

You Were Raised Right

Studies in the Book of Colossians

Text

Colossians 1:3-8

Topic

Paul emphasizes the importance of thinking about the hope that is awaiting us when we go home to Heaven

Title

*“Heigh Hope! Heigh Hope!
It’s Home to Heaven We Go”*

Let’s start with the word counter-intuitive.

Something is counter-intuitive if it goes against what you believe would be logical, or if it goes against common sense.

For example: A placebo is a substance or treatment with no therapeutic value. Often in testing medications, one group gets the meds, while the other gets a placebo.

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Sometimes those who receive the placebo nevertheless believe they are improving. This is called the placebo-effect.

What if you were told outright that your meds were a placebo; would there still be a placebo-effect?

A “Yes” answer would be counter-intuitive, but it’s the right answer. This was shown in a 2010 study involving people with IBS. The researchers wrote, “Our study suggests that openly described [placebos] when delivered with a plausible rationale can produce positive responses.”

Here’s a more colorful example from the world of Pixar. Doc Hudson’s counter-intuitive advice to Lightning McQueen regarding dirt track oval racing was, “If you're going hard enough left, you'll find yourself turning right.”

Frustrated, Lightning sarcastically replied, “Oh, right. That makes perfect sense. Turn right to go left. Yes, thank you! Or should I say, NO THANK YOU!!! Because in Opposite World, maybe that really means thank you.”

He promptly ignored Doc's advice, turned left to go left, and crashed on the first turn.

What if I told you that the way to being a more loving and effective Christian on earth was to think more about Heaven?

It seems so counter-intuitive that men have created an often used sarcastic slogan, saying that you can be "so heavenly minded that you are no earthly good."

The apostle Paul makes an incredible counter-intuitive statement in verses four and five, when he says, "we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; **because of the hope which is laid up for you in Heaven.**"

It was precisely "because of" their "hope" in "Heaven" that the Colossians were doing earthly good by growing in their "faith" toward Jesus, and in their "love for all the saints."

One commentator put it this way:

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Colossians 1:3-8
*"Heigh Hope! Heigh Hope!
It's Home to Heaven We Go"*

The important thing is to notice that hope produces faith, and faith in turn grows into love. Hope is the root, faith is the plant, and love is the fruit. **Thus, hope is foundational.**

Truth be told, **we don't think of Heaven enough.** We need to do it more. Paul will go on to say, “[Since] then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, **not** on things on the earth” (3:1-2).

The “hope awaiting” us in Heaven will be our focus today - and it should remain that way every day until we are home there.

I'll organize my comments around two points: #1 It's Healthy For You To Think About The Hope That Is Awaiting You In Heaven, and #2 It's Helpful For You To Think About The Hope That Is awaiting You In Heaven

#1 It's Healthy For You To Think About The Hope That Is Awaiting You In Heaven

(v3-5)

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Colossians 1:3-8
*“Heigh Hope! Heigh Hope!
It's Home to Heaven We Go”*

Have you read *Ulysses* by James Joyce? If so, you might remember it once contained the longest sentence in English Literature - 4,391 words.

Joyce's record was surpassed in 2001. Jonathan Coe's *The Rotters Club* contains a sentence with 13,955 words.

Ephesians 1:3-14 is probably the longest sentence in the Bible. In our translations, it is broken down into a few sentences; but not so in the original.

Our text today, what we call verses three through eight - You guessed it: One long sentence.

Col 1:3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

The language-guys say that “always” describes the giving of thanks, *not* “praying.”

Whenever Paul did pray for the believers in Colossae, which I’m sure was often, he gave “thanks” to God because of the radical changes that

God had effected in their lives after they heard and received the Gospel.

No matter your needs and your circumstances, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ you can be thankful in them because of what God has done for you. **He's saved you!** It makes all the difference in the world and in the world to come.

The particular words used for his praying could be translated “prayed around,” as if to indicate Paul’s prayers surrounded them. I like that. Your prayers for people surround them in the spiritual realm.

Col 1:4 since we heard...

Epaphras had gone to see Paul, who was under house arrest in Rome. That’s how he heard about them.

There were some problems with false teachers in Colossae, and Epaphras needed counsel on how to deal with them. We’ll get to them later in the letter.

Col 1:4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints;

Col 1:5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel,

Faith and love spring forth from “hope.” One commentator put it this way:

The preposition “because, or “on account of,” can only be taken as pointing to faith and love as in some sense a response to hope. In some way, hope produces faith and love.

