

Paul's Grateful Heart

Colossians 1:1-5

Pastor John Miller

Begin with me in Colossians 1:1. Let's read the first five verses. It starts with, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and,"—he includes with his greeting, Timothy, the King James has—"Timotheus our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ,"—now we're going to come back to that, but notice that phrase "in Christ." If you're a highlighter or underliner, the little phrase "in Christ" or "in Christ Jesus" or "in Christ Jesus the Lord" deserves to be highlighted and noted in your Bible. He says, "...and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse,"—which was their earthly location—"Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Notice Paul's thankful heart. That's, by the way, the title of my message, I forgot to mention, is "Paul's Grateful Heart" or thankful heart.

Verse 3, Paul says, "We,"—whenever he uses the plural 'we,' he's including himself and Timothy, no doubt—"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."

A.W. Tozer once said, "We do not preach Christ with a comma after His name, as though waiting for something else. Nor do we preach Christ with a dash after His name, as though leading to something else, we preach Christ period." I love that. The book of Colossians is preaching Christ period. A one very simple way, but it's not overly simplistic, to view the book of Colossians is that it preaches Christ, that it's one of the most Christ-exalting letters Paul ever penned. Some feel, and I can almost concur, I hate to be venturing out too strong on this, that it is the most Christ-exalting epistle in Paul's letters, and some feel even in the Scriptures altogether. There are several books of the Bible that stand out for the glories of Christ. The gospel of John is one, of course, and the book of Hebrews is another; and so Christ is exalted in these books, but this book is all about Christ's preeminence and Christ's sufficiency.

Let me break down three main themes for the book of Colossians. The first is Christ's preeminence, and I want you to peek at that with me in Colossians 1:18. Look down at verse 18. This is a key text for the book, "And he,"—that is, Christ—"is the head of the body,"—notice it's the focus of Christ, the head of the Church, the body of Christ—"who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,"—and notice at the end of verse 18—"that in all things he might have the preeminence."

The word "preeminence" means nothing is to be above Christ—nothing is higher than Christ, nothing is to be above Christ, nothing is to be more exalted than Christ. He is above all things, Christ preeminence. This is one of the main themes, it's one of the key verses, to the book of Colossians

Secondly, Christ's sufficiency is brought out in Colossians. Look at Colossians 2:8-9, "Beware

lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. 9 For in him,"—that is, Christ—"dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," so don't be spoiled by the philosophies and the teachings of men because in Christ we are complete; which, by the way, is talking about our sufficiency in Christ, and He is the head of all things, the fullness of the full Godhead in bodily form.

The third point that I would make about the theme of Colossians is in the next verse, verse 10, "And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power." So, Christ preeminent, Colossians 1:18; Christ sufficient, Colossians 2:8-9; and then Christ our completeness. That word "complete" again is a nautical term. It means that you are fully rigged, ship shape, ready to sail. It's actually a nautical term for a ship that was fully rigged and ready to sail, so we have everything we need. I believe that the moment you are born again and you are placed in Christ, and I'll talk more about this in a moment, that you have at your disposal everything you need to live a life of godliness that is pleasing to the Lord.

Now, why did Paul write this letter? Well, I just gave you three reasons why Paul wrote the letter, but let me mention a couple of other things. Paul actually wrote the letter when he was under house arrest in Rome. Paul had two imprisonments, or two main incarcerations, and the first was he ended up in Rome at the end of the book of Acts at around 61-62 A.D. The book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome, but when we say imprisoned, he was under house arrest. He wasn't in the Mamertine dungeon, he was in a house that he rented and people could come to visit him. He could teach, preach, and minister to them. During this time, when Paul was in prison, he wrote from Rome to the believers in Colossae, about a 160-mile gap between those two locations.

Colossians is one of what's called Paul's prison epistles. By the way just to mention, don't neglect the Pauline letters of the Bible. There is a dangerous trend today to focus only on the gospels of Christ, the words of Christ, and the teachings of Christ. That's a wonderful thing to do, but sometimes people think, Paul was too doctrinal and too legalistic. Paul was kind of out there in left field, so we just want to follow Jesus, listen to Jesus, and be like Jesus. It sounds good, but Paul was an apostle by the will of God, we're going to see in our text, and he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He wrote with full apostolic authority, and "All scripture is given by inspiration of God," so don't neglect because it's important that you, when you study the Bible, that you get the gospels' historical narrative, the doctrinal epistles, and the prophetic Scriptures as well understanding the different types of literature in the Bible. Don't neglect one over the other, the whole counsel of God is important; so don't neglect the Pauline epistles in your Bible, they are favorites of everyone.

