



## Colossians 1:3-12

# Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer for the Colossians

The apostle Paul was an encourager.

He began each of his letters with a prayer of thanksgiving and a petition for the recipients of his letters.

One of the most enlightening Bible studies is to take the recorded prayers of Paul and study them. They also make great petitions for our own Christian prayer life. Indeed, we can learn to pray a more meaningful prayer life by letting the apostle Paul be our model. We can grow in our spiritual life by praying Scripture thoughts and petitions to God.

Paul's letter to the believers at Colossae begins with a prayer of thanksgiving and blends into several petitions for these Christians. With the exception of the letter to Galatians Paul begins each letter with thanksgiving and praise to God for what he is doing in the churches and individuals lives. We gain insight into his prayer life. This is the kind of person you want to be around.

## PAUL'S PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING (1:3-8)

Paul begins his prayer with thanksgiving to God the Father. "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (Colossians 1:3).

Paul's song of thanksgiving runs though out the letter (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15-17; 4:2). It expressed his attitude toward God and other believers. He was dependent upon God for everything in his life. He was Christ-centered.

## Give thanks to the Father

The plural "we" can be epistolary plural like, "I thank" or it can be a real plural with the idea of "Timothy and I thank God." Keep in mind the author of the letter is Paul, not Paul and Timothy.

Paul was a team player. He never fails to find people and provisions of God for which to praise Him. Every time he prayed he remembered the churches with whom he ministered.

The adverb "always" can go with "we give thanks" as "We always give thanks to God, the Father . . . when we pray for you" (NET). It can also be associated with "we pray" as "We give thanks to God . . . praying always for

associated with "we pray" as "We give thanks to God . . . praying always for you" (NASB). He gives thanks constantly, "praying always for you."

His praying is present tense pointing to the fact that he repeatedly prays for these believers. It was his life style. He was persistent in his prayer life. "Always," "give thanks" and "praying" are in the present continuous tense in the original language. He prayed without ceasing.

He could be referring to his daily devotion as his reflection on the great provisions and promises of God for His people, and the needs of the churches. Did he have in mind the Jewish practice of praying three times a day as seen in the life of the prophet Daniel and John and Peter (Dan. 6:11; Acts 3:1)? Every day he prayed for those who had turned their lives over to Christ. The apostle could also have in mind his prayer life as he walked on journeys or making tents or throughout the day in his house imprisonment in Rome. Can you imagine the impact of Paul's prayers upon the pagan Roman soldier attached to the other end of his chain? One of best times to pray is while you are walking, riding in your car, or working at a task. Prayer is not limited to a formal bowing your head and closing your eyes. For Paul the important thing was consistency. He was doing it at every opportunity. It was part of his life style.

His thanksgiving was address "to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3). God has revealed Himself personally and fully in the person of His eternal Son. No one else can better reveal God than His own unique one of a kind Son. He knows the Father's eternal purpose better than anyone else. Paul has absolute confidence in the total deity of Christ and His perfect humanity.

## **Reasons for Paul's thanksgiving**

To the Corinthian church Paul wrote, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves" (2 Corinthians 4:6-7).

God was at work in his life and in the church.

### **1. He thanks God for the testimony of the believers at Colossae.**

He has been praying for them "since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints" (v. 4). Paul heard from Epaphras about their faith in Christ. He had never been to Colossae (2:1-2). He praised God for the report from Epaphras about their love, faith and hope.

No doubt the word "faith" in verse four refers to the initial trust in the person and finished saving work of Jesus Christ. They have a saving relationship with God because of Christ. A person is not a Christian because

relationship with God because of Christ. A person is not a Christian because they have faith; they are Christians because they have faith "in Christ" Jesus. Christ is the object of their faith. He is the one who saves. The sphere in which their faith resided was Christ.

He praised God because they had heard the gospel and put their faith in Christ as their Savior. He rejoiced over the demonstration of God's grace in their lives. They have been born again and were continuing in their walk with Christ. Paul breaks forth with thanksgiving to God for them. Their faith pictured the initial act of trusting in Christ for eternal life. But they also had a living personal faith in Christ moment by moment. Their faith resided in Christ. Their faith rested in Christ. It was like an anchor on the bottom of the ocean.

