

## Colossians, Chapter One, Lesson Two

LEARNING TO SERVE Colossians 1:5-8

### STIMULATE

\*\* It was good for us last week to observe the apostle Paul and his companions as they were "**Praying Always**" for the victorious faith of the Colossians. We learned together of the need to be upholding one another in prayer regarding our spiritual growth, obedience to the Word and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ. Did you find yourself spending more time praying for your brothers and sisters in the Lord?

It can be difficult to set aside our "normal" patterns for each day and become selfless enough to be more concerned for others than for what is going on in our own life.

### MOTIVATE

\*\* People on this planet have many things in common. For believers in Jesus Christ the greatest thing we have in common is what the Bible calls "hope". By contrast, what do you suppose the unsaved people around us have in common with each other?

They live a life of "no hope" as they stumble through each day trying to please themselves.

\*\* Today we are going to meet a wonderful man of God and once we understand what the Bible means by "hope", we should be able to better follow his life's example by "**Learning to Serve**" the Lord out of loving gratitude. Please open you Bibles to our passage in Colossians 1:5-8. As we set our minds toward the Word of God, let's re-read some of what we studied last week to help us understand the context of what we will be learning today.

Read Passage (V.3-8)

Opening Prayer

### *Learning to Serve*

### INVESTIGATE

**V. 5** \*\* What characteristic of the Christian life is mentioned here at the beginning of verse five"?

"...hope..."

\*\* Can you find two others, mentioned in the previous verse from last week's study?

"...faith..." and "...love..."

\*\* Do you recall any passages where these three characteristics are mentioned together?

1Corinthians 13:13 "...but now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." (possibly the best known verse)

Romans 5:1-5 "...justified by faith..." Tribulations produce "hope" "the love of God has been poured out within our hearts"

1Thessalonians 1:3 "work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope"

1Thessalonians 5:8 "the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation"

These three characteristics serve a pillars to the Christian life. They are tightly woven together, and each serves to support the other as they describe who Christ has made us to be.

\*\* Looking back at the beginning of verse five, to what is Paul referring when he uses the phrase "because of"?

Two possibilities can come to mind. First would be that Paul is completing his statement from verse three, "We give thanks to God...because of the hope laid up for you in heaven". The second possibility is that he is referring to the Colossians' faith an love mentioned in verse four, which they have... "because of the hope laid up for you in heaven".

To help us answer this question, let's take a closer look at what the Bible says about hope!

Colossians 1:5 and 12 "laid up...in heaven" and "the inheritance of the saints in light".

1Peter 1:4 "to obtain an inheritance... reserved in heaven for you"

Hebrews 6:17-19 "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul..."

Titus 2:13 "looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus..."

Hope then, from a Biblical perspective, is the very foundation of the Christian life. It is based upon the absolute certainty of what will come to pass regarding our eternal security, because of the promise of God in Christ Jesus. cf. Hebrews 11:1

This is far removed from the hopelessness of the world around us that would say, "I hope I win the lottery"!

Now, answering our original question, it would appear that Paul is saying that the Colossians have both faith and love "because of" the hope that has been laid up for them in Heaven. Or, to put it another way, the only reason they have a hope laid up for them in Heaven, is because of their genuine salvation which bears the fruit of faith and love.

In any case, Paul and his companions were indeed thankful to God for this miraculous work of grace.

\*\* Still here in verse five, what was used to bring this great hope to the lives of the Colossians?

The "gospel", "the word of truth"!

\*\* Does the Bible say what the gospel is, or is that just a new term of contemporary Christianity?

1Corinthians 15:1-4 - Paul presents the gospel

Matthew 4:23 - Jesus proclaimed the gospel

Mark 16:15 - We proclaim the gospel

Philippians 1:27 - We strive for the gospel

2Timothy 1:8 - We suffer for the gospel

Romans 1:16 - We are not ashamed of the gospel

All of this because it is "the word of truth"!

**V. 6** \*\* As we turn our attention to verse six, does Paul indicate that the gospel truth is somehow limited?

Absolutely not! "...which has come to you, just as in all the world..."

