

THE EPISTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS

INTRODUCTION

- A. Importance of the Epistle to the Colossians
 - 1. This letter from Paul is a book on Christian doctrine.
 - 2. Doctrine gives instruction against heresy.
- B. The heresy at Colossae
 - 1. It was tied to Judaism and Gnosticism.
 - 2. Emphasis was on spiritual fullness, special freedom, super protection, strict behavior, super knowledge and superior attitude.
 - 3. Like all heresies, Jesus is not enough.
- C. An outline of the Epistle to the Colossians
 - 1. Introduction (1:1-14)
 - a. Greeting (1-2)
 - b. A prayer of thanksgiving for their faith (3-8)
 - c. A prayer of petition for them (9-14)

COLOSSIANS 1:1-8, PAUL'S INTRODUCTION OF HIS LETTER

- A. Greeting (1-2)
 - 1. Identification and authority of the senders of the epistle (1), *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,*
 - a. Paul identified himself as an *apostle of Christ Jesus*.
 - 1) Qualifications of an apostle
 - a) One selected by Jesus who was with Him from the beginning of His earthly ministry, Acts 1:22, *beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.*
 - b) Possessed special miraculous powers given to authenticate the apostles, 2 Corinthians 12:12, *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.*
 - 2) Paul's qualifications
 - a) He was selected *by the will of God* to minister with the authority of an apostle to Gentiles in contrast to the false teachers.
 - 1] Acts 9:15, *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*
 - 2] 1 Timothy 2:7, *For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*
 - b) He saw the risen Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:1, *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?*
 - c) He possessed the miraculous powers of an apostle, Romans 15:19, *by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;*
 - 3) Paul identified himself as an apostle to give authority to his instruction against heresy not out of personal ambition.
 - b. Paul mentioned Timothy who was with Paul when he wrote the letter.
 - 1) Timothy learned the Old Testament Scriptures from his godly mother and grandmother, 2 Timothy 3:15, *and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*
 - 2) Timothy became a frequent companion of Paul from the time they met at Lystra on Paul's Second Missionary Journey, Acts 16:2, *He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.*
 - 3) Paul spent time discipling Timothy and wrote two of his last letters to Timothy, 1 and 2 Timothy.

- c. Paul identified Timothy as a brother in Christ who was concerned for their well-being and one who would become prominent as a future Christian leader.
 - 1) 1 Timothy 1:3, *As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine,*
 - 2) Paul trained Timothy to do in Ephesus what he did in Colossae through this epistle.
- 2. Blessing on the recipients of the epistle (2), ***To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.***
 - a. Paul addressed those at the church in Colossae as *saints*.
 - 1) *saints* comes from the Greek word which means here, *dedicated, consecrated*.
 - 2) This references their position as those who placed faith in Christ alone not their practical holiness.
 - 3) 1 Corinthians 1:2, *To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:*
 - b. *faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae*
 - 1) Some say Paul was specifying those who had remained true to the original message.
 - 2) I believe this referenced the believers' practice as an encouragement to continue to be faithful to the Gospel.
 - c. Paul gave them a two-part blessing.
 - 1) First, there is *grace*.
 - a) It is God's unmerited favor and enablement.
 - b) It is most evidently seen in the Gospel, Ephesians 2:8, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*
 - 2) Second, there is *peace from God*.
 - a) This is the inner confidence God gives to those who have received His grace.
 - b) Peace is the result of grace received from God when one places trust in Christ alone, Romans 5:1, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- B. A prayer of thanksgiving for the believers in Colossae (3-8)
 - 1. Paul was thankful for their faith expressed by love tied to hope (3-5a), ***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, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.***
 - a. He thanked God that they had placed faith in Jesus Christ.
 - 1) Paul would address heresy in the letter, but now, he tells them of his prayers of thanksgiving because they placed faith in the truth instead of in error, Lucas, *...the Colossian thanksgiving...is an impressive piece of reassurance.*
 - 2) Truth is in God and revealed in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a) The important qualifier is *in Christ* because faith is only as solid as the subject in which it is placed.
 - b) This is the foundational quality on which the spiritual life must be built.
 - b. He thanked God for their love for others.
 - 1) Their faith was evidenced by their actions.
 - 2) Faith in Christ gives a heart of sacrificial love for others, John 13:34-35, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*
 - 3) Epaphras was probably the one who shared with Paul how the Colossians expressed their faith with love for others, as seen in Colossians 1:7 and 4:12.
 - c. He thanked God that their actions were motivated by hope.
 - 1) The Colossians knew that because of their position in Christ they had heaven to gain.
 - 2) Hope is realizing that one day faith will become sight.
 - a) Romans 8:24-25, *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*
 - b) 2 Corinthians 4:18, *as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

