

## CROSSING THE BORDER

An Expositional Study of Colossians

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### CHAPTER TWO

#### HIS COURTEOUS ADDRESS, 1:3-11

3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,  
4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,

5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;

6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world, and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:

7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;

8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;

10 That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;

11. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;

OUR apostle now gets to the object and purpose of his writing; and he continues in that strain of the good manners of the perfect gentleman which we have already observed.

He proceeds with agreeable Christian courtesy, and expresses first-

#### HIS DELIGHT, 3-5a

"We give thanks to God for you." It is to be noted that Paul strikes this note so often at the beginning of his letters, even in the case of I Corinthians, in which he is going to rebuke those Christians so severely for the low level of their lives. It is evidently his custom to look for something good in people, and he does not hesitate to give expression to it. Neither, on the other hand, does he allow these good points to blind him to the fundamental weakness and wickedness of the human heart - "**there is none that doeth good. no, not one**". Romans 3:12.

In spite of flashes of goodness, there is fundamental badness, which needs to be dealt with - can only be dealt with - by the grace and gospel, of GOD, in whose saving efficacy Paul glories,

Romans 1:16.

Well, now, what are the things which he praises in this Colossian church?

*Their "faith".*

The relationship between faith, or belief, and the Lord JESUS is expressed, in the Greek, by various prepositions.

in Acts 16:31, "**Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ**". it is *epi*, whose significance may be pictorially suggested as resting on a foundation.

In Acts 20:21. "**faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ**". we have *eis*, which may not unjustly be thought of as conveying the idea of coming home, to find our dwelling-place in Him - "**abide in Me**", John 15:4.

And now here in our passage, "**faith in Christ Jesus**", the word is "in", as if we had come to anchor in Him - "**as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil**", Hebrews 6.

How infinitely blessed is the intimate relationship with Him which He has so graciously allowed our faith to secure for us - our *Foundation*, on which all our security rests; our *Home*, in which all our joys and privileges are enjoyed; our *Anchor*, which keeps us safely riding the storms of life. And what next?

*Their "love".*

Note that it is "*the love that ye have to all the saints*". It is, of course, a *Christian quality*, for it comes after faith, which makes them Christians in the first place.

There is a kind of love whose Greek equivalent, *eros*, is not found in the New Testament. It is a merely physical, sensual thing, a parody of the real thing. It is the subject of so many silly, nauseating songs of to-day. No, indeed, the Bible will have nothing to do with it.

There is another kind, *philos*, wholly admirable in its degree - one might term it family love, or the love of friends; but it is only a human affection.

This, however, that Paul speaks of is *agape*, a divine quality. It is a *complete* quality, embracing "**all the saints**", and some even of the saints are not easily lovable. Moreover, it is a *commanded* quality, not something about which we can make our choice - "**This is His commandment, that we should believe on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment**", 1 John 3:23. It is a *compassable* quality, therefore, since He never expects us to do what we can't; and the secret of this attitude toward folk is given us plainly - "**the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given unto us**", Romans 5:5.

We ought: therefore, we can: therefore, we will? Notice our verse 8, "**Who hath declared unto us your love in the Spirit**": there lie the Spring, and the Secret, and the Strength of this all-

powerful virtue - "**the fruit of the Spirit**", Galatians 5:22. And now Paul cites a further cause for his thankfulness.

*Their "hope"*

The "**for**", meaning "through", as if this hope possessed a causal character, as if it were a part source of the love he has just been speaking of, and indeed, of the faith he mentioned in the earlier part of the paragraph.

This hope is so frequently tied up with the fact of the Second Advent - "**that blessed hope**", as Titus 2:13 calls it. Many have accused this subject as encouraging an impractical star-gazing attitude to life; and indeed, it could minister to that outlook. In fact, that did happen in the case of some of the Thessalonian believers; and this was probably why Paul wrote his First Epistle to them, to correct this very tendency.

The New Testament leaves us in no doubt that, rightly and healthily held, the doctrine of the Return of our Lord possesses an ethical value second to none among all the teachings of Holy Scripture - "**through**" its influence many Christian virtues flourish. This will naturally lead on to a consideration of the second theme in Paul's mind here -

### **HIS DECLARATION, 5b-8**

It concerns "**the word of the truth of the Gospel**" - a matter always uppermost in his thoughts, and which was indeed the very mainspring of all his magnificent life and service. He was "**separated unto the Gospel of God**", Romans 1:1 - that meant everything to this intrepid missionary adventurer. What, then, has he to say about this gospel in our present passage? It is -

*The original Gospel* - "**whereof ye heard before**", 5; that is, at the first. The old gospel, as contrasted with any new-fangled gospel, such as was being propagated in certain quarters in the Colossian church.

