

Colossians 1: 1-12

Paul's Thanksgiving and Prayer

Paul begins his letter by giving thanks to God for the Colossian Christians. He is specifically thankful for the evidences of their salvation that Epaphras shared with him and the success that the Gospel has had in their lives. He then expresses that his constant prayer for them is that they grow and mature in Christ.

Evidence of salvation

Triad of Christian virtues

- Faith in Jesus Christ, love for the saints, hope of eternal life
- Always defining evidences of salvation – 1 Thess 1:2-4
- In this context – used a little differently than normal

Hearing about the hope of eternal life

- Paul puts it as the reason for the other two virtues – faith & love
- “Christian hope is not mere wishing – fervent yearning, confident expectation, and patient waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promises – a full assurance that these promises will be realized.” Hendrickson
 - Specific promise mentioned here – eternal life
- It stimulated their faith in Christ Jesus – the source of eternal life
- It inspired their love for all the saints – those they would spend eternity with
 - Love for the saints is mentioned twice – 1:4, 8
 - 2X emphasizes its importance in Paul’s mind – in all his letters he strongly encourages peace, unity and love toward one another
 - Also in the Apostle John’s mind
 - 1 John 2:10 3:23 4:7-11 4:20-21
 - This kind of love is a fruit of the Spirit 1:8 (only time the Spirit is mentioned in the letter)

Success of the Gospel

The Gospel is the “word of truth” (1:5b)

- Christian hope is based upon truth – being sure of something creates hope

The Gospel is the “grace of God in truth” (1:6b)

- Grace is the essence of the gospel
- Acts 20:24 – Paul’s said that his whole purpose in life was to “testify solemnly of the gospel of the grace of God”.
- The gospel is a message of unmerited favor, loving forgiveness, sustaining strength, eternal hope – the grace of God

The Gospel is guaranteed success (1:6-7)

- It does and will go out into all the world – God will make sure of it
- God sends it out through the means faithful servants of Christ – Epaphras
- The Gospel will be heard & understood by God’s elect

- The Gospel will bear fruit and increase – just as it did in their lives since they heard and understood it
 - > Paul is thankful for the guaranteed success of the gospel – motivation to keep preaching it.

Christian growth and maturity

Foundation – knowledge, wisdom, understanding of God’s will & truth

- We must come to know God’s will if we are to grow
- We need spiritual wisdom & understanding to know how to apply God’s will

Growth – right thinking leads to right living - “As a man thinks, so he is”

- A life that glorifies God – “Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”
- A life that pleases God – “To please Him in all respects”
 - A righteous God is pleased with righteousness
 - A life that pleases God allows enjoyment of God
- A life that blesses others – “Bearing fruit in every good work”
- A life that continues to grow in the knowledge of God
 - The experience of stepping out in faith to obey leads to greater knowledge of God
- A life that is empowered by God’s strength – “strengthen with all power according to his glorious might”
 - Power to live this kind of life & experience this kind of growth comes from God himself
 - A gift given in answer to prayer (what Paul is praying for them to have)

Maturity – the goal of increasing knowledge and growth is to develop proven character (over a period of time)

- Steadfastness, patience, and filled with the joy of salvation

Praying for saints

Praying for other believers

- Once Paul heard about the evidences of God’s grace in their lives, he was prompted to make them a regular part of his prayer life.
- He was praying for believers he had never seen and did not know
- Do we ever do that? Examples?

Praying for other believers faithfully

- “Praying always for you” (1:3) - “Have not ceased to pray for you” (1:9)
- Are we faithful in our prayers for others?

Praying for other believers with thanksgiving

- What is Paul specifically thankful for?
 - For being confident in their salvation and the success of the gospel
- Guide for our prayers – should include thanksgiving
 - We should be thankful for brothers & sisters in Christ
 - We should express our thankfulness for them in pray regularly

- Will shape our attitude about them

Praying for other believers' knowledge, growth and maturity

- Guide for our prayers – what to pray for
 - Foundation of knowledge, wisdom & understanding of truth / God's will
 - Grow to live a life that glorifies God, pleases Him, blesses others, continually increases in the knowledge of God, and strengthen by his might
 - Mature to develop a proven character of steadfastness, patience and full of the joy of their salvation

Relation to major themes of the letter

Paul is thankful for and confident in their salvation.

