

A Prayer to Keep Growing and Going Colossians 1:3-14

This morning, we will be considering Paul's words to the church in Colosse from chapter 1, where I invite you to turn in your Bibles. Next week Dan Green will be here and planning on staying for our luncheon and then for a time of shoe box packing. I want to strongly encourage you to be here next week, not only for the luncheon and the fun of packing shoe boxes but also to meet and hear from Dan. It is also a time for him to meet you. Be praying for both he and the Board as they consider the interim pastoral role.

Today, our focus is from **Colossians 1:3-14**. It is one of his prison letters that scholars believe was written about the same time as Philemon and Ephesians and delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus. This church had apparently gotten its start when one of its citizens, Epaphras, had visited Ephesus where he heard Paul proclaim the gospel and was saved. He then went back to Colosse armed with the gospel and excited about his new faith, much like we saw in that video clip about the little girl, Epiphani in Ghana. Both Epaphras and Epiphani joyfully and dutifully shared the gospel, the result of which is the establishment and growth of the church in both places.

Paul had never been to Colosse, yet he wrote to them excited about what he had heard about them from his friend Epaphras. Paul calls them holy and faithful, words that describe you and me. He is overjoyed and thankful for what he has heard about their faith. It is the kind of thanks that forms into a prayer to God who made it possible for them to belong to the family of God and receive an eternal inheritance. His prayer also encourages them to continue to grow in their faith reminding them that they were removed from one kingdom into another through Christ who had forgiven them of sin and redeemed them.

What Paul has to say to them are words that I would like to say to you, words that I want you to carry with you and practice. As I look back over almost 20 years of ministry here, I am thankful for the spiritual growth I have seen in you, thankful for your stand on

the truth of God's Word, thankful for the spiritual fruit evident in your lives, but praying that you will continue to grow even more in your faith living by God's Word and His will for you. Keep growing in and going for the gospel.

Let's consider three things this morning, the first of which is Paul's prayer for the church

I. PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH – vv. 3-6

Paul told the Philippian church that thanksgiving should accompany their prayers and supplications (**Philippians 4:6-7**).

We always include a prayer leaflet in our bulletin as a way of reminding us to pray for a variety of requests from those who hold office, to those who need to know Christ as Savior, to those who have tangible needs like work issues or health concerns or financial needs. What would happen if we included thanks for the spiritual well-being of each other as well, to pray for or about growth for each other's faith?

As Paul writes, it is first a prayer of admiration.

A. It's a Prayer of Admiration – vv. 3-6a

The "we" of **verse 3** is of course both he and Timothy, who is the co-author of this letter. Most likely Timothy wrote the letter as Paul dictated it to him. Knowing Timothy's heart for people, we can be assured that he was also praying for these believers in Colosse with the same passion as Paul.

We also notice that it is a prayer of thanksgiving for these believers. I say this just as much to myself as I say to you – how much of our prayer time is given to thanks, especially for spiritual growth we see in others. Oh, maybe we thank God for the beautiful day or for our food when we eat or for our family or health or any other number of things. But how much time do we spend thanking God for others?

Paul points to our need to pray for others and to do so with thanksgiving.

Now notice that Paul doesn't say he prays for them all the time. Maybe he does. When they came to

mind he prayed for them and thanked God for them.

When I was counseling at camp, there was a retired schoolteacher who was like the counselor to the counselors. Mr. Moore always did the devotional during our counselor circle when campers were in chapel. During the day you could find him sitting on any number of benches along the various paths around camp with a thick file folder in his lap. In the folder were the prayer cards of all the missionaries he was praying for. He would take one out and pray for that missionary. I don't know this for sure, but if I were a betting man, I'd bet he had all the counselors' names on a sheet praying for each one.

Paul was a praying man, and sitting in prison he had a lot of time to do just that. **Do we pray at stop lights or are we counting down the seconds before the light turns green while we think about where we are going?**

Do we pray in the store checkout line for those ahead of us or for the cashier?

Do we pray for the people pumping gas next to us?

Like Jesus who prayed all the time, Paul was a praying man, and he wanted others to know that he was praying for them.

What he tells them is that when he prays for them, he thanks God for them and then he gives the reasons. In the case of the Colossians, he has three reasons why he gave thanks for them. They should be familiar because it's what he writes about in **I Corinthians 13**.

He first thanks God for their faith.