During this time Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Real quick before I forget, Philemon was written to a man who owned a slave in Colossae. Philemon was from Colossae. When you read that little letter of Paul, "Philemon," it was written to Philemon in Colossae. Some feel that this Colossian church was the church that met in Philemon's house and that Philemon could've been instrumental in actually starting the church there in Colossae. That, we don't know. The Bible doesn't describe its origin or beginnings, but he was writing from Rome,

the same time he wrote Philippians, Ephesians, and Philemon. Those are the prison epistles of Paul. Much more could be said about that, but we need to move on.

We also know that there was a problem in the church at Colossae. Again, real quick, it's believed that the church at Colossae started while Paul was in Ephesus, Acts 19. If you get a map, if you've ever studied the seven churches of Revelation 2 and 3, the area that those seven churches existed in modern-day Turkey, which at Bible times was known as Asia minor, is actually the area where Colossae existed. It was about 60 miles east of Ephesus. I didn't get a map for the screen tonight, but look at a map and check it all out. While Paul was in Ephesus, in Acts 19 it says, "...so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord." It's believed that some people—maybe Philemon, maybe Epaphras (we're going to read about him in the epistle, who is believed to be the pastor), that they came to Ephesus and heard Paul's preaching and teaching, were converted to Christ, and then took the gospel back to Colossae and the church was born. We don't have the record in the book of Acts of the beginning of the church being started in Colossae, and Paul did not, as far as we know, actually start the church in Colossae, it was the fruit of his ministry there in Asia with no reference to it in the book of Acts.

Why did Paul write? Because there was a crisis in the church. There were false teachers...so many of Paul's letters were written because of problems in the church. Sometimes you hear people say, "Well, we just need to get back to the church of the New Testament. The church has drifted so far, we gotta get back to the church." Which church would you like to go back to? Do you want to go back to the church at Corinth, be like the Corinthians? Or the Galatians? Or the Colossians? They all had their problems. They had all their issues, but God used it to bring about Paul's letters to correct the error that we are still dealing with today in our world.

The problem is that the epistle was written to deal with a problem then, but the problem is that it's so prevalent still yet in our world today. It's sad that people neglect these letters because there are still false teachers in the church today, and the combination of false teaching was that they were teaching Jewish legalism, they were teaching an element of eastern mysticism, and an element of Greek philosophy. I'm going to develop this background, especially when we get to Colossians 2 more, but it's believed that this false teaching that came into Colossae, and it could be that maybe they came from Colossae to tell Paul about the problem.

Think about it, Paul's under house arrest. He's in chains. He's never been to Colossae. It was a small church of new believers, they show up and tell Paul, "There's these crazy false teachers in our church. You've gotta do something." Paul got his pen out and wrote this letter to take back to the believers, but it's believed that this false teaching was the beginning stages of what is known as Gnosticism. Take note of that word, "Gnosticism."

Gnosticism comes from the Greek word $\gamma\acute{\nu}\omega\sigma\kappa\omega$ —to know. Basically, they were people that thought that salvation was attained through a superior knowledge that could be given only to an elite group of people initiated into their "club" or to their group. They believed they had a superior knowledge and that salvation was by knowledge and working your way back up to

God. I'm going to talk more about Gnosticism again as we go through the epistle, but they had this false concept that everything physical—all matter—was evil and only spirit was good. Because of that, they didn't believe that God created our world, they believed that God let out these demigods or this emanation came out from God and eventually a god so far from the true and living God, created the universe. They didn't believe that matter was good, they thought it was evil; so because of that, they denied the incarnation of Jesus Christ. They denied that Jesus Christ had a physical body. They denied that He created the heavens and the earth or that Jesus had a physical body. The gnostic heresy that they had an insufficient, inadequate, unbiblical Christ, and it's so important that our Christology, our knowledge of Christ, is accurate when it comes to understanding who Jesus Christ is.

