

# Reason for Thanksgiving

Colossians 1:1-8



## Letter to the Colossians

- ❑ Author: The apostle Paul (1:1; 4:18).
- ❑ Recipients: Christian believers at Colosse (1:2);<sup>1</sup> mostly Gentile (non-Jewish) (1:12, 21, 27).
- ❑ Time & Place of Writing: Probably AD 60-62 when Paul was in prison in Rome (4:3; 10, 18).<sup>2</sup>
- ❑ Purpose of Letter: Paul had heard that false teaching was affecting the church at Colosse.<sup>3</sup> So he wrote this letter to refute (prove wrong) this false teaching by presenting the truth.

1. How common is “false teaching” in churches today? How is “false teaching” identified? Where does it come from? Why does it happen?

## Greeting

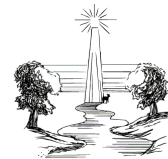
- ❑ Paul begins his letter in the customary way by mentioning his own name (along with Timothy); then mentioning the recipients; and then offering a Christian greeting. Read Colossians 1:1-2.<sup>4</sup>

## Thanksgiving

- ❑ Read Colossians 1:3-8. Paul has great reason for thanksgiving, because he has heard (from Epaphras) of their “faith in Christ Jesus” and their “love...for all the saints” (1:4).
2. According to verse 5, what is their faith and love based on? What do they “spring from”?<sup>5</sup>

## Hope

- ❑ The Christian hope is the “totality of blessing that awaits the Christian in the life to come.”<sup>6</sup> The Colossians “need to be reminded that their present experience of faith and love rests on the solid foundation of what God has committed to do for them in the future.”<sup>7</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Colosse was located in the Phrygian region of the Roman province of Asia, about 18 km east of Laodicea and 161 km east of Ephesus (in present-day southwest Turkey). Colosse was a very important city for at least five centuries prior to the time of Christ because of its location along a major trade route. Thus it had a diverse population. The church at Colosse was likely founded during Paul’s three years in Ephesus (on his 3rd missionary journey, AD 53-55), but he probably never went there. Rather Epaphras, one of Paul’s converts, brought Colosse the gospel (1:7; 2:1).

<sup>2</sup> Colossians was likely written about the same time as Ephesians and Philemon, with Philippians written a little later.

<sup>3</sup> The precise nature of the false teaching is difficult to identify. Various elements are mentioned (2:4, 8, 16-18) but the teaching is not explicitly described. Common contemporary views include: 1) Jewish mysticism; 2) Judaism in some form; or 3) syncretism (mixing of Christianity, Judaism, and other beliefs). Clinton Arnold says it was a “combination of Phrygian folk belief, local folk Judaism, and Christianity” (Clinton E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 243). While Clinton’s thesis is not accepted by all, the majority of scholars agree that some type of syncretism was involved.

<sup>4</sup> “holy...brothers” – they are “holy” (*hagiois*) because they are “set apart” for God and his service. *Hagios* could also be translated “saint”. All true believers are “saints”, not just certain dead people designated by the Catholic Church.

<sup>5</sup> Faith, love, and hope are often mentioned together (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6; 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8). Here, faith and love “spring from” (are based on) hope. In this context, “hope” does not mean the action of hoping; but is something objective. It is “that which is hoped for”. In this case, it is a certain hope based on the promise of God.

<sup>6</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmann, 2008), 85. This includes the blessings of complete salvation, eternal life, peace, joy and righteousness, in fellowship with our holy and loving God.

<sup>7</sup> Moo, 85.

3. What does this passage say about the Christian hope? (1:5) How is this encouraging?<sup>8</sup>
4. How does the Christian hope compare to the “hopes” (or ends) offered by other worldviews?<sup>9</sup>

### Gospel

❑ The “gospel” is the “good news” of what God has done for us in his Son Jesus Christ, who died for our sins, and was raised from the dead, thereby defeating sin and death. Through faith in Christ, we receive God’s gracious salvation, and enter into a loving, personal relationship with him. In Christ we have a new life – everlasting and abundant, and we have the Christian hope.

5. What does Paul say about the effects and extent of the gospel?<sup>10</sup>  
What do you think he means by saying the gospel is “bearing fruit and growing”? (1:6)



❑ Paul reminds the Colossians of the gospel’s truthfulness and life-changing power, which they had accepted and experienced (1:6). Paul also reminds them of the integrity and qualifications of the gospel messenger – Epaphras, who is a “faithful minister” (1:7). Paul likely does this to contrast the gospel with the false teaching they are hearing.

6. What effects of the gospel have you experienced (or observed) in your involvement with authentic Christianity? How has this affected your beliefs about the Christian gospel?<sup>11</sup>

❑ Paul again mentions “the great love for others that the Holy Spirit has given [the Colossian believers] (1:8, *NLT*). Such love is great reason for thanksgiving.

### Reflection/Application

- Do you have hope? What is your ultimate (greatest, final) hope? What is the basis of your hope? The Christian hope is realized through faith in Jesus Christ. Do you want that hope?
- As a believer, do you realize the value of the hope you have in Christ? How does it affect your life? Does it encourage your faith and motivate your love? Think about the Christian hope.
- As a believer, do you realize the truthfulness and life-changing power of the gospel? Do you regularly give thanks to God for its effects in your life and the lives of others? Be thankful.

<sup>8</sup> The Christian hope is “stored up for [believers] in heaven” (1:5). It is “kept in heaven” for them (1 Peter 1:4). It is reserved and secure. No powers can take it away. Though full realization of this hope is future, its certainty affects the believer’s present life, which is “hidden with Christ” (Colossians 3:3) and “shielded by God’s power” until the hope is fully realized (1 Peter 1:5). This hope is revealed in the “word of truth” – the reliable, trustworthy gospel (Col. 3:5).

<sup>9</sup> The greatest “hope” of naturalism is mere earthly advance, because we cease to exist at death. The “hope” of some religions is more like wishful thinking because it depends on human effort or an unpredictable God. Still other religions offer the “hope” of ultimate extinction, or the merging into some impersonal oneness. What “hope” sounds best?

<sup>10</sup> The gospel is “bearing fruit and growing”, not only in Colosse, but “all over the world.” This does not necessarily mean the gospel has gone everywhere on the planet, but the effects of the gospel have been widespread. “Bearing fruit and growing” may refer to the inward and outward activity of the gospel. The gospel results in inward renewal and changed lives, and through these changed lives others are impacted and drawn to Christ, and God’s family grows.

<sup>11</sup> This may be a risky question because some people have negative experiences or observations. However, many Christians are encouraged in their faith because of the life-changing power of the gospel in their own lives and the lives of others. And many non-Christians are attracted to Christianity because they see the positive results of the gospel.