

# Colossians 1:3-14

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[ 0 : 00 ] Father, we thank you for the good work that you have begun. And we pray that you would continue it in our lives, Lord.

! Speak, O Lord. And by the power of your Holy Spirit, give us what only you can give us. Ears to hear, minds to know, and hearts to receive all that you have for us in the Lord Jesus.

And we pray this in his name. Amen. You may be seated. A special welcome to any family or friends that have come to witness Lucy, Oliver, and Elizabeth being confirmed.

It's wonderful to have you with us. And I'm just going to say what a joy it is to have seen the work of the Lord in them. Their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Their love for the church. I love that Lucy mentioned that she wants to love and serve and build up the body of Christ. And their hope in the gospel is evident to us.

[ 1 : 04 ] And we are trusting that the Lord will continue the good work that he has begun in them. It is one of the great goals of the Christian life to still be a Christian when you die. And more than that, to be a little bit more like Jesus than when you began.

And Paul is writing in Colossians to a group of Christians who have been Christians for some period of time. And he doesn't want them to grow complacent.

He wants them to remind them of the rich glory that they have in the Lord Jesus. And he wants to spur them on to grow deeper and deeper in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But before he preaches to them, Paul prays for them. I love this. Paul seeks to pray into their lives what he's eventually going to preach to them. And that's where we're dropping into, in Colossians chapter 1, Paul's prayer for this church.

And I chose this because it is a confirmation service. And we pray for these people. And I wanted us to spend time thinking about what particularly are we praying for them. So, two points, very simply.

[ 2 : 13 ] Verses 3 through 8, we thank God for you. We are joining Paul in thanking God. And number two, verses 9 through 14, we pray for you.

We are joining Paul in praying for you. So, first, we thank God. Oliver, Lucy, Elizabeth, we thank God for you. Why? Because we have heard you are real Christians who believe in the real gospel. Paul mentions all this language of hearing. If you look in these verses, you hear this language of hearing. Start in verse 3 with me. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith, your love, and your hope.

And then in verse 5, you heard the word of truth, the gospel. And then in verse 6, you heard the grace of God in truth. And then verse 9, we heard. So, you see what's happening here?

It's we heard, you heard, you heard, we heard. In other words, we heard that you heard good news. And we're really happy about it. We're glad you received it.

[ 3 : 20 ] And it's obviously bearing fruit in your life. And so, we're turning to God and saying, thank you, God, that you've done this. It's pretty a simple thing. It's a pretty simple thing. Now, let me tease this out with us, just with a couple questions.

If Paul's giving thanks because he's heard that they are true Christians who have heard the true gospel, then what does it look like to be a true Christian? And Paul's description of this is really fascinating.

If you look at verse 4 and 5 with me, he says, we pray for you. And he lists three things. Since, first, we heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus. Faith. Faith. Number two, and of the love that you have for all the saints.

In other words, the love you have for everybody who believes in Jesus. And number three, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. It's faith, hope, and love. These are the three elements of

authentic Christian spirituality.

These are the sure signs that the work of God is happening in your lives. But did you notice how hope comes last in the list? In other places, when Paul uses this list, which is his favorite list, he often puts love last.

[ 4 : 28 ] And he calls love the greatest of these three. But in this particular place, Paul puts hope last. And he says it's actually hope that fuels your faith and love.

Did you notice how he says your faith in Jesus Christ, your love you have for all the saints, because of your hope laid up for you in heaven? So true Christians, according to Paul, are known by their hope.

They're known by the hope that animates their lives. And if our hope dwindles, then our faith and our love will diminish too. Did any of you have the chance this last Friday to listen to Elon Musk give his speech as SpaceX went public?

Anybody? Wow. I'm really showing that I'm a Silicon Valley kid at this point. I'm just really interested in this technology stuff. Anyways, well, here's the point.

It has to do with hope. He made some really fascinating comments about what he believes the hope of humanity is. And on a public stage, he said the goal of SpaceX is to make human life multi-planetary, to take the fiction out of science fiction.

[ 5 : 39 ] To create an exciting and inspiring future for everyone, where anyone can go anywhere in the solar system and beyond, he even said. But what really struck me is his ending quote.

Let me quote directly what he says. He says, There are always problems on Earth and things that we wish were better. Problems we want to solve and problems we should solve. But he says this. But there also have to be things that get you excited about the future and make you glad to wake up in the morning because you can't wait to see what happens next. That's the future that SpaceX wants to bring to you.

Isn't that marvelous and sad at the same time? I mean, this is so fascinating to me. He's not getting up there talking about all the impressive technology that he's invented. He's not talking about all the money that their company is making.

He's giving a message of what the hope of humanity is. He's tapping into something that we all long for. No matter how great this life is, no matter how much we can accumulate, we all have this sense that there's something deeply wrong and there must be something more that we are living for.