This “hope” is not just a feeling of expectation. It is the objective reality of what is securely in store for you in the future:

- Jesus Himself - the resurrected and glorified Lord - awaits you in the future. You’ll see Him face-to-face.
- More than that, you will “awake in His likeness” - meaning that the work that He began in you at your salvation will culminate in you being glorified

as He is. You'll have a perfect body; a perfect mind. There will be no propensity to sin in your glorified body.

- The Carpenter-King is building you a house; and it's a mansion. It's in the Golden City, the New Jerusalem. You can read its description in the last chapters of the Bible.
- Somewhere in Heaven your rewards for serving the Lord on the earth are being stored.
- You'll be reunited with believing loved ones.
- You'll never cry again.

We could go on-and-on. The point Paul was making is this: The hope that awaits us in Heaven is immensely practical for our time on earth. It awakens faith, and it inspires love.

It's counter-intuitive. It seems like hope in Heaven is an escapism that would cause withdrawal from our responsibilities on earth. But Paul says it's just the opposite. The more we set our minds on things in Heaven, the more it will result in practical faith and love.

In a more affluent, free, modern society, it can be really hard to focus on Heaven. It's there more like a reward at the end. As a result, we get distracted by life, rarely thinking of after-life. If what Paul is saying is true (and it is), **if we're not fixated on Heaven, our faith in Jesus and love for the saints is falling short.**

What does faith that is awakened by hope act like? Paul exemplified it as a longing in the heart to see Jesus; a strong desire to be with Him.

Always keep in mind that Paul was a "to live is Christ, but to die is gain" sort of believer. He had a healthy desire to depart this life and be with the Lord; He said it was far better.

The Colossians, because of their hope, must have had similar faith. If you were around the Colossians, you got the distinct impression that they couldn't wait to see Jesus.

What does love for all the saints act like when it is inspired by hope? Paul demonstrated this, too, in how he ministered to folks who were suffering.

When members of the church in Thessalonica were dying, Paul directed their thoughts to the hope of the Lord's coming to resurrect and rapture the church. He told them to sorrow, but not as those without this ultimate hope.

I want to say this carefully, and respectfully. We too often want to give believers hope on earth. We don't like their affliction; we object to their suffering, so we encourage them, either directly or indirectly, that God is going to take it away - that things will return to normal. But that can be a false hope.

Sometimes God heals; most times, He does not. If I love the saints, I will pray hard for healing, but simultaneously seek to elevate their gaze to Heaven, assuring them that their "light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory" (Second Corinthians 4:17).

Paul said, "of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel." There were in the church

false teachers who were convincing the Colossians that there were things they lacked - spiritual things. But that wasn't true. "Heard" is *heard before*. It's a very deliberate choice of verb tense. It undermines any heretical notion that the believers were deficient in their walk with the Lord. In other words, they had in the past "heard" the Gospel. There was no further, secret, knowledge to be achieved.

Paul was not alone among the apostles in calling attention to hope. The apostle Peter said,

1Pe 1:3 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1Pe 1:4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

You've been born-again and you have a "living hope" in your inheritance in Heaven.

Then Peter said, “rest *your* hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:13).

These guys were future-oriented. Hope was a lot more foundational to their writing and preaching than we normally think.

I know what you’re thinking. Doesn’t Paul, in First Corinthians 13:13, say, “And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.”

Yes; but think about it for a moment. He says, “**Now** abide faith, hope, and love.” In the future - in Heaven - that will change:

- When you get to Heaven, you won’t need hope, because all the things you hoped for will be realized.
- When you get to Heaven, you won’t need faith, because all the things you couldn’t see will all be seen.

Hope and faith will be fulfilled. Love, however, will be the very air you breathe in Heaven.

Today, right now and for the rest of your life on earth, hope in Heaven and what awaits you there ought to guide your life. To the extent it does, you will grow in faith in Jesus, and in love for all the saints.

Thus hope is a true indicator of your spiritual health.

#2 It's Helpful For You To Think About The Hope That Is Awaiting You In Heaven

(v6-8)

Lightning McQueen spent quite a bit of time ignoring Doc's advice. He kept turning left to go left, crashing each time. He finally got it, and became quite the dirt-track racer.

There's a lot you can do to grow in the Lord. I Googled "How do I grow in Jesus," and this was the first list I encountered:

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- Go to God in prayer daily.
- Read God's Words daily.
- Obey God moment by moment.
- Witness for Christ by your life and words.
- Trust God for every detail of your life.
- Allow the Holy Spirit to control and empower your daily life and witness.

