

Paul's Thanks and Prayer for Spiritual Maturity

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(Colossians 1:3-14)

Paul's Appreciation for the Colossians

Col 1:3 – We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Father emphasizes the personal family relationship believers have with God. Paul is **praying always** for them. **Praying** is the Greek word *proseuchomai*, the typical word for bringing your thoughts and requests to God. **Always** is positioned between **giving thanks** and **praying**, so it could go with either of those actions.

Col 1:4 – since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints;

Paul had only **heard** about the Colossians. Even though Paul carried out an intensive two-year ministry throughout the Roman province of Asia Minor (Acts 19:10), he apparently had not been to Colossae. Later in Col 2:1 Paul says that they had not seen his face, and the Greek word **see** (*horaō*) means “to look at” and by implication “to become personally acquainted with.”

First, Paul is thankful for their faith in Christ Jesus. **Faith** is the Greek word *pistis* which is the firm conviction of the truth of something. The Colossians' faith is **in Christ Jesus**. The object of faith is crucially important.

Second, Paul is thankful for the **love** which they have **for all the saints**. The Greek word *agape* is used, which could be described as unmerited, unselfish, and sacrificial love. Someone has said, “In the Christian life, faith is the root and love is the fruit.” The love which you have **for all the saints** is a special familial love in the household of faith.

Col 1:5 – because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel

Third Paul is thankful for the **hope** exhibited by the Colossians. They had an eager expectation of the future life which they knew was **laid up** for them. The Greek word for the phrase **laid up** means to be stored away, or reserved and waiting for the arrival of the owner. Even though we may not see them here and now, there are many things that we have in Christ which are reserved for us and wait for our arrival in **heaven** to enjoy them.

Starting in the last half of verse 5 Paul briefly describes what happened when the Colossians heard about the good news of what Christ Jesus did for them. The word **gospel** simply means

good news. They had **previously heard** these truths about Christ in the **word of truth**. God's Word is truth (John 17:17). The proof that objective truth really does exist is in the next verse.

Col 1:6 – 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;

The Colossians themselves are proof that the gospel message is true and effective. The **word of truth** ... has **come to you** and is **constantly bearing fruit**. Lives are being changed for the better, and the positive fruit of godly living is evident not only in the Colossians but also in **all the world**. The gospel is a universal truth that was having this same effect everywhere. God's work of reconciliation and renewal began immediately – **since the day you heard and understood** the message. The word **understood** is the Greek word *epignosis*, which means thoroughly understanding, recognizing the importance, accepting and applying something personally. The **truth** concerning the **grace of God** is the undeserved favor and blessing that comes to a believer as a result of Christ's death in our place and His resurrection from the dead.

**Col 1:7-8 – just as you learned [it] from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf,
⁸ and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.**

The Greek word translated “**learned**” (*manthanō*) can carry the idea of gaining information, comprehending it, and then obeying it. **Epaphras** brought the gospel to the Colossians since he himself was from Colossae (Col 4:12), and he was working **on Paul's behalf** when he took the gospel message to his hometown. Here Paul describes him as a **beloved fellow bondservant**. Epaphras told Paul about the conditions of the church in Colossae and reported their sacrificial love for the brethren empowered through the Holy **Spirit**.

Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Maturity

In verses 3 & 4 Paul said that ever **since he heard** of their faith, hope, and love, he poured out his gratitude to God for them in his prayers. Starting in verse 9 Paul gives specific details about his prayer requests for the Colossians.

Col 1:9 – For this reason also, since the day we heard [of it,] we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

First, he asks that they **may be filled with the knowledge of God's will**. The word **knowledge** is not the normal Greek word for knowledge (*gnosis*). Instead Paul uses the same Greek word we saw in verse 6, which intensifies the meaning. *epignosis* means “thoroughly understanding, recognizing the importance, accepting and applying something personally in our lives.”

Here Paul explains that he wants them to be **filled** with knowledge. This is the Greek word *pleroo* which means to completely fill to capacity. **Filled** or **fullness** are key words in the Book of Colossians. Their knowledge should be **in all spiritual wisdom and understanding**.