[ 6 : 50 ] And the great difference between the true and genuine Christian and everyone else is not that they hope, it's what they hope for. And here in this passage, the Christian hope is a heavenly hope.

In other words, when you become a Christian, the horizon of your life expands beyond this earth. And it expands even much higher than the solar system. It goes all the way up to heaven into the immediate presence of God.

And we begin to realize that our little lives are getting caught up in God's great purposes to reconcile and redeem the whole world. And to draw all things into his holy presence again.

Which is why Paul describes the Christian life in Colossians as Christ in you, the hope of glory. And which is why Paul also says when Christ your life appears, when he comes again, you also will appear with him in glory.

Being a true Christian includes having a true hope, says Paul. That is the firm foundation of your life, that is the anchor in the storm, that is the thing that makes you glad to get up in the morning and live for.

[ 7 : 57 ] Because you know the Lord Jesus is coming in glory and you will share in it with him. But this true hope, Paul says, is only given in the true gospel. And that leads us to our second question.

Not just what does it look like to be a true Christian, but what is the true gospel? Now in Colossians, there are two major presentations of the gospel. This is where it gets really dangerous if you give a preacher one text from a book, because then he wants to preach the whole book.

So here it goes. The first presentation of the gospel comes in chapter one. It's a two-part presentation. Paul says Christ reigns and Christ reconciles.

Two parts. Christ reigns over all things as God. There is not a square inch that is outside the grip of his sovereignty. And Christ died to reconcile all things to God.

He reigns and he reconciles. That's the true gospel in chapter one. And the true gospel in chapter two is a three-parter. God dwells, God deletes, and God disarms. God dwells in all his fullness in

Jesus Christ.

[ 9 : 05 ] If you know Jesus, you know the fullness of God. And God deletes the record of our sin by nailing it to the cross of Jesus Christ. It no longer exists in his eyes. And God disarms the rulers of evil and the powers of evil by triumphing them over them in Jesus Christ.

God dwells and he deletes and he disarms. It's a three-part gospel in chapter two. And the interesting thing is that both presentations of the gospel at their center, it revolves around the cross of Jesus Christ.

This is the gravity, this is the weight of glory in the world is Jesus' cross. This is the gravity of his grace. And when that grace gets a grip on our hearts, we start to view the future with a whole lot more hope.

And that hope starts to fan into flame our faith and our love for the Lord Jesus. And our lives begin to reflect more and more the gospel that we have heard. And we start to walk more and more in a manner worthy of the Lord and pleasing unto him.

So that at the end of our lives, hopefully we're a little bit more like Jesus than we were at the beginning. And this is precisely what Paul goes on to pray for the Christians in Colossae.

[ 10 : 18 ] He doesn't just give thanks for God's work in them. He prays for them that God's work would continue in them. And that's our second point in verses 9 to 14. We pray for you.

But before jumping into the content of the prayer, I just want us to note something quickly. Just the gift of being prayed for at all. Don't take that for granted.

Notice, Paul has never met these Christians. They've never met him. He sent Epaphras to go plant this church and the seeds of the gospel and to shepherd them. And he's heard about their faith from afar.

And he brings the, and he gets this news of them. And yet Paul, this wonderful apostle, is praying for them consistently and persistently in his prayers. And it reminds me of the fact that we all need prayer.

And we all need prayer all the time. There was a particular season, number of months, last year where I was particularly struggling to go, Lord, what are you doing in my life right now?

[ 11 : 19 ] And it was interesting because there were some, the Lord chose Tuesday mornings for some reason to have people call me. So for some reason, there was a series of about three or four months where on Tuesday mornings, I would get these random phone calls when I was reading my Bible and praying from people all over the world.

Like one morning in an hour, I had three people call me from Mexico, from the U.S., and from Switzerland. And they would just call me and they'd say the same thing.

I was praying this morning. I was praying today. And the Lord brought you to mind. How can I pray for you? And that was it. You see, there's this lovely thing that God stirs his people to pray for one another.

And it's one of the ways that he strengthens us through each other. In his providence, this is part of how God wants to fulfill his purposes in our lives, is to stir other people to pray and then to delight in answering their prayers.

And he wants us to be involved in the process of one another's growth. And so Paul prays for these Christians. And there's only one thing he prays, if you would look at verse 9 with me.

[ 12 : 25 ] And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you. Here it is. Asking that you may be filled.

He's praying for filling. Filled with what, you may ask? Well, he goes on. With the knowledge of God's will.

In all spiritual wisdom and insight. And when he uses the word spiritual here, I think it means the wisdom and the knowledge and the insight that only the spirit can impart.

So this is a gift of the spirit at work in us. And interestingly, all three of these words, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding, are words that are used in chapter 2 to describe what God reveals to us and what God gives to us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So when we're talking about knowledge, will, and understanding, we're not talking about something that we're trying to pry out of heaven that God is reluctant to give to us. We're talking about the riches of God's will for us that he has already revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 13 : 28 ] And the spirit bringing that to bear in our hearts and minds when we need it most, which is about 95 to 100% of the time. I mean, think about it. How much of your life is black and white right

now?

