

# Colossians 1:3-8

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/col/col-1/colossians-13-8/>

*The unifying power of the gospel brings believers together, from Paul to Colossae to the ends of the earth.*

Paul (and Timothy) continues his adulation of the believers in Colossae. Paul's aim in these verses is to further connect the three entities at play—himself/Timothy as authors of the letter, the believers in Colossae as the letter's recipients, and *Jesus* whom they all serve.

Paul/Timothy state *We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The word for *give thanks* is the Greek word “eucharisteo.” It is related to the word *charis*, which means “grace” or “favor.” Grace and thankfulness are closely related. The grace in verse 2 was bestowed on the Colossians from Paul's role as Christ's ambassador. Here, the *thanks* is given to *God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Unequivocally, *Jesus* is the purpose for the connection between Paul and the Colossian believers. The word *Lord* is the Greek word “kyrios.” It denotes the owner, a possessor, the person to whom a thing belongs. It comes from the root “kuros,” which means “supremacy.”

So, these three entities—Paul/Timothy, the Colossians, and God/Christ—are all coming together, but there is no doubt who the head is. The supremacy lies with *Christ*.

Connecting *God the Father* with *Jesus the Christ* is a bringing together of two of the three persons that make up one God. It connects the Old Testament “Yahweh” with the New Testament revelation of *supremacy*, which is *Jesus*. Paul is writing roughly thirty years after the death of Jesus; establishing this connection is still pretty new to the world at large. It is a message Paul is adamant about confirming.

The authors are *praying always for you*. Paul is establishing an eternal camaraderie, a kinship between the believers in Colossae.

Paul and Timothy have been praying for the Colossians *since they heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints*. This is a pretty firm indication that Paul has not visited the Colossians in person. He has *heard* about them. It is important for Paul to establish that what he has *heard* is not just about their problems and struggles. It is fundamentally and primarily about their *faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints*.

He has *heard* good things and this has inspired him to *pray* for the Colossians and care for their community. This celebration of the Colossians acknowledges two values Paul has *heard* about—their *faith* (or trust) in the supremacy of *Christ* and their *love* for the believers (not just in their own community, but *all the saints* around the world). This elevates the obedience of the Colossians to the two greatest commands, as articulated by Jesus:

“And [Jesus] said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”  
(Matthew 22:37-40)

Like any good leader, Paul is setting the stage by reminding the Colossians of the vision and the purpose of Christ, and of the great context in which it is being played out. The Colossians are important contributors to the realization of that purpose. They have proven themselves deserving of Paul’s attention through their faithfulness, as Paul was strategic in spending his time investing in those whom he found to be faithful (2 Timothy 2:2).

Paul then reminds them of the foundation for their *faith* and *love*. It was *because of the hope laid up for you in heaven*. This may be Paul’s way of reminding the Colossians that life is not about instant gratification. He is calling them to live above their circumstances. To remember it is a *hope* that causes us to *love* and believe, a trust in something bigger than our current circumstances.

The Greek word “apokeimai” is translated *laid up* here. It means “reserved.” Again, Paul is reminding them of what we might refer to as a higher calling. The Colossian believers have an inheritance *laid up* for them in heaven, a reward waiting for them if they continue in faithfulness (Colossians 3:23). At the end of Paul’s life, he expressed his own hope that God was preserving what he had sent ahead as treasure laid up in heaven through his obedience to Christ:

“For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed;  
for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard  
what I have entrusted to Him until that day.”  
(2 Timothy 1:12)

This *hope* in a future reward came to the Colossians much the same way a report of their current state has come to Paul. He says, *...of which you have previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel that has come to you*. This is a call to remembrance. None of what Paul is saying is new. They have *heard it previously*. Perhaps they need a reminder. What they heard was *the word of truth*. It was true then and is true now. It is the *gospel* (The Greek “euangelion,” “good news”) that was brought to the Colossians.

The good news begins with a new spiritual birth. We are given new life by having enough faith to look upon Jesus, hoping to be healed of the poisonous venom of sin (John 3:14-16). But the good news is much more. It gives meaning and purpose to living a life opposing evil, and suffering for standing for what is true, because that is a means to lay up lasting treasure in heaven.

Paul speaks further to the power and importance of the *gospel*. It is not just to the Colossians this hope has been communicated and expressed. *Just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and*

*understood the grace of God in truth.* This purpose Paul is reminding them of is a mission that is coming to fruition. It is succeeding.