- 3) Hope is the motivation for spiritual action.
 - a) 1 John 3:2-3, *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*
 - b) R. Lucas, *We are to recognize that heaven holds most of the great things won for us by Christ, and that our present experience is no more than a precious foretaste of what is to come.*
- 4) The believer's hope is laid up in heaven.
 - a) Bishop Wilson, *...deposited, reserved, put by in store out of the reach of all enemies and sorrows.*
 - b) Norman Geisler, *...Christ, the essence of this hope is there. Without Christ's Ascension to heaven and His present intercession there on behalf of believers (Hebrews 7:25), they would have no hope.*
 - c) References
 - 1] Acts 1:10-11, *And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*
 - 2] Hebrews 7:25, *Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.*
 - 3] 1 Corinthians 15:19, *If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.*
- d. Paul used this trilogy of faith, hope and love in other epistles to picture the Gospel's impact on those who believe.
 - 1) 1 Corinthians 13:13, *So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*
 - 2) 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3, *We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*
- e. Others' thoughts on faith, hope and love.
 - 1) N. Geisler, *Faith is the soul looking upward to God; love looks outward to others; hope looks forward to the future. Faith rests on the past work of Christ; love works in the present; and hope anticipates the future.*
 - 2) R. Hughes, *None of these qualities can be manufactured by men; they all come from God.*
 - 3) Lucas, *These three qualities are the hallmarks, and proper evidences, of a work of God in the soul of man.*
2. Paul informed them of the priority of the Gospel for them and for people worldwide (5b-6), ***Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,***
 - a. The Colossians heard of the hope when the *word of truth, the gospel*, was proclaimed to them.
 - b. The Gospel was spreading worldwide, bearing fruit among others even as it bore fruit in Colossae.
 - c. The Gospel bears fruit when it, the true grace of God, is heard, understood, and received.
 - 1) It must be understood intellectually - I believe Christ died and rose again to make payment for sin.
 - 2) It must be accepted emotionally - I believe Christ died and rose again to make payment for my sins.
 - 3) It must be received volitionally - I choose to receive Christ's payment for my sins.
 - d. Paul was contrasting the true grace of God, faith in Christ plus nothing, to the heresy presented by false teachers, Christ plus something.
 - 1) Romans 11:6, *But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*
 - 2) Ephesians 2:8-9, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
 - 3) Titus 3:5-7, *he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*
 - e. A biblical study of Gospel.
 - 1) Purposes
 - a) It is the only message of salvation for mankind, Romans 1:16, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
 - b) It is a message of condemnation for those who reject it, 1 Peter 4:17, *For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

- 2) Distinctives
 - a) The Gospel is supernatural
 - 1] It is a message from and about Jesus Christ, Galatians 1:11-12, *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*
 - 2] It is confirmed by the Holy Spirit, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, *because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*
 - 3] It is a heavenly message, 1 Peter 1:12, *It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.*
 - 4] It is a message opposed by the forces of evil, 2 Corinthians 4:4, *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*
 - b) The Gospel is a one of a kind message, Galatians 1:6-7, *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.*
 - c) The Gospel is supremely powerful, 2 Timothy 1:10, *and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,*
 - d) The Gospel must be proclaimed worldwide, Mark 13:10, *And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.*
3. Paul reminded them that they received the message through Epaphras (7-8), ***just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.***
 - a. The believers in Colossae learned the Gospel message from Epaphras.
 - 1) Paul reminded them that they had received the Gospel message from one of their own in contrast to the heretical messages coming from unknown teachers.
 - 2) It would encourage believers in Colossae to accept Paul's epistle since his message was the same message given to them by Epaphras.
 - 3) M. Anders, *...the most significant day in the history of Colosse was the day Epaphras came to town and planted the seed of the gospel. No banners unfurled in the wind, nor did trumpets blare in the breeze; but lives were changed and destinies were eternally altered when the gospel was planted.*
 - b. Paul learned about the church at Colossae from Epaphras.
 - 1) Paul declared to them that Epaphras was a faithful minister to him on their behalf.
 - 2) Epaphras informed Paul of their *love in the Spirit*.
 - a) They had love produced by the Holy Spirit.
 - b) Galatians 5:22-23, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.*

CONCLUSION

- A. There is no greater blessing than God's grace and peace which comes through new life in Christ.
- B. The Gospel is the source of hope which motivates one's faith in God and love for others.
- C. The marks of a true believer are faith expressed by love based in hope secured by the Gospel.
- D. True doctrine taught by God's servants overcomes the heresy of false teachers.