

Colossians 1:1-8 – We Give Thanks for You

Colossians is one of Paul's prison letters. Paul had not planted the church in Colossae. Epaphras, a fellow servant of Christ, had that privilege. Unlike 1 John, this letter generally follows the standard NT letter structure. The letter opens with the writer of the letter and then the recipients of the letter along with a standard greeting. Thanks are given for the recipients of the letter. Doctrine is then laid out which addresses false teaching that is affecting the church. The doctrine is followed by instructions for every day life. Finally there are some personal comments with a final standard closing.

Read Colossians 1:1-2.

Who was the letter of Colossians from? How did Paul identify himself? Can we assume that Paul's apostleship was not being questioned like it was when Paul wrote Galatians? In Galatians, Paul had an expanded title. "Paul, an apostle, not from man nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father". In Colossians 1:1, how did Paul remind them of his authority? (1:1)

Who were the recipients of the letter? Where was Colossae? (1:2)

When and where did Paul write this letter? The answer to "when" depends on the answer to "where". The two most popular views among conservatives is that Paul either wrote from prison in Rome or from prison in Ephesus. Paul's imprisonment in Ephesus is not explicitly stated in Acts or any other NT book. Paul was in Ephesus for 2 years and some see implications that he spent part of the time there in prison. If Paul wrote from Ephesus, then the letter was written in the early 50s. If the letter was written from Rome, then the letter was written in 60-61 AD or even as early as 58 AD.

In verse 2, Paul gave a shortened version of his standard greeting. "Grace to you and peace from God our Father". The KJV and others, based on a manuscript variant, add "and the Lord Jesus Christ". (1:2)

Why did Paul write the letter to the Colossians? Even before we read the letter, there is a good chance that Paul wrote the letter because there were problems in the church. When studying a book of the Bible, it is good to read the entire book 2 or 3 times before diving into the details. That way you can avoid missing the forest for the trees. If you read ahead, what were some of the problems that Paul addressed?

Read Colossians 1:3-8.

Verse 3 is translated two ways. 1) “we always give thanks when we pray for you”. 2) “we give thanks, always praying for you”. Which do you think best fits the context? If you believe it is best translated “always praying for you”, what does it mean to always pray for someone? Does it mean continually, regularly or something else? (1:3)

Based on verse 4, what two things was Paul specifically thankful for? Does this remind you of the tests found in 1 John? (1:4)

Verse 4 mentions faith and love. Verse 5 talks about hope. NIV has “the faith and love that spring from the hope”. Some understand the hope as another basis for being thankful to God (“we give thanks ... because of the hope laid up for you”). Which best fits the context? G.K. Beale argues that it means “love that is because of the hope”, leaving out “faith”. He bases this on rules of grammar and Paul’s writing style. Where is their hope laid up or “stored”? What does it mean that their hope is laid up in heaven? (1:5)

How did the Colossians hear about this hope? What is the Gospel called in verse 5? (1:5, 7)

How did Paul describe the Gospel’s global success? When they heard the Gospel, what did they understand? (1:6)

Who was Epaphras? Besides verses 7 and 8, also see Colossians 4:12 and Philemon 1:23. How did Paul describe Epaphras? (1:7-8)

Based on verse 8, what did Epaphras tell Paul about the Colossians? (1:8)

If you have read the whole book, what are some of your impressions of the book? One thing that jumps off the page is that it is a very Christ centered book.