

(Colossians) 02 Paul Thanks God for the Colossians Part II

by Bob Utley

Bob Utley emphasizes the importance of thanksgiving and prayer in the Christian life while exploring Paul's gratitude for the Colossians' faith.

Duration: 34:10

Scripture: Malachi 3:6, Matthew 28:19-20, Colossians 1:3-9, Colossians 3:16

Topics: "Colossians"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on interpreting a specific sentence from the Bible, which spans five verses. He emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical context in order to interpret the scripture accurately. The speaker also highlights the significance of having a positive outlook on life and facing challenges with gratitude and joy, based on the knowledge of God's grace and love. He encourages the audience to embrace their spiritual calling and to constantly bear fruit and increase in their faith.

Transcript

Now, Schuyler, I don't know if it's fair that when you minister behind this pulpit, people have to smile, and when I minister behind this pulpit, I still see their teeth as a joke, y'all. Really, I have felt such a freedom with you, and I thank you for that, that I have felt that freedom to share with you as powerfully as I can, and I hope you have sensed the respect that I give for your understanding of the Bible and your Christian experience that I have challenged you not to necessarily agree with me, but to check out my Biblical evidence, pray, and then walk in the light you have. I think that's a good deal.

I enjoy that. Last week, I wanted to get through this first little prayer, but as you know, I got kind of hung up on the introduction and only got through verses 1 and 2, so today, I'm going to do the next sentence. I know it covers five verses, but it's just one sentence in Greek, and it's verses 3 through 8. It always helps me when I interpret the Bible to remember that I've got to try to put myself back into the place of the first hearers.

To truly interpret, we've got to hear as it was heard, and then take the truth and apply it to our day, and there are several steps in there. And Paul, as all of the writers of the New Testament, were affected by their own historical situation, and much of what they have given us is in that historical first century. Now, many times for Paul, it may be a rabbinical, but most often, it's in a Greek situation.

And last week, I mentioned to you that he slightly changed the normal Greek greeting from greeting to grace. They're very similar in your Greek words, but he kept that traditional greeting. He also kept the traditional Greek understanding of starting a letter with a prayer for the recipients of the letter.

Now, sometimes Paul is so mad at the recipients, he just prays to God and doesn't pray for the hearers. In this particular book, he is going to pray to God again, not because he's mad at the hearers, but because he's overwhelmed of what God has done. Think about this sequence.

Paul preaches in Ephesus. A man named Epaphras is wonderfully saved and takes the message to another community two hundred miles away, and three vibrant New Testament churches start. And Paul wants to thank God for that kind of fruit and growth in the gospel message.

Paul had never personally met these hearers, but he had heard about them through Epaphras, and he is thanking God for their faith and their faithfulness. So, I'd like to work through this prayer with you, and as always, we're trying to understand what the inspired author was saying to his day, but as we do, we know there are bedrock, eternal gospel truths. We know that there are, even in this prayer, and we are asking, all of us are asking for the Holy Spirit to help us grasp the essence of this prayer, the thrust of Paul's intent in this prayer for these believers, because we know in some real vibrant sense that's still the will of God for his church today.

There is a historical element and a universal relevance in these writings, and we're seeking to understand both, but the truth is we never know if we've done it well, because we can't interview Paul. There's always ambiguity in text. So, all of us are trying to say, and I hope in sermons you pray, God, help me understand.

I always appreciate the prayers on behalf of people before I get up to speak, because all of us understand our frailty, and we want the power of God to flow through our lives, and we don't all exactly agree about that, but we still want that power, that insight. So, I pray today that God will speak to you in a way that this prayer will not just be historical, but be existential, have a meaning for today for you, as well as a meaning to these churches. Now it starts out, we give thanks to God.

If I could characterize the book of Philippians, it would be joy. The word joy and rejoice is just used over and over and over in Philippians. If I could characterize Colossians, the word is thanks, thanksgiving.

Now, Paul is just repeating this, I don't know how many times, but a lot in this book. He thanks God, he thanks the believers, he just goes on and on about how grateful he is for what God is doing in the lives of these people. And I think all of us can share that, amen? You know, we don't get to choose what's happening to us, but we do get to choose how we respond to it.

I mean, is your life half full or half empty? Are you so overwhelmed with problems and concerns and issues that life is just negative, it's just, as my wife would say, her grandmother used to say, it's just bad, bad, bad. It's bad. Well, come on, life's been the same for every generation of human beings.

I would say we in America have it pretty good, amen? And it's how you look at these things. All of us share these common things that everybody goes through. But because of the grace of God in us, because of the indwelling Holy Spirit, because of knowledge of Scripture, it seems to me we ought to face whatever comes with a sense of thankfulness and joy because of our world view, because of our certainty of the love of God.

