

FAITH AND LOVE THAT SPRING FROM HOPE

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Scripture: Colossians 1

BACKGROUND.

Colossae was a town which was not at all prominent; in fact, a very tiny place. But for this particular epistle, none of us would have heard about Colossae. The reason Paul wrote this and the person behind it, is what makes it very interesting, encouraging and even challenging. All of us have heard about Philemon and Onesimus.

This particular epistle was written from prison during Paul's first imprisonment in Rome, which you read in Acts 28. During that time, three more letters were written – to the church at Ephesus, Philippians, and Philemon. It is said that Paul was put in prison, but it was kind of a house arrest with a soldier guarding him all the time. It is mentioned that he was allowed to have people to take care of him, like Luke and others.

Now I want to introduce a very interesting person who is the reason for this particular book. This is Epaphras, who was responsible for starting this church. Colossae is about 150 kilometers east of Ephesus, and Paul was in Ephesus for about three years, where he taught and disciplined. It is quite likely that Epaphras came to Christ during those three years.

What is remarkable is that Epaphras went back and shared what he received with his relatives and friends. And a church started there. So, that should be an encouragement for all of us. God wants to use each and every one of us in His own way. And only eternity will know the impact of that. So, that's an encouragement for us.

Apostle Paul writes this letter to address some issues or problems that the church was facing, which he came to know from Epaphras. Now, the major problem was some of these wrong teachings and heresy in Colossae, and Paul wrote this particular letter to address those issues. Mainly, the Colossian church was struggling with problems such as came from the false teachers and heretics who said that "Christ and being a Christian was fine. But you're not complete. You need more wisdom." It's a kind of mix of the Judaic legalism and Gnosticism – some of the issues that were troubling them. So, Paul wrote this particular letter to address these issues.

SCRIPTURE

Colossians 1: 1-8 (NIV)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² 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, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – ⁵ 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 ⁶ 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. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

In these few verses we read about Epaphras, and how Paul came to know about them. But let me share a few verses from this particular portion we read.

³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints – ⁵the 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 ⁶that has come to you.

I like this phrase which we find here – “the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven.” Now, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and the love we have for all the saints which Paul was referring to, and that came from the hope kept by the Colossian church. These believers were convinced about the hope of eternal life and what God has kept in store for them.

The other very important thing we need to read is **verse 6**, – “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.” What Paul is saying is: “When the gospel transforms us, we would bear fruit.” And he says “This gospel is bearing fruit and growing just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard and understood God's grace and all its truth.”

So, one of the challenges for us, which we'll see a bit later, is to see whether our lives are bearing fruit, because it is impossible that God's Spirit is residing in us and there is no fruit. It is bearing fruit, that's what Paul is saying here.

What is the motivation for Paul writing this particular letter? It was to address the false teaching which denied that faith in Christ alone was sufficient for salvation. They were being taught that what you have is not enough. You need something more. This heresy threatened the peace and the purity of the Colossian church. It was a combination of Eastern philosophy and Jewish legalism with elements of Gnosticism.

In the first century church, Gnosticism was a big issue, meaning that you need some kind of a superior knowledge. What you have is not enough and you need some kind of experience. And that is what Paul strongly wanted to address. That's the main theme of the book of Colossians.

Colossians 1: 13-20

¹³For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created by him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Let's look at some of the main themes coming out of this passage.

Verses 13 and 14. This is kind of the essence of the gospel. It talks about our past and our present state.

Verse 13 says, “He rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son.” Dominion of darkness means before we came to Christ, we were under slavery. We were

literally slaves to our sinful nature and to Satan. And it says that He has brought us into the kingdom of the Son. The worship songs that we sang earlier brought up this aspect very clearly that it is God who rescued us and brought us into the kingdom of His Son. We could not rescue ourselves. That's the good news.

Verse 14 says *"In whom (i.e. the Son) we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* This word redemption is a very important legal term, even today. Redeemed means something which was lost and has to be redeemed by paying a big price. That's exactly what happened. We were under slavery, we were under bondage to the sinful nature we had, and to Satan. And Jesus paid the heavy price of His blood to redeem us and bring us back. That's the good news. Therefore, we are forgiven and we are made sons and daughters of the Most-high God. We should always be joyful in this particular gospel.

Now getting into the portion which talks about the supremacy of Christ.