If you wanted to rouse Paul's ire, you had only to start proclaiming a rival so-called gospel. Listen to him in Galatians 1:6-9 - "**if any man preach any other gospel unto you, let him be accursed**".

Blessed intolerance!

- the Gospel of Do your best.
- the Gospel of accumulated merit,
- the Gospel of personal worth,
- the Gospel of ritual observance - away with them, and all like them.

They flatter to deceive, and can never avail to save a soul.

By all the repeated emphasis of Divine revelation, It is only Paul's "**gospel of the grace of God**" that can accomplish the saving work. Like Jacob's ladder it is brought within reach of man, "**set up on the earth**" and "**it reached**" to Heaven, Genesis 28:12. And when our Lord JESUS came

to earth to be our Ladder to the Skies, John 1:51, thank GOD "**it reached**".

All other ladders however attractive in themselves, fall short.

The fact is that He is not "a" way to Heaven, but "the" Way, as He Himself told us, John 14:6 - the only way, the true way, the living way.

*The universal Gospel* - "**which is come unto you as it is in all the world**", 6. It was this same writer who declared, "**I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth to the Jew first, and also to the Greek**", Romans 1:16.

Down through the years it has proved itself indigenous in all lands, It has settled itself down as native to all races, it is at home in every clime and age, it has flourished in its conquests of human hearts throughout the wide world.

By the way, it was when some Greeks desired to see Him that the Saviour used words that express the very heart of the Gospel, "**I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto Me**", John 12:32 - that is, not "**all**" without exception, for that has manifestly not been so but "**all**" without distinction - Greeks as well as Jews.

The appeal and efficacy of His atoning death is without frontiers, and will prove to have embraced "**a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues which stood before the throne and before the Lamb**", Revelation 7:9.

Oh, then, to fall in line with this mighty purpose of GOD, and to be truly missionary-hearted Christians, like this Paul himself.

*The vital Gospel* - "**bringeth forth fruit**", 6.

All that we have seen thus far has emphasized for us that the Gospel is a living force. Stories could be multiplied of instances wherein the sound, or sight, of a Gospel word, without any human explanation, has brought about the complete conversion of an erstwhile godless and careless soul.

One recalls the case of a man doing some repair work high up in the old Crystal Palace building. All of a sudden, he heard distinctly words, coming seemingly from nowhere, which changed his whole life with GOD's salvation - the words, "**Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world**", John 1:29.

The story is that C. H. Spurgeon was engaged to preach at a great rally to be held at the Crystal Palace, and the previous day he went to the place to try out his voice in the great auditorium, and to test himself he just declaimed that Gospel verse, with the result we have mentioned. Many such incidents could be recounted, to demonstrate the vital "**power . . . unto salvation**" of this Divine good news.

*The personal Gospel* - "**which is come unto you**", 6. Be it proclaimed to the multitude, it yet is

presented to the individual. The prophetic statement of Old Testament deliverance is also a principle of New Testament salvation, "**Ye shall be gathered one by one**", Isaiah 27:12.

"**What must I do to be saved?**" Acts 16:30. "**What shall I do then with Jesus?**" Matthew 27:22. Well then, let this suffice for our consideration of Paul's great declaration of the Gospel, and let us go on to -

### **HIS DESIRE, 9-11**

In his Christian courtesy, he reveals to these friends a big secret. As we have suggested, he has never seen them; and, in any case, there in Rome he is many miles, of land and sea, away from them - but he now opens his heart to them. and tells them that they are often in his mind, and better still, in his prayers, "**we do not cease to pray for you**", 9.

He has heard from their friend and leader Epaphras (7) of their faith, and love and hope, and so he lets them know that, because he is well aware of the enervating influences of a heathen atmosphere, as in Colossae, he is giving himself continually to prayer for them, that those estimable qualities may be deepened, and strengthened.

And, tell me: what better could anyone do for another than to pray for them? To the end, therefore, of their well-being, he opens his heart to them, and reveals to them the pattern of his prayers, his "**desire**" for them.

Note the recurrence of that word "**all**" - which almost appears to indicate what is the complete Christian.

"**All wisdom**", 9.

(a) The "knowledge" here referred to is not of a merely formal or superficial kind, but of a deeper, more thorough sort, since a prepositional addition is made to the simple word here, which indicates this.