The mission is succeeding in *all the world*. The *gospel* is growing and impacting the world; it is truly a purpose greater than themselves to which they belong and can be proud to belong. It is expanding throughout the world *even as it has been doing in you also*. The seed of the *gospel* is being planted and grown all over the world as well as in the hearts of the saints at Colossae.

The *gospel* has grown in them since the day they *heard* it. Their faithfulness has grown as they have walked in the obedience of faith, with the hope that attends such faithfulness. And, Paul affirms, they did not just hear it. They also *understood the grace of God in truth*. The Greek word for *understood* is “epiginosko” and it means “to become thoroughly acquainted with.” “Ginosko” means “to learn” or “to know.” And “epi” is a preposition that means “into.” “Epiginosko” then is a deeper knowing, going further into knowledge to a true intimacy and comprehension. The more the Colossians understood the truth of the gospel, the greater they understood its benefits.

Paul is reminding them of what they already know. It is easy to forget, for circumstances to cloud our better judgment. The great benefits of the gospel are seen through the eyes of faith. Paul is inviting the Colossians to recall the deeper truth of who they are and the *gospel* they serve. He is reminding them to continue to walk in the knowledge of faith.

Paul then reminds them of the messenger who brought them this life-altering good news: *Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on your behalf.* It is likely Epaphras is the one who brought the report of the Colossians to the apostle. We learn in Chapter 4 that Epaphras is with Paul. It is widely asserted that Epaphras learned the gospel from Paul during the apostle’s two-year stay in nearby Ephesus on his second missionary journey ([Acts 19:10](#)).

Paul calls Epaphras “*our beloved fellow bond-servant.*” The word for *beloved* here is “agepetos,” which is a form of the word “agape.” “Agape” is one of several Greek words that are translated into English as “love.” “Agape” is a form of love that is connected with action. A positive example of the attributes of agape love is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13. Patience is a chosen action. A negative example is in 1 John 2:16 where “agape” is used to describe those who choose to follow the lusts of the world. Agape is widely considered the greatest, most intimate kind of love—perhaps it is because this is the kind of love that spurs us into action.

Epaphras is described as a *bond-servant*. Some theologians suggest the use of *bond-servant* here indicates that Epaphras is in prison in Rome alongside Paul. The Greek word is “syndoulos,” a combination of two words. “Syn” means “with” or “alongside,” it is a preposition denoting unity. “Doulos” is the term for “servant” or “slave.” Therefore, “syndoulos” is perhaps most properly understood as a “servant who shares the same master.” The bond is not necessarily the physical bond of imprisonment, but the binding in unity that comes from acknowledging the same supremacy.

This aligns with Paul's clear agenda in these early verses of Colossians—to show how they all are connected and on the same team.

*Epaphras* may very well have been in prison with Paul (the verse in Colossians 4:12 is stronger evidence of this). Here, *bond-servant* is a term of endearment, of spiritual reality, showing the unity under which Paul and *Epaphras* serve. There is a real irony here. Although at least one of them is imprisoned in Rome, it is to Christ (and through Him to one another) they are truly bound.

Paul further lauds *Epaphras*, *who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf*. The word for servant here is “*diakonos*,” which means “errand-bringer” or someone who serves on behalf of another. It is often translated as “minister.” Paul’s use of *our* in the phrase “*Epaphras was a faithful servant on our behalf*” indicates that *Epaphras* was serving Paul and his team, and likely also his fellow believers in Colossae. Therefore, *Epaphras* was an excellent example of a great team player.

Then Paul hints again at the possibility that *Epaphras* is the one who gave him the update on the Colossians that has sparked the writing of this letter—and *he also informed us of your love in the Spirit*.

*Epaphras* is a focal point of the communication in Colossae. He brought the gospel to the Colossians, brought a report of the state of the Colossians to Paul and has reported to Paul the fervor of the Colossian believers. However, Paul includes Timothy as a co-author of this letter to the Colossians, which might indicate that Paul had intent for Timothy to take over for *Epaphras*.

### **Biblical Text**

**We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,<sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;<sup>5</sup> because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel<sup>6</sup> which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth;<sup>7</sup> just as you learned it from *Epaphras*, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,<sup>8</sup> and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.**