In Colossians 2:3, it says, "In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." If you have Jesus Christ, you don't need anything else, and the same thing happens today. You get born again, you have Christ, you come to the Lord, and some will say, "Well, you need this book," or "You need this particular translation," or "You need this preacher," or "You need this group," or "You need this experience." "You need this," or "You need that," or "You need the other." The problem is that Christ is sufficient—He's all that we need. Colossians is one of the most Christ-exalting books that show that in Christ we are complete, that He is to have preeminence, that everything we need is found in Christ.

I'm still warming up to my text, believe it or not, and I want to just rapid fire (I believe it'll be on the screen) give you an outline of the whole book. In chapter 1, we have doctrine—Christ's preeminence is declared; in chapter 2, we have danger—Christ's preeminence is defended; in chapters 3 and 4, we have duty—Christ's preeminence is demonstrated. So, chapter 1 is doctrine, Christ's preeminence declared; chapter 2, danger, Christ's preeminence defended; chapters 3 and 4, duty, that's the practical aspect of the book—living out Christ's preeminence demonstrated in our daily lives.

Ephesians focuses on Christ, a body, the Church, and Colossians focuses on Christ the head of the Church. We discover that Paul does not immediately in our text confront the crisis at Colossae but rather begins with two things: the greeting, verses 1-2; and the expression of gratitude, verses 3-4. Look at it with me in your Bibles. It starts with, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Now, Paul's greeting is in verses 1-2, and there are basically three things I want you to note. First of all, Paul's greeting, he gives us his name. We have the author, verse 1. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God." You could just stop right there, we won't do that, and we could spend the whole rest of the time together just talking about the greatness of Paul. I have no problems calling Paul the greatest Christian that ever lived. He was a man. He was a sinner that was saved by grace, but what a marvelous individual he was. Just seeing his name there...by the way, the name "Paul" means little. Interesting, my middle name is Paul; it means little. He was first known as Saul. He was from Tarsus. He was the proud Pharisee, no doubt,

or religious leader. He was on his way to Damascus, and we know the famous story of his conversion in Acts 9 when he encountered Christ on the Damascus road, was converted to Christ, and became an apostle seeing Christ, the risen Lord. His name, "Paul,"—his authority—"an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God."

An apostle in this primary sense does not exist today. I don't believe that we have any apostles in the church in this sense. What do I mean by "this sense"? These are men who had to have seen the Lord—accompanied with the Lord, saw the Lord, Paul saw Him on the Damascus road—and then they were commissioned by the Lord and given the authority of the Lord. They were chosen by Christ. They saw Him. They had miracles performed by them in their name. But the church's foundation was laid by the apostles, and the apostles' teachings—listen to me very carefully—are contained in the Scriptures. If you have a church or an organization that claims apostles, be very, very suspect (and I'm being nice when I say that). What I should say is, "Run for your life." The reason they do that is because they want to shift the authority from the apostolic New Testament and its writings to themselves, so they claim apostles. They don't meet the qualifications, they're self-appointed, they're not by the will of God, they can't write or speak with apostolic authority, so beware and be careful.

What is the secondary sense? Only in that the word "apostle" means sent out or one sent. It would be the equivalent of a modern-day ambassador. When an ambassador goes from one country that it represents to another country, it speaks with all the authority of that country where they came from. So, we in a sense, as His ambassadors, are, you could say, apostles, although I don't like to use that term or go there at all. We're His ambassadors, but some like to think of missionaries as having an apostolic kind of ministry in that they represent Christ. Again, I don't believe that we have in the primary first sense apostles alive and still in the world today, that they've died off, they're dead and gone; but we have their writings in the New Testament which are authoritative which we must build our Christian doctrine upon.

Paul had an associate with him, verse 1. His name was Timothy. Timothy was the traveling companion of Paul. If you read the book of Acts, you know that Paul came to Troas. Timothy had a mother who was a believer, and he evidently had a father who maybe wasn't a believer, but he came to Christ and became a companion traveling with Paul. Paul wrote to him, 1 and 2 Timothy, which were pastoral epistles. It's believed that actually Timothy spent some time pastoring the church in Ephesus himself, but he was there now in Rome with Paul under house arrest as his companion. Notice he's, "our brother," so our brother in Christ.

