Firm In Faith

Colossians 1:1-8

v.1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

*Standard greeting, written by Paul (leading apostle), accompanied by Timothy (pastoral intern), to a group of believers in a small country church, meeting in homes, in a town smaller than Bellaire MI.

4 historical notes of importance:

*The letter was written by Paul to a church he had not founded and likely had never visited.

*The church was the smallest, seemingly irrelevant, and “least important church” in the NT.

*The village of Colossae was “a small suburb” in close proximity (10 miles) to a “great city” largely known for materialism & mediocrity (called Laodicea)

*The region (Galatia/Turkey) became a ghost town & in time nearly extinct of the gospel.

A. Our love for the church should be global.

*News of N. Korea, Houston, Puerto Rico, should cause us to pray for the church to rise up.

*I received a book in the mail from Pakistan; Pastor Gill, who lifts up New Hope and its ministry, though he has never stepped foot on our property.

B. Our perspective of significance must be biblical.

*I can understand Paul writing to Rome (Willow Creek)...but to Colossae? (New Hope)

*How prone we are to evaluate success & make decisions based on outward notoriety

*Outreach Magazine: “Top 100 churches” & “100 Fastest Growing” (New Hope is on neither!)

*But the average church in America & the world is more like Colossae, than Rome.

*God’s measurement of “who’s who” and “whats important” is upside-down from ours

C. Our proximity to mediocrity can be transmittable.

*Colossae is to Laodicea, like Kalkaska is to TC...close in proximity, and prone to influence.

*At a missions conference last week, my nametag said “Williamsburg” – Where’s that?

*Williamsburg is a village situated squarely in a Vacationland of modern day Laodicea, where there is a dangerous undercurrent in the water pulling towards mediocrity & materialism.

D. Our legacy of faith is not foreseeable.

*Paul encouraged the church to be firm in faith, but today if you fly to Istanbul, drove 365 miles to the ruins of Colossae, you find a region nearly devoid of the Christian faith.

*In a country of 80 Million, 99+% Muslim; .2% Christian
*Perspective: 184 believers in GT County; 2 believers at NH; or .12 believers at NH Bellaire

*If church history teaches anything, every generation must stand firm in faith, or not stand at all.

This is why Paul writes the church - to remind them to be: **Firm in faith**

Theme verse: “*If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all.*” (Is. 7:9)

1. **Two of God’s greatest gifts,** (v.2)

   v.2…Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

   - **Grace** - God’s unmerited favor, desperately needed every day and uniquely offered in Christ.
   - **Peace** - quietness & rest; the wake produced behind the boat of grace; implication: whole.

   *A personal word: two of the greatest blessings the Father gives His children: Grace & Peace.

Leaving Asheville NC last week, driving through the Smoky Mountain gorge toward Knoxville.

*Passed a small van, inexpensive and simple, with decal promoting their band: “For His Glory.”

*½ mile later we passed a large, expensive tour bus, promoting: “The Devil don’t Sleep Tour.”

*Two vehicles, driving through a gorge,* and a symbolic picture of 2 opposite directions of life:

*One people, recipients of Grace & Peace,* pursuing the advancement of God’s glory.

*One people,* devoid of Grace & Peace, chasing sleepless nights of Man’s praise.

It has been said: “Even blind squirrels occasionally bump into an acorn.”

*To which I invite you: don’t just bump into God’s grace & peace…run into it! Ask him for it.

2. **…give us 3 ways forward,** (v.3-5a)

   v.3  *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,* 4 *since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,* 5 *because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.*

   *Prayer = Thanking God…when we pray for you. That’s what our staff will do this week, when we pray daily for you. (Facebook Live at 7am.)*

   _Woody Hayes, talking about the forward pass: “Three things can happen in two of them are bad.”_

   Here, Paul indicates the 3 ways forward for Christians are all good…Faith; Love; Hope:

   - **Faith**  (Vertical Trust)

     “*Faith in Christ Jesus***” = Confidence, conviction & reliance upon Christ.

