

Prayer for the Church

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Date: 07 January 2024

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[0 : 0 0] Now, you know, the trick of preaching is not to have everything right to say, but just knowing where to go get the information to present. And these guys always do a good job. By the way, they're running Bible studies now.

You can go to the Bible Project and you can actually look at different books of the Bible in detail. So if you want to do that, they're good teachers. So today we start Colossians.

This book is one that complements Ephesians and Philippians. It's like in Galatians, for instance, it does also address false teaching, probably in the form of the beginnings of Gnosticism that rose up in the next century or so, and also the Judaizers who have been there all along troubling these believers.

Both these groups wanted to add to Christianity. They wanted to say Christ isn't enough. He's a good start, but He isn't enough. You need more. You need to do, and depending on which side you are on, you know, you need to have this asceticism.

You've got to deny yourself. You've got to realize that everything physical and material is evil and look for the spiritual good and transcend this world. And then on the other side, not only what you've got to do is obey the law.

[1 : 1 9] You've got to watch what you eat. You've got to be circumcised. You've got to follow the Torah as best you can, given that the, you know, by this time probably the temple didn't exist. And so all of that.

It was a sort of a joining together, a synthesis of pagan and Jewish and Christianity trying to mesh it all together and make sense of it.

And that goes on today. We still have people who are doing that kind of thing on both sides. It's still, I think there's some wonderful believers in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but what they've done is they've added Jewish practices.

Why? They say, well, we need to follow those. Well, they haven't convinced me yet. Then there are those on the other side that say, look, how could it be wrong that? And then they list out all these things, you know, how could it be wrong to have gay marriage?

If love is love and God is God of love, so why can't we bless that? Right now the Catholic Church is in turmoil because the Pope said they could bless it. If it was the blessing lasted 15 seconds or less.

[2 : 1 8] I mean, wait a minute, wait a minute. Anyway, so, you know, here we are. So we're going to be looking today at verses 1 through 14. So you need to open, I'm not going to put slides up there.

You need to open up your Bibles. Colossians, Gentiles eat pork constantly. So it's the last of that group right before 1 and 2 Thessalonians. And we're going to read the first 14 verses.

Now, as I said in the video, Paul had probably never been to Colossae. He was not responsible for this church being founded, but he was the one who probably led and taught Epaphras.

And he said it differently, and I will, but I'm not going to change. I sat in my way, 75 years old, I can do what I want. But he probably was fundamental in preparing him who went back to his hometown and preached the gospel there and started the church.

And then probably they think that from Colossae and probably the works of Epaphras and others there spread the church to Laodicea and Heropolis, which were not too far away.

[3 : 25] He calls this man his fellow slave and a faithful minister of the gospel. So let's look at Colossians 1. And I'll read it. My voice is doing all right.

All right. So from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the saints, to us, the saints, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ at Colossae.

Grace and peace to you from God, our Father. We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and the love you have for all the saints.

Your faith and love have arisen from the hope laid up for you in heaven, which you have heard about in the message of truth, the gospel, that has come to you.

Just as in the entire world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, so it has also been bearing fruit and growing among you from the very first day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

[4 : 29] You learned the gospel from the apostles, our dear fellow slave, a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, who also told us of your love in the spirit.

For this reason, we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with all knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for the display of all patience and steadfastness, joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light.

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his Son he loves, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins. Typical Paul, right?

Dense sentences, just full of things, and you're going, well, where does this all hook together? Dense sentences, and you're going, well, where does this all hook together?

So there's a connection. The first part is really a prayer of thanksgiving. He's giving thanks to God for these believers that he's heard about and that heard of their faith and what's going on in their church.

[6 : 14] And then the second part is a petition, praying that they will grow in their faith and in their witness in Christ. So he thanks God for the believers and for their faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

And in this, he's also going to address subtly things he's going to discuss later in more detail, some of the issues that are troubling the church.

He's going to emphasize certain things. And when we get to that poem, whoever gets to preach that poem in the second part of this chapter, blessed be you because you got the best part. Anyway, he's going to really, those verses are going to really touch on those heresies that people are pushing.

And he's going to say, no, no, it's not Christ is a good man, but he is the Lord of creation. He is the one, you know, God himself. So everything in here, even though he may not be specifically saying, contrary to what you were told, this is true.

