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

It is claimed from this verse that Paul had not been to Colossae before writing this epistle because of the words, "...since we heard of your faith." There is nothing to suggest that he had not been there, and such words are not intended to mean that. In fact, he uses the same term in writing to the Ephesians that he uses here. And there is no doubt that he was the founder of the church at Ephesus -

"Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints..." Ephesians 1:15

He is merely writing now about the faith that they held at the present time. They had faith in the past, and he is thanking God for the faith which still continues to the present. And this faith is "in Christ Jesus." It is a saving faith, and an enduring faith. They not only heard the gospel and received it unto salvation, but they also continued in that faith, walking in it unto rewards.

And even more, he says that they (meaning he and Timothy of verse 1) were thankful for their "love for all the saints." The joy of the saints is that their love extends beyond just faith in Christ Jesus, but it extends to all who are in Christ Jesus. It is the bond of unity which is hoped for in the Christian walk, but one which too often breaks down into division, as is seen in his other epistles. At this point, such divisions were not a part of their walk in Christ and in their fellowship with other believers.

In his words ahead, Paul will give sound advice in order to avoid such future divisions. He will warn against heresies, and he will exhort those in Colossae in how to properly conduct their walk. If his words are adhered to, many troubling pitfalls will be avoided, both for the Colossians and for those of us who are willing to receive them.

Life application: How willing are we to spend time in the word each day in order to be sound in our theology and faithful in our walk? Let us endeavor to read the word, and to

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study in order to show ourselves approved. Great rewards lie ahead for those who are willing to look to the eternal, and not just to the here and now.

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

Paul's words now are a continuation of the previous verses. Taken together, the intent becomes much more evident -

“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup> since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; <sup>5</sup> because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel...”

They had given thanks for the faith of those in Colosse in Christ Jesus, and in their love for the saints. Now explaining that further, he says, “because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.” The faith in Christ Jesus is what gives them this hope and which resulted in their love for all the saints. This sentiment then is comparable to what he says to those in Thessalonica -

“...remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.”

-1 Thessalonians 1:3

The three tenets of faith, hope, and love work together and complement one another. Hope is the object which is to be attained. In this case, Paul notes that the object is our heavenly home which awaits us. Because of this hope, faith and love grow in us. It is as if the hope is a fire which kindles the resulting faith and love. This is how it should be with all believers. We have a hope, and therefore we should exercise faith in Christ Jesus and love towards others.

The hope which lies ahead is then explained by Paul with the words, “of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel.” His words, “the truth of the gospel” are in the emphatic position. As Charles Ellicott notes, “It refers to the gospel, not chiefly as a message of graciousness and mercy, but rather as a revelation of eternal truths, itself changeless as the truth it reveals.”

The gospel was and is God's plan for the salvation of man. In receiving the gospel, we are granted a heavenly hope; a return to Eden and God's paradise which was lost so long ago. But with our return, we will have something more than Adam had. We will have the understanding that God has done everything needed to grant us access, and to keep us

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in His presence for all eternity. We will be able to appreciate what was unknown to Adam because of the conscience we possess, having acquired the knowledge of good and evil. Thus, we will always be able to look with awe and wonder at the majesty of Christ's work for us.

Life application: We may think of what Adam had as the epitome of all that we could ever wish for, but we will have even more. When we are in our heavenly dwelling, we will have the appreciation for all of what God was willing to do for us in order to bring us back to Himself. We will have Jesus, radiant in splendor and majesty, to see and to worship for all eternity. Today, take time to thank God for Jesus Christ – our hope of eternity in God's presence.

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

Paul now refers to “the truth of the gospel” from the previous verse with the word “which.” It is this message, as he says, “which has come to you.” The gospel is that which established their faith (see Romans 10:17) as Paul noted in verse 4, and which has laid up the hope for them as he noted in verse 5.

Next, he uses hyperbole by saying that this same gospel message which has come to them has also come “in all the world.” It is important to understand that he is using hyperbole because replacement theology wrongly uses this verse to show that Jesus' words of Matthew 24:14 are fulfilled in Paul's words of this verse. Such is not the case. Paul uses a different word for “world” than Jesus does. It is true that he uses the same word as Jesus in other verses (such as Romans 10:18), but the context indicates there that he is not speaking of the gospel itself having gone out to the entire world. The context of his words in Romans is based on an Old Testament reference concerning the general revelation of God to the whole world. From there, Israel is rebuked for rejecting His special revelation, meaning the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Further, Paul uses the same word and in the same way in Romans 1:8 by saying -

“First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”

It is clear that Paul is using hyperbole there to show that the faith of those in Rome seems to shout out to all the world. Rome was the center of the Roman Empire, and therefore the faith of those in Rome extended out in a unique way. Clearly not all in the

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Roman Empire, much less the entire inhabited world, had heard of the faith of those in Rome.

It is an inappropriate stretch to take Jesus' words of the gospel going out to the entire world and then to apply them in an absolute way to what occurred in the first century. However, concerning the gospel which had come to those in Colossae, he next says that it "is bringing forth fruit." Fruit is the result of something else. The gospel had been preached, and there was a result because of it. People were coming to Christ, they were being obedient to the message, and they were continuing to share the message with others. These things are evident from Paul's coming words.

However, he is writing the letter now to correct misconceptions or misrepresentations of Christ which were already coming about. He is writing to ensure that the fruit which is brought forth will be good fruit. This is why he continues with, "as *it is* also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth." They had heard the message, they had received the grace of God, and it was received "in truth." In order to ensure that this same message would continue on unstained by bad doctrine, or even heresy, he will continue with the words of this letter.

Life application: Context always needs to be considered when looking at statements which use the same terminology in the Bible. It is true that the use of identical words often is intended to show a pattern, or the fulfillment of something else, but the surrounding context cannot be tossed out in order to make unfounded conclusions. Always consider what the writer's reference is before making a final determination about how his words are intended to be taken.

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

Paul now introduces Epaphras whom he calls "our dear fellow servant." This may or may not be the same as Epaphroditus who was seen in the letter to the Philippians. Epaphras is merely a shortened form of the same name, and so it is possible. However, in verse 4:12, Paul says that he "is *one* of you." For this reason, it does appear he is not the same person. Either way, this individual was an evangelist, having taught the word of the Lord to those at Colossae. This is seen in the words, "as you also learned from Epaphras." This is based on the previous verse which said, "since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth."

Thus, the "bringing forth fruit" which Paul mentioned in verse 6 is realized in the evangelism of Epaphras. He was not just an evangelist, but one who was successful in his duties. In calling him "our dear fellow servant," Paul uses a term that is seen 10 times in

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the New Testament, but his use of it will only be in this book. He uses the term here, and then he will use it once again when speaking of Tychicus in verse 4:7. It is a term which indicates “belonging to the same master,” and thus it is a term of endearment towards these two men. As Paul notes of Epaphras here, he is “a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf.”

There is a dispute as to whether the true reading is “on our behalf” or “on your behalf.” Either way, whether ministering for Paul and Timothy, or whether ministering for the good of those in Colossae, he was faithful in his ministry, and he is so recognized for it by Paul.

Life application: How are you perceived by the leaders of your church? Do they know you as a seat-warmer, a fair-weather attendee, or as a fellow servant who faithfully ministers in the church and towards others? The record is being compiled, and it will all be laid before the Lord on the day when we stand before Him for rewards or losses. Don't waste right now... it counts forever.