

The watchword of gratitude

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[0 : 00] Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 to 17. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you have a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

And over all these virtues, put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Since, as members of one body, you were called to peace and be thankful.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

[1 : 45] And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, the Father through him.

And now chapter 4 verses 2 to 6. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

And pray for us, to that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. Be wise in the way you act towards outsiders.

Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

[3 : 20] Amen. Let's turn back to the passage that we read, Colossians chapter 3 and verses 12 to 17.

First of all, we're not going to read through the whole of that section, but we're going to read just a few verses at the beginning of that section. First of all, Colossians chapter 3 and at verse 12.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other.

As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Now, as we read through these words earlier, you maybe have noticed that the word thankfulness, thankful, be thankful, to have gratitude, this thought keeps recurring through this passage.

[4 : 57] And it's interesting to note that. I think it's more than just interesting. I think it's very important to note that. That it's like a refrain. If this passage or these passages were a hymn or a song, this would be the kind of refrain or chorus that would be in it.

Be thankful. Have gratitude towards God for His goodness towards you.

And you might say to yourself then, why? Why is this the refrain that Paul has writing to the church in Colossae in this section?

Why is this the thing that he keeps coming back to? It's almost like each section, there's this focus again, sometimes through each section, sometimes at the end of the section.

He keeps reinforcing this. We are to recognize that we have something to be thankful for.

[6 : 15] We are to recognize that we have cause for thanks. And it is something that should shape how we live our lives.

It should affect how we respond to the situations that face us. And in a way, I think what we see here is that this thankfulness, this gratitude, becomes almost like the oil in the machine of our actions.

Thankfulness and gratitude lubricating our lives, causing that connection between grace and our activity to actually work.

And I want us to think through basically three sections of these two passages that we've read. The last passage in chapter 4 is like one unit in itself.

And then there are two sections in the first passage. And the first focuses in on, you might say, bearing with one another.

[7 : 34] The way that we deal with one another in a kind and compassionate way. The next section deals with how we praise God with one another.

And how thankfulness comes into that as well. And then we also see that the Lord encourages thankfulness in the midst of our praying with and for one another.

So let's work our way through these three sections then. The first section is the verses that we've just read. And we see that it concludes with these words, and be thankful.

Be thankful as you bear with one another. Now we see in the passage reference being made to forgiving one another and being compassionate and kind towards one another.

Now these are very important themes because the Scriptures reveal God to us as a God of compassion, a God who shows kindness to His people, and indeed the God who has granted forgiveness to His people.

[9 : 10] Now, if that is true for us as those who have come to know God's salvation, have come to know God through faith in Jesus Christ, then these things should have an impact upon our lives and how our lives are lived out.

And that impact that it has, these things that we do in response to that are really an expression, or should be an expression, of thankfulness, of gratitude towards God.

When we recognize the compassion that He has shown towards us, when we recognize His great kindness towards us, and when we recognize how He has forgiven us, in thankfulness, we also seek to express these same characteristics in how we relate to one another as believers in Jesus Christ.

But of course it does go wider than that in that we should also seek to express these things towards those who are outside of the faith, but it should be particularly true in relation to how we deal with those who are our brothers and sisters in the faith.

The gospel does have this profound impact upon our lives, because Jesus has had such a profound impact on our lives in terms of where we stand before Him.

[11 : 00] And the Scriptures make it very clear that that should have an impact in our lives. So, for instance, we read how Jesus, speaking in the context of the Lord's Prayer, expresses how forgiveness is, you know, incredibly important in relation to that, because if we have come to know forgiveness for ourselves, that should be apparent in the way that we are ready to forgive others.

And if it's not, then there are serious questions to be asked. Why? Well, I suppose at times it may be that we have lost sight of where things are at, lost sight of what the Lord has done in our lives, and we need to be reminded of that and drawn back to that.

But then there may be situations where there are those who profess to know these things, but have never actually come to know these things. And in that situation, then they need to be brought back to the gospel and to recognize what Jesus actually does for those in whose lives He works, that He actually brings forgiveness and salvation into their experience.