1. Paul was thankful for their faith

Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

The NIV says it's **"being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."**

The ESV describes faith as **"the conviction of what we do not see."**

There are two important words in there. They are the words assurance and conviction. Faith for the believer isn't some vague hope based on some idea

that may or may not come true.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have some estimated 8 million followers worldwide, yet they believe that only 144,000 will actually go to heaven. There is no hope for over 90% of them that they'll be selected. In my senior year of High school I missed going to the State meet by one runner. Think if you were 144,001st person missing heaven by one person. My faith in Christ assures me of my salvation and my eternal destiny.

These believers in Colosse along with Christians today share the same confidence in the power of God through the atonement of Christ that our heavenly home is guaranteed. We can go to bed every night with the assurance that what God said is true and he will never change His mind. That's what is so amazing about grace. It is by grace that we are saved through faith, not by anything we can do. My confidence isn't in me it's in Christ and the promises of God that make my faith a reality.

Here's a simple yet biblical definition of faith: **"trusting in something you cannot explicitly see."**

John MacArthur adds that faith is being persuaded that something is true and then to trust it. Faith isn't believing what you see, it's believing even though you don't see it yet.

The word for faith in the Greek comes from a word that means to obey. Obedience and belief go together. When we hear the truth of the gospel that Christ died for our sins and that to have eternal life we must obey by believing, faith obeys by exercising that trust by placing our faith in Him for salvation and in nothing else. Faith plus something else isn't faith. If faith is being persuaded that something is true and then trusting in it, thinking that something else must be done to add to it isn't real or saving faith because you are actually trusting in something you can see vs. trusting in what God's Word says you have even though you can't see it.

Not one of you, me included, came into the sanctuary and went up to Carl and said, "Say, you're an engineer. Could you come over and test

the quality of my chair before I sit in it? I want to make sure it's safe before I sit down." Now, maybe you came into the sanctuary and had a look around and you noticed others sitting down and concluded that if they could sit down in a chair so could you. Or maybe you saw someone else walk over to a chair and sit down confirming that it was safe. Your faith in the chair's stability and quality gives you the confidence to sit down without questioning if it would hold you up.

We cannot see God, but His Word says He exists and that He rewards those who walk by faith. That faith pleases God (**Hebrews 11:6**). Paul hadn't actually seen their faith, but he had heard about it and was thankful for their faith because it was a faith that pleased God. Our faith is based on the fact or evidence of Scripture.

Many at the crucifixion who heard Jesus cry out that it was finished may have assumed that He meant He was about to die. For the believer, we understand those words to mean that with His death, He had atoned for our sin, making the necessary payment on our behalf that would redeem us, ensuring that God's wrath would not be meted out on those who placed their faith in Him. **John 3:16** says that those who believe in Christ will not perish. **Why can we and the believers of Colosse have such confidence?** It's because of the object of our faith, it is in God who made that promise. And because God cannot lie, we have the confidence that what He said will happen just the way He said it would. Paul was thankful for their faith.

Paul was also thankful for their love.

2. Paul was thankful for their love

Assumed in this is that they first had a love for the Lord. That is, after all, the greatest commandment, to love the Lord with our whole being. The second is to love others as ourselves. **John 13:34-35** says that we prove that we are the disciples of Christ if we love others. John would later write that if we don't love others who we can see, how can we say that we love God whom we can't see. The proof of our love for God is in how we love others.

Everyone I meet with for pre-marital counseling hears me tell them that the degree to which they love God is the degree to which they will love their spouse. John goes on to say in **I John 4:7-8** that this kind of love for others comes from God and is proof that we have been born again. Anyone who doesn't love others doesn't know God.

I'm not sure who the author was but I read this once from Warren Wiersbe.

To dwell above with saints we love,
That will indeed be glory.
But to dwell below with saints we know,
Well, that's another story.

Here Paul thanks God for their love for others and to the Romans he adds another dimension to how we should love others when he writes in **Romans 12:9** that **"love must be sincere."** The KJV uses the phrase **"without hypocrisy."** In other words, love is to be genuine. It is to be true, without any deceit. There isn't to be any ulterior motives in why or how we love. In other words, it's not conditional but unconditional. Sincere love isn't just an attitude, but also something expressed in action. I can tell Robyn I love her all day long, but the real proof in the pudding is by showing her through my actions.

John says in his letter that **"We know we have passed from death into life, because we love the brethren."** (**I John 3:14**)

I am thankful for the love you show one another. Paul was also thankful for their love. He then rounded out this trilogy by saying he was thankful for their hope. It's a hope in what is to come that was the springboard of their faith and love.

