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The Gospel Truth (Colossians 1:1-8)

1

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, 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; just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. (1:1-8)

Scripture describes the gospel with several phrases. Acts 20:24 calls it “the gospel of the grace of God.” Romans 1:9 designates it “the gospel of His Son,” and 1 Corinthians 9:12 “the gospel of Christ.” Romans 15:16 refers to it as “the gospel of God,” 2 Corinthians 4:4 characterizes it as “the gospel of the glory of Christ,” Ephesians 6:15 as “the

gospel of peace,” and Revelation 14:6 as the “eternal gospel.”

The gospel is also described as the “word of truth” (Col. 1:5), or the “message of truth” (Eph. 1:13). Those descriptions have given rise to our common expression “the gospel truth.” People use that phrase when they want to stress their sincerity, so that what they say will be believed.

Although people often use that expression flippantly, there is a real gospel truth. **Gospel** (v. 5) is the Greek word *euangelion*, from which we derive the English word *evangelize*. It literally means, “good news.” It was used often in classical Greek to speak of the report of victory brought back from a battle. The gospel is the good news of Jesus’ victory over Satan, sin, and death. It is also the good news that we, too, can triumph eternally over those enemies through Him.

First Corinthians 15:1-4 succinctly summarizes the historical content of the gospel: “Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.” The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died to provide complete forgiveness of sins and rose again that those who believe might live forever.

Such glorious, thrilling truth compels Christians to respond in several basic ways, all of which are noted by descriptive phrases using *gospel*. First, we should proclaim the good news, following the example of Jesus (Matt. 4:23), the apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and believers of all ages.

Second, we are to defend its veracity. Paul described himself as one “appointed for the defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:16). Peter told his readers to “make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15).

Third, we are to work hard for the advance of the gospel. Paul admonishes the Philippians to “[strive] together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil. 1:27). The gospel demands of us discipline and strenuous effort.

Fourth, we are to pursue the fellowship we share with others who have believed the gospel. Devotion to the fellowship of the gospel characterized the early church (Acts 2:42). Paul often expressed his gratitude for those who had received the gospel (cf. Phil. 1:3-5).

Fifth, we must be ready to suffer for the sake of the gospel. Paul exhorted Timothy, “Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, or of me His prisoner; but join with me in suffering for the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:8).

Sixth, we are to make sure that our lives do not hinder the gospel. Paul told the Corinthians that he would waive his right to be paid for his ministry rather than cheapen the message of the gospel (1 Cor. 9:12).

Seventh, we must never be ashamed of the gospel. Paul said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16).

Finally, we are to realize the gospel carries with it divine empowerment. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit" (1 Thess. 1:5). The power of the gospel does not come from our cleverness or persuasiveness, but from the Holy Spirit.

This wonderful gospel is the reason for Paul's thanksgiving expressed in Colossians 1:3-8. Rejoicing at the report of their faith brought to him by Epaphras, the founder of the church at Colossae, he characteristically expresses thanks that the Colossians heard the gospel, and that it bore fruit in their lives.

Following the salutation in verses 1 and 2, Paul's words in verses 3-8 suggest seven aspects of the gospel: it is received by faith, results in love, rests in hope, reaches the world, reproduces fruit, is rooted in grace, and is reported by people. Before considering those aspects, let's take a brief look at the familiar terms of Paul's opening greeting that we find in his other epistles.

THE SALUTATION

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. (1:1-2)

Following the practice of correspondence in the ancient world, Paul begins the letter with his name. Paul was the most important and influential person in history since our Lord Jesus Christ. His personality was the remarkable combination of a brilliant mind, an indomitable will, and a tender heart. Of Jewish ancestry, a "Hebrew of Hebrews" (Phil. 3:5), he was a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5). Paul was educated under Gamaliel (Acts 22:3), one of the leading rabbis of that time. He was also by birth a Roman citizen (Acts 22:28) and exposed to Greek culture in his home city of Tarsus. Such a background rendered him uniquely qualified to communicate the gospel in the Greco-Roman world. It was largely his efforts that transformed Christianity from a small Palestinian sect to a religion with adherents throughout the Roman Empire. The church

would be blessed to have record of even one letter from such a man, let alone the thirteen found in the New Testament.

Lest anyone doubt his authority, Paul describes himself as **an apostle of Jesus Christ**. He is not simply a messenger, but an official representative of the One who sent him. What he writes in this letter is not merely his opinion, but God's authoritative Word.