\*\* Is God's marvelous gospel truth stagnate, sluggish or dull, according to Paul?

No! "...it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing..."

\*\* What does it mean that the gospel is bearing fruit?

- 1) Numerical increase - Acts 9:31
- 2) Trust and courage - Philippians 1:12-14
- 3) Glory to God alone - 1Thessalonians 1:8-9

\*\* Who causes this amazing "growth"?

God, Himself! cf. Isaiah 55:11, 1Corinthians 3:4-7, Colossians 2:19

\*\* How long had this God given growth been manifested among the saints at Colossae according to Paul?

"since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth" - "understood" is *epiginosko* in the Greek and means "to know exactly", it comes from two root words which mean "to come to know" and "upon or about". What Paul is saying is that the Colossians came to know about the gospel and fully accepted it by faith, giving them an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. They knew the gospel truth exactly!

**V. 7** \*\* From whom had they learned it?

Epaphras - a truly faithful servant of Christ! He was most likely the founder of the church at Colossae and was probably their pastor. Having heard Paul preach in Ephesus, Epaphras returned to his Lycus valley town of Colossae and spread the good news.  
cf. Acts 19:8-10 (from last week)

\*\* How do you suppose the Colossian readers felt about the way that Paul describe his own feeling for Epaphras?

They had to be encourage and blessed to hear how much Paul loved their pastor and considered him to be a fellow bond-servant of the apostle's, as well as a faithful servant of Christ.

\*\* While these loving observations by Paul must have reaffirmed the character of Epaphras to the Colossian church, they also give us a good insight as to what else the Colossians learned from Epaphras beyond the message of the gospel. What do you suppose they were learning from the life of their pastor?

They were "**Learning to Serve**"! Just as he was a "fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ", these same Colossians were to learn to do the same as the only acceptable manifestation of their new faith in Christ!

\*\* We would do well to follow this Biblical pattern. If our's is a claim to new life in Christ; out of loving appreciation for all the Jesus has accomplished on our behalf, we should be "**Learning to Serve**" each day that

He grants us to live here on earth for His glory. Where do you find your own heart on this issue? Is it a bother to serve the One who alone has secured your eternal life in glory?

**V. 8** \*\* Did Epaphras go to Paul in Rome to get a promotion or to look good before the famous apostle? (Remember, this was a trip of over 1000 miles!)

No - He went (selflessly) to encourage Paul by telling him of the glory that God was receiving through the genuine faith of the Colossians. cf. Colossians 4:12-13 and Philemon 1:23

\*\* What did he report to Paul concerning their faith?

He told him about their "love in the Spirit".

\*\* If Epaphras wanted to reassure Paul of the Colossians faith, why did he choose to tell him of their love?

Remember 1Corinthians 13:13 - "...the greatest of these is love..." This is an outward manifestation of a true or genuine inward transformation. When someone becomes truly saved, they put on a heart of love. cf. Romans 5:5, Colossians 3:14, 1John 3:14, 4:8

It was their love in the Spirit that showed how much they "understood" (V.6) the word of truth, the gospel (V.5).

### **EXTRICATE**

\*\* What do we have in common with all believers?

Biblically defined - "Hope", that is the absolute certainty of what will come to pass regarding our eternal security, because of the promise of God in Christ Jesus. (Hebrews 11:1)

### **DELINEATE**

\*\* Knowing that we have this marvelous hope within us, who is going to cause it to grow as we share it with others?

God, Himself - Three ways:

- 1) Numerical increase
- 2) Trust and courage
- 3) Glory to God, alone

### **EVALUATE**

\*\* If I am truly thankful for what God has accomplished on my behalf through "the word of truth, the gospel", what will I spend my life learning - for His sake?

I will be "**Learning to Serve**" the One that I call both Lord and Savior. Having given His all for me, I can do no less for Him.

### **ACTIVATE**

\*\* Does this seem like an unusual response to what we have learned together today? Or, is it an appropriate one which demands that we strive to live each day for our Lord? Hopefully, we will take the time to evaluate our hearts and make whatever changes are necessary so that we will be "**Learning to Serve**" Jesus Christ for the remainder of our days.

Closing Prayer