     *Our faith is not flimsy mysticism, like walking precariously over a ravine on a slack line

     *Rather, our faith is reasonable & firm (walking on a steel bridge) rooted in the person of Jesus, based in His death, confirmed by eyewitness testimony of His resurrection.

     *Though our faith is within reason, does not mean our faith will never be without doubt.
Stuart McCallister: “We can know many things really. We can know a lot of things truly. We can know most things sufficiently. But very few things exhaustively.”

*So it is with the Christian Faith. It is a faith so simple a toddler can understand it, and yet so exhaustive even the most educated professional could never fully describe it.

Doubt of the will = where people see evidence for Jesus, but reject it outright. (Pharisees)

Doubt of the mind = where people may believe, but struggle intellectually (Thomas: I will never)

Doubt of emotions = where people trust Christ, but feelings betray them. (Help my Unbelief)

*Believers are invited to bring our doubts to the Lord, and trust in the risen Christ.

• Love (Horizontal Fellowship)

“the love that you have for ALL the saints...”

*Paul applauds their love for ALL saints; that forgives when wronged; blesses when cursed

*There is no perfect church. Book “Imperfect Pastor.” I am...and so are we all.

*Every church has its share of perks & jerks; saints & felons; messes & miracles.

*Alden Spices – “Miracle Blend” of some of the most fantastic spices.

*If we are candid, our church is a “Miracle Blend of Messes”

*None of us are easy to love. On our best days, we are unstable, temperamental, moody, and inconsistent, yet remarkably we are recipients of God’s grace & peace.

*Pastor Rick reminds our staff often to love people he calls E.G.R. – “Extra Grace Required”

*Anyone can love “some” of the saints. But the love applauded here: “all the saints”

“Find Friends” – Monitoring app, where you can track loved ones to know whereabouts.

*Recent study: 16% of parents track their children; like I do with Annika in Ann Arbor.

*The “Find Friends” in my app are my wife, my daughter, my bro...and Bob Felton.

*As pastor, I don’t track peoples physical locations, but I do have a sense of relational locations

*My pastor in Chicago said: “There are no enduring relationships without forgiveness”

*No matter the person, no matter the offense, God calls us to love for all the saints.

• Hope (Eternal Perspective)

“the hope laid up for you in heaven.”

Hope = not ‘uncertain anticipation’ (like “I hope the Lions win” or “I hope taxes go down”)

*Rather, it is a ‘confident and certain expectation’ of what is yet to come. (Heb: Faith)

*We’ve all been to funerals with “no hope”; and at funerals with “confident hope”.

*Recent study: 16% of parents track their children; like I do with Annika in Ann Arbor.
*In the old days, stores offered a way to purchase things: “Lay Away.”

If you are under 30, “Lay Away” may be as strange as 8mm film & faxes (what’s a fax).

*4/5 stores we called did not offer Lay Away, but encouraged us to get a credit card.

Lay Away is where you want to buy an item, but since you don’t have the money, you pay a deposit, and the store “lays it away” for you, until a later date when it is paid in full.

*In 1996, that’s how I paid for my wife’s wedding ring…3 payments of $100 😊

*Here, Paul talks about hope “laid up” for us. Literally: “Reserved; On hold”; will be ours!

*The resurrection hope is our eternal “Lay Away” program, paid for by Christ.

3. ...all from the gospel we need. (v.5b-8)

v.5...Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

*Daughter saw on Pinterest: “The Gospel is the only story where the hero dies for the villain.”

*Gospel = “Good News” that we need; and it is available to all through Jesus Christ.

• It’s objective Truth.

“The word of truth.” Truth. Not a subjective set of ideas “true for one; not true for another.”

Reminds me: One home plate umpire says, “I call them as they are.” The second says, “I call them as I see them.” The third says, “They ain’t nothing until I call them.”

*But God’s word is objectively true...called as they are, as He sees them, and good news.