3. Paul was thankful for their hope

Faith and hope are conjoined twins, inseparably linked together. Belief leads to hope. These believers had a faith in God that looked forward to the promises that God had stored up for them in heaven. Hope is confident expectation that rests in the character of God to carry out what He promised. Politicians make a lot of promises that they cannot keep. This hope is in the anticipation of what is yet to come. It's the hope of something better than the

believers in **Hebrews 11** waited for, longed for. It's the anticipation of an inheritance in an eternal home that Peter spoke of when he said that this world is not our home, we're just passing through, an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled, a hope that will not fade away (**I Peter 1:4**). The writer of Hebrews also says that because God is incapable of lying, this hope is an anchor for the soul, one that is firm and secure (**Heb. 6:18-19**).

Paul said this hope is in something that is securely tucked away in heaven waiting for us. It is something that nothing on this earth nor any demonic power can ever rob us of. It is a hope that is laid up, stored, reserved for the believer. **Do we have that kind of steadfast assurance in what God has promised?** As Paul prayed he was thankful that the believers in Colosse had such unshakeable hope.

His was a prayer of admiration. It was also a prayer of acknowledgement.

B. It's a Prayer of Acknowledgement – v. 6b

Paul took a moment in his thoughts to mention the impact of the gospel around the world. The same saving faith in the gospel of Christ that had been preached to them had been shared around the world, the evidence of which is seen in that it was bearing fruit in the lives of many others. The fruit of the gospel was producing people whose lives were being forever changed as the gospel spread.

We are hearing testimonies of how many who are coming to Christ through the crisis in the middle east. We are hearing testimonies of how many are coming to Christ through the crisis in Ukraine and Russia. We saw on the earlier video how many are coming to Christ in the red zone in Colombia. Read the newsletters from CEF or the Jesus film or Forget Me Not ministries or Reach the Forgotten Jail ministry and you hear about the impact of the gospel taking place in the hearts of many around the world.

I think this is a reassurance to the believers in Colosse that God was at work around the world in the same way He had been at work in their city.

Isaiah 55:10-11

No matter what or who or why, God's Word will continue to be proclaimed in power and bring the results He intends. Nothing can thwart His plan or purpose for the spread of the gospel.

Like Paul speaking to the church at Colosse, let's also give admiration and acknowledgement for what God is doing in the world and through our church.

The second thing we notice in **verses 7-8** is Paul's partner at the church.

II. PAUL'S PARTNER AT THE CHURCH – vv. 7-8

I mentioned earlier that it's believed that Epaphras had heard the gospel preached by Paul in Ephesus and then took the gospel back to Colosse. It reminds me of **Luke 9:26-39** where Jesus healed the man who had been possessed by a legion of demons. He was so overjoyed by what Jesus had done for him freeing him from the grip of demonic power that he wanted to travel around with Jesus. Instead, Jesus told him to go back to his hometown and tell them what great things God had done for him.

Epaphras returned to Colosse with great zeal and shared the good news of salvation through Jesus.

First, Paul described him as a fruitful messenger.

A. Epaphras Was A Fruitful Messenger – v. 7a

“You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant”

Paul links Epaphras with his own ministry by using the word “our.” Epaphras was Paul's representative in Colosse, serving there on behalf of Paul. What he had learned from Paul, he took back home and shared with the people who in turn came to know Christ as Savior. The word servant means someone who is subservient to, and entirely at the disposal of his master. In Roman times, the term could be used for someone who voluntarily served others, but usually referred to someone who was held in a permanent position of servitude. They essentially had no rights.

In a metaphorical sense, Paul inferred that he, along

with Epaphras were the willing slaves of Christ and that in his service was a fruitful messenger sharing the good news with those in Colosse, which brings us to Paul's second commendation of Epaphras. Paul says Epaphras was a faithful minister.

B. Epaphras Was A Faithful Minister – vv. 7b-8

“Epaphras...who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.”

Because Paul couldn't be there in person due to his imprisonment, Epaphras was the boots on the ground serving the church on Paul's behalf.

Faithful means to be loyal and steadfast. It means to be reliable and trusted.

In the Bible, to be faithful is to be reliable, steady and unwavering in your beliefs, actions, and commitments, especially in your relationship with God. It stands to reason that if you are faithful in your relationship with God, you will be faithful in your relationships with others.

One author writes that **“When a person walks consistently with God, in humble service to Him, he or she can be called ‘faithful.’ When Nehemiah had to leave Jerusalem to return to Persia, he put Hanani and Hananiah in charge. The reason for his choice of these men was that they were ‘more faithful and God-fearing . . . than many’ (Nehemiah 7:2, ESV). Nehemiah needed men of character whom he could trust. Men who would not take bribes, who were committed to the welfare of the people, and who would uphold the integrity of the office. Notice, also, that faithfulness is associated with fearing God. The better we truly know God, the more we will want to imitate Him (Ephesians 5:1).”**

Paul had a great partner at the church in Colosse who served the believers. **Could we be described as a fruitful messenger or a faithful minister?**

Our final point from this passage is in **verses 9-14** where we see Paul's petition about the church.