You and I can give praise today for our own salvation. Thank God we have been born again. But we can also give praise to God for the salvation of family members, and the members of our church who have experienced God's saving grace.

## **2. Paul thanks God for their love for all the saints (v. 4b).**

They love one another with a sacrificial love. Paul has heard about "the love which you have for all the saints" (v. 4b).

This love in the heart of the Colossians was being expressed toward all the saints. It was to all the saints without exception. It was a consistent communion of the saints. It was an all embracing fellowship.

Paul rejoiced over this continuing demonstration of their self-sacrificing love for one another.

## **3. Paul gives thanks to God for the "hope laid up for you in heaven" (v. 5a).**

They heard the gospel of truth and received eternal life. We can give thanks to God for our own salvation and for the many who have come to Christ all over the world. Paul gives thanks to God the Father "because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel" (Colossians 1:5).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news. Anytime we preach the gospel we bring good news of God's saving grace in Jesus Christ that will save you, forgive you of all your sins, and give you eternal life.

It is the gospel of truth which is the essence of the gospel based on the historical facts of the birth, life death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.

What will you do with Jesus Christ? The apostle Peter finished up one of his great sermons saying, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus told His disciples, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6).

This was not the exclusive hope of the false teachers who were trying to lead the believers in Christ astray. The good news of Jesus Christ and His saving grace is for all men and women everywhere.

Our "hope" is stored up, put away for one's use. It is a present hope centered in Christ (Col. 1:27). Nothing can touch this hope because Paul says the place of storage is heaven where God the Father is presently. It is safe; it is secure; it is protected. The word was originally used for storing up supplies for faithful servants of

safe; it is secure; it is protected. The word was originally used for storing up supplies for faithful servants of the Persian rulers. These Christians had heard the word of truth before they heard the false teachings. They have a confident expectation or prospect of eternal life with God the Father. It is a hope that "is laid up for you in heaven."

The apostle Peter wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). This blessed hope is a living, imperishable, undefiled, unfading hope through the resurrection of Christ. Talk about eternal security. This hope is kept by the power of God.

#### **4. Paul gives thanks to God for the gospel that has been preached in the entire world (v. 6).**

The message of salvation "which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth" (v. 6). "Bearing fruit and growing" emphasizes the continuous activity of the gospel due to its inherent power. God is at work in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This good news has an inherent power. It transforms and empowers lives. It changes life from the inside out. Paul stresses the inward bearing of fruit and the outward growing activity of the truth.

The Word of God is constantly bearing fruit and increasing in their lives and everywhere else it is preached. The idea is to grow, to increase, and to develop. It is the outward expansion of the personal inner working of the truth of God in Christ Jesus. This fruitfulness and spiritual growth began on the day they heard the gospel and trust in Christ. Paul wrote to the Philippians about the same time, "in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now. For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:5-6).

He praises God because his readers have experienced God's saving grace. In the mind of Paul grace is a synonym for the gospel. He preached "the gospel of the grace of God." It is absolutely free, unmerited favor of God to those who can never deserve or earn it by any virtue or thing they do. It is always undeserved. The sinner never gets what he deserves! "The wages of sin is death . . ." "The free gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."

#### **5. He thanks God for the faithful pastor Epaphras (v. 7).**

"You learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf" (v. 7). Epaphras brought the gospel of the city of Colossae.

Paul described this faithful servant of God as "beloved fellow bond-servant." That is a powerful description of fellowship and inclusion. Paul was not protecting his little kingdom as some do. You would never find him stealing sheep. Here is a bond of love among God's servants.

In the Old Testament the highest compliment you could give was "servant of Yahweh." The prophets were God's servants. Christian pastors fit into that same class of servants of God. Paul uses one of his favorite terms, "bond-servant" (*doulos*). He is a "beloved fellow bond-servant." The stress is on relationship and attitude to Christ. A bond-slave or bond-servant is someone who was owned by another and so completely that he was dependent upon his master for everything in life. Epaphras was in submission to the will of God. His life was controlled by Him. He no longer owned his life; he had been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

blood of Jesus Christ.