So, being thankful is incredibly important in that connection because if we consciously think about these things, it should have an impact, and we need to remind ourselves.

And being thankful, expressing that thankfulness is part of that process of reminding ourselves. And this is something that we see repeated in the Scriptures, this idea, this principle of reminding ourselves, reminding ourselves of what God has done, reminding ourselves of His goodness, reminding ourselves of His kindness.

[13 : 23] You might say that Psalm 107 is one example of that. It's just a whole lengthy hymn of praise to God and thanks to God that He has done such marvelous works in the lives of His people.

It's there, and it was sung in Old Testament times to remind the people. And, you know, there's a section of the book of Psalms there that you might see a whole load of the Psalms there, Psalm 103, Psalm 105, Psalm 106, Psalm 107.

They really have that kind of character to them where they are there by way of reminder to remind God's people of the importance of giving thanks to Him for what He's done for them as a people.

And expressing our thanks in that way is so important because it's a way of guarding against losing sight of what is really important, what God has done that is so significant in our lives.

I guess there's always that risk that we can fall into the trap of doing things because we think we can earn God's favor.

[14 : 52] But when we're thankful in the way that Paul speaks of here and we're reminding ourselves of the way that God has granted to us such great gifts, this great salvation that we don't deserve, the compassion that we don't deserve, the love that we don't deserve, the kindness that we don't deserve, we have immense reason for thankfulness.

And we are encouraged here to keep expressing that, to express it in our words, in our prayers, in our praises, but to express it also in our lives and the way that we live and relate to one another and bear with one another, expressing our thankfulness to God even in the midst of these kinds of actions in our lives.

This thankfulness becomes in that context an antidote to our ingratitude.

And it stimulates our thinking, stimulates a response of faith before God when we express this thankfulness before Him.

because we can only really truly express that kind of thankfulness by faith. It is something that we do when we recognize the goodness and the glory of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus.

[16 : 51] Let's move on then to verses 16 and 17. We'll read those verses now. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. And again, in this passage we see this idea of giving thanks, of expressing gratitude, expressed more than once here.

Well, we might say that psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs express that so much that it's there almost, it's expressed specifically on two occasions but it's implied on more, it's implied in the other words of the, these two verses as well.

So, the truth of the gospel has this profound impact on our lives. We rejoice in His truth. We rejoice in the God of all truth.

And so, it's a delight both to praise Him and to share that truth. Encouraging, instructing, teaching, and admonishing one another by His Word.

[18 : 27] And when we sing God's Word and when we communicate the truth of God's Word in song, we are actually teaching one another. It's, you might say, the one point in our services where the whole of the body of the kirk are involved in teaching one another as we speak out these truths or sing out these truths.

And in this way, we build each other up. I suppose I suppose we can tend to lose sight of that aspect of our singing together.

But it is an important truth that's being expressed here in these verses. Now, of course, we're expressing our thankfulness to God, we're expressing our praises, we are certainly doing that, but we're also blessing one another by sharing the truth of the gospel with one another.

And that should inform the way that we approach our singing. We should approach it with open hearts, ready to receive instruction, with a prayerful desire that others would also be taught.

So, we come to it with a sense of humility, but we also come to it seeking that others would also be blessed through this. That's one of the reasons, I guess, the fact that this actually happens through our singing is one reason why we need to be careful that we ensure that what we sing is indeed biblical.

[20 : 31] Singing has a strong impact upon how we process things. So, it's a very useful way of memorizing and absorbing things.

So, for instance, I kind of hesitate to mention the example, but Arius, you might say the arch-heretic of the early period of the church, second, third century, I can't remember the exact dates, but Arius, who was the man who promoted what became known as the Arian controversy, was really good at writing songs, apparently, writing hymns.