He's also just addressing those things and reinforcing the truths of the gospel that are being brought under question back in the church in Colossae. He probably got this report by way from Apophros, at least in some form.

[7 : 35] Maybe he came and visited him or not. We don't know for sure. Probably others. And he thanks God for him. He tells him their faith and love have arisen from their hope. And that's what our discussion at Sunday school this morning was.

Does it arise from our hope or does our hope arise from our faith? Well, here Paul's very specifically saying your faith and your love come from the hope that you know is stored up for you in heaven.

That God has said in his promises that these things are true. These things are going to happen. There is redemption. There is forgiveness. There is life in Christ. And this has been promised to you.

It began the day you put your faith in Christ. And it will continue for eternity. That the life you have now in Christ is just the taste, foretaste maybe even, the beginning of what's going to be for growing in depth and breadth and reality as we go through eternity.

I can't wait. Now there's some of us who actually got our names on a waiting list. Lord, will you get the train ready, please? I'd like a ticket to go.

[8 : 41] I'm ready. I'm ready. When's the bus leave? If others of us are saying, well, I'll wait a day or two. But there's a hope.

And that hope is something that sustains us in this life right now. Keeps us alive and active and confident that it's all going to work.

No matter how bleak things get around us, Christ is real and the life we have in him is real. And the promises we have are going to be fulfilled. That's a hope.

Okay. I mean, I jumped all over the place, so I'm going to make a farm of place. So, he says, the promises of God in Christ, that's the goal or the reward for those that are in Christ.

And that should impel them and us to live a life of faith and love. Faith in Christ and in the faithfulness of Christ.

[9 : 50] One of the things I like about the New English translation is that they've taken a phrase that too often in the past has been translated, our faith in Christ, and said, no, it's more accurately translated, Christ's faithfulness toward us.

Now, think about that. And I won't ask for a show of hands, although mine would have to be the first one raised. How many of us have been faithful to Christ?

And the answer is, well, off and on. But how often has Christ been faithful to you? And the answer is, always.

And so, that's what he's telling us. We have faith in Christ, but we also have faith in his faithfulness toward us. We have love for God and love for the saints.

Where does the love for the saints come from? From God. We love God, and he puts the love back in us to love those that belong to God. Jesus told us that we should store up treasures in heaven where a thief or a moth could not touch it.

[10 : 59] And if we were actually to sit down and do an accounting, a ledger, treasures, location, the question is, where would the list be longest?

Think about that. Where would the list be longest? On earth? The things you treasure, are they here? Or are they in heaven? The treasure is our hope.

Now, that hope is assured. God has promised that that hope will not be disappointed. It will be fulfilled. But what is that hope? What is it that we hope?

Well, we hope for salvation. We just said a whole bunch of them, didn't we? We hope for salvation. What is salvation? That's a big word. What does it mean? It includes forgiveness of sin.

Rescuing from death. Securing our lives in Him. Forgiveness of sin. Of life now and forever in Christ.

[12 : 04] Do you realize that? That the life you live today, you don't live to yourself. You live unto Christ. And it's a new life. You are a new creature in Christ. You became a new creature in Christ when? The day you believed.

Eternal hope. Eternal hope. You put yourself in His hands and said, I'm now a new creature in Christ. I'm alive in Him. The life I lived in the past is what?

Dead. And it's supposed to be buried, folks. But if you're like me, we practice necromancy. What does that mean? We like to raise the dead and pretend they're alive.

We like to think about how and act like, well, we have that old life and we enjoyed it. Why can't we continue on with it? Oh, it's wrong. I know, I know. Lord, forgive me. But, but, but, but, but, but.

We're alive in Christ. And I don't know about you, but it was that hope. I can remember sitting there and that guy was telling me the gospel, explaining to me where I was wrong, helping me to understand the truth.

[13 : 09] It was the hope. I knew I needed something more than I had. Because what I had wasn't working. And he kept telling me about life in Christ. And what Christ had done for me.

And I put my hope. That was the hope. If I could just get that. If I could just find that, things would be okay. And then he told me how to do that.

And I put my faith that what he told me was true. In the Savior who gave me that hope. Hope with the assurance of the Spirit working in me.