Wisdom is the Greek word *sophia*, which some have described as “the ability to apply knowledge correctly.” **Understanding** is the Greek word *sunesis*, which literally means “flowing together,” a mental “putting together” of ideas and actions to gain the best result. This will help to protect them from errors in their own thinking as well as from attacks by false teachers who may be trying to influence them.

Col 1:10 – so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please [Him] in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

The word translated **walk** is the Greek word *peripateo* which is typically used to mean “daily walk and life or lifestyle.” Paul is saying that the more they know about God’s will and His ways, the more they will be able to live lives that are worthy of God and pleasing to Him. What we believe will affect how we behave. Paul says if we gain godly knowledge and we demonstrate that knowledge in a pleasing and productive lifestyle, then God is able to **increase our knowledge** even more.

This sequence describes the process of growing into spiritual maturity, and that is what Paul is praying for the Colossians. With a foundation of faith in Christ Jesus, believers begin to grow in their knowledge and understanding of God and His will, which leads to living in a way that pleases God and grows into productive service for God. Next, Paul will tell us what resources God provides that can empower us to live this kind of pleasing and productive life.

Col 1:11 – strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously

Paul says we can be **strengthened with all power**. The Greek word for **power** is *dunamis*, which means “inherent power or ability that arises from the nature of something.” This comes **according to His glorious might**. Since the Holy Spirit indwells every believer from the moment of salvation, He is able to energize us when we have very little strength of our own.

Paul ends this verse by describing two times when we might need this godly inner strength. First, he says it is for **attaining all steadfastness**. **Steadfastness** is the Greek word *hupomone* which literally means “to abide under.” It could be translated as “patiently enduring difficult circumstances.” **Patience** is the Greek word *makrothumia* which literally means “long tempered.” It can be translated as “longsuffering or forbearance toward people.” So God can assist us whether we are dealing with difficult circumstances or with difficult people. The final word (**joyously**) is from the same Greek word (*chara*) that was typically used in the salutation of ancient letters. It means “with gladness, cheerfulness, or joy.” It is possible for us to handle difficult circumstances and difficult people, but it is only when we do it with cheerfulness that it brings glory to God.

Col 1:12 – giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Giving thanks to God is an essential quality as we deal with the ups and downs of life. When we give thanks, we acknowledge that every situation is in His hands and under His control. God

Qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. An heir is someone who has been granted an inheritance. Even though they do not currently possess their inheritance, they know that it is guaranteed by right. It is the same **hope laid up in heaven** for us (Col 1:5). This inheritance is described as being in the glorious **light** of God, which contrasts with the darkness Paul is going to explain in the next verse.

Col 1:13-14 – For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

In contrast to the inheritance in light, there is also a **dark domain** from which God **rescued us**. **Domain** is the Greek word *exousia* which means a realm of power and authority that rules over us. Paul states both the negative and positive aspects of what Christ accomplished for us. First, God **rescued us out of** the power and sphere of the dark domain. **Rescued** is the Greek word *rhuomai* which means “to draw or pull something to oneself.” Second, on the positive side, God **transferred us into** Christ’s kingdom. **Transferred** is the Greek word *metestēsen*, which means “to move from one state or place to another.”

Just as God made us legal heirs of our heavenly inheritance, which we will ultimately possess in the future according to Col 1:12, so He also guaranteed our legal status as members of Christ’s future kingdom – even though we will not actually experience the kingdom until the coming of Christ for His Church and our ultimate return to reign with Him during the millennial kingdom.

Paul also mentions another of the things that God accomplished for us through the death & resurrection of Christ. He says that in His beloved Son we have **redemption**. This is the powerful Greek word *apolutrōsis*, which means “to pay the ransom price for a slave or debtor in order to secure his release.”

So God “buys back” our lives, and then He “sends away” our sins. The **forgiveness of sins** literally means “to send away” and provide freedom or release. The Greek word for **sin** is *hamartiōn*, which means “to do wrong or to go wrong; to miss or wander from the path of righteousness.” God through Christ has provided an opportunity for freedom, which is given to every believer at the point when they put their trust in Christ’s work on their behalf.

In light of all that believers have received from God, no wonder Paul tells us to give thanks for everything He has done for us.