

Hyperlinks to Topics

[1.0 Historical](#)

[1.1 External](#)

[1.1.1 Compositional](#)

[1.1.2 Transcriptional](#)

[1.2 Internal](#)

[1.2.1 People](#)

[1.2.2 Places](#)

[1.2.3 Times](#)

[1.2.4 Events](#)

[2.0 Literary](#)

[2.1 External: Forms](#)

[2.1.1 Literary Form](#)

[2.1.2 Text as form](#)

[2.2 Internal: Structure](#)

[2.2.1 Wording](#)

[2.2.2 Arrangement](#)

[2.2.3 Context](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Volume 15 Colossians 1.3-8

Exegesis

English Edition



Pericope 02



Introduction:

Welcome to this study of the Proem of Paul's Letter to the Colossians. Now for just a quick reminder of the meaning of some of the key terms used in the BIC commentary series. Then we will immerse ourselves in the world of the Colossians in the second half of the first Christian century.

Exegesis, as used in the BIC project, seeks to develop an historical understanding of the meaning of the scripture text. The guiding question is What did the text mean to those who first heard it read in a gathered assembly of believers? Of course, absolute certainty of recovering this meaning fully is not possible. But by utilization of several interpretive approaches, relative certainty of most of the likely meaning can be achieved. The variety of angles revolve around careful analysis of both the historical and the literary dimensions embedded into the scripture text. The conclusions drawn from such analysis establish the boundaries for making modern applications of the text's meaning for our day. Thus, the thought flow must always move forward from exegesis to exposition. To reverse it means eisegesis, i.e., a false reading of modern assumptions back into an ancient text.



We first should take a look at the original language

text written initially in Koine Greek. This is the text that we will be analyzing in detail:

3 Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ* Χριστοῦ πάντοτε* περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι,* 4 ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ* Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην* ἣν ἔχετε* εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους* 5 διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,* ἣν προηκούσατε ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου* 6 τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ* ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον* καὶ αὐξανόμενον* καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν,* ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ.* 7 καθὼς* ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν,* ὅς ἐστιν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ* ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 8 ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.*¹

¹A very literal English translation of this Greek sentence is:

"3 We are giving thanks to God, Father of the Lord our Jesus Christ always, concerning you praying, 4 after having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you possess for all the saints 5 because of the hope that is stored up for you in the heavenlies, which you heard before in the word of Truth of the Gospel, 6 which came among you, just as also in all the world it is bearing fruit and growing just as also in you, from the very day you heard and came to understand the grace of God in Truth; 7 just as you were taught by Epaphras our beloved fellow servant, who is faithful in your behalf as a servant of Christ, 8 who also informed us of your love in the Spirit."



Ignore the asterisks (*) inserted into the Greek text for the moment.² We will get to them later in the study.

You should note that vv. 3-8 contain a single sentence. The first three words, *Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ*, which translate as “we give thanks to God,” form the main clause, which serves as the basis for the many expansion elements found in the rest of the sentence. This we will examine more deeply in the Literary Aspects section below. Of the 39 Greek sentences found in the entire letter, four of them extend across four or more verses. Fifteen of the 39 are found in a single verse each. But extra long sentences in ancient Koine Greek writings were relatively common, especially among the more educated composers of various documents. Given the oral dictation nature of these words as Paul dictated them to Timothy who wrote them down, it is clear that one phrase or clause triggers the next one until the entire thought is expressed as a prayer wish.

Yet it is still rather compact, in a careful depiction of the scenario which prompted the composition of the letter. The beginning expression in the Proem, *Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ*, dominates the opening statement of most of Paul’s letters. There is deep gratitude to God from Paul for the Colossians. This praise of the Colossian believers in the prayer further cements the friendship bonds first expressed

¹The Greek New Testament text being used is Nestle, Eberhard, and Erwin Nestle. *Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece*. Edited by Barbara Aland, Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger. 28. revidierte Auflage. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012. Abbreviated as NA28 GBS

in the Greeting of the Praescriptio (1.2b). He paints an idealistic picture of their spirituality and credits Epaphrus with having a major role in its creation.

So clearly we are looking at prayer in first century Christianity, with this passage. This text centers on thanksgiving in intercessory prayer expression. That theme will be expanded considerably in the subsequent body of the letter (1.9-4.6).

Now let’s dig into this text in its ancient setting. First we look at the historical aspects of the text. Then we will examine the literary aspects. These ways of examining the text will enable us to derive a clear historical meaning of the passage. This will be sketched out in the Conclusion at the end. From such conclusions the foundation will be established for modern day applications of the text to our lives.

1.0 Historical

The historical aspects of this text necessitate the identification of expressions with historical orientation. In Col. 1.3-8, such expressions include the following. Who is the ‘we’ referred to? And who is the “you” referenced in these verses. Plus who is Epaphrus mentioned here? To be sure, these questions allude mostly to internal historical angles. But implicit also implicit in them are several external historical perspectives needing attention. Let’s look first at the external aspects of the initial writing of these words and the subsequent copying of them until the invention of the printing press in the late Middle Ages.



1.1 External

The history **of the text** is different from the history **in the text**. It has to do with the circumstances of the initial writing of the letter, and then also with the stability of the wording in the hand copying of this passage by others down through the centuries. Some of the issues were settled at this point in the treatment of 1.1-2. Those conclusions will be assumed here as foundational to our present analysis.

1.1.1 Compositional

The assumption from 1.1-2 is that the letter was dictated by the Apostle Paul to Timothy who actually composed the letter during the time of Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea during 57 to 60 AD. New compositional issues emerging in 1.3-8 focus mainly on grammatical connections of some of the words in the Greek text.³

The primary thrust of these expansion elements moves from 'faith and love' to hope which is central to the Word of Truth which itself is the Gospel. At each transition modifiers are added to flesh out each label. But it is hope and Gospel that receive the greatest elaboration with multiple modifiers. Considerable difference of opinion over "what modifies what" can be found in the commentaries.

In the first part of this lengthy sentence, the temporal adverb, πάντοτε, "always," surfaces. The uncertainty grammatically is whether it modifies the main clause verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν, with the meaning of "we always are giving thanks." Or, does it modify

³The [Block Diagram](#) under the 2.0 Literary Aspects will visually highlight the high complexity of the grammar of this Greek sentence.

the participle προσευχόμενοι that follows giving the meaning of "always praying"? The nuance of meaning then becomes: 1) Does Paul always give thanks when he prays? Or, 2) Does he always pray? A similar pattern surfaces in the Proem of 1 Thess 1.2; 2 Thess 1.3 (τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε περὶ), 1 Cor. 1.4 (τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε περὶ), and Philm. 4 (τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε) with less unclarity.⁴ Most commentators favor the adverb modifying the verb, rather than the participle.⁵ The NRSV would be an example with their translation, "In our prayers for you we always thank God...." Thus whenever Paul re-

⁴Where a πάντοτε occurs in the formula in other letters (1 Cor., 1 Thess., 2 Thess.; the structure in Phil. is different), it clearly belongs with εὐχαριστῶ (cf. also Eph. 5:20), which suggests that here too it should be taken with εὐχαριστοῦμεν and not with προσευχόμενοι. [R. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, 84]

⁵In his round about manner, Peter O'Brien affirms this understanding of the role of the adverb.

"πάντοτε ... προσευχόμενοι. By means of the adverb "always" the apostle indicates the frequency with which he gave thanks. However, by using this term he was not referring to unceasing thanksgiving. To speak of prayer by this and similar terms (e.g. "continually," "at all times," "day and night") was part and parcel of the style of ancient letters, being a Jewish practice as well as a pagan one. A measure of hyperbole is also to be noted in these expressions. When Paul states he gave thanks "always" or "continually" he means that he regularly remembered them in his times of prayer: morning, noon and evening (the customary three hours each day), and whenever else he prayed."

[Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 10.]



members in prayer the Colossians, it is always with thanksgiving to God.

In verses four and five, the triad of faith, love, and hope surfaces here as it does in 1 Thess. 1:3, 5:8, and 1 Cor. 13:13 et als. But, different from the other references, here hope is the basis of faith and love (διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα). Our commitment to Christ and our active compassion for others flow out of our expectation of the future blessing of God (τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς).

Our faith (τὴν πίστιν) in Christ Jesus means not so much that Christ is the object of our faith, as it signals that being In Christ, where His presence is, is the sphere of our existence. It is the result of our commitment to Him. In other words, the upward vertical faith commitment and the outward horizontal love for others come together positively when we are ἐν Χριστῷ, "in Christ."

Hope. (noun: ἐλπίς; verb: ἐλπίζω) in Paul's writings, defines both a stance of confidence as well as its content: "salvation (1 Thess 5:8), righteousness (Gal 5:5), resurrection in an incorruptible body (1 Cor 15:52–55), eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7) and God's glory (Rom 5:2)."⁶ The confidence comes from our hope being focused on God and His promises, and not on ourselves or on others.

Christian hope in this depiction is being stored up in Heaven for us by God. It was first grasped by the Colossians in the initial proclamation of the

⁶Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 11.

Word of Truth. Another label for this message is Gospel. And this Good News message was producing results and expanding its influence all over Paul's world, as well as in Colossae. Its basic thrust was the disclosure of God's grace. This was the message faithfully and lovingly set forth from the beginning by Epaphras to the Colossians. This beloved servant of Christ established a solid footing for the Gospel in Colossae and also was careful to convey to Paul the depth of their love for Paul.

