stored up in heaven

We hear the word "hope" used frequently. We "hope" for good surf. We "hope" our kids turn out OK. We "hope" for the best. Most of the time we seem to use "hope" as wishful thinking. But that is not the kind of hope that Paul is speaking of here in Colossians.

Hope = Elpis = "To anticipate with pleasure and total confidence"

There are two dimensions of hope for us as believers:

1. Our future hope

- a. **The hope of salvation:** Deliverance from judgment (1 Thess 5:8)
- b. **The hope of the resurrection:** Life after death (Acts 23:6)
- c. **The hope of righteousness:** God's verdict of "not guilty" (Gal 5:5)
- d. **The blessed hope:** The promised return of Christ (Titus 2:13)
- e. **The hope of the glory of God:**
 1. Our resurrected & glorified body (Rom 5:2; 1 Cor 15:19, 52-55)
 2. Our sharing in Christ's future glory (Col 1:27; 3:4)

2. Our present hope

The word translated "**heaven**" in most translations is actually the Greek plural "**heavens**" meaning "in the spiritual realm."

So as believers, we not only confidently anticipate our future glory, but we are also confident of God's power, love and sovereignty in the invisible spiritual kingdom that surrounds us right now!

And this hope is **"stored up"** = Present continuous tense = "Accumulating"
 1 Peter 1:3-5 "In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a **living hope** [deals with the present] through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an **inheritance** [deals with the future] that can never perish, spoil or fade -- kept in heaven for you."

Interestingly, Paul is telling us in this letter that love comes from faith and faith comes from hope – our present hope and our future hope in Christ.

But then the question is, "What produces hope?"

Paul answers that question in verse 5! Hope is awakened by the Word of truth – the gospel. When nothing else can give hope, the gospel will. That's why it's called the Good News! It is a message of hope!

2. The word of truth [Verse 5b-6a]

Eph 1:13 "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation."

Dorothy Sayers, the great Christian philosopher, said, "The test of any religion is not whether it pleases us or is comfortable, but whether it is true."

Now we hear people all the time saying, "Hey, whatever is true for you is true." Or, "Truth is relative . . . different people have different truth." Both those statements are absurd and illogical.

There is such a thing a truth! And it *exists objectively outside ourselves*. We do not create truth; we can only discover it!

Illustration:

There are universal principles that apply in every country and in every era:

1. If $2 + 2 = 4$ then it can't at the same time equal 3 or 6! In every place and age, $2+2=4$!
2. If a person decides to test the law of gravity and jumps off a tall building, he will come face to face with the reality of gravity's universal nature. Gravity can't be true for some and not for others.
3. Contrary to what some may say, there are universal truths that apply to religion as well.

When Jesus said, "He is the only way to Heaven" and other religions say "Jesus is one of many ways to Heaven" can they both be true? No! If we are told, "there is no other name under heaven that can save us" (Acts 4:12) can it also be true that there are many roads to Heaven? No! If Islam is right . . . then Christianity is wrong. If the Buddhists

are right, then Christianity is wrong. If the New Agers are right, then Christianity is wrong. Paul says the gospel declares the truth from the God who does not change. You can't have it both ways.

3. The **gospel** that had come to them

The gospel = Euangelion = “Good News”

The Good News of Jesus Christ is that a sinful person can be made right with God. Through the death and resurrection of our Jesus Christ our debt of sin is paid for in full. We are declared "Not Guilty." But the gospel message goes even further. This Good News says that we not only have our sin forgiven, but we also have all the goodness of Christ applied to our account. We can now stand before a holy God clothed in the righteousness of His own Son, Jesus Christ!

Note: This Good News CAME – someone brought it to them

Rom 10:14-15 “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?”

III A Commitment To The Gospel

- A. The gospel’s power is **universal** [Verse 6a]

It is not limited to any one race or nation, or to any one class of people. Its message is open to all men without exception.

Rom 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

Rom 3:22-24 “This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to **all** who believe. There is no difference, for **all** have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

- B. The gospel’s message is fruitful [Verse 6b]

Fruitful = Present continuous = “Is bearing fruit”

Application: Sow the seed and it will bear fruit! (Matthew 13:1-23)

Our job is not to make the seed take root and grow. Our job is to simply sow the seed and do what we can to encourage the right conditions for growth.

- C. The gospel’s impact is **growing** [Verse 6c]

We know that after the day of Pentecost and following the martyrdom of Stephen, the gospel spread rapidly all over the known world. And everywhere the Gospel went, people responded and were changed. Even while Paul was in prison the impact of the gospel was rippling out to the world (Acts 1:8).