I mean, there ought to be a difference about the way we do life. And it ought to project itself into how we view each day and what happens to us. I still like that song.

This is the day the Lord has made. I will rejoice and be glad in it. Not because it's good for me, not because there's this or that that I like.

It's because this is a stewardship from the Lord and He is with us and for us and He has an agenda for us. You believe there's an agenda, a spiritual agenda for your life? Well, if you don't, you don't get it. Friends, you are an important spiritual cog in what God wants to do in your sphere of influence today.

So Paul is thanking God. It's just a recurrent theme through here. I wanted to pick up on the word Lord for a minute.

I think there's some theological significance to the use of this word. Now it is true that sometimes the word can mean sir or mister, kind of a polite address. But quite often it means far more than that.

And I think for these, remember these are Hebrew thinkers writing street Greek. Hebrew thinkers writing street Greek. And when you take it that way, this word has a significant theological usage in the Old Testament.

The Jewish people developed, not originally, but they developed a fear of breaking the commandments. And one of the commandments was taking the Lord's name in vain. And their way of viewing what could and could not be done, they began to ask, how could we be sure we don't take the Lord's name in vain? And their answer was, we just won't pronounce it.

We just refuse to pronounce it. Therefore we can never take it in vain. And they changed the covenant name from God, which many of us moderns assume it's pronounced Yahweh, which is an assumption we don't know, which is the Hebrew verb to be.

They changed that to the Hebrew word for owner, master, husband, or Lord. Adonai means my Lord. So they would substitute that name.

So when the New Testament authors begin to call Jesus the Lord Jesus Christ, they're not calling him Mr. Jesus. There is a theological emphasis that comes. I think this is one of the New Testament authors' way of asserting the deity of Christ by calling him this Old Testament substitute title for God, the covenant God of Israel.

Now, you've got to decide if that's true, but I think there's several kind of ways the New Testament authors do that. Not only attributing to Jesus actions that only God can do, and not only attributing to Jesus Old Testament titles for God, but linking the peasant carpenter from Nazareth in grammatic relationships that make God the Father and Jesus from Nazareth grammatically equal. Now, that's shocking that we could put the Holy One of Israel, which no one or nothing is in his category.

There is no one like me, and yet we can stick a Jewish carpenter killed for treason in a grammatically equal balanced relationship is shocking. And yet it's exactly what these New Testament authors wanted you to face, that this really was the divine Son of God. Now, notice, praying always for you.

It's real uncertain in the grammar here if always should go with thanks always or pray always. Now, either one of those is a good bet. Amen? This is almost the 1 Thessalonians 5, pray without ceasing.

Give thanks in everything. Paul's just putting it a new way. If I could ask you, could we characterize our life as a life of thanksgiving and prayerfulness? That's a good question.

Now, if we can't, I think we ought to think about some of these biblical admonitions that both faith, thanksgiving, and prayer please God. Now, think about that. Have you stopped today and thanked God for who you are, where you are? Have you taken a moment to prepare yourself for worship by stopping to pray and thank? Now, these are, I think, essentials for a happy, healthy, Christian daily world view, world view.

Always praying, and it could go with that. It always mentions to me that Paul prays for them. Now, look at your Bible, chapter 1, verse 9. He's praying for them all the way in 3 through 8, but specifically in 9. In chapter 4, verse 3, Paul asks them to pray for him.

Now, that's the way it works. That's the way it works. We pray for each other and expect that we pray for one another.

Do you have a prayer list? I mean, if you don't have a prayer list, how do you know and can praise God for what He's done if you never write down what you ask for in the lives of others? Maybe James is right. We have not. How's it finish? Because we've asked not.

You want a more vibrant worship service? Pray. You want a more vibrant church? Pray. You want a more evangelistic church? Pray.

Prayer is the key that unlocks the spiritual resources of heaven, and without prayer, no spiritual power will be manifest among the people of God. Do you believe that? Now, Paul's going to continue. Since we heard of your faith, now, he heard it from Epiphra.

Look for a minute at verse 7. Epiphra is the one that started this church, and he's the one that found Paul in prison, told Paul about the problem. Paul wrote the letter to the area, sent it back by Epiphra, so he, Paul's heard from this man, and what he's heard, and just think how Paul presents. He doesn't say, I heard about these stinking false teachers.

No, no, no, no. He's going to get to these stinking false teachers, but he starts out with, I heard about your faith, your faith in Christ, who you are, your acceptance of the gospel that Epiphra preached. He told me about your faith.

I want to thank God for what you're doing, Paul says, to these churches that he never met. Isn't it interesting here? I look at your Bible, and in verse 4, faith, love, and hope are all in verses 4 and 5. Now, this is a famous triad with Paul. He uses it in Romans 5. He uses it in Galatians 5. He uses it at one time in 1 Corinthians.