Notice the repeated reference to the Truth: τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας and ἐν ἀληθείᾳ. The Gospel preached by Epaphras is divine truth in expression. The Colossians came to fully grasp God's grace in Truth. The apostle affirms vividly the correctness of the message that was given them. In making these affirmations at the beginning of the letter he sets the stage for affirming, in chapter two, the wrongness of the false gospel being advocated at Colossae.

An important confirmation of the correctness of the message of the apostolic Gospel is its productivity. The image of a tree producing fruit and growing is very typically found in both Old Testament and Jewish scribal expressions: פֶּרָהּ וְגִבְרָהּ in the Hebrew with the Septuagint using καρποφορεῖν for fruit bearing. Here Paul uses the Greek middle voice participle καρποφορούμενον with heightened emphasis on the verbal action. But in verse ten, the active voice καρποφοροῦντες is used with the same essential meaning. This positive productivity is not limited to Colossae. All across the Roman world of Paul's day, the Gospel was reaching growing numbers of individuals. One should note



that the image of bearing fruit and growing is not only numerical, but also qualitative. Increasing numbers of people are being reached and the quality of their Christianity is increasing as well. Luke highlights this rapid growth of the Gospel in Acts 6.7; 12.24; and 19:20.

1.1.2 Transcriptional

The second external historical aspect has to do with the process of hand copying the text over the centuries until the release of the Greek text by the printing press. Textual Criticism is the formal methodology for analyzing the still existing copies with the goal of establishing the most likely original reading of the text. Indeed, it is one of the most complex disciplines of study in existence, but the principles of 'rational eclecticism' dominate the procedure as applied to producing an up-to-date printed Greek New Testament. The UBS 5th revised edition of *The Greek New Testament*, and the 28th revised edition of the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* represent the best texts available today. With almost identical texts, the first is oriented toward Bible translators while the second is geared toward scholarly study of the New Testament.

With this background in mind, what about the hand copying of 1.3-8 over these centuries? The critical apparatus of the UBS 5th edition indicates two places where different wording could impact the translation of this passage: v. 3 and v. 7. In verse three, the printed text reading is τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ("to God Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"). Some manuscripts,⁷ however,

⁶"The reading adopted for the text, although it is rather

add the connector καὶ between θεῷ and πατρὶ so that the alternative reading becomes τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ("to the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ").⁸ With either reading of the text, the meaning remains essentially the same.

In verse seven, a shift in personal pronouns takes place between ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ("in your behalf") to ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ("in our behalf").⁹ The difference in

er narrowly supported (B C* 1739 Augustine), appears to account best for the origin of the other readings. In order to avoid the very unusual collocation of words, some copyists inserted τῷ (D* G 2005 Chrysostom) and others inserted καὶ (x A C2 Dc I K P Ψ 33 81 614 Byz Lect). (See also the comments on ver. 12 and 3.17.)" [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 552.]

⁷This doesn't imply two separate deity references since τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ follows the standard Greek grammar construction for a twofold reference to a single entity: article + noun and + noun. The meaning is clearly "to the God who also is Father..."

⁸"Although on the basis of superior Greek evidence (P46 and early Alexandrian and Western authorities) ἡμῶν might seem to be preferable, a majority of the Committee, impressed by the widespread currency of ὑμῶν in versal and patristic witnesses, considered it probable that copyists introduced the first person pronoun under the influence of the preceding ἡμῶν and the following ἡμῖν."

[Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*,



meaning is between asserting that Epaphras was a faithful servant of Christ in behalf of the Colossians (ὕπὲρ ὑμῶν) or a faithful servant in Paul's behalf (ὕπὲρ ἡμῶν). The immediate context favors the first understanding, as does both the external and internal manuscript evidence.¹⁰ Again, little shift in meaning occurs regardless of the reading that is adopted.

The text apparatus of the *Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (28th revised edition) is more detailed and contains eight places where variations of wording exist among the almost five thousand existing copies of the Greek text of this passage. The differences will reflect stylistic 'improvements' by later copyists who sought to bring the Greek text into line with the more natural way it was written in subsequent centuries after the original writing in the first century.

What can be concluded from this analysis? Primarily, that the wording of this passage of scripture remained stable over the first thousand or so years of it being hand copied. No existing variations in wording alter the meaning of the passage, and certainly do not impact the expression of religious ideas in the text.

1.2 Internal

Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 552-53.]

⁹For those interested in learning more about how this evaluation of evidence is done, see the unit "Introduction to Textual Criticism, in the Greek 202 course that I taught at Gardner-Webb University: <http://cranfordville.com/g202TxtCritStdY.html#Wk1>

The history embedded inside verses 3 through 8 builds on that which was established in the first two verses of the letter. Paul and Timothy are the senders of the letter which was addressed to the believing community of Colossae in the Lycus River Valley in the Roman province of Asia. The most likely time of writing was during the imprisonment of Paul in Caesarea from 57 to 60 AD.

The historical picture is somewhat expanded in verses three through eight. A new name surfaces. More details about the beginning of the church emerge. The indirect link of the church to the apostle Paul becomes clearer and easier to understand. In the many expansion elements off the core clause statement in verse 3a are several time and event oriented expressions. Let's take a look at all of these through the fourfold sense in the exegetical model listed below.

1.2.1 People

The one person mentioned directly in this passage is Epaphras, Ἐπαφρᾶς, "probably a shortened form of Ἐπαφρόδιτος."¹¹

But the connection to the name Ἐπαφρόδιτος is disputed. In Phil. 2:25-30 and 4.18, Paul mentions sending an Ἐπαφρόδιτος, Epaphroditus, back to Philippi who had fallen ill upon visiting Paul while under house arrest in Rome sometime in 60-61 AD. This is a different person who had roots in

¹¹Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker's Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 159.



Philippi in the Roman province of Macedonia. He had brought their love offering to Paul at Rome.

Two of the six verses in Col. 1.3-8 are devoted to describing Epaphras. He is also mentioned twice again in chapter four and in Philemon 23.¹² Col. 4:12-13 also contains detailed depiction of this fellow.¹³ Although only these three texts mention him, the picture that emerges from these sources paints a glowing description of a Christian worker of extraordinary character and ministry. Out of these three sources some eleven depictions of Epaphras emerge.¹⁴ Of the many named individu-

¹² Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,
Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you,

¹³ 4.12 ἀσπάζεται ὑμᾶς Ἐπαφρᾶς ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν, δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, πάντοτε ἀγωνιζόμενος ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν ἐν ταῖς προσευχαῖς, ἵνα σταθῇτε τέλειοι καὶ πεπληροφορημένοι ἐν παντὶ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ. 13 μαρτυρῶ γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι ἔχει πολὺν πόνον ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ καὶ τῶν ἐν Ἱεραπόλει.

12 Epaphras, who is one of yourselves, a bond-servant of Jesus Christ, sends greeting to you, always wrestling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand firm — Christians of ripe character and of clear conviction as to everything which is God's will. 13 For I can bear witness to the deep interest he takes in you and in the brethren at Laodicea and in those at Hierapolis.

¹⁴ **Col. 1.7-8:**

- 1) He taught (ἐμάθετε) the Gospel to the Colossians.
- 2) A beloved fellow servant with Paul and Timothy (τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν).
- 3) A faithful servant of Christ in behalf of the Colossians

als who worked with the Apostle Paul, few if any have such a positive picture painted of them in scripture. He also became a prisoner of Rome after having visited Paul while in Caesarea.

How this happened is not shared. Neither do we know how he became a believer and how he evangelized his home town of Colossae, as well as elsewhere in the Lycus River Valley. Whether Paul was directly responsible for his conversion is unclear. But what is clear is that the sources of influence upon him had Pauline roots that led him to reach out to the apostle at great personal risk. Later church tradition asserts that he became the leader of the church at Colossae and suffered martyrdom there. But given the tendency to adopt legends as factual history by these sources creates serious doubt about the accuracy of these accounts.

1.2.2 Places

(πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ).

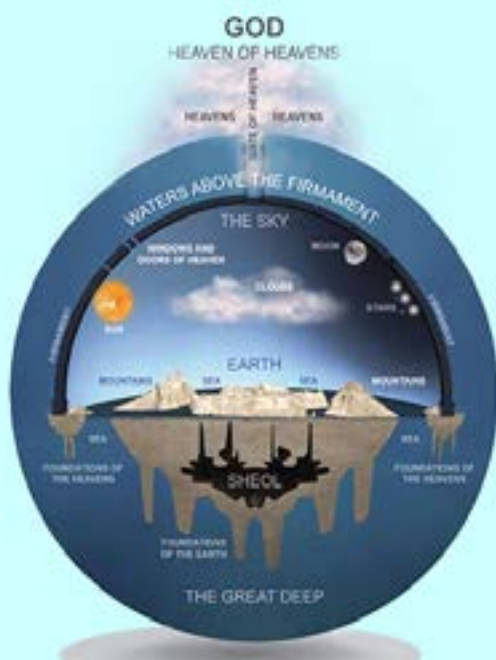
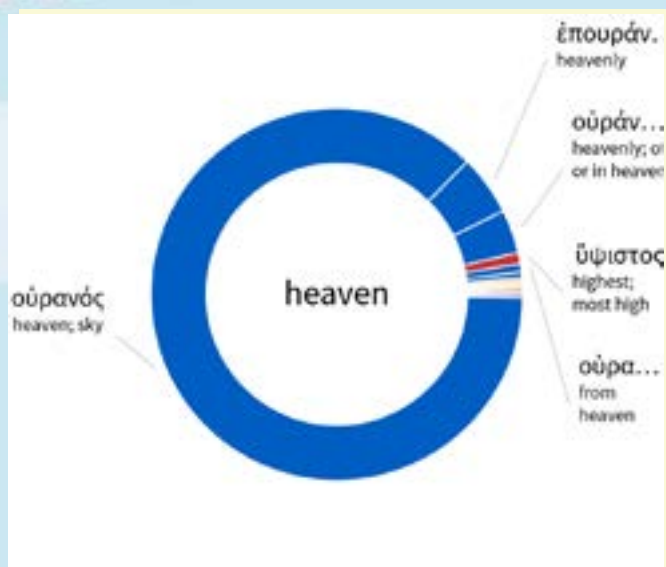
4) One who informed (ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν) Paul and Timothy of the Colossians' love in the Spirit.

