



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

Greeting and Thanksgiving Colossians 1.1–8

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The Big Picture

1. Before analyzing the details of the text, we'll get an overview of the extended introduction that prepares the Colossians for the heart of the letter (1.3–2.5; see Wright 1986, 48–49).
 - a. In 1.3–8, he says he is praying for them and gives reasons for his prayers.
 - b. In 1.9–23, he elaborates on the content and reason he was praying for them: they had received deliverance, according to God's plan (vv. 9–20), and needed to recall their place in that plan (vv. 21–23).
 - c. In 1.24–2.5, he shows why he is concerned, based on his work as a minister (διάκονος, *diakonos*) who was committed to declaring the word of God (1.23, 25).

Analysis: The Greeting (1.1–2)

2. Verse 1
 - a. Paul and Timothy are the named authors, though Paul is singled out in 1.23 and 4.18; Timothy was likely Paul's amanuensis ("we" in v. 3 may be editorial).
 - b. Paul identifies himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ by [through; διὰ, *dia*] the will of God."
3. Verse 2
 - a. The Greek reads "saints and faithful brothers"¹ (ESV), but the construction and style suggest the two groups are synonymous; "faithful brothers" is an apposition (NET; Harris 2019, 1.2 n. 2).
 - b. Paul replaces the customary "greetings" (χαίρειν, *chairein*) typical in Greco-Roman letters with "grace" (χάρις, *charis*), and thus "deepens the call of the one true God to manifest his dynamic generosity upon these dear believers" (Arnold 2002, 376–377).
 - c. He adds the Jewish greeting, "peace" (εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*), the wish for things to be as they should.

Analysis: Thanksgiving and Prayer (1.3–8)

4. In the Greek text, verses 3–8 form one sentence, creating a sense of overflowing thanksgiving for the Colossians' conversion and growth.
5. In the letters of Paul that include the opening prayer/wish statement of thanksgiving typical in

¹ On translating ἀδελφός (*adelphos*) "brothers and sisters," see the non biblical evidence cited in BDAG 2000, 18.

ancient letters, he usually sets the stage for the entire writing. Identify the themes in the opening statement, and you will have identified the big ideas in the letter as a whole.²

6. Verses 3–4.
 - a. Including the customary expression of thanksgiving, Paul stresses that he gives thanks for them when he prays (v. 3).
 - b. This has been his practice since the time he heard that the Colossians had come to faith (“since we heard” translates the aorist participle, ἀκούσαντες, *akousantes*) (v. 4).
7. Verses 4–5 – Regarding what he heard, he singles out their faith, love, and hope.
 - a. Notice that the order is not what we might expect, based on 1 Corinthians 13.13, but faith-love-hope.³ All three terms are mentioned multiple times in Colossians: faith (πίστις, *pistis*) – 1.4, 23; 2.5, 7, 12; love (ἀγάπη, *agapē*) – 1.4, 8, 13; 2.2; 3.14; hope (ἐλπίς, *elpis*) – 1.5, 23, 27.
 - b. Notice the sphere or object of the terms in 1.4–5.
 - 1) Faith is “in Christ Jesus” – a reference to “the sphere in which faith operates rather than, as an English reader tends to assume, the object of faith” (Wright 1986, 51).
 - 2) Love is “for all the saints” – they were seeking what was best for their fellow believers.
 - 3) Hope is “being laid up in heaven” – the present participle form of the verb ἀπόκειμαι (*apokeimai*) which has the sense of “reserved” (CSB; cf. BDAG 2000, 113).⁴
8. Verses 5b–6a identify the basis for hope.
 - a. It originated in what they had “heard before” (προακούω, *proakouō*).
 - b. It was found “in the word [message, NET; λόγος, *logos*] of truth, [which is] the gospel.” The message has an objective content.
 - c. The gospel is described in terms of its fruitfulness and growth, beginning from the time they received the grace of God.
 - 1) The sense of “bearing fruit” (καρποφορέω, *karpophreō*) is that “the gospel bears fruit of itself” (Rogers and Rogers 1998, 459); that is, it has a positive effect wherever it is taught.
 - 2) Its increase (αὐξάνω, *auxanō*), ever expanding throughout the world, was also to be celebrated (cf. Arnold 2002, 377).⁵ See also “growing in the knowledge of God” in 1.10.
 - d. They were blessed because they were among those who had “heard” and “understood” (content again) the grace of God in truth, that is, as it truly is (cf. Rogers and Rogers 1998, 459).
 - 1) This was because of Epaphras from whom they had “learned” (μανθάνω, *manthanō*) it, a term that suggests he had “continued to instruct them in the faith” (Arnold 2002, 377).⁶
9. Epaphras had been a “faithful minister” (διάκονος, *diakonos*) on “behalf” of others.

² Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon have more elaborate expressions of thanks. 1–2 Thessalonians and 2 Timothy have shorter statements. 2 Corinthians, Galatians, 1 Timothy, and Titus lack such a statement.

³ In fact, the order faith-hope-love appears in Paul only in 1 Cor 13.13 and Rom 5.1–5. In addition to Col 1.4–5, he uses the faith-love-hope order in Eph 1.15–18; and 1 Thess 1.3; 5.8. In Ephesians 4.2–4, the order is love-hope-faith. In Gal 5.5–6, the order is faith-hope-faith-love.

⁴ There is evidence that, “as an extension of royal Persian custom, Hellenistic rulers would store up goods for faithful servants” (Rogers and Rogers 1998, 459).

⁵ Notably, the three uses of *auxanō* in Acts referring to Christianity’s growth refer to the increase of the word (6.7; 12.24; 19.20). The other appearance in the book refers to the increase of the Israelites in Egypt (7.17).

⁶ For the emphasis on learning for being and growing as a disciple, see these uses of *manthanō*: Matt 9.13; 11.29; 24.32 = Mark 13.28; John 6.45; Rom 16.17; 1 Cor 4.6; 14.31, 35; Gal 3.2; Eph 4.20; Phil 4.9; 1 Tim 2.11; 5.4; 2 Tim 3.14; Tit 3.14; Heb 5.9.

- a. Because of a textual variant, there is a question whether the text is “your” (ὁμῶν, *hymōn*; ESV) or “our” (ἡμῶν; *hēmōn*; NET, NASB, NIV).
 - 1) If ὁμῶν, then his point is that Epaphras had served for the sake of the Colossians.
 - 2) If ἡμῶν, he had served on behalf of Paul (reasonable in view of the likely circumstances that led to the founding of the church; cf. Acts 19.8–10; Col 2.1).⁷
- b. The editors of the UBS5 and Nestle28 Greek texts preferred ὁμῶν; based on its “widespread currency” in the versions and patristic writings, Metzger concurred (Metzger 1971, 619–620).
- c. But Harris 2019, 1.7 n. 16, is persuasive that the use of ἡμῶν in “the superior [early] witnesses” favors its use. (It fits with the inferred scenario for the church’s founding; see n. 7, above.)

Thinking More about Faith, Love, and Hope

10. These three terms are used differently today than they were then.
 - a. Biblical faith is tied to truth and assurance and always includes three elements: *knowledge* that gives us the basis for *trust* that in turn motivates us to *action* (cf. Jas 2.14–26; discussed **here**).
 - b. *Agapē*, one of several words the Greeks had for “love,”⁸ is the determination to do what is in the other person’s best interests, even if it inconvenient or unpleasant. It is grounded in reality with feelings, attraction, etc., being secondary at best.
 - c. Hope is confident expectation that what is anticipated *will* occur, not merely a desire or longing that it will; it is based in the confidence of faith and practice of love (cf. Mark 12.28–31).
11. Given the widespread misunderstanding of these terms today, Paul’s use of them can be distorted. In biblical terms, all are grounded in objective truth and revealed expectations that result.

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Works Cited

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⁷ See the discussion in the previous notes, “[To the Colossians](#).”

⁸ Günther and Link begin their discussion of *agapaō* as follows: “In contradistinction to Eng., extra-biblical Gk. has quite a number of words for love and to love; *the most important* [but not all] being → *phileō*, *stergō*, *eraō* and *agapaō*.” Outside biblical Greek, “*phileō* is the most commonly used word, indicating a general attraction towards a person or thing” (Günther and Link 1976, 538; emphasis mine). *Agapaō* (143) and *agapē* (116) appear 259 times in the NT; *phileō* (25) and *philos* (29; only in the sense “friend”) appear just 54 times.