III. PAUL'S PETITION ABOUT THE CHURCH

– vv. 9-14

Paul had just said some great things about their faith, but he didn't want them to remain there. He wanted them to continue to grow and mature. You have heard me say before that faith is not static, meaning it will never stay the same. It will either grow or diminish. It will either increase or decrease. God has given us all we need to mature in our faith, but it's our desire and resolve to implement or apply what He has given to that will determine if we will grow in our faith. Your garden won't grow a thing if you keep the seeds in the packet. Knowing that spiritual maturity takes effort, Paul has a plea with God about the church.

A. Paul's Plea – vv. 9-11

There are three specific things Paul prays for.

1. He prays for their spiritual sight – v. 9

Paul didn't want them only to be filled with Biblical facts. Facts alone can produce spiritual pride on the one hand and spiritual lethargy on the other. We can get puffed up about how much we know about the Bible that it makes no spiritual impact in how we live which leads to spiritual lethargy thinking that there's nothing else for us to learn. But when the Bible speaks of biblical wisdom and knowledge is refers to an application of what we have learned. God doesn't want us to be Bible encyclopedias, He wants us to be biblical examples. That's why when Paul writes his letters to the various churches he begins with what they need to know about biblical truth or doctrine but then follows it up with how to apply those truths to everyday life. Biblical knowledge should always lead to a changed life. My prayer is that when you leave here each Sunday you learn something you need to know but also that you know what to do with it, how it can relate to something in your life that will make a difference in how you live.

Paul wanted them to be filled full or complete with the knowledge of God's will for them that would bring them closer to knowing the Lord and being like Him in character. That's my prayer for you as well.

Such a change in character through knowing and doing the will of God leads to the second thing he wanted for the church – spiritual stability.

2. He prays for their spiritual stability – v. 10

Paul told the Ephesian church to be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might and then gave them a list of armor to help in the battle to stand firm in their faith. For the Colossians, he prayed for their spiritual stability in order to live a life worthy to God, a life that would please God, a life that would grow in knowing God, a life anchored in God, a life that would bear fruit for God.

There is the fruit of good works as we serve Christ.
There is the fruit of our lips which is our praise to God.
There is the fruit of those we lead to Christ.
Those all come from the stability we have in Christ as we live to please Him and serve Him in faithfulness.
This leads to the spiritual success we experience in **verse 11**.

3. He prays for their spiritual success – v. 11

Verse 11 speaks to our inability to be successful apart from the power of Christ. He uses three similar terms but all different Greek words to emphasize that our success only comes through the work of God's Spirit in us – strengthened, power, and might. It is the Spirit's limitless power that is at work in us to produce a life that bears spiritual fruit. This power is available to the believer filled with the knowledge of God. Power within that comes through the enablement of God's Spirit that leads to power without to bear fruit and live a God honoring life. **There is a lot of power in my car engine that won't do a thing if I don't turn the key on. But with all that power running, it still won't do a thing if I don't engage the transmission.** We won't be spiritually successful if we don't engage the Holy Spirit to make us more like Christ.

That is Paul's plea for the believers in Colosse and my plea for you to have spiritual sight, spiritual stability and spiritual success.

Paul has a closing thought. It's a word of praise, not praise for them, but praise to God.

B. Paul's Praise – vv. 12-14

He mentions three things for which He praises God.
It's praise that God remade them – **v. 12**
It's praise that God rescued them – **v. 13**
It's praise that God redeemed them – **v. 14**

While we are giving praise to God for what God is doing in others, let's not forget to praise God who made that change possible. The word **"qualified"** means to make sufficient or to make fit. It is His work through the Holy Spirit that regenerates us, changes us from the old nature to the new nature. Only then can we be fit to inherit what He has promised. We had no capacity to escape the dominion that held us in its grip. But through faith in Christ, we were immediately transferred out of darkness and into His kingdom of light. It is through Him that we have redemption and are forever forgiven of our sin.

Redemption requires the payment of a price. That payment saves us from sin and death. That payment was made by Christ. We have been bought from the slave market of sin by the ransom paid to God by Christ through His death on the cross. It's something we remember as we take communion this morning, and something for which we give God praise.

I am thankful for your spiritual faith in the gospel and love through the gospel toward each other.

I am thankful for your spiritual partnership in the gospel.

I am thankful for your spiritual growth because of the gospel.

But continue to grow in your knowledge of the will of God as you live a life worthy of Him that you might please Him in all things.