Here’s an action step: “In 300 words or less, articulate the Christian worldview.” (RZIM)

*Not, what is your testimony? Because many people answer: “Well, I was raised...”

*Rather, what is the Christian worldview, which is objectively true for the world?

“The Christian worldview is established in the historical person of Jesus Christ, who is the image of the invisible God. He died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, was buried, and raised from the dead 3 days later, with hundreds of witnesses testifying to his bodily resurrection. The Christian faith, including its truth claims about Origin, Meaning, Morality, and Destiny, find its reliability in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This single act in history sets Jesus above all others as the King of glory and the One name who offers salvation to all who trust in Him.” (100 words)

• It’s universal Appeal.

“...as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing...”
Lady on an airplane asked a Pastor what he did for a living: “I work for a global enterprise. We’ve got outlets in nearly every country of the world. We’ve got hospitals, hospices, homeless shelters. We do marriage work, orphanages, feeding programs, educational programs. We do justice & reconciliation. We look after people from birth to death and we deal in the area of behavioral alteration.”

The lady next to him: “Wow! What’s it called?” The pastor: “The church.”

That is the calling of the church. To represent a gospel that is: “A church for All People.”

The church is the largest multi-ethnic, cross-cultural, global enterprise, representing people from every nation, tribe & language.

Mission India Conference - The gospel is bearing fruit all around the world, through average people like Raju Joseph, who has been transformed by Jesus Christ.

He is a picture of the average Christian in the world: poor, barefoot, & non-Caucasian

As Raju began ministering the gospel in his village, Hindu opposition arose and people built a pagan altar on Raju’s property to the god, Ganesh.

Raju ignored the pagan altar, and kept ministering Jesus. 7 months later, as the gospel was growing, the pagan altar was unkempt & wild. (See picture)

Good News: All around the world, the gospel is bearing fruit…and NH is a key part.

This year in just 9 months, NH has given $65,000 just to Mission India, which represents 10 church planters, 1700 children in Bible clubs, 750 adult literacy…and a huge gospel impact.

2010 map, showing red dots which represented the unreached people in India.

2016 map, 6 years later, shows the progress of the gospel reaching the nation.

It’s personal Effect.

“…since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth”

Heard & Understood. One is passive (listen); the other is active (acknowledging).

Scripture: “Faith comes from hearing. And hearing through the word of Christ.”

Lot of media attention of athletes protesting during anthem. But, here the believers are pictured as “hearing” about God’s grace and “kneeling” to honor His authority.

This is what it looks like to come to saving faith in a personal way.

It is hearing about Jesus as Lord, and receiving it by bending a knee in honor of Him.

Colossae heard about the good news through pastor Epaphras. Some of us through grandma

But, if you have never heard it, let me be Epaphras today: “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all people.” And this grace has a name: Jesus.

Action Steps:
A. Get on the Bus.

“For His Glory” or “The Devil don’t Sleep Tour”.

(Dostoevsky) “There is a battle between heaven and hell and that battleground is in the hearts of men.”

The good news of Christ gives us 3 ways forward:

1. I am sure of this and give thanks to Jesus today.
2. I have never been totally sure but I cement it today and pray to confess Christ as Lord.
3. I am not ready to follow Christ this way but I am willing to receive prayer to know if it is true.

B. Confront your Doubts

Our faith in Christ is a “Faith supported by Reason”: so we don’t let doubts win the day

With Doubts of the will (heart rejects it) = we challenge.

With Doubts of the mind (question facts) = we investigate.

With Doubts of the emotion (feelings betray the mind) = Be patient & rest

C. Partner to reach the unreached.

*Recent UN Report = 52% of the world still has no access to the internet.

*More concerning: parts of world “without hope” & without access to the FAITH ...

*Paul was never in Colossae. Most of us have never been to places like India.

*But, one action step is to extend the gospel of truth to a culture who needs it most.

District Strategy: “Operation: From Red to Green”