Col. 4.12-13:

- 1) Sends greetings (ἀσπάζεται) to the Colossians.
- 2) One of them (ὁ ἐξ ὑμῶν), the Colossians.
- 3) A servant (δοῦλος) of Christ Jesus
- 4) Always agonizing (ἀγωνιζόμενος) over the spirituality of the Colossians.
- 5) Possesses deep interest (πολὺν πόνον) in the believers at Colossae, Laodicea, and Hierapolis.

Philemon 23

- 1) Sends greetings (Ἀσπάζεται σε Ἐπαφρᾶς) to Philemon at Colossae
- 2) A fellow prisoner (ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου) with Paul at Caesarea.



These are the terms designating a place or location:

ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, in the heavnlies (v5).

The Greek word οὐρανός for Heaven and/or sky

simply reflects in the New Testament¹⁵ the evolving understanding of the Old Testament words שָׁמַיִם *shamayim*, and רָקִיעַ *raqia'*. At its core is the idea of something far above the earth.¹⁶ In the earliest OT texts, it is a huge dome that functions as a canopy separating the earth from the realm of deity above it (Gen. 1.6-20). This idea was shaped by the semitic cultures of the ancient near east that saw *shamayim* as where the gods that controlled everything resided. But Yahweh created both heaven and earth, with heaven as His place of residence. "That the first the ancient Israelites imagined the heavenly realm as a vast cosmic canopy is apparent from the use of the verb *natah* (נָתַן, 'stretch out' or 'spread') to describe how God 'stretched out' this canopy over earth (2 Sam 22:10; Isa 40:22, 42:5, 44:24, 45:12, 51:13, 16; Jer 10:12, 51:15; Zech 12:1; Ps 104:2; Job 9:8).

The second image of the material composition of the heavenly realm involves a firm substance. The term *raqia'* 'firmament' (from Vulgate's *firmamentum*) is based on the root *rq'* (רָקַע), which means 'stamp out' or 'forge'.¹⁷ The impact of Babylonian

¹⁵The Greek term οὐρανός is used 199 times in the Greek New Testament.

¹⁶In the Bible the word "heaven" is used to describe both a physical part of the universe and the dwelling place of God. In Hebrew the word for heaven is plural; the LXX usually translates the Hebrew word by a singular noun. In the NT both the singular and plural forms occur with no difference in meaning.

[Mitchell G. Reddish, "Heaven," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 90.]

¹⁷J. Edward Wright, "Heaven," ed. Katharine Doob



thinking on intertestamental Judaism was largely to heighten the view of the underworld, Sheol, as the fate of humans while the heavens were reserved exclusively for the gods. Greek thought also viewed the threefold existence of the heavens above the earth and the underworld below it. The heavens, however, were largely a mystery and this promoted the asteriological study of the stars, moon, and sun in the effort to better understand the activities of the gods who controlled activities on earth.

Paul's reference here in Colossian 1:5 is reflective of early Christian adoption of much of the understanding in contemporary Judaism. But distinctly Christian views centered in the Ascension of Jesus to God's right hand in Heaven (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9); Paul (2 Cor 12:2–4; Rom. 8:34) and expanded this older perspective.¹⁸ "The hope that is stored up for you in the heavenlies," τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς, anticipates a moment in time when believers will journey to the presence of God and receive His blessings based upon their obedience to Him while on earth. It is eschatological by nature meaning that this journey takes place at the end of human history.

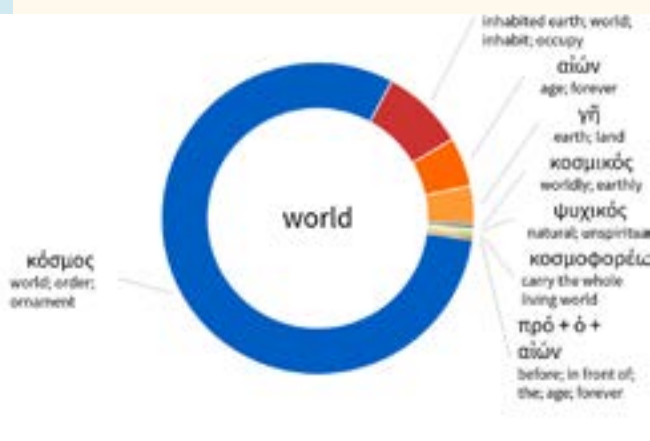
Sakenfeld, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006–2009), 768.

¹⁸The idea of heaven as the place of eternal reward for the faithful is well attested in the NT, which describes heaven as having many rooms (John 14:2), as containing the believer's eternal house (2 Cor 5:1–10), and as being the location of the believer's commonwealth (Phil 3:20; see also Heb 11:16; Rev 11:12).

[Mitchell G. Reddish, "Heaven," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 90.]

The preaching of the Gospel message to the Colossians by Epaphras prior to the writing of Paul's letter gave central emphasis to gaining confidence of being with God after death in Heaven and of receiving His blessings for being in spiritual union with the resurrected Christ. This message provided clear expectation over against the maize of religious and philosophical speculations about life after death which dominated the pagan culture of Colossae.

Paul will refer to οὐρανός three more times in the letter: Col. 1:16, "in Him was created the universe of things in heaven (ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς) and on earth." Col. 1:20, "to reconcile to Himself through Him, I say, things on earth and things in Heaven (τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς)." Col. 4:1, 'Masters, deal justly and equitably with your slaves, knowing that you too have a Master in heaven (ἐν οὐρανῷ).' The consistent use of the preposition ἐν identifies heaven as a spatial location above the earth. As 1.16 specifies, it contains "things invisible," τὰ ἀόρατα. But nonetheless is very real.



**ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ, in all the world (v. 6)**

Two primary Greek terms specify the material world that we live on during this life: γῆ, earth; and κόσμος, world (227x in NT).¹⁹ In English, the natural reference is 'on the earth' and 'in the world.' Likewise in Greek, 'ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,' and 'ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ' are commonly found.²⁰

In order to reference what we would label as the universe, the ancient Hebrew and Greek worlds simply labeled it as the heavens and the earth.²¹

¹⁹"κόσμος G3180 (kosmos), order, adornment, world, universe; κοσμέω G3175 (kosmeō), to arrange, put in order, adorn; κόσμιος G3177 (kosmios), respectable, honorable; κοσμικός G3176 (kosmikos), earthly, worldly; κοσμοκράτωρ G3179 (kosmokratōr), world power, world ruler"

[Colin Brown, gen. ed., ["Earth, Land, World," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1971), 1:5]

²⁰Paul, after John, is the most prolific user of kosmos in the NT. He, like John, shows a preference for kosmos over gē, although gē is predominant in the NT. When gē occurs in the Pauline corpus it is often in an OT quotation. In Paul the creation of the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1) finds expression in terms of the creation of the kosmos (Rom 1:20) or the creation of all things (ta panta, Eph 3:9; Col 1:15–17; cf. Eph 1:10). This idiom (ta panta) is characteristic of Stoicism (see Philosophy), the Corpus Hermeticum and Gnosticism. In Colossians 1:16, 20 the reference is to "all things in heaven and earth," combining Greek and Jewish idioms. The notion of creation (ktisis, ktizō, ktisma, "creation") has its roots in Judaism. The language of Romans 11:36 and 1 Corinthians 8:6 is more ambiguous, raising the question of influences on the development of this language.

²¹"For the Bible, the world is not so much a part of the

The Greek philosophical development of κόσμος that laid the foundation for the thinking of the first century had varying concepts. The original core meaning of order and structure laid the basis for κόσμος coming to refer as the order found in all material existence. The English word cosmos somewhat gets at this idea. Some ancient philosophers taught that this dynamic in κόσμος was totally corrupt and corrupting. When Greek thinking associated the material universe as κόσμος just before the beginning of Christianity, the ideas of a beginning and an ending of the κόσμος as the material universe came into the debate. Mostly the idea of no beginning (especially in the sense of creation) and no ending of the spatial universe existed. The philosopher Aristotle represents the zenith of classical Greek thinking about the κόσμος.

From then on, the debates over the potential meanings of κόσμος reflects interaction with growing religious influences from the ancient near east. With Colossae located at major cross-universe as the place where man lives. gē, which was originally used to distinguish land and soil from the sky (→ Heaven) and the sea (→ Water), is more particularly used for the area where man lives and works, or for a country as part of it. When the thought is political rather than geographical, hē oikoumenē is more often used. This has no special theological significance in the NT. It is seen rather as the area into which the gospel has to penetrate. Both words are clearly concrete in their application in contrast to kosmos (world) which has strong philosophical and religious overtones. It may be noted that Eng. idiom often demands the translation "world" for them."