Then, the readers, or the recipients in verse 2, notice in four ways that Paul characterizes them. They were "saints." "To the saints,"—and then they were called—"faithful brethren in Christ." So, they were "saints," they were "faithful brethren," and they were "in Christ," again, a key word, "saints."

You know, it's a tragedy that the Roman Catholic Church has elevated some people to sainthood when the Bible teaches all Christians are saints. Did you know that if you're a Christian, you're a saint? You say, "No, I ain't." You're either a saint or you ain't. The word

“saint” the word “sanctify” and the word “holy” all come from the same root word which basically means to be set apart unto God. We’re set apart unto God. The word here does not convey any intrinsic holiness or necessary moral good, so it doesn’t mean that you are living like a saint, it means that you are classified, categorized, positioned as a saint.

The goal of the Christian life, and I’ve gotta be careful I don’t spend too much time on this, and I hit it all the time but it’s essential, fundamental Christianity, is to bring your walk up to your position. Positionally, you are a saint. The goal of the Christian life, it’s a lifelong process, is become more saintly and to walk more holy, to walk more righteously before God as the Spirit of God sanctifies the believer and we live saintly lives before God.

All this happens the moment you are born again, you are set apart unto Christ, and then the Holy Spirit starts His work of sanctification. It starts with justification, and then a lifelong process of sanctification, and then when you die and go to heaven or the rapture of the Church takes place, then you have what’s called glorification, right? After throwing my back out last week, I can’t wait for a new body. Can you imagine being in heaven in your new body and say, “Ahhhhh, I hurt my back!” That won’t happen. Praise God for that! Amen? There won’t be any weakness. There won’t be any sin. There won’t be any sickness. There won’t be any disease. There won’t be any ERs, no hospitals, no crutches, no ambulances, no cancer, no chemotherapy, no strokes, no heart attacks, no cataracts. Nobody’s teeth are going to fall out. Shall I keep going?

Three things: Justification, I’m saved; sanctification, I’m being saved; glorification, I will be completely saved. I’m justified, free from sin’s penalty; I’m being sanctified, free from sin’s power; I will be perfectly glorified, free from sin’s presence altogether. Again, what begins with grace, ends in glory. The Spirit of God convicts us, draws us, regenerates us, indwells us, sanctifies us, and one day we will get a new body in heaven. That’s something to be thankful for. Amen? So all this that you are set apart as saints, and in so many of Paul’s epistles he addresses the believers saints.

This is not a select group of the “deeper life club.” This isn’t some super Christian group, “We’re the saints!” All Christians are saints. Get that in your mind; get that in your heart. Now, that’s not a license to sin, that’s not a license to go out and do whatever you want, the goal is to live who you are, to live out your position in Christ—knowing who you are in Christ, living out that position before a watching world.

They were also, “faithful brethren.” The word “faithful” in verse 2 can be translated steadfast; and the word “brethren” indicates that they were loved, so they were loved, steadfast brethren. This is the same people Paul just addressed as saints. They were faithful to God, steadfast, and they were loved by Paul. They were brethren.

Thirdly, and I have already alluded to a lot of things that could be said about this, but they were “in Christ,” verse 2. The reason they were saints, the reason they were brethren, is because they were “in Christ.” Everyone who’s born again, saved, is a saint. The minute you’re a saint,

you're in the body of Christ; the minute you're in the body of Christ, you're a brethren or sistren in Christ, and all of it is because you are all placed together as believers, we are, in Christ or in Christ Jesus. This phrase, "in Christ," is used by Paul in his epistles more than any other expression. If you don't understand it, give special attention and focus to understanding what it means that, "I am in Christ." It will totally revolutionize and transform your spiritual life. When the light goes on and you understand what it means to be "in Christ..."

I grew up in church, came to Christ at an early age, kind of fell away and got a little "prodigal" during my high school years. I came to Christ right after I graduated from high school, back to Christ, and I grew up in a church that never taught or explained or understood this. This is why the Christians I knew struggled. Many of them thought they lost their salvation and every week had to get saved again. They thought that God didn't love them or didn't like them or didn't care for them. They didn't know that they were "in Christ," and what a marvelous concept this is.