Statistics today: Is Christianity still growing or is it on the decline?

The Lausanne Statistics Task Force, cited in *Final Warning*, Grant Jeffery, Harvest House publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1996, pages. 251-254

In the period 1934-1996, the number of Christians in the world increased by 1700 percent (from 40 million to 680 million in the last 60 years), while the world's population grew only 400 percent.

1. In China, there are approximately 100 million Christians with an average of 28,000 new converts coming to Christ every day.
2. In Africa, the number of believers in Christ has risen from 3% in 1900 to a present figure of 45%.
3. Over the last few decades, South Koreans have been flocking to Jesus by the millions. In response, the UN has officially reclassified as a Christian nation this one-time Buddhist stronghold.
4. Worldwide, people are surrendering their lives to Jesus at an astounding rate of nearly a million converts per week.
5. It is estimated that of every genuine Christian since the day of Pentecost, 70% came to Christ after 1900 AD. Of those, 70% had their life-transforming encounter with Jesus since World War II. And of those, 70% became Christians in the last 4-5 years.

D. The gospel's influence is personal [Verse 6d]

1. They **heard** the gospel message

a. They learned it from Epaphras

Learn = Manthano = "To learn from someone or to be discipled."

Epaphras was a **disciple maker**! He gave them systematic instruction in their new-found faith in Christ.

Application: How can we become disciple makers?

In the same way Epaphras did: By watching his mentor (Paul)!

2 Tim 2:2 "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

2. They understood God's grace

Understood = "Come to know; complete full knowledge"

Grace = Charis = "The free, unmerited favor of God"

Eph 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -- not by works, so that no one can boast."

"Grace means there is nothing we can do to make God love us more – and nothing we can do to make God love us less."

By emphasizing God's grace in this letter, Paul is clearly refuting the false teachers who were claiming that true spirituality demanded works in addition to simple faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

3. They **appropriated** its truth

What the Colossians heard and learned From Epaphras was God's truth. But for the truth of the Gospel to have effect, it must not only be heard but believed and appropriated.

1 Thess 2:13 "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe."

IV A Lifestyle of Service

A. Epaphras **communicated** the gospel [Verse 7a]

Philem 1:6 "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

God has not called us to "make the gospel relevant. . . . it already IS relevant. Our job is simple: tell others the good news of God's grace.

B. Epaphras was a fellow-servant of Paul's [Verse 7b] 2 Cor 8:23; 1 Thess 3:2

Fellow servant = Sun-doulos = "Co-bondslave"; "Two or more persons performing similar tasks under the supervision of the same employer"

Application:

If you are a believer, performing God's work under God's guidance and supervision and with God's power, then you are a Sun-Doulos with those who are like-minded.

C. Epaphras was a faithful **minister** of Christ [Verse 7c]

Faithful = Pistos = "Reliable"

Minister of Christ = Diakonos = "Deacon"; "One who serves by helping others"

Warren Wiersbe:

"We who disciple other believers must be careful not . . . to make disciples *for ourselves*, but for Jesus Christ."

Epaphras faithfully pointed the believers in Colosse to Jesus Christ, but the false teachers came in and tried to "draw away disciples." (Acts 20:28–30)

D. Epaphras reported their love in the **Spirit** [Verse 8]

Paul again called attention to the love of the Colossians, only this time he identified their love as being inspired or promoted by the Spirit. Their love for one another was a work engendered by the Spirit.

Gal 5:22-23 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Conclusion

How can a person know if he or she is a true follow of Christ?

Jesus answered this in Matthew 7:15-20 when he said, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit ... by their fruit you will recognize them.”

Paul's letter to the Colossian church provides us with tangible, observable character qualities that should mark the life of every true believer:

1. A pattern of thanksgiving and prayer
2. A heart of faith and love
3. A commitment to the gospel
4. A lifestyle of service

If you would like to receive Christ as your Savior it's as simple as ABC!

1. **Admit** and repent of your sin

Make the choice to turn away from all known sin. This is what the Bible refers to as “repentance”. To repent is to change your mind and attitude towards sin. It's to hate sin enough to stop doing it. God promises His grace to help us repent.

Rom. 3:23 “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Rom. 6:23 “The wages of sin is death.”

2. **Believe** in Jesus Christ

You must personally receive Jesus Christ by believing that He is God's Son who died on the cross for your sins and was raised on the 3rd day according to the scriptures and that He is “the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Him]” (John 14:6).

John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

3. **Confess** Jesus as your Lord

This means to acknowledge Him as the new leader and ruler of your life.

Rom 10:9 “That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

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