[Colin Brown, gen. ed., ["Earth, Land, World," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Zondervan Publishing, 1971), 1:5]



roads between Greek and Roman influences in the West as well as with streams of near eastern religious thinking, a fertile field of debate over the nature of life, existence, morality etc. existed in the Lycus Valley. The apostle sees the debates in non-Christian circles as encroaching into the life of the Christian community at Colossae and as a potential danger for corrupting the apostolic Gospel proclaimed to them by Epaphras.

So he doesn't hesitate to inject his perspective into the discussion of world, time, space, and universe.²² In Colossians, he develops his view of cosmology more detailedly than anywhere else in his letters.²³ In this first reference to κόσμος in 1.6, the spatial implication is the focus. This is signaled by the inclusive predicate adjective παντὶ. Of course, 'all the world' doesn't register the same image today that it did in 57-60 AD. For Paul, it meant the Mediterranean Roman world of his time. And in particular,

²²"Kosmos is sometimes understood as planet earth, at times with a special focus on its human inhabitants, but also in a wider sense as the universe."

[J. Painter, "World, Cosmology," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Ed. by Gerald Hawthorne et als. (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1993), 980.]

²³Colossians also has a strong emphasis on creation and the most detailed cosmology (Col 1:15-20) in the Pauline corpus. This cosmology can be illumined by appeal to Jewish wisdom tradition, some form of Gnosticism or a combination of the two. It can also be attributed to false teachings at Colossae upon which Paul has drawn in framing his response (see Colossians).

[J. Painter, "World, Cosmology," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Ed. by Gerald Hawthorne et als. (Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 1993), 982.]

the eastern Mediterranean world where most of his missionary activities had been. His lengthy stay in Ephesus in the early to middle 50s saw a rapid spread of the Gospel over what is today the western part of Turkey. Acts 19 and 20 provide a helpful insight into this growing influence of the Gospel on the Roman province of Asia.

καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, just as also in you (v. 6)

The affirmation of the productivity of the Gospel in 'all the world' stands as the comparative base to 'just as also with you,' καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν. The preposition ἐν with a plural object normally conveys the sense of 'in your midst.' Thus a location is implicit here, the city of Colossae and the Christian community found there. What then does this phrase imply? Only numerical growth? Probably that, plus a qualitative dimension of spiritual maturation in the house church communities. The context of this phrase stresses this latter aspect more than the former. Epaphras' report pictured a spiritually maturing and vital religious community. It would be quite some years later before Christianity became numerically dominate in the Lycus Valley. The second participle αὐξανόμενον, 'growing,' figuratively affirms the Gospel as a growing tree. To be sure, over time it becomes larger, but only as it matures from inward vitality.

Paul especially notes the beginning of this process with the temporal marker ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, "from the very day you heard and understood the grace of God in Truth."

1.2.3 Times



Here are the terms asserting or implying a temporal designation:

πάντοτε, always (v. 3).

This adverb is used three times in Colossians: 1.3; 4.6; 4.12 out of 21 uses in his letters. That is, “always giving thanks,” “speech always gracious,” “always wrestling in prayers.” Dominantly in the 21 Pauline uses of πάντοτε, it is connected to praying. In the Proems of Philm 4, 2 Thess 1:11, 1 Thess. 1:2, Phil. 1:4, 1 Cor. 1:4 the adverb is positioned similar to Col. 1:4 where it qualifies giving thanks and praying. The focus is on consistency of action over time. The continuation of the action of praying over time is the point. And very often these are prayers of thanksgiving for the readers of his letters. Interestingly, in the Greek literature of this era the adverb is never linked to the action of praying outside of Paul’s writings.

περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, for you praying (v. 3).

The adverbial modal use of the participle προσευχόμενοι implies a temporal action, which the present tense of the participle specifies is ongoing action. In Paul’s ongoing prayer life, he remembered the Colossians on a consistent basis. The participle modifies the verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν, which is also present tense denoting continuous action of giving thanks. The syntactical link between participle and verb defines the action of giving thanks as prayer expression.

ἀκούσαντες after having heard of (v. 4)

The adverbial temporal function of this Aorist tense participle, that also modifies Εὐχαριστοῦμεν, denotes the starting point of Paul’s thanksgiving prayers to God in behalf of the Colossians. As verses

7 - 8 make clear, this beginning of thanksgiving commenced upon Epaphras reporting to Paul about the Colossians. The precise dating of his arrival to where Paul was is not given. But it thrilled the apostle greatly to hear the glowing report about the faith commitment of the Colossians.

τὴν ἐλπίδα τὴν ἀποκειμένην ὑμῖν the hope stored up for you (v. 5)

The present tense adjectival participle ἀποκειμένην signals ongoing action of storing up. It is hope that is being stored up for the Colossians by God. This hope, τὴν ἐλπίδα, is the expectancy of divine blessing at the eschatological end when humanity stands before God in final judgment. The ongoing storing up streams out of the love of the Colossians for ‘all the saints,’ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους. Given the action orientation of their love, τὴν ἀγάπην, they expressed love in specific ways toward fellow believers. This in turn increased the expectancy of divine blessing. The fundamental principle here is simply that reaching out to others in loving actions strengthens our relationship with Almighty God.

ἣν προηκούσατε, which you heard earlier (v. 5)

This adjectival relative clause is attached to ‘hope,’ τὴν ἐλπίδα, via the feminine singular relative pronoun ‘which,’ ἣν. The Aorist compound verb προηκούσατε combines the linking of the preposition προ to the root stem verb ἀκούω. The prefix προ qualifies the hearing action as taking place in advance of something else happening. Here it refers to the initial preaching of the Gospel to the Colossians, presumably by Epaphras. This is the only use of προακούω in the entire New Testa-



ment, although the verb does occur in the secular literature of this era. Some ambiguity does exist since the sense here can be either “before you received the message,” or “before you received this letter.” The former is preferable due to the preposition phrase attached to the verb, “in the word of Truth, i.e., the Gospel,” ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. The initial preaching of the Gospel stressed the truth that one could find real hope for the life to come. Upon hearing this message, the Colossians accepted it and committed themselves to Christ.

τοῦ παρόντος εἰς ὑμᾶς, which exists in you (v. 6)

Clearly the participle is attached to “the Gospel,” τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, as an adjectival modifier²⁴. The verb πάρειμι signifies a presence established upon arrival. The attached prepositional phrase εἰς ὑμᾶς locates this presence of the Gospel as inside the Colossian believers. The preposition εἰς rather than ἐν pushes this presence more deeply into the lives of these believers. Out of this deeper permeating presence of the Gospel comes the fruit bearing and growth set up by the pair of καθὼς καὶ ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ... καθὼς καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν, “just as both in all the world...just as also in you.” The present tense of παρόντος underscores an ongoing presence of the Gospel. The duration of this presence is marked only by its starting point by the relative clause ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας, “from the very day...”

ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον, it is bearing fruit and growing (v. 6)

This periphrastic grammar construction with the

²⁴The neuter gender, singular number spelling links the participle back to τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.

εἰμί verb and a predicate adjective participle emphasizes duration even more than just the present tense of verbs and verbals. Thus extra strong emphasis is placed by Paul on the continual productivity of the Gospel as bearing fruit and growing. The passive voice form of the participles from καρποφορέω and αὐξάνω underscore the agent of this productivity as being outside the Gospel itself. God was causing it to bear fruit and grow.

Thus we note from these time markers some insight into how Paul reflected on placing a narrative inside a time frame. He, like most writers in his day, did not concern themselves with precise time markers that could be plotted on a calendar. To be sure, time was real and was important to them. The modern concern relates to what ancient Greeks labeled as χρόνος, chronological time. That is, precised dating of occurrences. Instead, their greater concern was with the meaning of those occurrences, which the ancients labeled as καιρός. That these temporal markers don’t reference actual occurrences is not in the picture. For they do. But more important to those in Paul’s day was the significance of those time moments, especially in relation to God’s actions in this world.

In the Proem of Colossians, we come across time indicators focused primarily on the ongoing impact of the Gospel message. The sense of something momentous having taken place at Colossae is quite prominent here. As interpreters of this text we need to resist the modern tendency to insist on developing a strict chronological time frame out of an ancient text not much concerned with such. We need to hear the text speak, more than



determine when and where the text first spoke.

1.2.4 Events

Here are the main events alluded to. There are two primary temporal events referenced in the Proem: 1) when the Colossians became believers, and 2) when Epaphras made his report to the apostle Paul. The connecting link between these two events is the continuing impact of the Gospel upon the lives of the believers at Colossae. What began with the initial preaching of the Gospel had life altering consequences on the believing community that came into being through the work of Epaphras.

ἡς ἡμέρας ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, which very day you heard and comprehended God's grace in Truth (v. 6)

The first event of beginnings stresses both the power of the Gospel to change lives and the faithful labors of God's servant Epaphras in bringing that message to them. Later on in the letter body the content of that message is fleshed out in greater detail. But here the message centers on faith, τὴν πίστιν, and love, τὴν ἀγάπην. These were the responses to the proclaiming of the word of Truth, τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας, which Paul labels as Gospel, τοῦ εὐαγγελίου. A major component of this message was the grace of God, τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ. In this skeletal glimpse at the Gospel in the Proem, we sense both the Divine and the human elements. In essence, God makes the provision of salvation and we humans must respond to that provision by commitment to God through Christ. This these Colossians had done in profound ways.

καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ, just as you learned from Epaphras (v. 7)

The human agent in the proclamation of this Gospel message in the Lycus Valley was Epaphras. He was a native to this region and thus was ministering to people whom he knew and identified with. The exact time and circumstances of this preaching ministry at Colossae are not given by Paul. For modern interpreters this opens a door of speculation that seems to be endless. The only thing made clear in the letter is that Paul had not visited the city. So Epaphras came to Christ himself evidently on a trip outside the city.

From the larger background of the Book of Acts, chapters nineteen and twenty describe a ministry of Paul in the western port city of Ephesus, some hundred miles west of the Lycus Valley. This lengthy ministry lasted over two years. Its impact is depicted by Luke (Acts 19:10) as τοῦτο δὲ ἐγένετο ἐπὶ ἔτη δύο, ὥστε πάντας τοὺς κατοικοῦντας τὴν Ἀσίαν ἀκοῦσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ κυρίου, Ἰουδαίους τε καὶ Ἕλληνας, "but this happened over two years so that all the inhabitants of Asia heard the Word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks."

This seems to have been the more likely period when Epaphras first met Paul in Ephesus and became a follower of Christ. His training in the Gospel came from Paul in Ephesus. Subsequently, he returned back home to the Lycus Valley and began sharing his new found faith in Christ. He labored in all three cities in the valley: Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colossae (cf. 4:13). Out of that ministry came house church groups meeting in private homes in each of the towns. From Colossians 4 and Phile-



mon, we know the names of at least two group leaders, Nympha and Philemon.

From all available indications, this would have taken place in the early to middle 50s of the first Christian century. To be sure, our modern curiosity would like more details about all this. But then baseless speculation takes over and we are not on factual grounds. But that Epaphras met Paul, was converted, and was largely responsible for the Christian communities in the Lycus River Valley is relatively certain. That he came under the Pauline teaching of the Gospel is clear from the letter to the Colossians itself.

ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην, who also informed us of your love (v. 8)

How much longer before Epaphras travels to where Paul is we do not know with certainty. The answer depends entirely on the assumptions about the time and circumstances of the writing of the letter to the Colossians. This scenario was explored in the commentary on the Praescriptio in 1.1-2.

In the assumption of Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea (app. 57-60 AD), there would have been somewhere between two and five years between these two points of contact with Paul. Paul alludes to that visit in verse eight.

Here the remark is made that Epaphras δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην, "informed us of your love." The verb δηλόω signifies verbal explanations that make clear some matters previously unknown. The Aorist active voice, adjective participle ὁ καὶ δηλώσας, "the one having also informed," indi-

cates that Epaphras made clear to Paul just how much the Colossians loved him. The prepositional phrase ἐν πνεύματι, "in the Spirit," indicates the basis of their love. It is prompted by God's Spirit. They did not know Paul personally since he had not visited their city. But their transformation spiritually through Epaphras' preaching of the Gospel that he had learned from Paul moved them to deep gratitude and appreciation of the apostle. In his letter back to them, he affirms his deep love for them as well.

Now in conclusion, what have we learned from the internal and external historical aspects of this Proem? Some things stand out.

First, the apostle Paul, now made aware of the healthy spiritual atmosphere of the Christians at Colossae, reaches out to them with love and thanksgiving to God for them.

Next, the composition of this letter is prompted by the arrival of Epaphras and his reporting of the situation to the apostle.

Also, dominantly in this single lengthy Greek sentence in vv. 3-8 stands the emphasis upon continuation and development in the religious life of the Colossians. Their commitment to God through Christ is real and is transforming them continuously since its first expression at the preaching of Epaphras.

Also, this faithful servant of Christ has played a significant role in the progress of the Gospel in the Lycus River Valley.



Further, the repetition of reference to Truth signals a caution that, in chapter two, we discover has to do with false teachers at work in the community. Their message severely corrupts the pure apostolic Gospel that Epaphras had brought to them at the beginning. Thus, a part of the motivation behind the writing of the letter is to reaffirm the apostolic Gospel that they had started with. Although Paul will intensely critique this phony message in chapter two, overwhelmingly his appeal is to the apostolic Gospel that God commissioned him to promote. He deeply desires that the Colossians remain true to this message, and reject the false one being advocated in their midst.

Without directly using the term σωτηρία, “salvation,” he sketches out its relevant aspects to the situation of the Colossians in both the Praescriptio and the Proem. Of course, it is not the full picture of God’s saving work that we would expect from a systematic theological work. This document is a letter prompted by a specific set of circumstances. It responds to those circumstances. Here the presence of the false teaching dictates much of Paul’s presentation of the apostolic Gospel message.

The heart of the situation is that the Colossians had a splendid beginning in the preaching of the apostolic Gospel to them. Now, they are being enticed to abandon that message in favor of the corrupted version being offered by the false teachers. The apostle counters with an emphatic emphasis upon the correctness of the apostolic Gospel in order to gain their commitment to remain in it.

2.0 Literary

Now we will take a look at the literary aspects in order to expand our understanding of the historical meaning of this ancient text. Again the external / internal perspectives guide our inquiry.

2.1 External: Literary Forms:

As explained in the discussion in the Praescriptio, the external perspective centers on the identification and significance of established literary forms in the text. A lot of comparison to other Pauline literature, as well as to the larger body of Hellenistic Greek literature of that time, is necessary.

2.1.1 Identify the literary structure or form

First, we have already established that this document is in the form of an ancient Greek letter.²⁵ It possess the four fold structural arrangement of material into a Praescriptio, Proem, letter body, and Conclusio sections. In Paul’s world, the letter was the most dominant form of written communication of ideas in use. He makes effective use

²⁵The turning point in American scholarly study of ancient letters is traceable back to the PhD dissertation of Francis Xavier J. Exler presented to the Catholic University of America in 1923. Subsequently published as Francis Xavier J. Exler, *A Study in Greek Epistolography* by the Catholic University Press, this opened a new opportunity for American biblical scholars to make significant contributions to the biblical studies world through literary analysis of ancient documents. A wide host of scholars began examining ancient letters both inside and outside of those in the New Testament. Another very influential work by David E. Aune appeared in 1987, *The New Testament and Its Literary Environment*. It surveys the NT letters against their world, as scholarly understanding had developed over most of the last century.



of this form in his communication with different churches and individuals.

The Proem subsection stood as the main opportunity to inject religious prayers into the communication.²⁶ The Proem emerged out of the greeting, the *Salutatio*, in the *Praescriptio*. This normally was a health wish in the form of a concise prayer expression. The longer prayer then comes out of this greeting. Its characteristic feature is expression of thanksgiving to deity for the recipients of the letter. Sometimes this prayer of thanksgiving shades off into an intercessory prayer for the recipients. The thanksgiving looks backward but the intercession looks forward.

The verb εὐχαριστέω, either in the first singular or plural forms, leads off the Proem in six of Paul's letters: 1 Thess. 1:2; 1 Cor. 1:4; Rom. 1:8; Philm 4; Col. 1:3; Phil. 1:3.²⁷ The adjective form εὐχάριστος, -ον, thankful, is found instead of the verb in 2 Cor. 1:3 and Eph. 1:3, as well as in 1 Pet. 1:3. The infinitive εὐχαριστεῖν, to express thanksgiving, is found in 2

²⁶For a listing of the Proems in the NT letters, see my "Proems in the Letters of the New Testament Greek Text," at <https://cranfordville.com/G496CLess02ProemList.pdf>.

²⁷The one letter where deep disappointment replaces thanksgiving is in Gal. 1:6-10. This substitute proem then sets the tone of the entire letter as very intense and harsh toward the Galatian churches. Here Paul opens the letter with Θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς..., "I am astounded that so quickly you are turning away from the One who called you..."

Thess. 1:3. The thanksgiving is always expressed τῷ θεῷ, "to God."

Additionally, these Proems typically are bundled into a lengthy single Greek introductory sentence.²⁸ As the footnote listing reveals, these thanksgiving expressions as the heart of the Proem in Paul's let-

²⁸*Early writings:*

Gal. 1:6-10 substitute proem, no thanksgiving
1st sentence vv. 6-7, 33 words.

Θαυμάζω ὅτι...

1 Thess. 1:2-10: 1st sentence vv. 2-6, 82 words

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε...

2 Thess 1:3-12, 1st sentence vv. 3-10, 158 words

Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε...

Middle Writings:

1 Cor. 1:4-9, only 1 sentence, 85 words

Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε...

2 Cor. 1:3-11, 1st sentence vv. 3-6, 90 words

Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεός...

Rom. 1:8-15, 1st sentence vv. 8-13, 91 words

Πρῶτον μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου...

Prison Letters:

Eph. 1:3-23, 1st sentence vv 3-6, 67 words

Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεός...

Col. 1:3-8, only 1 sentence, 104 words

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ...

Philm. 4-7, only 1 sentence, 72 words

Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε...

Phil. 1:3-11, 1st sentence vv. 3-6, 83 words

Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου...

