**Study Notes on Colossians 1:1-14**

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NOTE: These notes are not intended to read as an article or well-rounded written work. Rather, this is a collage of different research and resources that will assist in the preparation of a sermon.

**Working Sermon Title**: What is the Gospel?

**Summary of the Passage**: As the letter to Colossians begins, Paul gives thanks to God for the faith, love and hope they have in Jesus. He establishes that the Gospel is the means by which we can keep our stamina is a world full of spiritual distractions.

**Outline of the passage:**

1. Greeting (vv. 1-2)
2. Thanksgiving (vv. 3-8)
3. Prayer (vv. 9-14)

**The Main Point of the Passage:**

**Exegetical Idea**: The Gospel is God’s means of giving us the knowledge of God needed to find salvation.

**Theological Idea**: The only means of having a spiritual inheritance (salvation) is to have a spiritual knowledge of God which comes only by His will and might.

**Applicational Idea**: The Gospel is our gift of knowledge, salvation and direction for everyday life. He is all We need.

**Possible Preaching Outline**:

1. A love for the Gospel results in an obedience to the Will of God. (vv. 1-2)
2. The Gospel in us results in God’s love shown through us. (vv. 3-8)
3. The Gospel gives is spiritual knowledge, wisdom, patience and joy (vv.9-11)
4. What is the gospel? (vv.12-14)
   1. Inheritance
   2. Freedom
   3. Eternal life
   4. Redemption
   5. Forgiveness

**CONTEXT BEFORE AND AFTER THIS PASSAGE:**

**Authorship**: Paul and Timothy are the authors, stated in 1:1 but Paul is speaking in the first person often (“I”) through out the letter.

**Probably written in A.D. 62** around the same time that Philemon and Ephesians were written. All of the letters were sent by or with Tychicus and Onesimus. That date assumes that Paul was speaking of his imprisonment in Rome from Acts 27-28).

**Context and background:**

* The church at Colossae was probably started during Paul’s three-year term in Ephesus (A.D. 52-55).
* The start of the church could have been through Epaphras who was a Colossian that responded to Pauls’ call of the Gospel in Acts 19:10. He may have returned to tell the good news and that was the spark needed to birth this new church (col. 1:7).
* We know that Epaphras was the one informing Paul of bad teaching (4:12) which may have sparked Paul to write this letter.
* The bad teaching that was happening is Colossae was most likely the Jewish and pagan folks influencing those in this young church.
  + A central misplaced theology was calling on angels for help and protection of evil spirits.
  + Ancient documents and even jewelry has been found to support this theology.
* This was probably written during Paul’s third missionary journey.

**Exegesis and Commentary:**

**1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,**

Paul had probably never been to Colossae but he felt a pastoral responsibility to care for them, protect them and teach them. He writes with the authority of Christ as an apostle to help the church as they faced false teaching. We see this type of title in his greeting also in 2 Corinthians 1:1 and Galatians 1:1.

**By the will of God** was an intentional way to show humility and submission to God while also conveying the authority by which he speaks.

**Timothy** was also writing this letter, may have been acting more as a scribe or an assistant. This was a young mentoree of Paul’s, so when Paul speaks he was (1) modeling for Timothy how to lead spiritually and (2) teaching the people of Colossae. The language in this letter is mostly “I” (speaking of Paul) instead of “We” but we know that Timothy was present. No doubt that he was partaking in the ongoing ministry at Colossae and wherever Paul was ministering.

Timothy’s story can be summarized as:

* Son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father
* Became a Christian during Barnabas and Paul’s first visit to his hometown in Acts 14:8-20.
* When Paul returned, he was impressed by Timothy’s spiritual growth
* Paul enlisted Timothy as a junior missionary to be with him on his journeys as he planted churches
* He was circumsized (acts 16:1-3) and remained faithful to the call and support of Paul

Only Paul is called “Apostle” not Timothy or Epaphras.

It is likely that this letter was written along with Philippians, Ephesians and Philemon from the prison cell in Rome. He would have been under close watch, perhaps even chained to a guard, but he was allowed to write letters and see visitors.

He knew that he was **appointed by the will of God** meaning that his as a divine mission that he was on. He was an apostle, having seen Christ and commissioned for His work, but all of this was according to the will of God.

