



Colossians 1:1-8 - Part 4

Out of the difficulties of the day comes that which only those difficulties could have produced. Something perhaps that we are looking at particularly today. Let's remember as we read the Scripture here, the setting was a lovely small town in a very lovely valley, the Lysus valley, about 100 miles inland, in which a man called Epaphras was particularly used to bring this church into being. Paul was writing not with an authority because he had been used to found it, but an authority that people recognised in him and certainly Epaphras and folks like that recognized that such an authority was true of Paul the Apostle.

So far in this letter we've looked particularly at verses 1-12. I'm going on this fourth occasion just to run over the things that stand out; the marvelous positives in this letter, for instance, only came into being because of the negatives that had become apparent, but for the problems that they seemed to come up against; the Gnostics, angelology, and more subtle, the group of people who were especially "with it", so to speak, which meant that there had to be those who were "without it"! Then the even subtler play upon either their Jewishness or their Gentileness, playing that off against one another. If the enemy can payoff anything against one Christian who sees an issue differently from his fellows for any reason, it might be for the people who seem to be so confident about their side of it. Thus we who are not so confident feel angry that they push their point of view, as it seems, and if we're secretly a little bit inferior those attitudes wear thin our sense of genuine fellowship. It might be an issue of colour, it might be an issue of race, it might be an issue that some seem to get it so easy while some seem to have it so hard, anything the devil can use to play God's people off against one another. He's adept at it, and there is always an ongoing issue of difference that he can make use of. So they had these problems in the Colossian church for various reasons; some thought they had a deeper spirituality than others, some thought they were closer to angels than others, some thought they'd got it and others hadn't, some were so Jewish, that they thought without being Jewish you couldn't be saved and some were so Gentile that you had to chuck away everything Jewish in order to safely keep the "new thing" ... so many, many things that God's People so easily trifle with. But out of all those negatives came the letter to the Colossians; that was God's point in all this, and that is what we are interested in today. We need to know about the other things - none of us should be ignorant of the ways in which the devil has troubled the Church, and, in much the same way, is still able to do so, but the positives!! Those vital certainties that God was able to assert out of those negatives matters. Those are what I want you to take away with you (this morning). Even so I want also to stress (this morning) the value of repeated negatives. This happens when God keeps on repeating a negative whatever it may be, and He does so because there is something that God needs to deal with which we are not able to see, on the one hand, or are not willing to face up to on the other... Or it may not be something to deal with, but something to help with, and we are either not willing or we do not realize that God is coming through these negative circumstances, not to make them worse, as it were, or to judge us in it, but to do in those circumstances what only God can do; if we become aware of His reason for a repeated negative and LET God work, that on-going negative will become a positive, much to our relief and perhaps especially for His praise. He has to be able to deal with issues of concern within the family life of God's people, particularly in the family of those who believe. God Almighty knows that if the family becomes disturbed over any issue or is troubled in any way, there will be unrest. God cannot command His blessing on a Fellowship or an individual in it, while His people

are falling out of love with one another for one reason or another. Sometimes we have very negative issues here, especially where money is concerned, but under money negatives are sometimes issues of which God is more concerned. That's why you have me stressing the importance of honest tithing, the importance of tithing. The Community that the Lord has led us to establish here on the West Coast of Scotland, is not unlike a Levitical family. The Levites, who served God's people along with the Levitical priests, were supported full time in their ministry. Nothing changes with God and what God brought into being at the beginning of the Bible is still relevant at the end of it. Jesus Himself said that not one jot or tittle of it will pass away until it is fulfilled, and so we have to consider what the Bible says in respect to ourselves. Now we who serve the Lord Jesus in the "Come Back to God" Campaign are full time in the Christian religion. The Levitical Priests were supported from the Tabernacle offerings, as well as certain meats from the sacrifices. The Levites were provided through the tithes of God's people, who brought a tenth of their income – in whatever form they received it - and the Levites were expected to tithe a tenth of what they received and put it into the purposes of God, as those purposes related to them. Now this is an obligation for blessing that is laid upon all who believe. Supposing one of us here is not happy about meeting God at this point. If so we may find that God keeps on creating negatives, or allowing negative circumstances over money to occur until we see the obvious. I learned this lesson early in my College when a fellow student asked me if I had appreciated the significance of praising God through the giving of a tenth of my income for His purposes elsewhere. I said that I had not done so, but I saw that what He had to say was relevant. I could see that it was an act of obedience to what God had made plain in Scripture. I said to my friend that I would tithe after I had deducted the money for my board and lodge, etc, only to hear from him that it was my gross income that had to be tithed, and other obligations sorted when that was done. Every one of us is under the obligations of Scripture, especially when it applies to groupings that God Almighty has seen fit to make important in the structure of Scriptural religion. So it is a matter of obligation. So God is more concerned over issues than He is over the matter of money and those issues are in our hearts and minds. Superb positives can come out of real hurt or problems, perplexity as to the truth, and sometimes fear of how it will be if we fulfill the obligations of God to the letter. When we meet God on His terms He turns our difficulties into pearls of experience and redeeming love. There is more than that here in the letter to the Colossians. Here are relationships applicable to a family and the situations relating to them. To have a significance within the family is absolutely essential; is there somebody here who perhaps feels they are not given enough significance within this family, or some other expression of a fellowship in Christ? Are you struggling with a sense of purpose or call that you have because it seems here, or wherever, that nobody seems to notice what you do, or notice who you are and how much you ought to matter? Sometimes, when people have too high opinion of themselves, God brings them into a family like this to show them that they don't matter so much after all. Some of us who feel that we matter have to be reduced to a place where we realize that we don't matter at all. Only He, the Lord God, really matters. Our significance is Nil in certain instances, as One Corinthians, chapter one and verses twenty-six to the end of the chapter, make only too plain. Sometimes God has to bring us to see that we are not after all such an important cog in the wheel and that God Almighty has lots of other cogs that He can use every bit as well as us and probably much better than us. Sometimes we know we are talented, we know we have gifts, we feel that we have an ability to express ourselves in public, or whatever it is and we feel that we are not given much opportunity to express ourselves in a place like this, and that can cause difficulties. Sometimes that is deliberate policy on the College's part, but if it is so, it is because we are showing you that you have been relying too much on the obvious and you need to be brought to a place where a much deeper experience of God becomes possible for you. That will be at a time and place of which only He and you will know about, rather like for the Psalmist who, when led to write Psalm 119, probably never thought that those confident assertions about a God experience would ever become public knowledge through the Bible. Sometimes people write things in very private places about their experience of God or whatever, never knowing that one day when they were called home, perhaps, someone would put it in a book and the whole world would thank God for, say, Oswald Chambers, in this instance, or

