

Colossians 1:1-14

Paul didn't know the Colossian church personally. He knew a few individual Colossians, but had never met most of them. We're not even sure if he ever made it to Colossae, except for perhaps driving through on the interstate (walking through on a Roman highway). Still, Paul takes the time to write to them and, as we'll see, he takes the time to pray for them. In so doing he sets an example for us to follow. We don't want to get stuck in the rut of thinking that the only things worth praying about are the things that matter directly to us.

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| I. | We should be thankful for what God is doing in the world | 1:1-8 |
| II. | We should learn how to pray for others. | 1:9-11 |
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Never underestimate the power of intercessory prayer; through prayer you can impact the world.

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| I. | We should be thankful for what God is doing in the world | 1:1-8 |
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- 1:1-2 Paul and Timothy are in Rome at this writing. Paul is under house arrest, chained to a Roman soldier. Timothy is there to help him, whether personally or in his ministry.
- 1:3-4 Paul thanked the Lord for this church though he had only heard of their faith and love. Love for one another is an important quality in believers. It's something we need to cultivate.
- How many people can thank God for our love as Paul could for love of the Colossians?
 - We should be intentional about loving others.
 - We should let that love be apparent to others.
 - What an awesome thing it would be to have our church be known for its love.
- 1:5 **Hope** The hope we have is not a vague feeling that the future will be positive, but it is complete assurance of God's ultimate victory. We can't always see this victory from our standpoint, but it remains a confident hope. As Paul explains elsewhere:

Rom 8:24-25 NKJV ²⁴For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

- 1:6 The gospel is bringing forth fruit in all the world. Most manuscripts add "and growing". What does that mean? It means that more and more people believe it than before. When we think of what God is doing in places like India or China or some parts of Africa or Iran, we should be thankful – and it should prompt us to pray for those people.
- 1:7-8 And even though that can sometimes feel a bit distant. We can pray for those people that are touched by our missionaries. The relationship that Paul had with this church was through Epaphras, who was probably from Colossae, but came to Christ through Paul's ministry. Epaphras then went out and shared the gospel in his hometown and the church we are reading about was established. So Epaphras was, in a sense, a missionary sent by Paul and his church during the time Paul was working in Ephesus.

Lesson for Us: We have a bunch of missionaries out there. They and the people they serve can always use our prayers. We don't have to know these people personally any more than Paul knew all the believers in Colossae, but we can pray for them. We can start by getting updates from the missionaries and then praying for the work that they do. When we hear about people or hear about needs we can pray for them. We can also pray about the things Paul will list here in the next section and make them our priorities whenever we intercede for others.

1:8 Again notice that Paul mentions the love of this church. Epaphras was bragging to him about their love.

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II. We should learn how to pray for others. 1:9-14

1:9-11 Paul tells the Colossians what he is praying for them so that they would have his words as an example. That's the best way to learn.

Jesus gave His disciples that model prayer that we sometimes call *The Lord's Prayer*. He also prayed in front of them, whether at the tomb of Lazarus or the Garden of Gethsemane. John 17 is often called Jesus' *High Priestly Prayer*.

We might entitle this section *Learning to Pray with Paul the Apostle*. So what are the things on his list, which we can then put on our own prayer lists as we intercede for other people?

We can request that they:

- (1) **Be filled with the knowledge of God's will (v.9).** God's will is not as elusive as we sometimes seem to think. It's not dark secret that God is hiding from us. In fact, when we see how Scripture so often clearly tells us right from wrong, we might conclude that doing God's will is often a bigger problem than knowing it. All that loving others and so on can seem like a pretty hard task if God didn't empower us to do it.
- (2) **Would gain spiritual wisdom and understanding (v.9).** We need spiritual insight, because sometimes we're just kind of stupid or resistant to spiritual things.
- (3) **Please and honor God, or "walk worthy of the Lord" (v.10).** Again, it can be easier to know God's will than to do it. Paul prays that the Colossians would act out their faith and spiritual understanding in visible real-life ways.
- (4) **Being fruitful in every good work (v.10).** Fruit serves two purposes. The first was multiplication and we talked about that in v.6. As the gospel goes out it bears fruit in the form of more and more people who believe in the Good News of Jesus and are saved. Jesus spoke of the seed that landed on good soil and bore fruit 30, 60 and 100 times what was sown.