"Beloved" is one who is loved by God.

Epaphras is one of Paul's co-laborers. He is a "faithful servant of Christ on our behalf." At the end of his letter, Paul tells us about the group that is with him in Rome. "As to all my affairs, Tychicus, our beloved brother and faithful servant and fellow bond-servant in the Lord, will bring you information. For I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know about our circumstances and that he may encourage your hearts; and with him Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother, who is one of your number. They will inform you about the whole situation here. Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you his greetings; and also Barnabas's cousin Mark (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him); and also Jesus who is called Justus; these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God who are from the circumcision, and they have proved to be an encouragement to me. Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bond-slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:7-12). The apostle was always surrounding himself with men and women like these. They were all faithful bond-servants of Christ Jesus.

We have an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison awaiting us in heaven.

## **6. Paul gives thanks for the Spirit inspired love in their lives (v. 8).**

The ministry of the Holy Spirit is to work in our lives in such a way that we love one another sacrificially the way God has loved us. This is a Holy Spirit inspired love. He has done a good work in their lives. In fact, He changes lives.

The love expressed is His work in the Christian. Love is the expression of their relationship with the Holy Spirit. Our task is to provide the tools and the spiritual environment in which every believer can live a Spirit-controlled, Christ-centered Christian life.

It is interesting that this is the only reference to the Holy Spirit in this letter. In this letter Paul ascribed the work of God that normally is associated with the Holy Spirit to Christ.

The expression of thanksgiving moves into specific petitions for these believers. Thanksgiving is an excellent way to begin our prayers from a grateful heart. After we have expressed our thanksgiving to Him we can readily begin making our petitions for His blessings on the spiritual needs of others.

## **SOME ABIDING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS**

### **When you are saved by grace through faith you want to tell the whole world about your most valued person.**

Will you take a few minutes today and tell a friend, a neighbor or a relative what Jesus Christ means to you? Share with him or her your testimony of what your life was like before you trusted in Christ. Tell them when you put your faith in Christ alone to save you, and then share the change Christ has made in your life. The important thing is to keep the focus on Christ. People in our day believe in a lot of false gospels which cannot save; they need to hear the truth in Christ Jesus. Because we are in possession of the gospel we are under obligation to share it.

obligation to share it.

### **When you are saved by grace your heart is filled with thanksgiving.**

Even on the most difficult days you can find things to praise and give thanks to God. Paul was in a Roman prison awaiting a decision from demented Nero, but he could praise God for His abundant provision of friends, saving grace, and the missionary movement across the Roman Empire.

When your heart is filled with thanksgiving and praise you will spend time in prayer daily. You will have a regularly scheduled time of prayer. You will also sense the need to pray spontaneously as the need arises. Anytime, anyplace regardless of the situation we can go to the throne of God in prayer. You can ask God for wisdom in a difficult situation. You can ask for His strength when facing a temptation. You can ask for His sustaining grace to see you through a stressful moment. We can be filled with praise and thanksgiving throughout the day. We can silently call upon His name in the classroom, courtroom, or corporate office. There is also the time to pray with brothers and sisters in Christ as we seek His face together in worship and in service.

### **When you are a servant leader you encourage your co-laborers.**

For Paul it was never I win – you lose. It was never a looking out for #1. You would never find him playing one person or group against another.

Servant leaders look for opportunities to encourage and praise another person's work and ministry.

### **When you keep your focus on Jesus Christ you gain the respect to be heard when a word of correction is called for.**

Does a man's message line up with the Word of God? Is he preaching or teaching his own private truth or is he preaching the objective truth about Christ? Is he teaching factual statements about spiritual reality? Everyone is entitled to their own private opinions, but there is no such thing as private truth.

Sure the apostle had to correct the errors of teaching, but he did it in a firm, focused conviction about the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Paul focused his energies on Jesus Christ. In this great letter we find Paul's greatest statements about who Jesus Christ is.

Spiritual intelligence comes through growing in the will of God by knowing the Word of God.

Are you a partaker in the inheritance of the saints? It comes only through an intimate love relationship with Jesus Christ.

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