

Hello and Thank You - Colossians 1:1-8
James Muldoon - Carey Baptist Church – 13 July 2008

v1-2 tell us that Colossians is a letter. It was written by Paul in all his apostolic authority, and Timothy was with him when he wrote. He addresses it to Christians (“**holy and faithful brothers [and sisters] in Christ**”) who lived in Colossae. A church had formed there through the ministry of Epaphras. But false teachers had come in after him, and their message seems to have appealed to the Colossians. That’s why Paul writes to them, even though he has never actually met them.

Paul wants what is best for the Colossians. He wants them to receive “**grace and peace ... from God our Father.**” He wants them to receive one blessing after another and a sense of all-round well-being from the Lord.

From v3, Paul starts to outline the significance of what has happened to the Christians in Colossae. And in this morning’s passage, he gives thanks for them. He points to what is good in them, and he says, “I give thanks to God for you, and this is why...”

i Godliness

v4-5 show Paul giving thanks for three aspects of godliness which the Colossians possess. These are godly characteristics which you should pray will be evident in your life and in the life of Carey as a whole.

❶ The first characteristic is their “**faith in Christ Jesus**” (v4). They trust in Jesus. They rely on him. They believe in him. They have faith in him. It’s truly remarkable that the Colossians came to believe in Messiah Jesus, a crucified Jew, especially bearing in mind that Colossae was a bit of a backwater and that most people who lived there were Gentiles.

Do you believe in Messiah Jesus? If not, come to him now. He saved the Colossians when they had faith in him. He will do the same for you if you have faith in him. And then live by faith in him because you can do nothing on your own.

❷ The second characteristic is their “**love ... for all the saints**” (v4). Christian love is a unique thing. It extends to all God’s people, regardless of where they come from, what they look like, how they smell, and everything else. The Colossians loved like that; and you should love like that too.

In fact, our effectiveness as a church depends upon love. If we love one another, it will be a powerful witness. The West today is starved of true love and real community. So if people see true love and real community in us, their attention will be grabbed. Who knows where that might lead? So love! Do you? Do you love all God’s people?

❸ The third characteristic is “**the hope that is stored up for you in heaven...**” Christian hope is a certainty that we will get to heaven. And because of that, Christian hope is a great motivator. Paul goes so far as to say that the Colossians’ faith and love spring from their hope. Their hope encouraged them to keep going. Their hope kept their faith and love burning brightly. And hope will do the same for you, if you let it.

Do you ever daydream about heaven? Do you ever wonder what it will be like being in paradise? It will do you good if you do. It will help you to keep going in the here-and-now. This life is hard at times. But this is not where you belong. You belong in heaven. Aim there. Put your energies there. And keep going with faith and love in the meantime, working for God's glory.

Faith, love and hope, then, are such essential characteristics for all of us to show. May God help us to be full of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, full of love for all Christians, and full of hope which keeps us going, even when it's tough. That's godliness.

ii Gospel

In **v6-8**, Paul tells us how Epaphras preached the gospel at Colossae. Epaphras taught them the gospel. They heard it. They understood it. And God so worked in them that they came to believe it.

And that is the way God works. He does not work through some automatic or magical process which bypasses the mind. When people are saved, it's generally because someone teaches them the gospel. They hear the gospel. They understand the gospel. And God so works within them that they come to believe it and to believe in Jesus himself.

That, of course, gives us a great responsibility to teach others the gospel. They won't be saved if they never hear it. They won't be saved if they don't understand it. So can you explain the gospel clearly? Are you praying for opportunities to tell others? With God's help, do you take those opportunities when they come?

But **v6** also gives us encouragement to tell others. All over the world in Paul's day, the gospel was bearing fruit and growing. It was spreading and people were being saved. The same is true today. Millions of people around the world become Christians every year. So you don't want to be a spectator, do you? Don't you want to be a participant in spreading the gospel? Be like Epaphras. Who knows how the gospel might bear fruit and grow, even in Reading, if we were all to do that?