Nor did he become an apostle through his own efforts. Neither was he nominated for the position by any human organization. Paul was an apostle **by the will of God**. God, having chosen him long before, brought His sovereign choice to realization with that most striking of conversions on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-9). It climaxed in his being set apart for missionary service by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2).

Paul, as was his custom, mentions a colaborer who was with him when he wrote: **Timothy our brother**. (Timothy is also included in the introductions to 2 Corinthians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon, being noted as the companion of Paul.) Such a reference does not indicate coauthorship of those epistles. Peter is certainly clear that the epistles bearing Paul's name were written by Paul (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

Paul had a unique and special confidence in and love for Timothy. Timothy had ministered to him for many years, ever since they first met on Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 19:22). Although Paul was now a prisoner, faithful Timothy was still with him. Perhaps no passage expresses Paul's feelings about his young friend more clearly than Philippians 2:19-22: "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father."

Despite his many strengths, Timothy had a delicate constitution and was frequently sick (1 Tim. 5:23). He even had an experience in Ephesus when he was timid, hesitant, perhaps ashamed and disloyal to his gift and duty, and was in need of encouragement and strength (cf. 2 Tim. 1:5-14). Still, no one served Paul as faithfully in the spread of the gospel (Phil. 2:22). He was Paul's true child in the faith (1 Cor. 4:17). It was to Timothy that Paul wrote his final letter (2 Timothy) and passed the mantle of leadership (2 Tim. 4).

Paul addresses his readers as the **saints and faithful brethren . . . who are at Colossae**. **Saints and faithful brethren** are not two distinct groups; the terms are equivalent. **And** [*kai*] could be translated, "even." *Hagios*, which translates **saints**, refers to separation, in this case being separated from sin and set apart to God. **Faithful** notes the

very source of that separation—saving faith. Believing saints are the only true saints. **Grace to you and peace** was the greeting Paul used to open all thirteen of his letters. Inasmuch as God is the source of both, Paul says those two blessings derive from our great God and Father.

THE GOSPEL TRUTH IS RECEIVED BY FAITH

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus (1:3-4a)

Though he admires their true and continuing saving faith, which had separated them from sin to God, Paul certainly does not begin by flattering the Colossians. He gives **thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**. Paul recognizes that God is the One who is owed thanks, because salvation in all its parts is a gift from Him (Eph. 2:8-9). **Always** should be considered in relation to the preceding phrase, **we give thanks to God**, not to **praying . . . for you**. Paul was not always praying for the Colossians. Rather, whenever he was praying for them, he always expressed his thanks to God.

Paul is thankful to God for their faith in Christ Jesus. The Colossians are not like those who distort the gospel (Gal. 1:7), or do not obey it (1 Pet. 4:17). Such people will face the terrifying experience of seeing “the Lord Jesus . . . revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess. 1:7-9). The Colossians are holy brothers in Christ, who have put faith in the Lord of the gospel.

FAITH'S DEFINITION

Pistis (**faith**) means to be persuaded that something is true and to trust in it. Far more than mere intellectual assent, it involves obedience. *Pistis* comes from the root word *peithō* (“obey”). The concept of obedience is equated with belief throughout the New Testament (cf. John 3:36; Acts 6:7; Rom. 15:18; 2 Thess. 1:8; Heb. 5:9; 1 Pet. 4:17). The Bible also speaks of the obedience of faith (Acts 6:7; Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

Biblical faith is not a “leap in the dark.” It is based on fact and grounded in evidence. It is defined in Hebrews 11:1 as “the assurance of

things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” Faith gives assurance and certainty about unseen realities.

I often have occasion to drive on roads I have never driven on before. I do not know what is around the next bend; the road could end at a cliff with a 500-foot drop. Nor do I know personally the people who built the road. However, I know enough about how highways are built to have confidence in the road. Likewise, I sometimes will eat at a restaurant I have never been to before. I trust the food is all right because I have confidence in the inspection and preparation procedures.

We trust that highways and restaurants are safe based on the evidence. And that is precisely the case with our faith in God. It is supported by convincing evidence, both from Scripture and from the testimony of those Christians who have gone before us.

Saving faith is carefully defined in Scripture and needs to be understood because there is a dead, non-saving faith that provides false security (James 2:14-26). True saving faith contains repentance and obedience as its elements.

