

The Book of Colossians

Lesson 1: Thanksgiving for the Colossians -- Colossians 1:1-8

Imagine the mail arriving in a small town where almost no one knows your name. The church at Colossae was like that, a young congregation in a modest city in the Lycus Valley, off the main road, easy to overlook. Paul had never walked their streets or stood in their assembly. Most of them had never seen his face. And yet a letter arrives, carried up the valley, addressed to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ who are in Colossae. Someone breaks the seal, and the room leans in to listen. The first thing they hear is not correction and not alarm. It is gratitude. Paul tells them that every time he prays, he thanks God for them.

That is a striking way to begin. Paul has heard reports about this little church, and what he has heard makes him want to give thanks. He has heard of their faith in Christ Jesus, of the love they have for all the saints, and of a hope that is laid up for them in heaven. Faith, love, and hope: the three great strands that run all through the New Testament, braided together here at the very start of the letter. Their faith is reaching up to Christ, their love is reaching out to one another, and their hope is reaching forward to what God has stored up for them where moth and rust cannot touch it.

Paul wants them to know where all of this came from. It came from the gospel, which he calls the word of the truth. That gospel had reached them through a man named Epaphras, one of their own, a faithful minister of Christ who had carried the good news home and watched it take root. And the same gospel that was growing in Colossae, Paul says, was bearing fruit and growing in all the world. A handful of believers in a forgettable town were caught up in something vast, a message that was quietly remaking lives from one end of the empire to the other.

Before this letter says a single word about the false teaching threatening the church, before it climbs to its breathtaking heights about the supremacy of Christ, it pauses to be thankful. It reminds these believers who they are and what God has already done in them. That is where we begin too. Not with a problem to fix, but with a fire of gratitude for the gospel that found us, the faith it planted, the love it grew, and the hope it secured. Read these eight verses slowly, and let Paul teach you to see your own life, and your own congregation, as a reason to give thanks.

Group Discussion: Paul begins not with instruction or correction but with thanksgiving, telling the Colossians he gives thanks to God every time he prays for them (vv. 3-4). Why do you think he chose to open this way, and what happens in a congregation when gratitude, rather than criticism, becomes the lens through which we see one another?

Personal Reflection: Paul gives thanks for the faith, love, and hope he sees in these believers. If someone who loved you were to thank God for the evidence of Christ in your life right now, what do you think they would name, and what do you wish they could name a year from now?

Study Questions

1. Paul links three things together in his thanksgiving: faith in Christ Jesus, love for all the saints, and the hope laid up in heaven (vv. 4–5). How do these three relate to one another, and in what sense does the hope stored up in heaven serve as a spring that feeds both faith and love?
2. Paul says the Colossians have love for all the saints, not just for the ones who are easy to love. Picture the people in your own congregation. Is there anyone your love has quietly skipped over? What would it look like this week to let the hope you share with them reshape the way you treat them?
3. Paul calls the gospel the word of the truth (v. 5) and says the Colossians understood the grace of God in truth (v. 6). What does it mean that the gospel is a fixed message of truth and not merely a private feeling or a story we adjust to suit ourselves, and why does that matter for the church in every generation?
4. Think back to when the gospel first became real to you. Was it something you mainly felt, or something you came to know as true and then acted on? How does remembering the gospel as the word of truth steady you on days when your feelings are unsteady?
5. Paul says the gospel is bearing fruit and growing, both in the wider world and among the Colossians since the day they heard it (v. 6). What does this picture of a living, fruit-bearing, growing word teach us about the nature and power of the gospel itself?
6. Paul expects the gospel to keep bearing fruit in those who have received it. Where do you see real fruit growing in your life since you came to Christ, and where is there a corner that still looks more like bare ground than a fruitful garden?
7. The Colossians learned the gospel from Epaphras, whom Paul calls a beloved fellow servant and a faithful minister of Christ on their behalf (v. 7). What does this tell us about how God has chosen to spread the gospel, and about the importance of faithful teachers in the life of the church?
8. Almost everyone who follows Christ can name an Epaphras, someone who first carried the good news to them. Who was yours? And whose Epaphras might God be asking you to become, even if you have never thought of yourself as a teacher?
9. Paul says the gospel came to the Colossians as grace, the grace of God which they understood in truth (vv. 5–6), and he opens the letter by wishing them grace and peace from God our Father (v. 2). How does the New Testament hold grace and truth together, so that grace is never an excuse to ignore what God commands, and obedience is never a way of earning what only grace can give?
10. Look back across these eight verses. Paul takes a small, unseen church and helps them see their faith, their love, their hope, and the worldwide gospel that bound them all together. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this passage. What is the single truth from Colossians 1:1–8 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 13:13, faith, hope, and love as the abiding three; 1 Thessalonians 1:2–10, a young church whose faith, love, and hope became known everywhere; Mark 4:1–20, the seed of the word bearing fruit in good soil; Acts 2:36–42, hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel of grace; Romans 1:16–17, the gospel as the power of God for salvation.