(b) It is, further, spiritual knowledge that Paul's prayer seeks for them, "**spiritual understanding**", as he calls it. "**The eyes of your understanding being enlightened**", he puts it, in Ephesians 1:18.

(c) It is, indeed, a growing knowledge - "**increasing in the knowledge**", he says. Are we growing thus? in "**the knowledge of His will**" - for ourselves, for the Kingdom, and for things at large.

All this is to be had by a continual study of His will as revealed in His Word, until, in ever-widening measure, "**we have the mind of Christ**", I Corinthians 2:16.

A deeper aspect of Christian knowledge now emerges - "**the knowledge of God**": not merely of His things, even of His will, but of Himself.

The acquaintance with people generally proceeds in orderly sequence.

(a) First, there is Introduction - and this came to us when first we came to CHRIST. How interesting is the story of Peter's introduction to Him, John 1:40-2. Have we, then, been introduced?

(b) Then, there is to be Increase - the theme of our present meditation. We see it developing in Peter from the time when the Master came to him subsequently, and called him to "**Follow Me**", Matthew 4:19.

(c) All which can lead up to Intimacy - so beautifully demonstrated in Peter's case, along with his two fellow-apostles, James and John, in Jairus' house, on the Transfiguration Mount, and in the Gethsemane garden.

Let us make no mistake, the Lord has no favourites, but He has intimates, who are prepared to pay the cost in absolute devotion, and complete consecration. You will recall that, in Philippians 3:10, the apostle tells us that in his pursuance of knowledge, his chief ambition was, "**that I may know Him**". Such close fellowship and understanding embodies "**all wisdom**", indeed!

"**All pleasing**," 10.

We affirm that it is no necessary mark of high spirituality that we are unpleasing to the worldlings.

Rather, let us, within Christian limits, hope to be popular with our fellows, and seek to use such "**pleasing**" to make an impact upon them for GOD. Yet we must keep our eyes open to the lurking danger of such a popularity - lest in winning the world's smile we come to lose the Lord's smile, which means everything to the earnest Christian.

When Paul is writing under the figure of the Christian as a soldier, he brings out this point when he says, "**No man that warreth** [that is, is engaged in active service] **entangleth himself with the affairs of this life** [that is, ordinary and civil life, seeing there's a war on], **that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier**", 2 Timothy 2:4. If he can please others, well and good; but his chief and over-riding loyalty must be to his Sovereign, "**that he may please Him**".

Such "**all pleasing**" is to be secured by our "**walk**", that is to be worthy of Him, in all we do, and are; and by our "**work**", which is to be worth-while, good, and serviceable to the Kingdom. Self-pleasing is, of course, right out of court for a Christian.

"**All might**," 11.

Comes next in our contemplation of this complete Christian. Whenever we come across a description of what a believer's character and conduct are to be like, we are inclined to be halted by such high demands.

A worthy walk, and a worth-while work - yes, indeed; but how? Let us ever bear this in mind as a principle of the spiritual life, that "**If God command thee so, then thou shalt be able to**",

Exodus 18:23. in other words, if I know that I ought, I know that I can.

"All might" is available to me, so that "**I can do all things** [He requires] **through Christ which strengtheneth me**", Philippians 4:13. So does our passage answer our trembling "How?"

Note that it is a continuous power - "**strengtheneth**" is a present participle, being strengthened - it goes on, ever at our disposal.

Moreover, it is a sufficient power - "**according to His glorious power**": we might render the phrase, "**up to the limit of His power**". I fancy that, however great our need, it will never exceed that limit. In another place, our apostle changes the metaphor to say, "**My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus**", Philippians 4:19 - His blank cheque to be drawn on the inexhaustible account in the Bank of Heaven.

Surely we need never live spiritually bankrupt lives when such limitless resources are ours for the taking. We should be living as princes, not as paupers. What relief, then, and what rejoicing, comes with the realisation that for all Divine calls upon us we have "all might" to draw on.

"**All patience**," 11.

That means Christian stickability: the power to keep on keeping on. We shall have temptations to give up:

- the allurements of the world;
- the weakness of our resolve;
- the frequency of our failures;

these, and other things, may tend to undermine our resistance.

So Paul prays that these Colossian believers may have the grace of perseverance. It was an outstanding quality in an Old Testament saint, "**Daniel purposed . . . and Daniel continued**", Daniel 1:8,21.

It was an outstanding quality in the first New Testament saints, who "**continued stedfastly**", Acts 2:42.

Be it ours also to display a like tenacity - and that, not in a temper of grim and glum resignation, but "**with joyfulness**".

What a grand note to finish on!

~ end of chapter 2 ~

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