

Title: ***Their reputation***

No. 201421

Venue: Tyrrell Baptist Church

Date: October 19, 2014

Scripture: Colossians 1v3-8

Call to Worship: Hebrews 10v19-25

Main Idea: Colossae shows qualities of a healthy and vital church

All Scripture is from the English Standard Version unless otherwise indicated

Call to Worship

(Hebrews 10v19-25)

19 *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places
by the blood of Jesus,*
20 *by the new and living way that He opened for us through the curtain,
that is, through his flesh,*
21 *and since we have a great priest over the house of God,*
22 *let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled
clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*
23 *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,
for He who promised is faithful.*
24 *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,*
25 *not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another,
and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.*

(Colossians 1)

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.
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.*

On the path of being a healthy and vital church

I don't know what type of church the folk of Tyrrell Baptist Church want to become. We don't yet know when you last had a congregational conversation about what you collectively want to see happening here. Your last congregational conversations were probably about the transition in pastoral care.

In my experience, Christian congregations tend not to have those conversations as often as would be healthy and beneficial.

The type of expectation about what will happen with a church is generally brought on an individual or family basis as husbands and wives share with one another.

Annual meetings are a time to gather reports of the past period—generally, the past twelve months. In my experience, very little attention is given to what a church might become in the next twelve, twenty-four or thirty-six months.

Are my observations correct?

Perhaps that is one reason why churches plateau and even decline. History is interesting and can teach us lessons but growth is built upon ministry today with a vision for the future.

I believe that growth for the individual Christian is based on searching after God's will with the question, "God, what will you have me become?"

I also believe that growth for a Christian congregation is based on searching after God's will with the question, "God, what will you have us become?"

The reason I began the sermon in this way is because Paul's words to the church in Colossae commended them for what they had become. As we proceed through this letter in the next weeks, we'll see that the church was being threatened by some false teaching. But here in verses 3 to 8, we find that Paul and others had been praying for the believers in Colossae and he was able to commend them for spiritual and other qualities that were being developed.

In the coming weeks, we'll see the guidance that Paul provides for how they could continue on that path of being a healthy and vital church. Please keep that in mind as Paul's desire and design for the church in Colossae—"continue on that path of being a healthy and vital church."

Their reputation

These people had a reputation with Paul. Paul probably talked about the church in Colossae to the others who were with him during his two years under house arrest in Rome. Possibly, the church in Colossae also had a reputation with other churches as well as with the citizens of Colossae and other people in the nearby communities. It never ceases to amaze me how much people know about what is going on in churches even if they don't attend one themselves.

This morning, we'll be looking at the qualities of this church that went into their reputation—qualities that gave reason for Paul to commend them.

Paul did not plant this church. It was probably Epaphras, who is mentioned in verse 7, who established this group of believers. Paul calls Epaphras "*our beloved fellow servant*" and a "*faithful minister on the church's behalf.*" It would appear that Epaphras was sent by the Colossians to minister to Paul's needs while he was under arrest.

In the fourth chapter (vs12-13), we read:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis.

So, if these Colossian Christians had a reputation, it seems that it was brought by the direct report of the man who had started and probably pastored the church.

Isn't it nice to think that someone who knew these people before they became followers of Christ and saw them changed by the work of God could be the one to report to the apostle Paul?

They learned of the grace of God in truth from Epaphras (v6-7)

1. They were people who were open to learn about God.

[the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras]

2. They were people who were open to hearing.

Now that might seem reasonable. People speak, people hear. But you know that is not always and maybe not often the case. Some people are more intent upon expressing their opinions than listening to God's opinions. If you mention "God," some will say, "I don't want to talk about religion!" I've had conversations with Jehovah Witnesses and while I am willing to take their literature, they won't accept mine. Let's realize that some people refuse to hear.

Well, these Colossians were open to both hearing and learning. As you must know, people can hear all sorts of things and learn some pretty bad stuff so it is important to use discernment.