5%? 10%? If you're doing really well, maybe 20? Much of our lives lives in this gray, unclear zone, where we find ourselves saying, God, have mercy and guarantee me wisdom.

And that's precisely what Paul is praying for. He's praying that God would give us wisdom to know how to live a life that is worthy of him and that is pleasing to him.

And then Paul gives us four little pictures of what this life looks like in our lives. Real on-the-ground practical stuff. They're called participles.

You know those I-N-G words? Four little participles in verses 10 and 11. Bearing fruit, and every good work is the first one.

[14:32] Growing, or increasing, the second one. Being strengthened, the third one. And giving thanks, the fourth one. Do you think we have time to dive into these right now?

Is that all right? I realize it's a confirmation service. It's a bit longer than normal, but I don't want to cut this short because this is good. Let's start with the first image. Bearing fruit in every good work. Paul here pictures the daily details and decisions of your life as the fruit of the seed of the gospel at work in you. So you're an investment banker, and you're trying to figure out how to invest your client's money.

Or you're a doctor, and you're trying to figure out the best treatment for your patient. Or you're a teacher, and you're trying to craft the most engaging and informative and truthful lesson.

Or maybe you're a counselor, and you're trying to help someone navigate their inner maze and find their way out to true freedom. In all these things, we need wisdom and insight from the Lord to know how the will of the Lord is worked out in this particular circumstance and situation so that what we are doing in our day-to-day decisions and moments, day-to-day from people, little details, is about bearing fruit that emerges out of the gospel for the Lord Jesus Christ so that people would see it and give glory to God the Father in heaven.

[15:53] And so you have this image of our lives as bearing fruit in every good work because of what God is doing in us. And the second image is one that we need in order for the first one to be able to happen. We need to continually be increasing in the knowledge of God.

This is the second picture that Paul gives us in verse 10. And I would suggest that increasing could easily be translated growing. It's another agricultural image. And I think this is important because it links the first two things together, bearing fruit and growing.

Our lives will not bear much fruit for others if we are not continually growing in our knowledge of God. And I don't just mean knowing true things about God, but my goodness how important it is to know true things about the true God.

But I mean those true things about God bringing us into a deep personal acquaintance with his holy presence. I'm talking about communion and counsel with God. I'm talking about that deep and lively fellowship that births faith and hope and love in your life.

And I think this is part of the reason why Jesus' two great commandments can never be lived apart. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength and love your neighbor as yourself. It's impossible to do one without the other.

[17:06] So the first two pictures that Paul gives us, it teaches us that a life of prayer and learning and a life of doing and serving are things that have to go in the Christian life.

We cannot grow complacent in our relationship with others and we cannot grow complacent in our relationship with God. But God wants to fill us so that both are increasing and growing and bearing fruit.

Does that make sense? Let's look at the next two images. The third picture in verse 11 is that of being strengthened. Is it translated in your Bibles, may you be strengthened?

Is that what it says? I almost never dare to do this, but I'm going to do it. I actually think it'd be better if it was translated being strengthened. Instead of seeing it as a new command, it was seen as one of the list of participles that comes out of the primary prayer that you would be filled.

So the picture is of you are being strengthened by God. And this is coupled with the fourth picture in verse 11 of giving thanks.

[18:16] In other words, you are having the strength from God to face the difficulties that you are encountering. The sorrow, the suffering, the persecution, and the resistance.

You have strength from God to face the difficulties and then you are being given perspective from God to give thanks in the middle of it. Do you note that? And this requires the power and joy of God.

So Paul is praying that you would be filled with God's power so that you don't fold under pressure and so that you don't lose spiritual perspective under pressure. That you would be strengthened to endure and that you would be strengthened to give thanks.

So this is what Paul is doing. He is giving thanks and then he is petitioning the Lord and both these belong together. This is, Paul looks at the Christians in Colossae and he says, the Lord is at work in you and he is doing marvelous things in you and we are giving thanks to God but do not grow complacent.

The Lord wants to do more in you. He wants you to go deeper into the life of Christ. He wants you to bear more fruit in good works. He wants you to experience more of the peace and patience and power of the Holy Spirit at work in your life.

[ 19 : 34 ] He wants you to shine forth into the world more of the faith and the hope and the love that is intended for all people to repent and come and believe in the Lord Jesus. Don't slow down in your faith but remember that God is the one at work in you and we're praying that he will fill you with everything you need to live a life worthy and pleasing of him.

And so it's a really interesting thing is that this prayer actually anticipates the main message that Paul preaches in the book of Colossians. If you flip over the page to chapter two, this is what Paul preaches in verse six.

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, that's what Paul gave thanks for. So walk in him. That's what Paul's praying for.

Rooted and built up in him and established in the faith just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. Isn't that good?

Thanks be to God. Amen. Amen.