And he used this to great effect because he wrote very clever songs that communicated his perspective, which was wrong, and he used it to spread that wrong thinking through the church.

church. And so, it's very important, recognizing that the power that this can have, it's very important that we are very careful to sing what is biblical.

I'm not in any way suggesting that you're not careful to do that here, but I'm just making the point that it's a very important thing because this is a powerful way in which truth is communicated, imparted to one another, and how we are actually able to build one another up in this way.

[22 : 18] I guess, you know, we can get attached to songs in a way because music can express an emotion for us, and sometimes people get attached to songs that they've never even really thought about the lyrics all that much.

It's an interesting thing. But you can see that in that context we need to have some level of care in that regard.

And, you know, if someone came into the congregation here and they expressed something, maybe it would be really surprising if anyone came in and expressed something really, really out there, heretical.

But if they expressed something that you responded to with a big question mark, you might say to yourselves, well, I don't think we should have that guy back again.

But it's amazing how when it comes to a song, if we like the tune, we're maybe sometimes more ready to kind of pass over the little things that might be there in the songs that might not be really expressing the truth as clearly or as helpfully as they should be.

[23 : 42] Anyway, it's kind of an aside in a way, but I think it's important to stress that we are teaching one another through this means, and it's a means of blessing one another.

And so we should lay hold of that and seek to participate in that prayerfully and to engage with that ourselves meaningfully as well.

The song praise is obviously it's focused in God's direction primarily, but it has this broader aspect to it as well. And we should be thankful for that.

And of course our praises are a great means of expressing that thankfulness, putting them into words, having them as words upon our lips that actually express this thankfulness.

And we should be thankful for one another and seek to bless one another as we sing in this way. So we lift up our voices in praise to God, thankful for the opportunity that He gives us not only to lift our voices in praise to Him, but to bless those around us through the truth of what we sing.

[25 : 09] Such activity without thankfulness wouldn't really fit the bill.

It would be kind of like a kind of abomination really. that's maybe expressing it quite strongly, but you know, it's an important issue. My mind was drawn to Psalm 51 and the thought that David expresses there towards the end of the psalm, for you will not delight in sacrifice or I would give it.

You will not be pleased with the burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken contrite heart. O God, you will not despise.

These words express that the sacrifices of praise that we should offer, although David is kind of referring to the actual physical things, but the truth carries over.

I mean, we can physically sing something in the same way as people in the Old Testament could come and give physical sacrifices, but their heart not be really right before God and not be truly thankful before God.

[26 : 33] And to do that is really of no use at all. we should come with thankful hearts, hearts that have recognized their own brokenness, but the wonder of His salvation, the wonder of that hope and life that we find in Jesus.

A life when we live it truly in light of that, will be characterized by a spirit of thankfulness and of gratitude.

And this sense of worship and service to God should pervade all of our lives as indeed thankfulness also ought to characterize our lives, including the relationships that we have with our family, our work colleagues, etc.

Now, I'm going to pass over that passage. It would be good to deal with maybe another time, but I'm going to pass over that passage and jump on towards the passage at the beginning of chapter 4.

chapter 4. Because there's an awful lot to go into there for a start, but also Paul doesn't specifically mention thanksgiving in those passages, but obviously in the context it's important.

[28 : 08] But moving on then to these verses at the beginning of chapter 4, verses 2 to 6. Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.

At the same time, pray also for us that God may open to us a door for the Word to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison, that I may make it clear which is how I ought to speak.

Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

But particularly verse 2 there, continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. Paul exhorts the believers here to pray and to do so with determination and persistence.

But apart from encouraging them to continue steadfastly and watchfully in prayer, prayer, he encourages them to do that also with thanksgiving, expressing that thanksgiving.

[29 : 28] Now, in a way, it's slightly surprising to have this encouragement to pray with thanksgiving, to have that appear at this point. But this is such an important reminder.

that it's, you know, in the context he's been expressing this again and again and again. But if we pray without thanksgiving, we're likely to continue in prayer.