Fruit serves another purpose; sometimes it is there for others to enjoy. Think about it: apples, oranges, bananas and pineapples don't have to taste good in order to reproduce their species – yet they do taste good. That is so that we can enjoy them.

In the same way when our lives are fruitful in every good work, others enjoy the taste. They enjoy having us around. Think about that fruit of the Spirit from Galatians:

Galatians 5:22-23 NKJV ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control.

How easy it would be to enjoy being around people whose lives always looked like that.

- (5) **Increasing in the knowledge of God** (v.10). All of us need to know God better.
- (6) **Strengthened with God's might (*dunamis*) according to His power** [strength] (v.11). Paul tells us why we need that strength and power. It's not to blow people away with the awesome power of God, like Jesus raising the dead or Elijah calling down fire from heaven. It would be great to see some kind of show-stopping miracle a day, but that's not what Paul is talking about. Let's read the rest of the verse.
- (7) **Have all patience (endurance) and longsuffering** (v.11). These almost sound the same, but sometimes the Bible puts them together for a wonderful combination of godly qualities. The Greek word that comes first is *hupomonē*, which is remaining under difficulties without succumbing or giving up, while the second word *makrothumia* refers more to self-restraint that does not retaliate. (Robertson)
- (8) **Stay full of Christ's joy** (v.11). The letter to Philippians reminded us over and over how important joy is in the Christian life. It comes right after love in the list of the fruit of the Spirit that we read a bit earlier.

Together we might say that God's almighty power can produce within us a joyful endurance and self-restraint that we are not capable of in ourselves.

All believers have these same basic needs. When you don't know how to pray for someone, use Paul's prayer pattern for the Colossians.

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III. We should be thankful for our salvation.

1:12-14

1:12-14 Most Christians probably don't appreciate their salvation enough – perhaps because they don't understand it. To remedy that, Paul feels a need to get a little bit theological. In each point he makes it is God who is doing something. We are on the receiving end of His grace.

- a. **He has qualified us.** That means salvation is not something we work for – we don't qualify ourselves or make ourselves good enough to receive God's grace.
- b. **He has given us a heavenly inheritance.** An inheritance is not something we work for either; you usually have to be born into it. In our case we are *born again* into it.
- c. **He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed or transferred us into Christ's kingdom.** We don't always appreciate that we were once held in the devil's grip and God had to remove us from it. Some of us may have more vivid memories of what that was like, but it's true for all of us at the deepest level. We were once by nature children of wrath, but by faith God has made us His children.
- d. **He has redeemed us.** In other words God has paid the required ransom to free us from the captivity of our sins. We can walk away as free men and women because we are no longer enslaved to our natural desires. ("Through His blood" is missing in most manuscripts, but it fits just fine nonetheless.)
- e. **He has forgiven us.** Sinners need forgiveness; it's as simple as that.

Conclusions:

On our salvation: Last week a few of us were in Ohio for a wedding. When we think of that picture of the church as the bride of Christ, this last section about our salvation brings to light some valuable insights.

- When we are in Christ, His riches become ours. The church is compared to a bride, but we are not a bride that comes into the marriage as an equal to our husband. When we see one point after another about what God did for us, we can't imagine that we somehow deserve this marvelous salvation because of all the benefit we bring to God. We, the church are a bride, but we are a bride that enters into the marriage with an enormous load of debt. It's a debt, however, that Christ is willing to pay out of His great love for us. Christ's riches are so vast and His love so great that He gladly takes care of all our obligations and provides riches that it will take us all eternity to enjoy.

On Prayer: With that in mind, there is a lot that we can get out of this passage regarding prayer:

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Moreover, we should use Paul's prayers as an example for our own. We can never run out of things to pray for because the Bible is full of prayers like these that we can use as our examples.

We can pray for each other here in the church. We can pray for our missionaries and the people that they serve. Finally we can give thanks for everything God is doing around the world and all that He has done in our own lives.

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Close in prayer mentioning the things we went over in this chapter.