These are things that are true, by the way, for every Christian no matter how long you've been saved. No matter how holy they live, they're in Christ. This freaks some people out. Some people can't quite digest this, but if you're saved period, you're "in Christ." If you're not saved, you're not "in Christ;" if you're not "in Christ," you're not saved—they're one and the same. If you're "in Christ," you're in the Church; you're in the Church going to get raptured. That's the issue. This opens up a whole area of understanding.

In Ephesians 1, we are, "...blessed...in Christ." In Colossians 2:10, we're, "...complete in him," Christ. In Romans 8:1, "There is...no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." In Romans 8:39, nothing, "...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus," and the list could go on and on and on and on.

Let me ask three quick questions before I move on. How do you get "in Christ"? By being born again. First Corinthians 12:13 says, "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body...and have been all made to drink into one Spirit." Every Christian has been baptized by the Spirit, taken out of Adam and placed in Christ. Before you were born again, you were in Adam—not good, sin, death, condemnation. Everyone outside of Christ is in Adam. All of humanity are in two federal heads—Adam or Christ. This is when you are saved, you're taken out of Adam and placed in Christ. When do you get in Christ? The moment you are regenerated by the Holy Spirit—they're one and the same.

Let me make mention of this. It's not necessarily a physical or emotional experience other than your sins are forgiven, you become a Christian, you sense His peace, but you don't have an experience, "Whoa! I just got taken out of Adam. I just felt it. Whew! Out of Adam, in Christ! Oo! That was awesome!" "Oh no! Out of Christ, back into Adam!" There is absolutely no teaching, text, or Scripture in the Bible that indicates that once you are in Christ you could ever get out of Christ.

I know that there are Christians—I was one of them for some time years ago—that believe that. I no longer believe that. From my study of God's Word, especially the book of Romans, and

we're working on a book actually in Romans 8 right now called Blessed Assurance, that once in Christ, always in Christ. Once in Christ, always in Christ. For you to lose your salvation, there's a whole list of things that would have to happen. One of them is you'd have to be taken out of Christ and put back in Adam! You didn't put yourself in Christ, how do you get yourself out of Christ? Once in Christ, always in Christ. That's not a license to sin, that's a motivation to live a holy life, a godly life.

Here's my third question, how long is a person in Christ? I guess I've already answered that question—once in Christ, always in Christ. Read Romans 8, nothing, "...shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In reference to them being in Colossae in verse 2, we already talked about the city and the founding of the church, and then there's the blessing, verse 2, "Grace,"—the Greek word *charis*, which has the concept of beautiful and charming and gracious and also unmerited favor—"be unto you, and peace, from God our Father,"—which is the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, and it always comes in this order—grace precedes peace. You can't experience the peace of God until you experience the grace of God. Once you come to experience God's grace, then you can experience the peace of God in your soul. So, salvation is peace with God; sanctification is the peace of God. "Grace...and peace,"—and it's—"...from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," and you can add Galatians 5:22, it also comes from God the Holy Spirit. So, we're saved by grace, we stand in God's grace, and we experience God's marvelous peace.

The second section, and we won't tarry, is verses 3-5, Paul's gratitude. We have his greeting, verses 1-2, to his gratitude. Follow with me again in your Bible. "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." Notice, "We're thankful for your faith, for your love, and for your hope," that triad of the Christian life—your faith, your hope, and your love.

Remember, Paul was writing from prison, house arrest but prison. He was in chains. The church in Colossae was facing danger of false teachers, yet Paul had a thankful heart. Oh, I wish I could be more like Paul in this area—I'm in prison, the church has got false teachers, and I'm thankful. That's an amazing tie. Because he was so stayed on Christ, he knew that He was the head of the Church and that He was in control. Even with this adverse situation that Paul was in, he still had a thankful heart. It's a dominant theme in the book of Colossians. Let me point them out quickly. We have here in Colossians 1:3, I mentioned to being grateful or thankful, but peek actually in Colossians 1:12. He says, "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." Then, jump down to Colossians 2:7, "Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving."

Look at Colossians 3:15 for just a moment. Paul says, "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Jump down to Colossians 3:17, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus,

giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Peek at Colossians 4:2, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” I never really realized that Colossians had so much reference to thanksgiving—a thankful heart, gratitude. That’s what happens when we get our minds upon the Lord. Amen?

