

496 Grounded and Settled

The Christians at Colosse were facing problems concerning the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. Just who was He? And just what did He achieve? Greek-based “Gnosticism” was gaining ground, with its emphases on mystery, “un-knowingness”, and the downgrading of Jesus to being merely some sort of well-intentioned man for whom things turned out badly, (views still held around us today).

It is likely that Epaphras, described by Paul as “our dear fellow servant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ” (1.7, KJV), had asked Paul to get involved in counteracting these gnostic errors. So here is Paul’s epistle to the Colossians in which, under the Holy Spirit’s guidance, he makes the basic Christian doctrines crystal-clear for these early Christians – and, thanks be to God, for the rest of us too. The result, though on a far more wonderful scale, is rather like a “Ben Stokes-on-fire” batting innings for England!

First comes Paul’s prayer for them, in which, as in all his prayers in his epistles, we learn so much. He prays: that they “might be filled with the knowledge of (God the Father’s) will in all wisdom and understanding” (1.9); that they might “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness, giving thanks unto the Father ... ” (from 1.10-12a).

Then he comes to God the Father’s great mercies, (with some refrains of praise from us!): who “hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (praise the Lord!); who hath delivered us from the power of darkness” (praise the Lord!); who “hath translated [us] into the kingdom of his dear Son” (praise the Lord!) (1.12-13).

Then, to Christ, Christ, Christ, resulting in a further, hearty “Good riddance” to Gnosticism and its fellow travellers. In Christ “we have redemption through his blood, [even] the forgiveness of sins” (praise the Lord!). Christ “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created ... by him, and for him ... he is before all things, and by him all things consist” (praise the Lord!). And he is the head of the body, the church ... who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] he might have the pre-eminence” (praise the Lord!) (from 1.14-18).

The Holy Spirit has not finished yet! “For it pleased [the Father] that in him (Christ) should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself” (praise the Lord!) (from 1.19-20).

Then to the Colossian Christians themselves, and to all other Christians too: “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in [your] mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight ...” (praise the Lord!) (1.21-22).

What blessings are bestowed upon us, by God the Father, through His eternal Son Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit! Praise the Lord indeed.

In response, the Holy Spirit through Paul comes on to emphasise our part in all this, which is very simply put: we are to “continue in the faith grounded and settled, and [be] not moved away from the hope of the gospel ...” (1.23a).

As mentioned whenever relevant in these Reflections, the Christian Faith itself is “grounded and settled” in an abundance of irrefutable historical events. The sacrificial death of Christ, shedding His sinless blood on our behalf, happened, as did the glories of His resurrection from the dead and His ascension back into heaven. With Peter and John and all the others, we too are to “hearken unto God” rather than to the Jesus-refusers of today, “for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (in our case, this “seeing and hearing” being found in God’s Word and in our experience); (egs., Leviticus 17.11 & Hebrews 9.22b / Acts 1.3; 4.19-20; 26.24-26 / I Corinthians 15.12-26 / Hebrews 11.1; 12.1-2).

With the Jews long since back in their land, and the nation of Israel so often in the news, the Lord God is clearly increasing His warnings to this sinful world as He approaches His promised judgments. These judgments will set in in earnest after both the physically dead in Christ and the physically still-living in Christ, have been “caught up ... to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (from I Thessalonians 4.16-17; & 1.10; 5.9-11 / John 11.25-26). What a prospect! Until then, by God’s grace and in good heart, we “continue in the faith, grounded and settled”.

“How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord / is laid for your faith in His excellent Word, / what more can He say than to you He hath said, / you who unto Jesus for refuge have fled?”

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