Hope of life and freedom from my sin. Finding hope in something greater than myself. That's what led me to believe, to faith, and to walk in Christ. To submit to his Lordship.

And from faith to love. As I experienced the fullness of Christ coming to me, freeing me, and enlivening me, I found love.

[14 : 11] And how could you not learn to love the one who rescued you from an eternal danger? From death.

How could you not turn and say, I love you for what you did for me. And I know you did it in love toward me.

I don't deserve your love. But you deserve all my love, and all that I have, and all that I am. Who gives you hope assured by the promises of God?

How did you get that? Well, it was by hearing the word of truth and believing it. Because when you heard the truth and you believed it, you encountered the living Christ.

Because who is truth? But Jesus. We encountered Christ. This same thing happened to the Colossian believers. Which leads us to the next sentence.

[15 : 18] Look down in verses 6 and 7. It says, Just as in the entire world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, so it has also been bearing fruit and growing among you from the first day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

Now, Paul is exaggerating a little bit. The gospel has not reached to the ends of the earth yet in his day. It hasn't reached the ends of the earth in our day. But it's getting there. But it's saying, in all the world that the gospel has gone out, it is now bearing fruit.

And it's growing. And that's happening not just on the grand scale, but it's happening locally in the church of Colossae. And if you go inside the church of Colossae, it's also happening where?

At each individual believer. And when did it start? It started from the first day you heard the gospel and understood the grace of God. Grace of God.

Boy, I'm way off track now, but think about that. The grace of God. What is the grace of God? There are some churches who treat the grace of God as a commodity that can be bought and sold.

[16 : 30] I mean, that was what the Reformation was all about, right? Selling indulgences. They were selling grace. You want grace? Here. Pay me \$100 and I'll give you grace. I'll put it in writing.

God gives you grace for this. How much grace do I need to get out of purgatory? Oh, you need a lot. So, you know, just keep giving and I'll keep giving. You get these scripts, you can present them to God in heaven when you die.

Say, look, I did all this. And you'll go, what is he really going to say? Depart from me. Depart from me. Yeah, yeah. Depart from me. I never knew you. Take your script with you.

Maybe it'll burn in hell with you. You know, that's just the way it is. But grace. God's favor. He overlooks.

Not because he's just generous and kind. He overlooks it because of his son. All of our sin and all of our failures and all of our humanity that is falling apart.

[17 : 31] Self-centered. Evil. Rebellious. Wicked. He says, because of my son, I extend to you my favor.

My grace. Come. Join me. So a true convert started demonstrating his salvation through bearing fruit and growing.

Bearing fruit in a way, in a changed way of life. Do you think? Do you remember that? I know I changed after that. When I accepted Christ, at first I was so exalted, happy.

I mean, they tied a rope, my ankle, and tied me to the bumper so I wouldn't float away as we drove back home. But just think about it. Once you got there, then you had to go back into the place that you worked or where you went to school or where you lived and you had to do what?

Face the very things that you were escaping in Christ. They're still there. The world hasn't changed. You've changed.

[18 : 33] So what did you do? Well, the temptation is to say, well, I still got to get along. And we compromise. That's the problem we had.

But most of us didn't do that. We wouldn't be here. What did we do? We changed. And we started living a changed life knowing that it was going to grow up questions.

I remember people coming to me and saying, what's wrong with you? Not what happened to you, but what's wrong with you? You won't go do whatever with us anymore.

And then having to explain to them, being joyfully able to explain to them, I've changed. I found a new life. I have a Savior. All that stuff that I did, I abandoned it.

Why? Because I have a better life in Christ. We have changed goals. We have changed purposes.

[19 : 32] We have changed relationships. Because we're bearing fruit, the fruit of the Spirit. Now, you know, you go to Galatians 5.22 and list them all out there.

Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. I have problems with the last ones. The first ones are easy. It's the last ones. Gentleness and self-control.

Just ask somebody that's had an encounter with me. But these things don't happen instantly and you become these things automatically. What happens? You start growing in them.

And when you don't do them, you start understanding that you were not, there's a better way, a fuller way, that God would have through the Spirit prompted you to do it differently.

I guess you would call that you get convicted. Right? And what do you do when you get convicted? We have two choices. Everything in the world is a choice.

[20 : 26] You always have at least two choices. When you get convicted because you didn't demonstrate self-control, but you, you know, really blasted that person at Walmart that gave you the difficulty, you know. What are your choices?