Pastoral Letters:

1 Tim. 1:12-17, 1st sentence vv. 12-14, 68 words

Χάριν ἔχω τῷ ἐνδυναμώσαντί με...

2 Tim. 1:3-5, only 1 sentence, 67 words

Χάριν ἔχω τῷ ἐνδυναμώσαντί με...

Titus; no Proem



ters are longer than is typical in Paul's writings. Colossians at 104 words is only surpassed by Second Thessalonians at 158 words.²⁹ In the literary Koine Greek world of Paul's very lengthy sentences were relatively common. So Paul dictating to Timothy, his writing secretary for this letter, was not creating something out of the ordinary with these long sentences.

One of the interpretive questions here is the precise terminus point of the Proem and the beginning of the body of the letter. Verse 9 introduces another long sentence (vv. 9-11) indicating intercessory prayers being lifted up in behalf of the Colossians. Sometimes the apostle incorporates both kinds of prayers into the Proem of his letters: 2 Thess 1.11-12; Eph. 1.15-23; Phil. 1.9-11; Philm 6-7.³⁰ The transition between thanksgiving and intercession in Col. 1.9 is Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, οὐ παυόμεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, ἵνα..., "For this reason also we, from the very day we heard, do not cease praying for you and asking that....

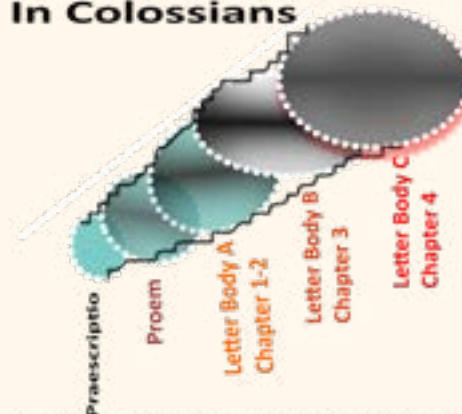
²⁹This analysis holds true unless the Proem of Ephesians 1.3-23 is counted as a single sentence as earlier Greek text punctuation understood. The three relative clauses in vv. 11-23 introduced by Ἐν ᾧ καὶ were understood in a dependent adjectival role. That would understand 1.3-23 as a single sentence with 193 words.

³⁰Transitions from thanksgiving to intercession:
2 Thess 1.11a, Εἰς ὃ καὶ προσευχόμεθα πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἵνα...
Eph. 1.15-17, Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γὰρ... οὐ παύομαι εὐχαριστῶν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν... ἵνα ὁ θεὸς... δώῃ ὑμῖν...
Phil 1.9, Καὶ τοῦτο προσεύχομαι, ἵνα...
Philm 6, ὅπως ἡ κοινωνία τῆς πίστεώς σου ἐνεργῆς γένηται...

Whether thus constitutes a continuation of the Proem or a transition into the letter body is debated among scholars. The clear transition is not really present, and the transition from the sentence in vv. 9-11a into the next sentence in vv. 11b-20, Μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ..., "With joy giving thanks to the Father...", gradually shifts focus back on his experiences under the theme of thanksgiving. Thus we are left with an ambiguous ending of the Proem as well as the beginning of the body proper of the letter. Somewhat arbitrarily we will see verse 8 as the end of the Proem proper. Beginning in verse nine, the general theme of prayer continues but initiates a new direction from vv. 3-8.³¹

2.1.2 Analyze the role of the text as a form

Expanding View of Salvation In Colossians



The concept of God's salvation is the foundational theme in Colossians. It developed from skeletal form at the beginning to a detailed depiction in the letter body.

³¹The chiasmic construction (A/B/C/A'/B') seen by some as binding vv. 3-11, at least, together seems to be far fetched to me. The various proposals that I have looked at do not seem to flow naturally from the text.



The basic role of the letter Proem was to further cement positive connections between the sender and recipients of the letter. With its roots in the Greeting, quite naturally a prayer of thanksgiving for the recipients could follow. Additionally, the Proem often signaled with more detail than in the Praescriptio general topics to be discussed in the letter body.

Both of those patterns are present in Col. 1.3-8. Paul's gratitude for the Colossians was deep and ongoing. And their's for him as well (v. 8). As portrayed in the above chart, the basic theme of salvation from God in Christ is first signaled in outline form in the Praescriptio. More details then follow in the Proem.

But the fuller development of the theme occurs in the various sections of the letter body. The general structure of ancient letter writing provided the apostle a convenient means of presenting this theme to the Colossians both in affirming it as the apostolic Gospel first preached to them by Ephraim and now elaborated upon by Paul in this letter. This also has an apologetic tone in that it stands as divine Truth over against the alternative version being presented by the false teachers at Colossae. The greater objective of the letter is to convince the Colossians to 'stay put' in the apostolic Gospel and to realize the full benefits of God's salvation in Christ.

2.2 Internal: Literary Structure:

While the external aspect analyzes the connection of established literary patterns to the surrounding world, the internal perspective looks at individual

words and how ideas are put together grammatically in ancient Koine Greek. This means a twofold examination of the contents of the Proem. Put figuratively, we look at the individual trees of this literary forest to determine their contextual meaning. Then we take a wholistic look at this literary forest searching of patterns of thought arrangement across the forest. Out of such examination will come a much clearer understanding of the message of the document, which enables a better perception of how this message can apply to us.

2.2.1 Develop an understanding of the wording

When translating from a source language to a receptor language is required, such as this original Greek text over into modern English, the beginning point is to be as certain as possible about the meaning of the individual words in the original text. This implies determining the core meaning, the range of possible developed meanings, and the correct choice of the appropriate meaning via its context in the passage. The first two of these elements are determined by systematic parsing of each word. The final decision of the most appropriate translation word in the receptor language comes with sensing the context of each word's usage in the text.

Here is a parsing of each word based on the model set forth in my grammar book *LEARNING BIBLICAL KOINE GREEK*, [volume 35](#) of BIC at cranfordville.com. See [APPENDIX TWO: GUIDES TO PARSING](#) for the specific model followed below.

Proem: Col. 1.3-8³²

³²In order to download the parsing into a separate pdf file, click on [PARSING PROEM ENG.pdf](#). A statistical anal-



For a comparison of the Pauline Proema see [List of Epistolary Division in the Pauline Letters](#). Also see [Epistolary Divisions for the Catholic Letters](#). At a secondary layer underneath these links stands a printing of the scripture text of the divisions, and is accessible from inside the links.

1:3

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν: Present (Iterative) - Active - Indicative - 1st - Plural - εὐχαριστέω - we regularly give thanks

τῷ θεῷ: 2nd declension noun - Dative (Direct Object) - Masc - Sing - θεός, ὁ - to God

πατρὶ: 3rd declension noun - Dative (Apposition) - Masc - Sing - πατήρ, πατέρος, ὁ - the Father

τοῦ κυρίου: 2nd declension noun - Genitive (Kinship) - Masc - Sing - κύριος, ὁ - of our Lord

ἡμῶν: Personal Pronoun - Genitive (Possession) - Plural - ἐγώ - our

Ἰησοῦ: Proper Name - Genitive (Kinship) - Masc - Sing - Ἰησοῦς, ὁ - Jesus

Χριστοῦ: 2nd declension noun - Genitive (Kinship) - Masc - Sing - Χριστός, ὁ - Christ

πάντοτε: Temporal Adverb connected either to the preceding main clause verb Εὐχαριστοῦμεν, or to the following participle προσευχόμενοι, meaning "always." See various translations and the punctuation apparatus of the UBS Greek text for details.

ysis of the words is also contained in this file.

περὶ: Preposition used with Genitive case noun to denote advantage - for, in your behalf

ὁμῶν: Personal Pronoun - Genitive (Advantage) - Plural - σύ - you

προσευχόμενοι: Present (Descriptive) - Deponent - Participle (Adverbial: Modal) - Nominative - Masc - Plural - προσεύχομαι - praying

1:4

ἀκούσαντες: 1 Aorist (Culminative) - Active - Participle (Adverbial: Temporal) - Nominative - Masc - Plural - ἀκούω - after having heard of

τὴν πίστιν: 3rd declension noun - Accusative (Direct Object) - Fem - Sing - πίστις, -εως, ἡ - your faith

ὁμῶν: Personal Pronoun - Genitive (Possession) - Plural - σύ - your

ἐν: Preposition used with locative case noun to denote metaphysical location - in (spiritual union with)

Χριστῷ: 2nd declension noun - Locative (Sphere) - Masc - Sing - Χριστός, ὁ - in Christ

Ἰησοῦ: Proper Name - Locative (Sphere) - Masc - Sing - Ἰησοῦς, ὁ - in Jesus

καί: coordinate conjunction linking the two accusative case nouns, πίστιν and ἀγάπην together

τὴν ἀγάπην: 1st declension noun - Accusative (Di-



rect Object) - Fem - Sing - ἀγάπη, ἡ - the love
 ἣν: Rel Pron - Accusative (Direct Object) - Fem - Sing - ὅς, ἥ, ὅ - which [introduces a relative subordinate clause which modifies ἀγάπην as adjective modifier.