Those are all good things. I'd add that you should be active in your local church. We tend to be individualistic in our approach to growth, when it's clear in the New Testament that we are meant to meet together:

- If you are in Christ, you are a living stone, meant to be strategically placed by Jesus into the building of His spiritual temple on the earth.
- If you are in Christ, you are a member of His body on the earth; and just as with the members of your own human body, there needs to be connection, and co-ordination.

I couldn't find any list that mentioned "the hope which is laid up for you in Heaven" as crucial to growing in Jesus - which is weird, because it clearly was foundational to faith and love in the apostles' doctrine.

In verse five, Paul mentioned the Gospel. What is the Gospel? Paul defined it when he wrote to the church at Corinth saying,

1 Corinthians 15:1 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand,

1 Corinthians 15:2 by which also you are saved...

1 Corinthians 15:3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,

1 Corinthians 15:4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,

You're a sinner. There's nothing you can do that will make you right before God. You need a Savior. Jesus came as God in human flesh to die as your

Substitute on the Cross. He rose from the dead validating His ability to save you for eternity.

Col 1:6 which has come to you, as *it has* also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth;

Paul took them back to the day they got saved. An ordinary man, Epaphras, returned from Ephesus having been changed, radically changed, by the “the grace of God in truth”; i.e., he had believed the “truth” that salvation was God’s gift of “grace.”

He began to tell his family and friends what had happened *to* him and *in* him. Other people in Colossae began to get saved. The Gospel of God’s grace thus was “bringing forth fruit.”

But not just locally, in Colossae. Epaphras had brought it to that city, but others were spreading the good news to every city in the known “world.” Wherever the message was sent by God it was sufficient to save people.

It is never deficient but is always everywhere the power of God to salvation. It needs no aids, no helps, to prop it up. It's simplicity is awesome. In addition to what God does *in* you through the Gospel, He does things *through* you once you're saved. Using Epaphras as an example Paul shows what God does through you and every other believer.

Col 1:7 as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,

The word "learned" indicates he taught them what he knew. We dress this up by saying he disciplined them.

Don't think that discipleship is something you can't do. Even an average 'Joe' like Epaphras could effect amazing changes in the lives of others. It's the message, not the messenger, that is important.

Understand that Epaphras was just a guy who God changed through the Gospel. The Colossians were just like him and vice-versa. Thus his description is

what the Gospel can do through each of us and every other believer.

It makes you a “fellow servant.” The particular words mean a *joint slave*. You are God’s slave but so is every other believer. Though we have different gifts and are called to various ministries we are all equal as slaves; we are jointly slaves in God’s great household of faith.

The Gospel makes you a “minister.” It is an interesting word. It’s where we get the word “deacon” from, but it is from two words that mean “through” and “dust.” The idea seems to be that you serve with such zeal and enthusiasm that you create dust as you move.

All of us are capable of kicking up dust in our serving. Epaphras did and was “faithful.” It’s a commendation, but it’s one we can all be happy about. You see, God doesn’t expect me to be great, or to accomplish great things. All He asks is that I be faithful and that is something definitely within my reach.

Any one of us. at any time, can be “faithful.” It isn’t hard to accomplish. If I’m not being faithful, it’s on me to recognize it and adjust.

Paul qualifies Epaphras’ serving by saying it was “on [their] behalf.” The Gospel had made Epaphras like His Master. It’s effect was to cause him to want to serve rather than be served.

One of the great effects of the grace of God is to overcome selfishness. When Christ rules rather than self, marriages, families, relationships, and everything else is redeemed and restored.

Col 1:8 who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

One paraphrase translation puts it this way:
“[Epaphras is] the one who told us how thoroughly love had been worked into your lives by the Spirit.”

Little by little, day-by-day, the indwelling Holy Spirit works in your life. His work in you is described elsewhere as producing the fruit of love.

I'm no gardener, but I know that things like soil and watering are important elements if I want my trees to produce fruit.

In the spiritual realm, Paul seems in this long sentence to be strongly suggesting that the hope which awaits us in Heaven is a crucial element - maybe THE crucial element - if we are to manifest the fruit of love.

Until you begin to focus on the hope which awaits you in Heaven, you're going to be turning left to go left; and you simply won't make any real progress in your walk with the Lord.

Look to Heaven in order to live on earth.