Verse 15 says, *"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."* Now He, that is Jesus, is the image of the Invisible God. You might remember in John 14, one of Jesus' disciples Philip asked Jesus this. "Lord, show us the Father, and that would be enough for us." To this Jesus replied, "Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father." For the Jews, this would have been a shocking statement. "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father." Here we get a shade of meaning when it says "Jesus is the image of the invisible God."

Verses 16-17 makes it very clear. *"For by Him, all things were created."* What are these all? *"Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."*

These two verses make it absolutely clear that Jesus is the creator, and He created all things. All things were created by Him and for Him. I think that brings the supremacy and the sovereignty of Jesus very strongly. All things hold together. Sometimes people think of Jesus as the creator, and that's it. No! All things hold together. The stability, whatever you see, is all because He is active, sovereign over each and every thing that is happening. Therefore, we can be very happy that each and every small detail that's happening in our life, and not only in our life, in the whole world, nothing happens without God's express permission and His knowledge. And that should thrill us, and also keep us in real reverence. When we read God's word, we must have that kind of reverence. We are worshipping a God who controls everything.

Verse 18 says, *"And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy."* That's the important thing. The Colossian church, the believers, need to be told that Jesus has the supremacy and that He is the head of the church.

Verses 19-20 takes up this thought further. *"For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross."*

This particular verse makes it absolutely clear that God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Jesus. There is nothing else. That is very important. Therefore, when we say that we are rescued and we are redeemed, that's it. it's complete. You don't need another experience or anything further. That's the important thing confirmed by Jesus said in John 14:6 when He said, *"I am the way and the truth and the life. no one comes to the Father except through Me."*

The first century believers in the church in Colossae were influenced by the Eastern philosophies. And likewise, we too, sitting here in India, are subjected to the same. Very often, in our casual conversations with our friends and our colleagues, someone will ask about your faith and make some kind of comment. For example, most of our friends are willing to accept Jesus as a good teacher or a great guru, but they are not willing to accept Jesus as the way, the truth, and the life. The only way to God – that's where the problem comes.

That is why we need to be all the more sure. Is it true that Jesus is the only way? Sitting here in India, in all our everyday conversations, these kinds of questions come up, and none of us can avoid it. That's why we need to be convinced.

People are willing to accept Jesus as a great guru or a great teacher, but not as God, the only way. The fallacy is this: if they are willing to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, then all that He is saying must be true. It cannot be two ways – that part of His life was true and part of His life was a lie. So, the assertion that Jesus made that He is the way, the truth and the life, is either true or false; it cannot be in-between.

C.S. Lewis used this argument. He said, "You must either accept Jesus as God or dismiss Him as a lunatic or devil, but not just a great moral teacher." And that is what we have to be very clear about. Who is Jesus? Is He just a great guru or is He the only way to God? He's the creator, and there's no other truth. This is a major issue that is facing the world today, in our families, our workplaces, our neighborhoods. As parents too, we need to engage our children in conversations like this. Though they go to church, read the Bible and everything, they are probably being bombarded by questions from their peers. And maybe, they're struggling. The supremacy of Jesus must be clear.

But we need not be arrogant when we witness this to our friends. We can tell them very politely, lovingly, so that they are able to see the fallacy of accepting Jesus as a moral teacher, but not wanting to accept all that He teaches. Then we tell them, "No, that's wrong! If you don't accept Jesus as a moral teacher, that's fine. But if you accept, then you have to accept him as God, not just as a teacher. That part is the main issue, and I think it needs to come up through our witnessing. I wish that all of us are like this great example we had in Epaphras. He made it a point to share what he received with his friends and relatives. And as part of that, a church was formed and we have this great epistle.

The book of Colossians is called the greatest epistle on Christology, or the doctrine of Christ. No other book in the Bible breaks it so clearly – who Jesus is and especially His supremacy.

Verses 21-22 says *"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation."*

For the Colossian church, this is very important – that it is such a God who has brought us from the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of His Son. Therefore, they need to be convinced that they don't need any extra experience or extra wisdom. No, they are complete and that's what they wanted to hear.

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR RESPONSE?

Paul brings it so beautifully in vs. 9-12. In fact, he says that is his prayer for the church. And that is something we could pray for, and also strive for and aim for.

Verses 9-12 says, *“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.”*

These four verses are Paul’s prayer for this church. If we look at v.10, we see some important points.

1. You may live a life worthy of the Lord.

Each one of us who has received Jesus in our heart, and who confess that He is our Lord and Savior, we need to remember that we are sons and daughters of the Most High God.