Repent? Repent? Or do it again. Or do it again. That's your choices. And so, the Spirit says, you need to change. You need to repent. Repent means change direction.

Don't do it that way next time. In fact, if you see that person you yelled at, you might want to say, I'm sorry. I didn't, I should have not done that. That was not right of me. You repent.

You do something different. And so these things get worked out in our lives by the work of the Spirit in us to mature us that we will become like Christ is. And sometimes that's slow and jerky.

I was thinking, I actually wrote, almost wrote down, it's two steps forward and four steps back. You know, we seem like we're going in reverse fashion and we're going forward. But God has it in hand. He is going to continue working.

[21 : 24] It reminds me of Colonel Lefner. He was the guy that taught our Sunday school at Fort Bragg. He's taught the same parable for two years, I think. It was of the soils.

And he really liked to talk about the rocky soil. Why? He says, this is where we live. All these rocks are the things God's trying to change in our lives and we have to dig each one of them out.

It's like we live on farmland in Maine. You know, it's all rock. It's just one rock and you've got two more. And you get those out. You've got three or four more and you just keep digging. And what's the goal? To have healthy, fertile, productive soil.

What does God want to do with us? Get those things out of our lives. Why? So that we can be healthy and productive and holy and perfect as Christ is. It's by grace that He doesn't give up on us.

So we are to grow in knowledge and grace. We're to be hungry to understand God's Word. To seek to grow in faith and relationship with Him.

[22 : 33] To grasp the fullness of Christ and His victory on our behalf over sin and death. We come to grow through prayer and worship and fellowship with the saints.

That means that there are no lone Christians. Only by necessity, if you're the only one in your place, then God says, okay, I'll work with that.

We'll make it two pretty soon. But we're blessed that we have lots of Christians, lots of brothers and sisters in Christ and we grow together through fellowship and worship and prayer.

We grow in our obedience to God and our faith in us to seek Him and to do His will by grasping the grace of God and truth. And that should be our prayer for each other and for the church as well.

That's Paul's prayer for the church at Colossae and it should be what we pray for our church and for ourselves that we would be found faithful, loving, and set in our hope in Christ, seeking to do His will, to put His will into action.

[23 : 46] We should seek to grow and share the same grace, that same gospel of truth and grace to those who live in darkness and death.

By the way, hope not acted on, trusted, is only willful thinking and daydreaming. Think about that. Do you say you have a hope in something?

What are you doing as a result of that hope? If you're doing nothing, but then you're not, you don't have a hope, you have a dream, a fantasy.

You have to act on your hope. Now Paul goes on to say, because he had heard of their faith, their love, and their hope, he prays for them that they will, that God would fill them with knowledge of God's will.

That's a pretty good thing. That's what we're praying right now, isn't it? That's what the church is praying for? Show us your will. Show us where you are working that we may join you. He prays that they will come to understand God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

[25 : 00] Those are big words. What does that mean? I'm not sure. But God's will, I know, is summed up in Christ. And in Christ, God is doing what?

He's doing what? Bringing all of creation back into relationship with Himself. Restoring all that has been destroyed and damaged by sin and rebellion.

He's bringing honor and glory to Himself as He establishes His kingdom on earth through the work of Christ. He's redeeming what was lost and damaged by sin.

He's restoring His order and provision for His creatures, particularly us, human beings. that He would be their God or our God and that we would be His people.

And Paul here is partly emphasizing as well that the will of God as it pertains to us also pertains to our conduct in Christian life. Remember that thing that he said up there?

[26 : 04] The whole half of the letter is going to be on how do you live out this thing? We are to be filled with the knowledge of God's will that tells us that this will of God is to pervade our thoughts, our affections, our purposes, and our plans.

The fullness of blessings and truth are not found outside the will of God. We can't find it in religious practices.

I think Steve told us that yesterday. Going to church isn't going to get you saved, right? It's not found in asceticism, that is denying the body and the soul. We can't find it in any of the pursuits that are common in the world.

You're not going to find it in work, although work is holy unto the Lord if done to Him. You're not going to find it in the things that you may possess. You will not find it in political parties or governments or whatever.