We're unlikely, rather, to continue in prayer because we need to keep reminding ourselves of the reasons why we have hope of answered prayers in the first instance.

Now, although there are times when our prayers may be complaints, it's not good for our prayers to remain there. It's not good for us to have this spirit of complaint and complaining and grumbling.

That's not a good place for us to remain. Of course, at times we find ourselves there and we acknowledge that and the Scriptures acknowledge that. But it's not a good place to continue.

[30 : 32] And so you see again and again in the Scriptures, you see, although these complaints may be expressed, yet the Scriptures come back to this place of expressing thanks to God.

Even in the midst of difficult and challenging situations, returning to this again and again because to have a grumbling and a discontented spirit is something something that is going to eat away at our faith, something that is going to undermine our faith eventually.

Not that we shouldn't express these things at all, but if we continue in them without finding the cause to give thanks, then these things are likely to be incredibly unhelpful if we continue in these without finding cause for praise even in the midst of the difficulties and the challenging situations.

So Paul moves from there on to requesting prayer for himself and for those whom he's serving with. Asking that the believers in Colossae would pray for them and for those serving alongside him.

Now, although it's not specifically expressed at this point that the prayers here are to be rooted in thankfulness, it should be apparent that actually that would be the case because he's really asking them to pray that the Lord would prosper them in doing what they're doing where they are in the same way that he did when he prospered them when they were in Colossae.

[32 : 25] And that's an important connection to make, to recognize that connection. They're going to pray for Paul and his companions who ministered to them out of a sense of thankfulness to God for the fact that he blessed their work among them in the first instance.

And they're going to pray that God would do the same thing there as he did with them in Colossae. And that reinforces that sense of thankfulness to God for the way that he works and the way that he involves us in that work.

This kind of prayer for gospel outreach, for evangelism, for cross-cultural mission is firmly rooted in thankfulness.

Now, one wonders when we see to a degree a sense of apathy in relation to these things. things, when we see a kind of lackluster approach to these matters, we wonder to ourselves, well, why is that?

[34 : 00] Is part of the issue that we're not really as thankful for these things as we ought to be? Are we not reminding ourselves enough of what God has done for us?

Are we not praying that God would do the same for others? Hopefully, that's not the case, but we think that surely, in many instances, that must be the case, or else the church in general would be much more fired up about these gospel issues.

And so, this is something that we also ought to pray for as we think about these issues, to thank and praise the Lord for His goodness and His blessing and His kindness towards us, and to pray that the Lord would do the same in many other people's lives, the people who live around about us in our neighborhoods, the people who we see at work, the people whom we bump into in the shops.

May the Lord grant us to have that renewed sense of thankfulness that would fire in us that desire and that passion so that our lives might be on fire for Him, might glow with an intensity of love for our Savior.

Savior that would pour itself out, as it were, in seeking that He would bless many others around us, and not just in our immediate vicinity, but across the world.

[35 : 48] People that we become aware of, places and nations that lack the gospel and gospel input, that it would be our great passion and desire, out of thankfulness to God for what He has done for us, that they also would be touched by this great gospel themselves.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You and we praise You for the power of the gospel. and we confess, Lord, that all too often our hearts don't exactly overflow with thankfulness to You as they ought.

We confess that at times we feel we must express this in the way that we have lost our first love, and we pray, Lord, that You would draw us back to Yourself.

help us to express our thanksgiving, and to remind ourselves of Your great goodness towards us, and work in our hearts, we pray, Lord, to stir us anew with the flame of the gospel, that it would burn in us as a passion to make Jesus known, and that a longing would be rekindled in us to see Your kingdom extended in our own neighborhoods, our communities, and in our nation, and even to the ends of the earth.

May we be passionate about these things, filled with a fervent desire, and may we continue steadfastly in prayer to pray to these ends, that we might see an answer to that great prayer that You taught us, that Your will might be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[38 : 10] we pray these things in and through the precious name of Jesus, and it is in His name alone that we ask it. Amen.