**1:2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.**

**To the saints and faithful brothers** points out that he was speaking to a Christian audience.

**Colossae:**

* This was a city in Phrygia
* It was located in the Roman providence of Asia
* It was located on the Lycus river just over 100 miles east of Ephesus.
* Not as influencia as the near by city of Laodicea but it was on the trade route and was a cross roads for religion and new ideas.
* Probably had a large Jewish population because of the Jews that were forced out of Jerusalem 200 years before Christ by Antiochus.

INTERESTING CURRENT EVENT OF THEIR TIME:

There was a significant earthquake in A.D. 60, two years before this letter would have been written. It occurred in the Lycus Valley during the reign of Nero. There have been many great find there such as a theatre, a cemetery, large structures, coins for worship to Roman deities and evidence of mystic cults. More can be found in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities,* 12.147-153.

**Grace and peace** was extended as a simple greeting but a sweet statement of where all hope comes from, even if you are writing from a prison cell.

**1:3 we always thank god, the father of our lord jesus christ, when we pray for you,**

Paul gives **thanks to God** for the way the **saints** are showing tangible signs of faith, hope and love. I find it significant that when he does pray for them, it is not just a list of requests but there is gratefulness to God for what He is doing in and through them.

He doesn’t’ just say “God” but he identifies Him as the father of the **Lord Jesus Christ.** We will see in this letter that Jesus is the central character. Paul wants to make clear that Jesus is not a separate God but has a close relationship with the Father; Jesus is the son, not a separate agent.

**1:4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,**

**Faith, love and hope (v. 5)** are significant themes in Paul’s writing (Rom. 5:1-5; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:5-6, Eph. 4:2-5; 1 Thes. 1:3; 5:8). This is the foundation of the Christian life—when our faith is correctly placed in God, we can’t help but have it expressed in hope and love. In this passage, faith and love are based on hope. Herein, it is not presented as something that is acted upon but rather is something objective, such as where Paul says “things hoped for”, meaning that believers in Christ can anticipate with confidence that treasure that is laid up for them in heaven. Nothing and no one can steal this from us.

**1:5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,**

**The Hope that is laid up for you in heaven** is the Gospel and the fact that we are accepted into God’s family through the sacrificial atonement of Christ. Because we know that our faith is secure in heaven, we are free to love fore Christ and love others (1 Peter 1:3-4). When we find ourselves wavering in our faith we can look to the hope we have for an eternal place in heaven.

**The word of truth** is a statement to contrast the false teaching they have been hearing and believing. He is going to address this in the coming passages and is an agenda of this letter. See 2:8.

This letter is going to address some ideas of Gnosticism that seem to be infiltrating the church at Colossae (1:15-23; 2:4). Gnosticism is a belief that it takes a special knowledge to be accepted by God. We know that it is Christ alone that is the way to salvation (1:20).

**1:6 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,**

30 years have pass since Christ had been resurrected. The Gospel was passing all over the known world: Syria, Asia, Greece, Italy and likely into Egypt, North Africa and Persia.

Paul lived out the idea of **bearing fruit** wherever he went. He was always preaching the Gospel to Jews, Gentiles, prison guards or whoever was in front of Him. God’s Word is not just information, it is transformation! When we are living out the Gospel our life is transformed and it is bearing fruit wherever we go.

**1:7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf**

The fact that Paul is not speaking about “what I taught you” but what you **learned from Epaphras** points out that this was a church that was probably not planted by Paul. They heard the Gospel from Epaphras (short for Epaphroditus) who was a fellow Colossian (4:12). He was most likely saved somewhere else under Paul’s teaching and now he went back to share the good news with his hometown.

This letter was probably prompted by Epaphras visiting Paul in Rome and telling him about the heresy at the church of Colossae. Paul wanted to write a letter to correct them on their thinking.

**Epaphras** is also mentioned in Philemon verse 23. The church met in Philemon’s home.

The term here “Learned” is from the Greek word *Manthanō.* This is closely related to being a disciple, which is more than hearing it but is the idea of really acting out on it.

The idea that they heard this as a **fellow servant** or on *our* behalf (some manuscripts) then it is to be understood that he was sent in place of Paul and Timothy.

**1:8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.**

Christians have a way to impact that word that can go far beyond just a meaningful relationship. The love of the Holy Spirit in us allows us have deep impact on our friends, neighborhoods and families. We’ve been given the love of God, which is shown to others through our love and actions (Gal. 5:22).

We have no choice but to love because of the love that has been shown to us. This love is expressed in our actions toward others.

**1:9 and so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,**

Paul and Timothy were praying for the church at Colossae often and in this section of the letter they are demonstrating what it is that they have been saying to God on their behalf.