Repentance is an initial element of saving faith, but it cannot be dismissed as simply another word for believing. The Greek word for “repentance” is *metanoia*, from *meta*, “after,” and *noeō*, “to understand.” Literally it means “afterthought” or “change of mind,” but biblically its meaning does not stop there. As *metanoia* is used in the New Testament, it always speaks of a change of purpose, and specifically a turning from sin. More specifically, repentance calls for a repudiation of the old life and a turning to God for salvation (1 Thess. 1:9). The repentance in saving faith involves three elements: a turning to God, a turning from evil, and an intent to serve God. No change of mind can be called true repentance without all three. Repentance is not merely being ashamed or sorry over sin, although genuine repentance always involves an element of remorse. It is a redirection of the human will, a purposeful decision to forsake all unrighteousness and pursue righteousness instead. And God has to grant it (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). In fact, God grants the whole of saving faith: “By grace you have been saved through *faith*; and that not of yourselves, it is *the gift of God*; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9, italics added; cf. Phil. 1:29).

Although it is true that “he who believes has eternal life” (John 6:47), Jesus also said, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him” (John 6:44). God effectually calls sinners to Christ and grants them the capability to exercise saving faith (cf. Matt. 16:17).

The faith that God grants is permanent. In all who receive it, faith will endure. Such passages as Habakkuk 2:4, Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, Philippians 1:6, and Hebrews 10:38 teach that genuine saving faith can never vanish.

Like repentance, obedience is also encompassed within the bounds of saving faith. The faith that saves involves more than mere intellectual assent and emotional conviction. It also includes the resolution of the will to obey God's commands and laws.

Obedience is the hallmark of the true believer. "When a man obeys God he gives the only possible evidence that in his heart he believes God" (W. E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, [Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1966], 3:124). Such obedience will of necessity be incomplete, since the flesh ever rears its ugly head (cf. Rom. 7:14-25). If not the perfection of the believer's life, however, it most certainly will be the direction.

Faith, then, must never be severed from good works. Martin Luther summed up the biblical view of the link between saving faith and good works in these words: "Good works do not make a man good, but a good man does good works" (cited in Tim Dowley, ed., *Eerdmans Handbook to the History of Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], p. 362).

FAITH'S OBJECT

Any definition of faith is also incomplete without a consideration of its object. In contrast to the contentless faith so prevalent in our culture, saving faith has as its object Christ Jesus. The relationship of faith to Jesus Christ is expressed in the New Testament by various Greek prepositions. Acts 16:31 uses the preposition *epe*, which suggests resting on a foundation. In Acts 20:21, *eis* is used, with the meaning of "to find a dwelling place in," "to go into," "to abide in," or "to find a home." Here **in** translates *en* and has the connotation of coming to a place of security and anchor. With Christ as its object, our faith is as secure as a house on a solid foundation, or a boat safely at anchor.

Charles Spurgeon illustrated the importance of faith's object by telling of two men in a boat. Caught in severe rapids, they were being swept toward a waterfall. Some men on shore tried to save them by throwing them a rope. One man caught hold of it and was pulled to safety on the shore. The other, in the panic of the moment, grabbed hold of a seemingly more substantial log that was floating by. That man was carried downstream, over the rapids, and was never seen again. Faith, represented by the rope linked to the shore, connects us to Jesus Christ and safety. Good works apart from true faith, represented in the story by the log, leads only to ruin.

THE GOSPEL TRUTH RESULTS IN LOVE

and the love which you have for all the saints; (1:4b)

Genuine faith does not exist in a vacuum but will inevitably result in a changed life. One of the visible and strong fruits of true saving faith is love for fellow believers (cf. John 13:34-35). The apostle John emphasizes that truth repeatedly in his first epistle:

The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (2:9-11)

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. (3:10)

We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (3:14-15)

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. (4:20)

A true child of God will love fellow believers. Faith in Christ purges us of our selfishness and affinity for sinners and gives us a new attraction to the people of God. Our love for fellow Christians is a reflection of His love for us. It is also obedience to His command to "love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 13:34).

Paul gives thanks that the Colossians love all the saints. Their love was nonselective. Apparently there were no divisive cliques at Colossae, such as those that fractured the Corinthian church. Christ's love not only drew the Colossians to Himself, but also to each other.