ἔχετε: Present (Descriptive) - Active - Indicative - 2 - Plural - ἔχω- you have, possess

εἰς: Preposition used with accusative of measure noun - for (most naturally implies motion into. Implies here love as active expression rather than static emotion)

πάντας: Adjective (Predicate) - Accusative - Masc - Plural - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - for all (the saints)

τοὺς ἁγίους: Adjective (Substantival) - Accusative (Measure/Reference) - Masc - Plural - ἅγιος, -α, -ον - for all the saints, the holy ones

1:5

διὰ: Preposition used with accusative of cause noun - because of

τὴν ἐλπίδα: 3rd declension noun - Accusative (Cause) - Fem - Plural - ἐλπίς, ἰδος, ἡ - because of the hope, confidence

τὴν ἀποκειμένην: Present (Descriptive) - Middle (Intensive) - Participle (Adjective: Attributive) - Accusative - Fem - Sing - ἀπόκειμαι - which is stored up, laid up

ὕμῃν: Personal Pronoun - Dative (Advantage) - Plural - σύ - for you, for your benefit

ἐν: Preposition used with locative of place noun - in (affirms Heaven spatially)

τοῖς οὐρανοῖς: 2nd declension noun - Locative (Place) - Masc - Plural - οὐρανός, ὁ - in Heaven [so-called plural of majesty, i.e., references to God in the plural number)

ἣν: Rel Pron - Accusative (Direct Object) - Fem - Sing - ὅς, ἥ, ὅ - which (introduce relative subordinate clause as adjectival modifier of ἐλπίδα)

προηκούσατε: 1st Aorist (Constantive) - Active - Indicative - 2 - Plural - προακούω - you heard about previously

ἐν: Preposition used with instrumental of means noun - by (means of)

τῷ λόγῳ: 2nd declension noun - Instrumental (Means) - Masc - Sing - λόγος, ὁ - by the Word, Message

τῆς ἀληθείας: 1st declension noun - Genitive (Objective) - Fem - Sing - ἀλήθεια, ἡ - about the Truth

τοῦ εὐαγγελίου: 2nd declension noun - Genitive (Apposition) - Neuter - Sing - εὐαγγέλιον, τό - that is, the Gospel

1:6

τοῦ παρόντος: Pres (Desc) - Ptc (Adj: Attrib) - Genitive - Neuter - Sing - πάρεμι- which is present, has come

εἰς: Preposition, used with Accusative of Measure



noun denoting 'how far' - to, in

ὕμᾱς: Personal Pronoun - Accusative (Measure) - Pl
- σὺ - to / among you

καθὼς: Subordinate conjunction introducing Adverbial Comparative clause - just as

καὶ: Correlative adverbial use - also (the καθὼς καὶ stands in parallel to the καθὼς καὶ that follows.)

ἐν: Preposition used with Locative of Place noun - in

παντὶ: Adjective (Predicate) - Locative - Masc - Sing
- πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - in all (the world)

τῷ κόσμῳ: 2nd Declension noun - Locative (Place)
- Masc - Sing - κόσμος, ὁ - in all the world (contextually the Roman world of Paul is meant)

ἐστὶν: Present (Descriptive) - Indicative - 3rd - Sing
- εἶμί - it is

καρποφορούμενον: Pres (Descriptive) - Middle (Intensive) - Ptc (Adj: Predicate) - Nominative - Neuter - Sing - ἀρποφορέω - bearing fruit

(ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον is a periphrastic present tense construction stressing continuation of the verbal action specified in the participle.)

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction linking the two participles together - and

αὐξανόμενον: Pres (Descriptive) - Middle (Inten-

sive) - Ptc (Adj: Predicate) - Nominative - Neuter - Sing - αὐξάνω - growing, increasing

καθὼς: Subordinate conjunction introducing Adverbial Comparative clause - just as

καὶ: Correlative adverbial use - also

ἐν: Preposition used with Locative of Place noun with distributive meaning with plural noun - among

ὕμῖν: Personal Pronoun - Locative (Place) - Pl - su - among you (i.e., the house churches)

ἀφ': Preposition used with Ablative of Separation in time reference - ἀπό - from, since

ἥς: Relative Pronoun used as adjective modifier of the following noun - Ablative - Feminine - Sing - ὅς, ἥ, ὅ - very

Introduces adverbial temporal relative dependent clause - from which (day), from the very day that

ἡμέρας: 1st declension noun - Ablative (Separation) - Feminine - Sing - ἡμέρα, ἡ - from the very day that

ἠκούσατε: 1st Aorist (Constative) - Active - Indicative - 2nd - Pl - ἀκούω - you heard

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction linking the two verbs together - and

ἐπέγνωτε: 2 Aorist (Constative) - Active - Indicative - 2nd - Pl - ἐπιγινώσκω - you recognized, realized,



understood

τὴν χάριν: 3rd declension noun - Accusative (Direct Object) - Fem - Sing - χάρις , -ιτος, ἡ - the grace

τοῦ θεοῦ: 2nd declension noun - Genitive (Possession) - Masc - Sing - θεός, ὁ - of God, God's

ἐν: Preposition used with Locative of Sphere anathorous noun with meaning - in

ἀληθεία: 1st declension noun - Locative (Sphere) - Fem - Sing - ἀλήθεια, ἡ - in Truth

1:7

καθὼς: Subordinate conjunction introducing Adverbial Comparative clause - just as [it is parallel to the above pair of καθὼς conjunctions but forms a second unit of comparative statements: just as -- just as & just as).

ἐμάθετε: 2 Aorist (Constative) - Active - Indicative - 2 - Pl - μανθάνω - you learned, (were taught)

ἀπὸ: Preposition used with Ablative of Separation noun - from

Ἐπαφρᾶ: Proper Name - Ablative (Separation) - Masc - Sing - Ἐπαφρᾶς. -ᾶ, ὁ - from Epaphras (Col. 1.7; 4.12; Philm 23)

τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ: Adjective (Attributive) - Ablative - Masc - Sing - ἀγαπητός , -ή, -όν - our beloved

συνδούλου: 2nd declension noun - Ablative (Apposition) - Masc - Sing - σύνδουλος , ὁ - fellow servant

ἡμῶν: Personal Pronoun - Genitive (Possession) - Plural - ἐγώ - our

ὃς: Relative Pronoun - Nominative (Subject) - Masc - Sing - ὃς , ἡ, ὅ - [Introducing a dependent relative attributive adjectival clause linked by gender/number back to Ἐπαφρᾶ] - who

ἐστὶν: Present (Descriptive) - Indicative - 3rd - Sing - εἰμί - who is

πιστός: Adjective (Attributive) - Nominative - Masc - Sing - πιστός , -ή, -όν - a faithful

ὕπὲρ: Preposition used with Genitive of Advantage noun - in your behalf, for your sake, in behalf of

ὁμῶν: Personal Pronoun - Genitive (Advantage) - Pl - σύ - you

διάκονος: 2nd declension noun - Nominative (Predicate) - Masc - Sing - διάκονος, ὁ/ ἡ - servant

τοῦ Χριστοῦ: Proper Name - Genitive (Possession/Objective) - Masc - Sing - Χριστός, ὁ - Christ's/ who serves Christ

1:8

ὁ...δηλώσας: 1 Aorist (Constative) - Active - Participle (Adj: Attributive) - Nominative - Masc - Sing - δηλώω - who showed, informed

καὶ: coordinate conjunction here use in adverbial adjunctive sense - also



ἡμῖν: Personal Pronoun - Dative (Indirect Object) -
PI - ἐγώ - to us

ὑμῶν: Personal Pronoun - Genitive (Possession) -
PI - σύ - your

τὴν...ἀγάπην: 1st declension noun - Accusative (Direct Object) - Feminine - Sing - ἀγάπη, ἡ - your love

ἐν: Preposition used with either Locative or Instrumental case noun - in / by means of

πνεύματι: 3rd declension noun - Locative (Sphere) / Instrumental (Means) - Neuter - Sing - πνεῦμα, -τος, τό - in / by the Spirit

An analysis of the 83 words in this single sentence underscores the key concepts. Central here from a human angle are the three abstract nouns πίστιν, "faith," ἀγάπην, "love," and ἐλπίδα, "hope." These sum up the essence of salvation from the necessary human response aspect. Here the first two produce the third element. Each Greek word inherently possesses an action orientation that is difficult to express adequately in English. The strong emphasis on continual action expression in the present tense verbs and participles underscores the constancy of these three responses to what God has done and continues to do for His people.

From the divine angle, there is continuous action as well. God continues to receive our regular deposits of hope that He stores in Heaven. Central to the divine action is what God first did in creating the Gospel message centered in Christ as His Son. Through Epaphras' preaching of this message

at Colossae, there came the positive acceptance of it as God's Truth that brought divine grace into the lives of those committing themselves to Christ. That divine favor continues to be poured out upon these individuals. The stamp of Truth is impressed on this message through the work of God's Spirit in their lives. Thus the Colossians have everything needed spiritually in this Gospel message of salvation. Paul here signals that how this is so will come in the letter body.

Very cleverly, Paul makes use of established phrases in order to stitch together his thoughts. These include the following:

Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ, "we give thanks to God," (v. 3): Rom. 1.8; 1 Cor. 1.4, 14; 14:18; Phil. 1.3 (1st sing); 1 Thess 1.2; 2.13; Philm 4.

πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, "Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," (v. 3): 1 Cor. 1.3; Eph. 1.3; (1 Pet. 1.3).

ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν...καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην, "having heard of your faith...and your love," (v. 4): Philm 5; Eph. 1.15;

πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους, "all the saints," (v. 4): 1 Thess. 3:13; Rom. 16.15; 2 Cor. 1.1; Eph.1.15; 3.8, 18; 6.18; Phil. 1.1; 4.22; Philm. 5.

