

Col. 1:4-8, The Report
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Overview

1. The three verbs in 1:3,4 summarize the entire prayer, which continues through 1:20.
 - a) "We give thanks" --> 1:12, "giving thanks to the Father."
 - b) "Praying always for you" --> 1:9, "we ... do not cease to pray for you"
 - c) "Having heard" introduces a summary of their condition that extends through 1:8, and motivates (1:9 *dio*) the following prayer and thanksgiving.

2. *Application*: When we learn of other believers, we should be motivated to intercede for their needs and give thanks for their victories. An excellent example to follow. Together, these two actions shut out any place for jealousy, strife, or malice.
 - a) We can always find something for which to thank God, and the exercise of seeking it out can help get our mind on a positive line of thought rather than a negative one.
 - b) If there is anything that we are not happy with, take it to the Lord and ask him to undertake.

3. This study focuses on 4-8, the report that Paul has heard.
 - a) 7b-8 shows us how Paul has received this report: from Epaphras, who is a faithful minister of Christ "on their behalf" (*huper*).
 - b) Paul begins with the surface "symptoms" of their faith and love, and then works back behind these to the successive causes of them. Exemplifies our Lord's teaching, "by their fruits you shall know them." True salvation will have visible results; if there is no visible evidence of belief, we can hardly accept it as real.

He traces four successive levels.

A. 4, The Symptoms: Faith and Love

Vertical and horizontal manifestations of salvation, respectively.

1. He has heard of their *faith*: "John Doe received the Lord and was baptized." But by itself this can be superficial.
2. Their practical *love* for one another is the works by which they show their faith (Jas 2:18, where the works in view are those of charity for other believers). Cf. John 13:35, "By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."
3. *Application*: The world today doesn't want us to show our faith. "It's a personal matter." But Paul thanks God for the public

report of the Colossians' faith, and we can be sure he would give thanks for the open report of ours as well, particularly as it shows itself in our love and care for one another.

B. 5a, The Motive: The Heavenly Hope

This faith and love are "for," "because of," the "hope ... laid up for you in heaven."

1. What is this hope? Not the subjective emotion of hope, but the object of that emotion, the thing for which we hope. Cf. 1 Pet. 1:3,4, where the "lively hope" is parallel with our heavenly inheritance. Don't be ashamed to look forward to our Lord's return and the glory we shall share with him. This is not "pie in the sky." On the contrary, "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable," 1 Cor. 15:19.
2. This hope motivates our faith, by giving us a reason not to be separated from God. Every good and perfect gift that we experience in this life comes down from above (Jas 1:17). That is the mother lode; these pleasures are only nuggets washed down from the hills. Whatever pleasantness there is in this life--the beauty of a spring morning, the singing of the birds, the brightness of sunshine, the joy of a family dinner around a bountiful table--these are but shadows of what God has prepared for those who love him. Sin blocks us from enjoying them now, and by death cuts us off from them in the future, but the promise of faith is that we shall be forever at the source of every good and perfect gift. "All my friends will be in hell." Ah, yes, but have you considered what will be in heaven, which you will miss if you are in hell?
3. This hope also motivates our love for other believers, by putting petty inconveniences in perspective. Compared with what God has prepared for us, everything else is dung, and we need not be upset if a brother's actions deprive us of some earthly comfort or convenience. If this life is all I have, I will naturally cling to it and despise those who deprive me of it. But if this is just samples, I can seek the blessing of others: "there's lots more where that came from."
4. Connection with the context of the epistle:
 - a) Written to address false teaching: 2:4, 8
 - b) This false teaching had a strongly ascetic trend, 2:20-23. It's only good if it feels bad. Cf. other aspects of first-century heresy:
 - 1) Denying the physical incarnation of Christ, 1 John 4:2,3
 - 2) Denying a future physical resurrection, insisting that instead it is fulfilled in our spiritual salvation, 2 Tim. 2:18; 1 Cor. 15.
 - 3) Cf. Augustine's objection to the teaching of a Millennium: that it encouraged carnal desires in people.
 - 4) Goes back to Greek Platonic thought, that the physical

world is inferior to the spiritual abstracts that lie behind it, and we must subdue the physical in order to appreciate the spiritual. Gnosticism is in large measure an adaptation of these ideas to eastern religion.

c) At the outset, and in opposition to these voices, Paul insists that the notion of future blessing is not an unworthy motive for salvation or the Christian life. His thought is much more Hebrew and OT. God made both body and soul; both are good, though both can be abused. His future blessings for us are both physical and spiritual, and we will be provided with bodies in which to enjoy them.