He addresses that he has been praying for their **knowledge and wisdom and understanding** because of the false witness(es) that have risen up in their midst. He acknowledges that this is not a worldly wisdom but a **spiritual** one that comes from God alone. He was making a slight case against human knowledge and Gnosticism here. Paul is pointing out that knowledge in itself is empty, but the knowledge of God brings wisdom.

As he leads into verse 10, Paul is making the point that spiritual wisdom and understanding leads to life changed that will produce a life that is pleasing to God. For knowledge to be worth anything it must lead to a changed life.

His prayer for the people at Colossae has a few key components:

1. That they might be filled with all spiritual knowledge
2. That they would bear fruit in every good work, all the while growing in the knowledge of God.

Knowledge is not merely accumulated but it should change our living and give us direction for the future. Paul wanted them to be wise, but he was more interested in their life reflecting Christ. Knowledge of God is not an exclusive thing that only the smart can achieve; yet through the Spirit, all men can have access to in faith.

**1:10 so as to walk in a manner worthy of the lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of god**.

**To walk** was a Jewish metaphor for how a person lived their life. It corresponds to the Hebrew term *halak*. The rabbis had an entire oral tradition, later written down (especially in the Mishnah and the Talmuds), called *Halakah*, that guided them in their behavior. As a former rabbi, Paul calls believers “to walk” not according to the oral traditions of Judaism but in a way that is **fully pleasing to** the Lord Jesus Christ.

Although Christians are completely justified from the moment of initial saving faith, they are not fully sanctified, and they can do things that either please or displease God each day.

**Every good work** is here viewed as the fruit of salvation in the life of a Christian, not as the prerequisite for entering a relationship with Christ. Paul’s reference to **bearing fruit … and increasing** brings to mind the parable of the sower (Mark 4:1–9, 13–20). The seed sown on the good soil bore fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold (*from the ESV Study Bible Notes*).

**1:11 may you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,**

The idea of spiritual power was a big deal in the Greco-Roman world. There were all sorts of traditions and ways people chose to worship other gods in hopes of getting what they wanted or needed. There was little fear of involving spiritual powers to get them the wealth, influence or fertility that they desired. Paul as trying to make the point that God can give them all that they need, according to His **glorious might.**

The pay off of having God’s glorious might in our life is **endurance and patience with joy.** No matter the circumstances, we can have this in our life.

**1:12 giving thanks to the father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.**

We have been given what is needed to have the **inheritance of the saints**, which comes only through the grace of the Father. Therefore the gratitude is directed solely to Him. It is again by his grace and mighty power that we can attain faith, withstand temptation and make sense of false teaching.

The idea of **inheritance** was normally only for the Jewish people, speaking to what it is that they have received as their covenantal right (Gen. 13:14-17; Num. 26:52-56; Josh. 19:9) but it is now being applied to all people. All people now can have access to God through faith in Jesus Christ. Here he calls them **saints** (“holy ones” or “Consecrated people”) that are redeemed through Jesus, God’s own Son.

In verses 12 through 14, Paul is listing 5 benefits that God gives all believers through Christ:

1. He made us qualified for an inheritance of God (2 Cor 5:21)
2. He rescued us from Satan’s dominion of darkness and made us his Children (cf 2:15)
3. He brought us into the eternal kingdom (Eph 1:5-6)
4. He redeems us — brought us out of sin and judgment (Heb 9:12)
5. He forgave all our sin (Eph 1:7)

**1:13 he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son,**

God delivered his people from slavery to Egypt (Ex. 6:6; 14:30) but also the slavery of sin. The Colossian people feared the unseen forces of darkness. This is a strong statement that we do not have anything to fear, we have been delivered from that and are now free in Christ—from darkness, sin, judgment, evil powers. The way we live our lives should reflect this freedom in our conduct.

**The Kingdom of the Beloved Son** is similar to the “Kingdom of God” or the “Kingdom of Heaven”. Jesus taught about this continually in His ministry. Paul talked about how Jesus will be the agent of God who reigns over the kingdom (1 Cor 15:24) until he hands the Kingdom over to the Father. This is where Paul begins to emphasis the current lordship of Christ.

**1:14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.**

Paul is emphasizing that redemption is forgiveness of the sins we have committed against God. They are out of the **domain of darkness** which is Satan’s power and influence and brought safely into God’s covering (Acts 26:18).

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