

“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints” (Col. 1:3–4). - Colossians 1:3-5a

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THE  
GROUNDING  
OF  
HOPE

Affirming Paul's authorship of Colossians does not necessarily mean he sat down with pen and parchment to write the letter. That is certainly possible, but in the ancient world people often enlisted the help of an amanuensis to write letters. An amanuensis was much like a modern-day secretary. Sometimes he received an epistle's content via dictation and wrote out the letters and words. At other times, the author would discuss the outline of the letter with the amanuensis, leaving the scribe free to craft the words. The author then read the letter before sending it, making sure it accurately reflected his thoughts. It may be that Paul used Timothy as an amanuensis to pen Colossians, for he is listed as its co-sender (Col. 1:1–2). If so, then God the Holy Spirit used the talents and experiences of both these men when He inspired the epistle.

Though it received many visitors, being located along a busy trading route in central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey), Colossae was not a very important city in the first century Roman Empire. Paul himself did not preach the gospel in Colossae or plant the church there, but as an apostle, he was duty-bound to instruct a church in need. The body of his letter to the Colossians begins with his thanksgiving to God for their faith and love (vv. 3–4). It would be easy to read through these verses quickly without a second thought, but doing so would cause us to miss a profound theological lesson: Paul does not thank the Colossians for working up faith and love within themselves; rather, he thanks God that they have these graces. This indicates that faith and love are gifts from the Lord. Our Creator must grant faith, which reveals itself as it works through love (Gal. 5:6), to human beings if they are to be saved. Clearly, this gift is not given indiscriminately to all people (Eph. 2:8), and knowing this must drive those of us who love Christ to thank God for His sovereign grace.

Hope is the ground of faith and love, the source from which they spring and are sustained by the Spirit's power (Col. 1:5a). Such hope is not a wish for something that may or may not happen, but the present expectation of what will surely be experienced in its fullness in the future. Knowing that we will experience the fullness of salvation in the age to come, our faith and love are sustained in the present era.

## CORAM DEO

The apostles often refer to Christian hope in the New Testament, and it is easy for us to read our modern understanding of the term into Scripture, believing that Christian hope lacks certainty. But our hope as Christians does not refer to something that may or may not be; rather, it is grounded in real events that will surely come to pass. Hoping in God means simply that we have a sure expectation of Him to be true to His Word.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>From Ligonier Ministries, the teaching fellowship of R.C. Sproul. All rights reserved. Website: [www.ligonier.org](http://www.ligonier.org)

# OPEN IT.

1. Imagine you were writing a letter to a group you have never met. What things would you share about yourself so that they could know what you are all about?
2. Share with the group about someone whom you would describe as faithful. In what ways has their faithfulness been displayed?

# READ IT.

Colossians 1:1-8

"...HOPE  
LAID UP  
FOR YOU  
IN HEAVEN..."

# EXPLORE IT.

1. Who were the authors and recipients of this letter?
2. Read Colossians 1:18 & 3:11. What is Paul's main theme for the letter?
3. What were the three reasons that caused Paul and Timothy to be thankful for the church in Colossae in verses 3-5?
4. According to verse 6, what was the result of those three reasons in verses 3-5 ?
5. In verse 8, what two things was Epaphras commended for?

FATHERFUL

# GET IT.

## COLOSSIANS IS ONE OF PAULS "PRISON EPISTLES".

Colossians is one of Paul's four "prison epistles" (4:18; cf. Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). The general consensus is that these epistles were written during Paul's imprisonment at Rome (cf. Acts 28:16, 30-31). If such is truly the case, then Paul wrote Colossians around 61-63 A.D. from Rome. The indication is that the epistles to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians were carried to their destination by Tychicus and Onesimus (cf. 4:7-9; Philemon 10-12; Ep 6:21-22).<sup>2</sup>

1. In light of Paul's present circumstances, what things strike you when it comes to the opening verses of this letter? (see text box)

What enabled Paul to keep such a focus in light of such difficulty?

What things keep us from taking a similar approach when it comes to our engagement with others when we are dealing with difficulties?

**PAUL HAD RECEIVED A REPORT OF THE SITUATION AT COLOSSAE BY WAY OF EPAPHRAS (1:7-8). THIS REPORT WAS FOR THE MOST PART FAVORABLE (2:5). BUT THE SUBJECT MATTER IN THE EPISTLE STRONGLY SUGGESTS THAT THE CHURCH WAS FACING A TWOFOLD DANGER:**

**THE DANGER OF RELAPSE INTO PAGANISM WITH ITS GROSS IMMORALITY (CF. 1:21-23; 2:6; 3:5-11).**

**THE DANGER OF ACCEPTING WHAT HAS COME TO BE KNOWN AS "THE COLOSSIAN HERESY". THIS HERESY WAS A SYNCRETISM INVOLVING FOUR ELEMENTS OF BOTH PAGAN AND JEWISH ORIGIN:**

- ☀ **PHILOSOPHIES OF MEN - WHICH DENIED THE ALL SUFFICIENCY AND PREEMINENCE OF CHRIST (2:8).**
- ☀ **JUDAISTIC CEREMONIALISM - WHICH ATTACHED SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE TO THE RITE OF CIRCUMCISION, FOOD REGULATIONS, AND OBSERVANCE OF SPECIAL DAYS (2:11,16-17).**
- ☀ **ANGEL WORSHIP - WHICH DETRACTED FROM THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST (2:18).**
- ☀ **ASCETICISM - WHICH CALLED FOR HARSH TREATMENT OF THE BODY AS THE MEANS TO CONTROL ITS LUSTS (2:20-23).<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>2</sup>The Epistle to the Colossians by Mark Copeland pg 4 of e-book @ [http://executableoutlines.com/pdf/colo\\_sg.pdf](http://executableoutlines.com/pdf/colo_sg.pdf).

<sup>3</sup>The Epistle to the Colossians by Mark Copeland pg 4 of e-book @ [http://executableoutlines.com/pdf/colo\\_sg.pdf](http://executableoutlines.com/pdf/colo_sg.pdf).

2. In what ways are the dangers that were evident in the Book of Colossians alive and well today? (see text box on previous page)

What makes these dangers so resilient even after 2000 years?

3. Paul and Timothy were encouraged and thankful to God for the faith, hope and love of the Colossian believers. What is it about seeing the godliness of others that causes us to be encouraged and thankful?

What things are you doing today that God can use to encourage the saints around you?

4. In verses 5 and 6 we learn that the same gospel that brought salvation to the Colossian believers is the same Gospel that is saving people throughout the world. How would this realization impact them and how should it impact us even now?

What does this truth tell us about the gospel and our living and sharing it before others?

5. In what ways have others heard of your faith in Christ Jesus? What might they say about it?