The triad of τὴν πίστιν, τὴν ἀγάπην, and τὴν ἐλπίδα faith, love, and hope (vv. 4-5): Rom. 5.1-5; 1 Cor. 13.13; Gal. 5.5-6; Eph. 4.2-5; 1 Thess 1.3; 5:8.

τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας, "the Word of Truth," (v. 5): Eph. 1.13; 2 Tim. 2.16; (Jas. 1.18).

παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ, "in all the world," (v. 6): Rom. 3.19;



- 1 v.3 **Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ**
πατρὶ
τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
- v4 πάντοτε
περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι,
ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν
ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ
καὶ
τὴν ἀγάπην
ἣν ἔχετε
v5 εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους
διὰ τὴν ἐλπίδα
τὴν ἀποκειμένην
ὑμῖν
ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
ἣν προηκούσατε
| ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας
| τοῦ εὐαγγελίου
v6 | τοῦ παρόντος
| εἰς ὑμᾶς,
|-----|
| ἐν παντὶ τῷ κόσμῳ
καθὼς καὶ... ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον
καθὼς καὶ -----
| ἐν ὑμῖν,
|
| ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας
v7 | ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωντε τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ
| ἐν ἀληθείᾳ·
| καθὼς ἐμάθετε
| ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ
τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν,

| ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν
ὅς ἐστιν πιστὸς...διάκονος
τοῦ Χριστοῦ,
| ὑμῶν
v8 | ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν...ἀγάπην
| ἐν πνεύματι.



τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ, "the grace of God," (v. 6): Rom. 5:15; 1 Cor. 1.4; 3.10; 15.10 (2x); 2 Cor. 1.12; 6.1; 8.1; 9.14; Gal. 2.21; Eph. 3.2, 7; Phil. 1.7; 2 Thess. 1.12; Tit. 2.11;

ἐν ἀληθείᾳ, "in Truth," (v. 6): 2 Jhn 1; 3 Jhn 1

διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, "servant of Christ," (v. 7): 1 Tim. 4.6; 2 Cor. 11:23. Rom. 9.1; 14.17; 15.16.

ἐν πνεύματι, "in the Spirit," (v. 8): Rom. 8.9, 13, 14; 1 Cor. 12.3; 14.2, 15, 16; Gal. 5.5; Eph. 5.18; 6.18;

Paul's repetitive use of key terms reflects the unity of his message to whomever he is communicating. Most likely, many of these expressions the Colossians had heard Epaphras use as he sought the disciple the new converts in his ministry there. The Pauline repetition of these in the letter served to underscore even stronger the correctness of the Gospel message from Epaphras.

2.2.2 Assess the structural arrangement of the passage

Although there exists in modern interpretive methodology a variety of ways for analyzing the shape of an ancient text, the use of a "Block Diagram" still seems to me to be one of the best approaches. It visually lays out the grammatical relationships and usually this provides a clearer way of tracing thought development in the text.

With vv. 3-8 comprising just one sentence, the block diagram becomes all the more helpful for determining the inner connectedness of ideas. Note the above listed diagram of the Colossians Proem.

The one main idea of giving thanks to God is central, and this core concept is elaborated extensively by a series of mostly adverbial modifiers. Hearing is the primary secondary concept. First, in vv. 4, 8, it's Paul's hearing, but then in vv. 5-7 it is the hearing of the Gospel message preached and taught by Epaphras to the Colossians. The role of hope as foundational to faith and love is very important to this hearing of the Gospel. The impeachable character of Epaphras sustained his initial ministry of Gospel preaching at Colossae and then later his reporting of all this to the apostle Paul upon his arrival at Caesarea where Paul was a prisoner. It is important to remember that this lengthy sentence is in the form of a prayer of thanksgiving for the Colossians being made regularly to God by Paul and Timothy.

The concept of salvation, σωτηρία, both human and divine aspects, is laid out in outline manner here. Each aspect -- τὴν πίστιν, "faith," τὴν ἀγάπην, "love," τὴν ἐλπίδα, "hope," τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας, "Word of Truth," τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, "the Gospel," τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ, "the grace of God," ἐν πνεύματι, "in the Spirit" -- will be described in greater detail in the letter body. But not in a systematic manner. The way Paul's thoughts unfold in the Proem in a rather liquid manner, moving from one idea to the next, is reflected in the letter body style as well.

Completely accurate outlining of the contents thus becomes impossible to achieve. At best, only an approximation of thought structure is possible. It is critically important to remember that modern outlining procedures automatically impose a mod-



ern rationally derived assumption down onto the text. And that the logic of Paul is in no way modern Western logical thinking. Therefore setting up an outline of the text represents primarily an attempt to apply the perceived meaning of the ancient text to today's world, not to uncover its historical meaning. This outlining we will attempt to do in Part Two: Exposition, which follows this study. But it will be done in the full awareness of the limitations involved. Oh that more commentary writers were both aware of these limitations, and would acknowledge them to their readers!

2.2.3 Assess the contextual role of the passage.

The final literary aspect focuses on the internal context of the passage in relation to the remainder of the contents of the document. Understanding this context clearly is very important because context imposes more specific meaning on the words and sentences of the passage. A word, for example, may have several potential meanings, but its context of usage will automatically limit that potential to one or at best two possible meanings. The context becomes decisive for arriving at final conclusions of meaning.

Colossians 1.3-8 stands as the Proem in this ancient letter. This means for contextual analysis that it grows out of the Praescriptio greeting or Salutatio. Thankfulness to deity for the letter recipients was the normal emphasis, which Paul carries to unique heights of expression with his Christian perspective. Additionally, the letter Proem helped to set up the themes for discussion in greater detail in the letter body.

The Colossians Proem clearly follows this ancient model of letter writing. By the time this beginning part of the letter had been read to the different house church groups, anticipation about what Paul was going to say most assuredly was building.

Thus in our interpretive process it becomes important to establish the connections of the Proem to both the Praescriptio and then especially to the body of the letter. Vv. 9-11a, the next sentence, goes back to Epaphras' arrival to where Paul was. His report to the apostle prompted the beginning of not just thanksgiving but also intercession for the Colossians. He uses some of the earlier language to phrase his prayer requests to God for the Colossians. Then in vv. 11b-20, thanksgiving comes back to the forefront, but now it is thanksgiving for the salvation created in Christ by God the Father. Verses 15-20 comprise a early Christian hymn that is adapted to this context by Paul as part of his thanksgiving. Verses 21-23 then apply this divinely created salvation to the Colossians with the climatic assertion of Paul being a servant of this message. The next sentence in vv. 24-29 affirms the role of sufferings by Paul in this divine operation. The theme of his sufferings continues in 2.1-3. Verses 4-5 point toward the culmination of this salvation at the end and Paul's pleasure in having played an indirect role in this for the Colossians.

Vv. 6-7 contain the first admonition to the Colossians to continue living in this apostolic Gospel message they first heard from Epaphras' preaching. Beginning with the second admonition in vv. 8-10 a warning about false teachers at Colossae is given. The critique of the false teachers continues



through verse 23, but always with the emphasis of don't you Colossians let these heretics corrupt your Christian walk. Beginning in 3.1-2, the practical application of the apostolic Gospel stresses correct implementation to their daily lives. Beginning in 4.2-4, prayer comes back into primary focus. The ending of the letter body is signaled in 4.7-9 with the travel plans for Tychicus to come to Colossae. The traditional letter Conclusio begins in 4.10, with its collection of greetings etc.

Throughout the letter body Paul seeks a commitment from the Colossians to stay firmly grounded in this apostolic Message of salvation that Epaphras had first brought to them. God gave it to Paul in direct commissioning as an apostle. It had been passed on to Epaphras, who in turn delivered it to the Colossians. It was, in the Pauline elaboration in this letter, all the message they needed. The alternative message of the false teachers should be completely rejected. It was not commissioned by God and would spell disaster for anyone who adopted it.

Summary Conclusion

All of the theological motifs in the Proem are developed in greater detail in the letter body. Just not in a wooden, mechanistic manner. Rather in a flowing style in which building block is stacked on top of building block until the end of the body proper of the letter. In weaving these key concepts together as he does, Paul paints a beautiful portrait of being Christian inside the apostolic Gospel.

The letter Praescriptio sketches out the picture of salvation with limited broad strokes that are pivot-

al. The Proem picks up on these strokes and adds additional slightly more detailed strokes painting the general idea of God's salvation in Christ. Then the letter body takes this picture sketch and fills in the details as they are relevant to the situation at Colossae. We don't end up with a massive portrayal of salvation that covers every aspect. Instead, we come to understand how God saves from the background of what the Colossians were facing in 57-60 AD. They had a thriving congregation that was being somewhat threatened by wrong teachings about God and His saving ways. Paul's appeal to the first readers and hearers of this letter was simply for them to stay put in the true apostolic Gospel that Epaphras had brought to them at first. How they could do this is set forth repeatedly throughout the letter. It included both theological thinking and strict moral practice of Gospel principles.

How then should we apply the concepts found in the Proem in verses 3-8? An answer will be found in part two on exposition that follows this study. It may not be the only legitimate application, but the exposition will line out a procedure for coming to legitimate applications to contemporary life. These will be based on the historical understanding of the Proem that we have developed in this exegetical study of the text.