whoever. We don't really know what our significance is until we come to the place where we do not have anything unless God gives it to us. Sometimes we come to a place like this with so much and think that we must display it, and be given the opportunity, and then God says, "I'm going to take that away from you, yes, everything that seems to be such a powerful Instrument for doing good for Jesus, declaring the truth in every place, but God says, "No - I'm going to take that away from you." When God deals with the heart, He will add a different value to what is personal to us, and it may be, in becoming obedient to His obligations, that the work that He needs to do will have begun.

Verses 3-6 tell us that Paul gave thanks for the fruit bearing saints in Colossae and that's a positive if you wish. Not so much the fruit that we once thought would be evident, but rather the fruit that God knew could become evident if He had the opportunity to produce it. In verses 7-8 there is a reference to Epaphras, a beloved fellow bondservant. Now look at the language here - this is not simply Paul writing to a church in some formal manner - this is to a brother who is in the family, and who holds a certain position that the rest look to. Everybody expects him to be used of God to write the obvious, to say the obvious, to be the obvious, or whatever, no matter how much he may take into account his own weaknesses, his own failings, or those parts of his life that only God can prop up. The reason why God can use some folk in these special ways is simply because they have come to know how much they need God to do so. God fulfils through the material that the family depends on. Paul was not slow to say that he was a weak vessel, and that he had real problems - and yet look how God could make use of that! Once Paul could give to God his heart, marred, broken, or whatever it might be, God could mend it and there is no limit as to what God might do with it. Paul still needed the power of God to keep him, but God could use that power through Paul in a way that kept many, many others as well, Epaphras was one of those. You may say to yourselves, I wonder how on earth the Colossian Church managed when Epaphras left them, going off for weeks, even months that it could have taken for him to journey to where Paul was in prison. He obviously spent enough time with Paul to get all the information and help he needed before he returned home. What could have happened to that fellowship in the meantime? In chapter 4:17 there is reference to Archipus who is referred to as a "beloved fellow minister" in the letter that Paul wrote to Philemon. No doubt that Archipus was there taking care of things whilst Epaphras went for the help he could find nowhere else at that time.

Look at verses 9-12 - the kind of prayer that was prayed for them and if you want to know the matters raised before God by Paul and his friends on behalf of others, you have the specifics there of his prayer life. Look at verse 9 where he prayed for them to "*be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*", and, in verse 10; ... "*that they might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord... to please Him... bearing fruit in the knowledge of God.*"; and, in verse 11, "*strengthened with all power... for... steadfastness... patience*", and also in verse 12 "*giving thanks*"... because they ... "*qualified*"... and had an ... "*inheritance*".

Now how do you pray brothers and sisters, within your part of the Christian family? When you come to pray for me for example, do you pray that I might be filled with all knowledge or do you think I have already got it?! Now the truth is, I am learning all the time. Do you pray that I might be filled with knowledge, with spiritual wisdom, and that I might walk worthily? Or do you think that I never walk unworthily. Let me assure you that, but for prayer, I could often walk unworthily. The fact that so many keep me in their prayers keeps me also walking worthily of Him. Do you pray that I might be strengthened with all power? Do you give thanks for me, if I am a blessing to you? Do you pray for me even if I don't seem to be? How, then, do we pray for one another? When Paul prayed it wasn't just - "God bless Bill" or "God bless Mary", or "thank God for this person or for that one". What Paul prayed for when He remembered his friends and fellow believers before God was for those spiritual and practical endurances that would count when they needed them most. He prayed for the knowledge of God's will, for steadfastness, for genuine spiritual power to come upon them as they might have need. How do we pray for the family of the redeemed?

