

## SECTION 1: We Thank God for you

### Colossians 1: 1-14

*1:1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.*

*3. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints - the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*

*9. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

The letter opens in Paul's traditional way with an acknowledgement of the church, gratitude for their existence and an indication of his aspirations for them. Here, writing to a modern church in danger of being blown off course, he introduces his stabilizing teaching with:

1. thanksgiving for core competencies (= what we are supposed to be good at)
2. a reminder of the power of the gospel (Paul always wants us to be excited about the gospel and to focus on the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ who is at the heart of the gospel)
3. prayer for continued growth in knowledge; and fruitfulness, and power (that's where we will see stability and maturity)

When we look at this first section of the letter to the Colossians we can see that Paul is seeking to bring people back to basics, to the core of the gospel and what the church is about.

This book is written to an actual church (possibly as a circular to a group of churches) outlining what he sees as being important for them. He starts with a greeting, as he does in all his epistles.

After the greeting, Paul looks at the core competencies of the gospel, those things at its heart, the very attributes it generates, those very aspects that we are expected to practise and to be good at.

I am not a great football fan and yet one thing I have noticed is that the really great footballers are the ones who have basic skills that have been developed to a high standard. Everything else grows from that. In the same way, we need to master the basic skills of being Christians: the rest will follow.

So, how does that apply here? In the first place,

1. Paul acknowledges their testimony. He gives thanks for their
  - **Faith** in Christ. This is essential if our life in Christ is to grow, for it is that union which keeps us from fear and anxiety.
  - **Love** for all the saints. This is in contrast to the love that is often seen in this world. That is often a tarnished love that is a selfish and self-centred love. But, this love is the love that we have for others, particularly the family and household of faith.
  - **Hope**. Our faith and love give rise to hope. It is a combination of desire and expectation. It is a confidence and a motivation. It directs us to the future and to our hope in glory; and it influences how we respond in the circumstances which challenge us in our lives.

These three - faith, love and hope - are core competencies for the believer. People should see faith, love and hope when they look at Christians; they should permeate our whole being and behaviour; be written all the way through, just like lettering on a stick of rock.

2. He affirms the basis of that hope: the gospel, the word of truth. We can never get too far away from the Word of God for this is the very anchor for our faith. It is through hearing - and believing - the word of truth that they - and we - have been regenerated and "*born again to a lively hope*" That is the message that came from God, the gospel, the good news of our salvation.
  - The gospel is the objective word of truth. The gospel is the message that tells us of the fact that God sent His Son into the world '*to save sinners*'. It is the truth in which we put our faith . "*Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the word of God*" Salvation comes through Christ and His finished work on the Cross.
  - The gospel is universal, '*all over the world it is bearing fruit*'. There can be no doubt that the good news of Jesus Christ is for all men. Yet, it is exclusive in that it is only available in Christ. It was He who said (exclusively), "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life*". John's Gospel records these '*I am's*'. where we read about: the

bread of life, the light of the world, the resurrection and the life, etc. He is the only way.

- The Gospel works: it bears fruit through changing lives; it increases by spreading among people and across the regions; it spontaneously manifests the grace of God, in contrast to legalism, ritualism, mysticism and intellectualism. It is a gospel which needs to be faithfully communicated. In Colossae, this is what Epaphras did. He is described as a partner in the gospel, *a faithful servant of Christ, who reports of your love in the Spirit.*

3. He prays for them. He prays a prayer for spiritual knowledge, obedience and maturity.

Beyond all that they enjoy at present, Paul prays that they may grow even more and reach greater maturity. It is for their benefit and for the welfare of the testimony.

Praying is an important activity. When we cannot preach the gospel, then we can pray. We can pray for the proclamation of that gospel, and for those who are in need of the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's prayers often follow a pattern of Request, Response and Result which we can follow and adopt in our praying. For example,

- Request - prayer for Spiritual Knowledge - not something for the spiritual elite but for all who trust in Jesus - the wisdom that comes from The Spirit
- Response - obedience that we may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.
- Result - maturity and stability: -in ministry, when we bear fruit in every good work; in knowledge, when we increase in the knowledge of God; in power, when we are strengthened with all power.

All of that is so that we might grow and that we might be good at what we are supposed to be good at - i.e. being Christians and spreading the light of Christ through our lives and the gospel.

That growth means letting Christ grow in us. He goes on to show something of all that Christ is.

Let's see what he says.