Therefore, we have an obligation to live as sons and daughters of the Most High God, so that our lives, our thoughts, our actions, all that we do, is in line with being a son or a daughter of the Most High God.

2. You may please Him in every way.

The primary goal of a Christian should be to please God in every way – eating, or drinking, or thinking, or whatever you do. If you look at what Jesus said in Matthew 5: “You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world.” He didn’t say, “You will be,” but He said, “You are.” That’s what we are.

Jesus also said in Matthew 5, “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” That’s the meaning.

3. Bearing fruit in every good work.

As we please God with our life, automatically our life will bring out fruit. And that will come in the form of our attitude to our work, the way we do things, the way we react, all that we do. Mind you, you are being noticed all the time, whether you like it or not. Your friends, your colleagues, your neighbors, they all watch you just like you watch them. Therefore, as Jesus said, “Let them see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Jesus also said in John 15, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.” So, the purpose of being redeemed is that we bear fruit. And it’s impossible that God has redeemed us but we have no fruit.

Therefore, remember that should be our genuine desire to bring glory and honor to God and to bear fruit. And that will happen if we are intentional. One of the things we need to do, and I do this every day, as I go to work, I pray: Lord, I commit the whole day into Your hands, all my actions, reactions, all of them, may they bring glory and honor to You. And Lord, if some questions arise, or some conversations start, help me to bear fruit, to bear witness to You.

And I’m sure God would make use of all those small opportunities you get. Today, times are different. I don’t think somebody will sit in front of you and say, “Please tell me the gospel.” Those opportunities would be very seldom. But one thing you will get is casual conversations. Use them to put in a word. Maybe one word from you, maybe a thought, or something you share could change them and make them understand. That’s where God has placed us where we are.

4. Growing in the knowledge of God.

How can we grow in the knowledge of the Lord? This is possible if our desire is to love the Lord with all our mind or being intentional about living a holy life, which means we need to invest quality time. You are not going to get knowledge of God from the newspaper or from your conversations. You are only going to get it from God's word. Therefore, each one of us needs to make it a point to invest quality time – whatever that time means for you. For me, that means about 30 to 45 minutes early in the morning, reading God's word, meditating on it. When that happens, God's Spirit who is residing within us permanently, can make us grow in the knowledge of God.

Sometimes we are often satisfied by listening to YouTube videos. Nothing wrong with that but make sure that you're balanced. Make sure that God's Spirit talks to you directly through His word. God's Spirit wants to speak to each one of us and that is possible only if we read and we invest in God's word. That's the only way to grow. Remember we are all in the path of sanctification. The day we receive Jesus Christ, we are in a race, and we are in that path. We are in a process; trust Him and depend on Him, and God will help us one step at a time, one day at a time, to grow in the Lord. let us do our part.

Now having heard all this, we may immediately get scared. How can I do it? I don't have the strength. Verse 10 and 11 says, What is our resource? "Being strengthened with all the power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience." Don't forget that you have divine resources. God's word is a divine resource. God's Spirit is permanently residing in you the day you receive Jesus. God's Spirit will give you all the power, all the ability, all the wisdom you need to do that.

5. Great endurance and patience should be our desire.

Lord, help me, give me endurance and patience. One thing we must remember is that God will never insulate us from problems and challenges. We will have our own dose of problems. Whatever problems our neighbors and friends are facing, we also will face. But there is a big difference, and that is how we face them. That will show those around us about our God. And that's what would make an impact on them. We are constantly being watched by friends and neighbors, and they notice our reaction to whatever happens in our lives.

How are we reacting to the problems that come our way? Remember, we have plenty of God's promises. For example, I am a person who gets anxious very often, and for me Philippians 4:6-7 is a passage which I need to remind myself on a daily basis. *"⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* So, we need to go back to God's word and claim His promises which are always true.

6. Being joyful.

Verse 12 says, *"Joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light."*

When we go through all kinds of struggles, we should never forget about being joyful. Why? Because we have a hope. This world is not our final destination. And one day or the other, all of us sitting here have to leave this world. That's a reality. None of us can escape from that. But that's not the end, and that's what God's word is reminding us, that we have a hope. This verse says, "He has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." We are pilgrims in this world. We are strangers in this world. We are aliens in this world. Therefore, we need to encourage each other that this is not our final destination.

So may our faith and love be shaped by the hope we have in God to help us live lives which will bear much fruit to the glory of our Father.

Amen.