That does not mean we are to feel the same emotional attachment toward everyone. True biblical love is so much more than an emotion; it is sacrificial service to others because they have need. We show godly love to someone when we sacrifice ourselves to meet that person's needs.

True godly love is illustrated in John 13. Verse 1 tells us that Jesus “having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.” He then showed what that love meant by washing the disciples’ feet (vv. 4-5). God does not expect us to feel sentimental toward each other all the time. He does expect us to serve one another (Gal. 5:13).

There are two sides to the Christian life, both of which are crucial: faith and love. Genuine belief in the truth and experiential love for other believers characterizes every true believer. We are saved by faith; we are saved to love. True saving faith is more than a conviction of the mind. It transforms the heart to love.

THE GOSPEL TRUTH RESTS IN HOPE

because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel, (1:5)

Hope is one component of the great triad of Christian virtues, along with faith and love. “But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13; cf. 1 Thess. 1:3; 5:8). Paul is thankful not only for the Colossians’ faith and love, but also for their hope. Faith and hope are inseparably linked. We believe, and so we hope.

Paul describes that hope as laid up for you in heaven. *Apokeimai* (**laid up**) means “in store,” or “reserved.” Peter speaks of “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4). The writer of Hebrews speaks of “laying hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil” (Heb. 6:18-19). Hope is the Christian’s anchor chain, connecting him inseparably to God’s throne.

God established our hope by making us His sons. The Colossians became sons of God by believing the message they previously heard **in the word of truth, the gospel**. First John 3:1 says, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God.” He will fulfill our hope by making us like His Son: “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (v. 2).

One result of our hope is a willingness to sacrifice the present on the altar of the future. That runs contrary to human nature. Young children, for example, have a difficult time waiting for something they want. My father warned me repeatedly while I was growing up not to

sacrifice the future on the altar of the immediate. The world wants what it wants now.

The Christian has a different perspective. He is willing to forsake the present glory, comfort, and satisfaction of this present world for the future glory that is his in Christ. In contrast to the “buy now—pay later” attitude prevalent in the world, the Christian is willing to pay now and receive it later. What makes Christians willing to make such sacrifices? Hope, based on faith that the future holds something far better than the present. Paul writes in Romans 8:18, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Moses serves as an example of one who willingly sacrificed the present because of the promise of his future hope. Hebrews 11:24-27 gives us his story: “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing Him who is unseen.”

As the adopted son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses had access to all the wealth and power of Pharaoh’s court. Yet, he turned his back on it and identified with God’s suffering, poor, humbled people. Moses refused to seize the moment and enjoy the temporal pleasures of sin. He sacrificed his present prospects for a future hope. He took his stand with the oppressed Israelites, an act that led to his killing an Egyptian overseer and eventual flight from Egypt. He forfeited earthly power and glory and instead wound up herding sheep in the desert for his father-in-law to be, Jethro.

What made Moses willing to make such sacrifices? “He was looking to the reward” (Heb. 11:26). Why was he willing to turn his back on the riches and power that were his in Egypt? “He endured, as seeing Him who is unseen” (Heb. 11:27). Moses knew that though he suffered loss in the present, God would richly reward him in the future.

Like Moses, believers look for a hope that is in heaven. We live in the light of eternity, knowing that our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). We serve the Lord, making sacrifices here to lay up treasure in heaven. Like Paul, we set aside our prerogatives, obeying God’s will and disciplining ourselves to win an incorruptible crown (cf. 2 Tim. 4:8). Like Jim Elliot, missionary and martyr to the Auca Indians, we must realize that “he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose” (cited in Elisabeth Elliot, *Shadow of the Almighty* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1979], p. 108).

THE GOSPEL TRUTH REACHES THE WORLD

which has come to you, just as in all the world (1:6a)

The gospel is also universal; it **has come to you, just as in all the world**. Christianity was not just another of the local sects of the Roman Empire. It was not merely one more cult like the others at Colossae. It was and is the good news for the whole world. The gospel transcends ethnic, geographic, cultural, and political boundaries.

This universality of the gospel is repeatedly emphasized in Scripture:

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come. (Matt. 24:14)

Again therefore Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12)

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world. . . . For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom. 1:8, 16)

But I say, surely they have never heard, have they? Indeed they have; "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." (Rom. 10:18)

For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. (1 Thess. 1:8)

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Rev. 7:9-10)

The diffusion of the gospel throughout the Roman Empire foreshadowed its spread throughout the world. It is a message of hope for all people in all cultures. The true church, the Body of Christ, is made up of people from all over the world (cf. Rev. 4:9-11).

