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Outline 1

Colossians 1:1-14

A. Place and Addressees

Colossae was situated in a part of Asia Minor called Phrygia, a prosperous region inhabited by both gentiles and Jews. In Acts 2:10 we read that Jews from Phrygia were present in Jerusalem at Pentecost. The Church at Colossae, which consisted mainly of gentile Christians (1:21, 27; 2:13), was not instituted by Paul himself (1:7, 2: 1), but likely was established as a result of Paul's preaching in Ephesus (*cf.* Acts 19:9,10). Epaphras of Colossae had heard this preaching of the Word, and he believed. He brought the message of salvation not only to his fellow-citizens, but also to the residents of Laodicea and Hierapolis, cities situated about 12 miles to the northwest of Colossae (see also 1:6, 7).

B. Commencement and Greeting, vv 1,2

Although Paul did not establish this Church, as an apostle of Jesus Christ he has authority there. Thus, at the beginning of this epistle he says, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God." Whoever hears him, Paul, also hears Christ who sent him. Paul does not act as a bishop, however, because at the same time he mentions the name of one of his helpers, Timothy (*cf.* Acts 16:1-3). Paul calls him "the brother"; he is Paul's brother as well as the brother of the Colossians. Paul does not exalt himself over the readers, but addresses them as brethren among the brethren. He calls his readers "faithful brethren and saints." The name "saint" signifies the nobility which God Himself gave them; they stand at His side, as His sanctified and holy people. In the same sentence Paul also calls them "faithful." The word "holy" shows what God has done to them; the word "faithful" shows how the Colossians have reacted "in faith" to this act of God. One cannot be "holy" without being "faithful."

Today the word "brethren" has been rendered weak and powerless, because it is used in expressions such as "the brotherhood of all men" and "Alle Menschen werden Bruder" ("all men became brethren"). But that is not how the Scripture speaks! Only those whose eldest brother is Christ can form the "Brotherhood of Christ" (Heb 2:11). If the name "brother" is used too generously, the only foundation of true brotherhood, Christ's blood, is ignored. That is why precision is needed, to preserve that true brotherhood. The Jews and Greeks knew the salutation "Shalom!"; "Grace to you and peace." But here, in verse 2, much more is meant. "Grace" speaks of God's redemption through Christ for those who did not deserve it, and "peace" means not just inner contentedness, but a total renewal of one's whole life to its original state. All things shall flourish through peace.

C. Thanksgiving, vv 3-8

In these verses, Paul solemnly gives thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the background of the salvation brought about by the blood of Christ: that God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. "We always thank God...when we pray for you," for supplication and thanksgiving always go hand in hand. Prayer is "the chief part of our thankfulness"

Next, Paul shows why he is giving thanks: "because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all saints" (v 4). Apparently Epaphras had reported this. "Faith" is the real secret and the basis of their existence as Church. He who is attached to Christ (that is, who believes), also has love for those who are Christ's. The phrase "which you have for all the saints" does not mean that the Colossians had selected a certain group of saints within the Church to "love," a group to their own liking. "Saints" are all those whom God has separated for Himself. God does the choosing. *We* may not select: they are *all* holy. For how can one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, love God whom he has not seen (1 Jn 4:20b)?

"All the saints" implies that they also show fellowship with Christ's church in other places. True fellowship means showing a sincere interest in sister churches, in the church confederation, as well as not living in isolation as a local church.