5. *Research note: What is the connection of "hope" with the rest of the paragraph? Does it motivate the faith and love, or is it the grounds of the thanksgiving?*

a) *Relationship of Faith, Hope, Love in the NT*

NB: "Hope" can be either objective (the thing hoped for) or subjective (our attitude).

1) *Parallel: 1 Cor. 13:13; 1Thes 1:3 (hope subj); Heb. 10:22-24 ("hope" paraphrased); Rev. 2:19*

2) *Faith and hope (subj) parallel, love results: 1 Pet. 1:21,22; Eph. 4:2-5*

3) *Faith and love parallel, hope separate: 1 Thes. 5:8*

4) *Completely non-parallel (embedded in text)*

a> *Rom. 5:1-5. Faith leads to hope; we are assured of that hope because of God's love toward us. Thus here hope depends causally on both faith and love. ("Because" is the reason for the statement, not for the matter stated.) "Hope" in Rom. 5 is subjective, our attitude, while in Col. 1:5 it is objective, the thing hoped for.*

b> *Gal. 5:5-6, Faith works by Love to reach the Hope (objective)*

c> *2Thes 1:3,4 Faith and Love provide patience (subj) in the face of tribulation*

d> *Heb. 6:10-12, Love and faith are means of diligence toward the full assurance of hope (subj).*

e> *1Pet 1:3-8 gives thanks for the hope (obj), from which stem faith and love.*

5) *Conclusion: there are many relations among these three, and 1Pet 1:3-8 seems to indicate that (objective) hope provides the motive for faith and love.*

b) *What does Paul thank God for in other epistles? Never the objective basis of their faith, but always their subjective response to it.*

1) *Rom. 1:8, their faith*

2) *Eph, the whole process of salvation*

3) *Phil 1:5, their fellowship in the gospel*

4) *1Thes 1:3,4 their subjective faith, hope, love*

5) *2Thes 1:3,4, their subjective faith, hope, love*

6) *2Tim. 1:5, faith (of Timothy's forebearers)*

7) *Phm 5, faith and love*

c) *Conclude: Paul's thanks are for faith and love, which in turn are motivated by the objective hope.*

C. 5b-6, The Message: The Word of the Truth of the Gospel

This hope in turn is presented in the gospel preaching to which they previously responded.

1. Its *Content*: The gospel includes presentation of God's blessing on his people. Today, the standard evangelical gospel omits the wrath of God, which is an important component of the message; this text warns us not to omit the positive anticipation of future blessing. It is, after all, a "good news" that we proclaim.
2. Its *Extent*: It has come "to all the world."
 - a) Could be hyperbolic statement meaning "everywhere:" the whole known world of that day. Cf. Rom. 1:8; 1 Thess. 1:8.
 - b) Deeper sense: the message is destined for the whole world; it is being inscripturated so that it might be taken there; it comes there in the same way ("as") it did to them. Since the Great Commission, it has been potentially in all the world, and it is the church's duty to actualize that message as Epaphras had in Colossae.
3. Its *Effect*: Bears fruit and increases. (Two verbs in MT, not just one; cf. v.10, where they are repeated in the prayer; same two roots in the parable of the soils in Mark 4:8.) Here as in Mark 4, it is the Gospel, not just believers, that is said to grow; cf. Acts 6:7; 12:24; 19:20. "The Word of God is quick and powerful." It is not a passive message that only takes effect if we respond; rather, it is the Spirit's sword that compels the belief of God's elect, a living "virus" that infects us and grows within us until it controls us. Implications:
 - a) If you are truly saved, your life WILL change. The Word of God within you will not let you remain in sin.
 - b) How we should witness to others: expose them to the germ itself. Get God's word before them and let it work.

D. 7a, The Preacher: Epaphras

This preaching depends on people to carry it. To the Colossians, the gospel came by the hand of Epaphras (not Paul). We know nothing of him except what is in here, 4:12-13; and Phm 23. He is "one of them" (4:12); perhaps saved through Paul's ministry elsewhere, then bringing the gospel back home to Colossae.

1. In his capacity as church planter, Paul calls him "our dear fellowservant."
2. Now the church has sent him to Paul, so he is also "for you [on your behalf] a faithful minister of Christ," bringing Paul news and encouragement in his captivity in Rome. (Cf. Philemon 23,

where he is called Paul's "fellow-prisoner," sharing his confinement, perhaps voluntarily.)

3. *Application:* "How shall they hear without a preacher?" The gospel is living and powerful, like seed, but must be sown in order to take effect. How lovely on the mountains are the feet of them who bring good news!

Summary

1. Symptoms of true Christianity: faith toward God and love toward the saints.
2. Motivated by God's promise of what awaits us after this life.
3. This hope in turn is proclaimed in the gospel, a living and powerful force.
4. Yet in order for it to take effect, we must proclaim it.