You may have been discouraged or depressed because your mind has been on other things than Christ. You want to get really depressed, just go home and spend some time looking in the mirror. Depression will set in. Think about your problems, how people are treating you, and all your issues, and you just get depressed. Cast your cares upon the Lord, turn to Him in prayer, look to Him, and you’ll be blessed. Amen?

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

Look full in His wonderful face,

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,

In the light of His glory and grace. Amen?

The book of Colossians has a grateful heart of Paul displayed for us, Paul’s gratitude.

Notice Paul’s attitude of gratitude, verse 3, “We give thanks,”—is in the present tense. It means we are continually, habitually, ongoingly giving thanks. It is a thankfulness that was a part of his prayers, so when he prayed, he didn’t just petition, he had thanksgiving in his prayers, even when he was in chains, and he was praying for you, “... praying always for you.” This is an interesting Greek phrase. It has the idea of literally around you. So, “...for you,” or surround you or we’re surrounding you with prayers.

It was a comfort to me this past week when I was laid up with this injury of my back to get the texts and the messages, “Pastor John, we’re praying for you.” To be surrounded and held up by prayer was such a blessing. So, Paul’s thankful heart as he prayed for them.

There are three things, as I pointed out, Paul was thankful for—their faith, their love, and their hope. Notice verse 4, “...of your faith,”—and notice that their faith was—“in Christ Jesus.” That phrase, “of your faith” is literally for the faith of you. Their faith was real, their faith was practical, and most importantly, notice their faith has as its object, Christ. You need to make sure that your faith ...is built on nothing less than, than Jesus’ blood and righteousness, right? I’ll stop there. I’ll be quoting hymns all night, I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand: all other ground is sinking sand. What your faith has as its object is the important issue—not the amount of your faith, the object of your faith. A little faith in Christ will take your soul to heaven. A lot of faith will bring heaven to your soul. It just takes a little faith in a great God to be in heaven. The Christian life is the life of faith, and they were living their faith. Are you living by faith or by feelings or emotions?

Then, notice verse 4, their love, “...and of the love which ye have to all the saints.” Notice, “all

the saints,” not just the ones you like, even the ones that irritate or bother you. You love all the saints. That’s hard. That’s no easy to do. Faith in God and love for God’s children always go together. You cannot say, “I’m a Christian. I’ve trusted Christ. I believe in God, but I don’t like Christians.” Or, “I’m a Christian, but not one of those loving kind. I’m a grumpy Christian.” Jesus said in John’s gospel, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” It’s the birthmark of a true believer—love.

In 1 John 3:23, “And 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.” By the way, that word “love” there is the Greek word agape. It’s God’s spiritual, divine love, and it’s to all the saints. Then, I love this, verse 5, their faith, their love, and their hope. This hope in verse 5, “...is laid up for you,”—that’s the believers, the saints—“in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,”—which brought about their salvation. This is talking about their hope of heaven.

When you become a Christian, you have a hope in your heart that prior to your salvation you didn’t have. People that are not “in Christ,” have no hope of heaven. Christians have the hope of heaven. This is why we can endure the sufferings, the physical infirmities, the weaknesses of our flesh, the adversities, the trials, the hardships because, “I’m going to heaven.” Amen? It’s perfectly legitimate, and I would say Biblical, to be heavenly minded; and the more heavenly minded, the more earthly good; the more earthly minded, the less heavenly good—to realize I’m headed to heaven and that I have a hope beyond the grave.

Christian hope is a steadfast assurance. That phrase, “laid up” literally means kept or secure. It has the idea of fixed or fastened as to not give way or to let loose or be lost. It’s for you in heaven. Jesus said in John 14, “Let not your heart be troubled,”—neither let it be afraid—“ye believe in God, believe also in me,”—there’s the object of your faith—“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” Don’t let your heart be troubled—believe in a Person, believe in a place, believe in a promise, “I’m going to heaven.” All this is in the hope of the gospel, verse 5. It says there, “...whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.”

Now, we’ll start here next session. The gospel message is that which joins the hope and the heart with the hope of heaven. It must be preached, “...ye heard before...the truth of the gospel,”—it’s true and it centers in Christ. The gospel is that Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that Jesus rose again from the dead according to the Scriptures. Amen?

So, believer, have faith. We look to God. We have love. We look out toward others. We have hope. We look to heaven. Jesus is coming to take us to the Father’s house. Amen?