I believe that these people had Holy Spirit discernment because they heard and believed the good news about Jesus Christ—something that Paul here calls "*the word of the truth, the gospel.*"

Here is how Paul described the "gospel" good news to people of another church:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand,

2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,

4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,

5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15)

The good news about Jesus Christ is what leads to personal salvation as you believe that Jesus died for your sins, was buried but then rose from the dead and is now a Living Lord proven in that He appeared, He appeared, He appeared. He appeared.

This is the gospel of truth that led the Colossians to believe in Jesus.

So let's recap some of the first things indicated about their reputation.

1. They were people who were open to learn about God.
2. They were people who were open to hearing.
3. They were people who had spiritual discernment in recognizing truth.

and we can add here that:

4. They were people who believed the gospel and had experienced the grace of God.

I have to attribute this insight to a fine Christian writer, Philip Yancey. He reminds us that of all the human organizations in the world, the church and only the church can demonstrate the grace of God—a grace that it has actually experienced.

Now, they had received and taken in what God had to offer but what was the result in their lives?

The evidence in their reputation

I find it interesting to consider, “How is the grace of God evident in my life?”

“How is the grace of God evident in the life of a congregation?”

Paul says that their faith is evident. Shared faith is what should bring people together as a church. If we don’t share the same basics of faith, how can we move ahead together? Imagine a van load of people who have different agendas, different priorities, and different destinations in mind. It’s going to be an uncomfortable and contentious journey and who knows where they are going to end up.

Shared faith is essential for a church to continue on that path of being a healthy and vital church. The Colossians had faith in Christ and I am confident that they saw Him as the head of their church.

After Paul commends them for their faith, he speaks well of their love for all the saints. Now, in the news, we might hear about people who are being proclaimed saints. These are presented like the “special achievers” in Christianity. But the Bible’s expression of “saints” comes from the word “holy” and saints means the “holy ones.” Whether you find it easy or comfortable to accept, all followers of Christ are those “holy ones.”

You are a saint by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and by God’s declaration.

And so, it is commendable to see people on that path of being healthy and vital Christians.

Well, the Colossians had genuine love for other believers and, in verse 8, Paul restates that their love was “in the Spirit.”

Love is the first named in a series of fruit of the Holy Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5v22-23)

The appearance of this fruit is evidence of the presence and work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

Jesus, Himself, said that this is how people will know that we are His disciples, *“that we love one another”* (John 13v34-35). A lot of churches have some work to do on that one.

So let’s again recap some of the things about their reputation.

1. They were people who were open to learn about God.
2. They were people who were open to hearing.
3. They were people who had spiritual discernment in recognizing truth.
4. They were people who believed the gospel and had experienced the grace of God.
5. They were people who shared faith in Jesus Christ.
6. They were people who loved their brothers and sisters in Christ.

In verse 6, Paul says that the gospel was bearing fruit and growing. This could mean that their ministry was being fruitful and was expanding within and beyond Colossae. The image of bearing fruit also makes me think that there was evidence of the other fruit of the Holy Spirit.

That fruit of the Spirit would have an impact on their relationships with one another as well as in their community.

There are two other points—and related ones—to make out of this passage of Colossians 1 verses 3 to 8. Epaphras had made the journey from Colossae to Rome to be with the apostle Paul. I don’t know how wealthy Epaphras was. Paul commends him as a hard worker. I am assuming that he was a man of modest means. In my imagination—and I think it is reasonable—the church in Colossae contributed their financial support so that Epaphras could make the journey to be with Paul. So, I would say that they were a generous people when it came to supporting ministry work.

And the second thing this suggests is that Epaphras had done some good ministry work in Colossae such that he could leave the church under the guidance of other trustworthy leaders. That suggests to me that people were developing their spiritual gifts and growing in their capabilities to carry out ministries.

So, here, we can add two more points.

7. They were people who supported the mission of the church.
8. They were people who were carrying out their own essential ministries.

Reading the first 8 verses of this book and some verses out of chapter 4, I am getting a picture of Paul, Epaphras and of the church in Colossae. I am getting a sense of the reputation that the Colossian Christians had with Paul. It was a good reputation—one that Epaphras was pleased to share. It was a reputation that led the apostle Paul to express thanks to God for them; that led him to pray for the church in Colossae—so that they would *“continue on that path of being a healthy and vital church.”*