THE GOSPEL TRUTH REPRODUCES FRUIT

it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it (1:6b)

The gospel is not merely a stagnant system of ethics; it is a living, moving, and growing reality. It bears fruit and spreads. Hebrews 4:12 says, "The word of God is living and active." When the gospel enters a divinely prepared heart, it results in fruit (Matt. 13:3-8). It possesses a divine energy that causes it to spread like a mustard seed growing into a tree (Matt. 13:31-32). Peter says it brings spiritual growth (1 Pet. 2:2).

The gospel has both an individual and a universal aspect. It is both **bearing fruit and increasing**. Paul tells the Colossians he is thankful the gospel had done both among them **since the day you** [the Colossians] **heard of it**. He is grateful they believed the gospel message when Epaphras shared it with them.

The gospel produces fruit both in the internal transformation of individuals, and also in the external growth of the church. The two concepts are interrelated. The spiritual growth of individuals will lead to new converts being won to Christ. That was the pattern of the early church. Acts 9:31 tells us that "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up . . . going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit," and as a result, "it continued to increase." First Thessalonians 1:6 speaks of the spiritual growth of the Thessalonians as they imitated Paul and the Lord. As a result, "the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything" (v.8).

The living gospel is the power that transforms lives. As it does so, the witness of those transformed lives produces fruit, including new converts. So as the gospel produces fruit in individual lives, its influence spreads.

THE GOSPEL TRUTH IS ROOTED IN GRACE

and understood the grace of God in truth. (1:6c)

Grace is the very heart of the gospel. It is God's freely giving us the forgiveness of sin and eternal life, which we do not deserve and cannot earn. Christianity contrasts sharply with other religions, which assume man can save himself by his good works. Nothing is more clearly

taught in Scripture than the truth that “by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph. 2:8-9).

After hearing Peter’s account of the conversion of Cornelius, the rest of the apostles exclaimed, “Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11:18). Lydia was saved after “the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 16:14). Paul told the Thessalonians he was thankful “because God has chosen [them] from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thess. 2:13). He wrote to Titus that “the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Titus 2:11-12). Salvation is a gracious act on God’s part (see also Acts 15:11; 18:27; Rom. 3:24; 4:1-8).

Paul describes saving grace as **the grace of God in truth**. The phrase **in truth** carries the sense of genuineness. It is truly **the grace of God** in contrast to all other claimants to the true gospel. God is freely, sovereignly merciful and forgiving. We can do nothing to cause our own salvation; God saves us freely by His grace. The hymn “Jesus Paid It All” expresses that thought in these familiar words:

For nothing good have I
Whereby Thy grace to claim.
I’ll wash my garments white
In the blood of Calv’ry’s Lamb.

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain
He washed it white as snow.

THE GOSPEL TRUTH IS REPORTED BY PEOPLE

just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bondservant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. (1:7-8)

Although salvation is solely by God’s grace, He uses humans as channels of that grace. Jesus told the disciples in Acts 1:8 that they, in the power of the Holy Spirit, were to be His witnesses. First Corinthians 1:21 speaks of those who believed through hearing the message preached. But perhaps no passage states this truth as forcefully as Ro-

mans 10:14: “How then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?”

As noted in the introduction, Epaphras brought the good news of God’s grace to the Colossian church. They learned it from him. Paul often referred to himself as a *doulos* (**bond-servant**) of Christ (Rom. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Titus 1:1). By referring to Epaphras as his **fellow bond-servant** (*sundoulos*), and calling him **a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf**, Paul connects Epaphras’s ministry with his own. Epaphras was Paul’s representative at Colossae, backed by his authority and that of the Lord Jesus. While Paul was imprisoned, unable to go to the Colossians, Epaphras ministered to them on Paul’s behalf. He also informed Paul of the Colossians’ **love in the Spirit**, a report that no doubt brought great joy to Paul’s heart. Paul was thankful for the gospel, and for the Colossians’ reception of it.

God gives us the wonderful privilege and sobering responsibility of being His agents in proclaiming the gospel of His grace. May we be faithful to share with others the gospel that has meant so much to us.