In verses 13 -14 we have a reminder that there is something only God can do for any of us. *“For He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* Now we need all of that, the darkness is so real and the deliverance is personal and it was part of the anointing that rested on the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus said that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him to preach the gospel, the good news of God’s intervention on behalf of men and women in need and part of that need was deliverance to the captives of darkness. Every one of us was in captivity before we came to Christ, captives within ourselves through many different chains, and when we come to Jesus in repentance and faith, there was an immediate deliverance for the essential self in believing the deliverance of forgiveness and spiritual cleansing before God. So the new self, the new man or woman in Christ flamed into life. But there was work still to do: *“for He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to His Kingdom”*. Deliverance and transference are actual experiences not just words used to express a general truth. Is there something that God needs to deal with, brothers and sisters? You and I live with constant negative circumstances, perhaps, in some personal place or other because God Almighty has not been allowed to change them. But only He can come into our spiritual experience and deliver us from the kingdom of darkness. Not only does He deliver us, He transfers us in that respect by the infilling of the Holy Ghost. When a person has been freed say, from a spirit of sorrow, we will pray down the oil of joy upon that sorrow, and they are transferred from that sorrow into an experience of joy in the very matter that nearly broke their heart, so that at some precious time, perhaps in the long future, yes, they can say thank you to God that it ever happened to them. You may think some folks will never get to that point over the losses of life, but they do. They do! There are those here that have done so.

The Colossians were reminded of this, perhaps reminded of the ongoing need for it too, that there were areas in which these heresies could breed, there were personal things in which the problems could grow, and it was enemy ground. The heresies weren’t only in the mind; there were places of sin in the spirit of men and women, areas that had never been cleaned up - and still left them with the idea that they could pick and choose whether this or that thing they would do for God or not; but you and I have no choice if we want to stay within the work of God! That’s why sometimes God uses circumstances to remind us that we are not so important after all and we’re not our own anyway; we’ve been bought at a price, and we don’t even have the right to assert ourselves other than in the areas that He permits. Deliverance! - and it can be ours by an act of deliverance and in those domains of darkness that once had sovereign power in your life and in mine. They don’t get cleaned up unless God is allowed to clean them up for us, and you and I don’t get transferred out of a negative into a positive save by the exercise of the power of God in the deliverance ministry of the Gospel. That’s all for us in these words of Scripture. *“He has delivered us from a domain of darkness and transferred us.”* Now when the Colossians read the certainty of that, and the many who have read it since then, there were those among them who had to say, “If only that were true for me!” Do you see why sometimes you get these confident certainties in the Scripture? Because they are expressions of the standards that God can bring about if only men and women would let Him do so, and the thing is God’s people will not always let Him do so. Some of us keep on struggling with negative situations because we will not let God come in and do for us only what God can do. I don’t think that there’s a Christian anywhere that is not in need of deliverance ministry. I believe that every Christian everywhere has a domain of darkness in which Satan has an ongoing opportunity, and some of us are unwilling that God should work the wonder of deliverance and transfer that domain of darkness into the Kingdom of His Light. Notice the essential ingredient here *“in Whom we have redemption”*. Redemption means that I have been bought back from what was so unlike God and now been placed in what is so like God. Redemption is not that I am bought back by a cash deal between God and Satan. Calvary paid the price and Calvary purchased the pardon, so that when a sinner comes to Calvary, he or she gets the benefits of the death of Jesus, the price which purchased my freedom from sin, and thank God for that! Paid the price for my sin!? My sin was that I deserved death for it before God,

but my Saviour died for me, in my place instead - and I don't need to die for my sin now, either by a living death of the spirit while here on earth, or by a living death eternally if I do not receive Christ for myself. Nevertheless, I have to enter upon the benefits of my salvation, deliberately and positively and some of them are in deliverance from the darkness of a life without the Saviour's Light. The forgiveness of my sins transfers me on the one hand, and the forgiveness of my sins then empowers God to do for me only what God can do, on the other. So when the Spirit of the Lord allows negatives in a life, that is, in an ongoing situation, and they don't seem to change, He must surely be saying something to His dear and precious child that is significant for a possible change. This is what the Lord was saying through Paul to these Colossians. The fact that you could be subject to these problems means that you are still in need of a work of God to be done among you that only God can do. I am before God totally redeemed; I go into God's presence to pray and I stand there in the righteousness of Christ which is mine by faith, but in my ongoing earthly life I know that there is old ground that God wants to take up, and needs to do for me so that I am able to say that what was positive for the Psalmist, what God longed might be positive for the Colossians, can be positive for me too. To actually live in a loving holiness. That's what God wanted for the Colossians and still wants for every soul that ever trusts in Christ - He wants it for you as well.

Amen.