- But he does want them to give in the two threats they are facing
 - Falling back into their pagan immoral life
 - Giving in to the false teaching they were encountering
- So he starts off his letter reminding them that it was the gospel of Jesus Christ, not something else that had first brought about the fruit in their life of faith, love and hope.
- His prayer for them is that they will continue to grow and mature in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He addresses the false teaching by implications in his prayer. Spiritual growth and maturity is the result of two things.

- Knowledge of God and his will gained from the readily available preach word of God – not from some hidden mystery
- God's almighty power working in their lives through the truth they have learned.
 - In other words, not from any other source or means such as keeping the OT ceremonial laws, new revelations of mysteries from angels, or subjecting oneself to rigid ascetic rules.

At the end of Paul's prayer he begins to introduce the theme that the Father has redeemed us by his Divine Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The end of the prayer and the next two verses connect and overlap.

Colossians 13: 12-14

The Father has redeemed us by His Beloved Son

The subject of these verses is our redemption. The source is the Father. His act of redemption is described as qualifying us and rescuing us. The agent of redemption is His Son. Our response should be thanksgiving.

The Source of our redemption – the Father

- James 1:17 – The Father of Lights is the source of all good gifts
- James 1:18 – The Father specifically is the source of our spiritual life - redemption

The Father's act of redemption described as a qualification

- The Father qualified us
 - To make worthy those who are not worthy - We on our own are not qualified for anything good
 - Justification - The Father declares us not guilty; instead declares us righteous
- What did he qualify us for?
 - To share in the **inheritance** of the saints in Light
 - 1:21 - Formerly they (we) were alienated from God not qualified to receive any kind of inheritance from Him.
 - OT idea of inheritance – The nation of Israel was given the land of Canaan.
 - Each tribe & family was allotted a portion of the land
 - This portion was handed down through generations as an inheritance.
 - Knowing you had an inheritance in the land was extremely important – this was the hope of all young men to one day receive their inheritance.
 - NT uses the OT earthly terms to describe spiritual truths
 - The hope that we have in Christ is a better inheritance
 - 1:5 - “The hope laid up for you in heaven” – which was the motivation behind their faith in Christ Jesus
 - Our inheritance is a heavenly one – an eternal imperishable one
 - Inheritance of the saint “In Light” – light represent all that is good and glorious
 - Goodness, holiness, joy, love, peace, glory, liberty
 - Light = nothing is hidden or shadowy anymore
 - This is the way our eternal inheritance is described as!!

The Father's act of redemption described as a rescue

- He rescued us from captivity
 - Our situation was not just that we needed a better inheritance for the future.
 - We need to be rescued because we were held captive as prisoners in a terrible evil kingdom of darkness.
 - Under the rule of Satan & our own sins in the kingdom of darkness
 - Controlled by the power of sin and evil forces
 - Only free will to sin in our fallen state
 - No power to break ourselves free
 - Had to be rescued by someone else
- He transferred us to a new kingdom
 - His rescue took us out of one kingdom and put us into another
 - Kingdom implies a ruler
 - New ruler is God's beloved Son - “The Son of his love”
 - Before under a hateful ruler
 - Now under a loving ruler

The agent of redemption is His Son

- Redemption is found in a person – the beloved Son of God

- The Father justifies (qualifies) us by placing us in his Son.
- The Father rescues us by united us with His Son in his death, burial and resurrection.
- “In Him” – the first of several references to our union with Christ
 - A theme that we will expand later in the letter
- Redemption is the forgiveness of sins
 - The Father’s qualification of us involves the removing of guilt
 - The Father will only transfer us into the kingdom of his beloved Son if our sins are removed – it is a holy kingdom.

The proper response to redemption is joyful thanksgiving

- 1:12 – “Giving thanks to the Father” - why?
- Because he qualified us to receive an eternal inheritance in the kingdom of His Son; a kingdom of Light and Love- something we are not worthy of – amazing!
- Because he rescued us from the grips of sin and Satan and eternal darkness – hallelujah!
- When you contemplate regularly what all God has done for us in His Son, you will become joyfully thankful -> The Lord’s Supper

Now Paul uses this opportunity in his letter to show that God’s Son, in whom we have redemption is a Divine Redeemer and therefore supreme in every way (next week’ lesson).