You're not going to find it except in Christ as you relate to Him in the will of God. It's only found when we submit ourselves, all of ourselves, individually and corporately, because I tell you right now, again, there are no individual Christians that the early church believed that you couldn't be saved without the church.

[27 : 30] Now, we don't believe that. We think you can go get saved by yourself and that's okay and you can continue on. That's not true, really. Why? Why is the church so important? Because it's what? The body of Christ.

How can you be saved outside the body of Christ? You need Christ. You need to be a part of His body. You are part of His body. If you're not joining with the body of Christ, what are you doing?

You're being a little rebellious part. And what is a rebellious part called in medicine? Cancer. That's how you solve it, isn't it?

Amen. We need to seek to know and do the will of God no matter what it may cost or call us to do.

We are to be and to do in conformity with Christ within us. The goal is to live worthy of the Lord. That's what Paul said.

[28 : 35] That you will grow spiritually in knowledge and grace. What? That you will come to be in conformity with the Christ that's in us.

The goal is to live worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way. And that's seen, according to what Paul wrote here, in bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power for the display of patience and steadfastness, joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints.

Elsewhere, Paul writes, that we have an inheritance in Christ. when Christ inherits the kingdom and rule over creation. We have a part of that.

Why do we do these things? Because we've been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Son in whom we have redemption and forgiveness of sin. We're to be good citizens of the kingdom of God.

We're to be loyal to our King and we're to be faithful, obedient servants to His purposes and His goals. We seek to serve God and one another in doing good works set before us, not to gain salvation, but because we have salvation.

[30 : 03] We are new creatures in Christ and as new creatures, we seek to serve the One who redeemed us by His blood. We can't earn God's favor but because we've been shown God's favor, that is His grace.

We seek to share that grace that we've received and bless others in love and fellowship with the Spirit. We are freed from the kingdom of darkness to live in the kingdom of the Son.

And we take on the actions and the habits and the methods and the purposes of our Lord. And that's sort of an aside. I'm almost finished. But you know why business practices in establishing churches doesn't work?

Where do they come from? Man. It's the worry of the world. And you can't build a church the way the world builds a business.

It won't work. Why? Because the church is not a business. It is not a man-made thing. It is a God-made thing. It is an organic being.

[31 : 07] And you can't do a business plan to make an organic being. You can only make an organization, a religion.

And those don't work. They always fall apart. Think of that. How many megachurches have fallen apart because the best business practices only can take them to a certain point and then there's a what kind of failure?

A business failure? No! A moral failure. What tears little churches apart? Moral failures.

We get too focused on something that's not Christ. When was the last when this church split? What broke it up? It was little things. Do we paint this wall or not?

Do we have a real organ or an electronic one? Do we put little brass plates on the pews or not? I mean, that's what tore it apart. People were trying to build the church based on human desire instead of God's desire.

[32 : 15] And of course, it has to fall apart. Why? Because we, as normal human beings, live in enmity to one another. But in Christ, we live what? In love with one another.

Naturally. That's our DNA as Christians. It's supposed to be. Then we need to pray for one another in such a prayer as Paul has prayed for the Colossians.

Thanksgiving. Petition. And as Hebrews tell us, we need to seek to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. I prefer the translation that says we need to provoke one another to love and good deeds.

Because sometimes some of us need to be provoked. If anyone knows me well enough, if you don't provoke me once in a while, I don't get it. So that we can live in Christ by the power of the Spirit in us.

And that Spirit is the Spirit of power and grace leading us to all hope that is firm and secure in Christ forever and ever. Amen. Let's pray.

[33 : 25] Lord, I just pray that what I've said is true and what I said is useful in your hands and by your Spirit to help us understand our calling in you as individuals and as the church.

Have mercy on us, Lord. We're just people. Without you, we are lost sheep needing guidance and help rescuing.

in our best efforts, Lord, we'll make a mess of things, but in your best efforts, we'll see you glorified and your kingdom built. Help us to build your kingdom. Help us to grow in wisdom and knowledge.

Help us to bear fruit both personally and as a church. Help us to see your kingdom spread in our neighborhoods, in our community, in our world.

Not for our sake, Lord, but for yours. That you will be glorified. That your purposes will be attained. That you will bring all things through us as your servants under your lordship, we pray in Jesus' name.

[34 : 35] Amen. Amen.