This is a famous triad, faith, hope, and love. I think of that one in Ephesians, now by these three, that's 1 Corinthians 13. Faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.

Faith, that's obviously how we came to know Christ. I thought about this word. This word is such a powerful New Testament word.

It can be translated, it's only one Greek root, but it can be translated faith, trust, or believe. Those all three English translations, this one Hebrew root. Faith, trust, and believe.

It can be used for our initial trust in Christ. It can be used for our trustworthy living, and it can be used for the doctrines that make up the gospel. So, you've got to look at the context of how this is used.

Is Paul using it here in the sense of Old Testament faithfulness? Is he using it here in the sense of they receive the gospel? Well, this very prayer is going to mention the gospel of truth, the word of truth. Maybe he's saying about you receive the truth. I come back to this over and over and over in my thought life.

The fundamental question that Christians have to ask is not just my personal experience, but the trustworthiness that backs up that experience in the promise and character of the revealed God. Is the Bible true? I mean, that is a foundation, and we need to know that and defend that and rely on that. Nothing else we do is worthy if Scripture is faulty.

Think about it. Are we living the truth or are we living a lie? Are we just one of many faiths, all of which are valid? Are there many holy books that are equally inspired? Does everybody's experience in religion equals everybody's experience? This is the kind of world we live in, and we have got to take the bull by the horns on the validity, trustworthiness, accuracy, dependability of the word of God. That was pitiful.

Amen. Well, this is Paul's triad. It's a powerful faith.

We start out with faith, the faith issues in a life of love. Friends, God is love. If you know God, there's going to be love in your life.

One of the markers of a believer is love. Satan has counterfeited everything, everything, but he cannot counterfeit love. And the word hope, even though the English word talks about maybe, could be, I wish, I want, that's not at all what this Greek word means.

Now, Paul, and by the way, I was going to mention this last week and forgot it. I'm going to be preaching through Paul for a while. If you're looking for a really good book on Paul, this book has been such a blessing to me.

It's an older book now. It's out of print, but you can get it on Amazon. It's James Stewart, A Man in Christ.

I just love that book. As a young student struggling with Paul using the word hope in different ways and Paul using the word mystery in different ways, you're going, Paul, is there any consistency in your theology? Well, it's not in the use of words. He's got several different uses of the word hope.

Every one of them have to do with something of the consummated, consummated promises of the gospel. So, we start in faith, we live in love, and we have a confident assurance that everything God promised is going to be in fruition in our lives and in our world. Three great words.

Three great words. Now, notice what it says, the love which you have for all the saints in verse 4. Now, that surprised me for two reasons. This church and these three churches really, Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea, are being devastated by false teachers.

We talked about them last time. They look like Christians, they act like Christians, but they're not Christians. So, is Paul including all saints? Is he including everybody in the church, everybody who meets with the church? Well, you wonder.

That just can't be what it means. It's got to mean you've got to have the ability to discern a true saint from a false teacher. There are wolves and sheeps clothing among us, and just because they go bah, that

doesn't mean they're a sheep.

And you've got to know the difference. We rejoice and love all the saints, and I am not a denominational person when it comes to this. If you've trusted Jesus Christ, you are my brother and sister, and I don't care what's on outside sign.

And if you haven't, I don't care what else you do that's good and societal and laudable. You're not my brother and sister. I think we ought to thank God and love all the saints, but we ought to have a little discerning ability on what a saint is.

I've said this to you before. I hope it comes home. Through the years as a pastor, it's been amazing to me when I go into Christian homes and see the literature that's on the coffee table from groups that I know are non-Christian, and the brothers and sisters I'm visiting do not have the ability to discern the groups that are gospel-oriented and not gospel-oriented.

There's a spirit of discernment that's necessary among the people of God. It's not a judgmentalism. It is a conformity to the tenets of the once and for all given to the saints faith.

Well, beginning at verse 5, we start with this word hope, because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven. I hope you remember the sermon I did on 1 Peter 1. That's a joke really. I always tell young preachers, if you want to get humility, just ask your church what you preached on last week, much less months ago.

But I want to tell you, 1 Peter 1, 4-6, you talk about an assurance text. The character of God garrisons us, and God himself protects our heavenly inheritance and our earthly presence. Man, what a great what a hope and assurance that God is with us and for us.

Man, laid up for you in heaven. I hope you'll look at that 1 Peter 1, 4-6, and I hope you'll look at 2 Timothy 4-8. Second Timothy 4-8.

These are texts that God secures and protects. And then it mentions you previously heard, that's epiphrastr. And here's this little phrase I was mentioning earlier, in the word of truth, the gospel.

That's in verse 5. There are several ways you could understand that. But it looks like to me these are appositional. The word of truth is the same as the gospel.

Now we have talked before about how do I know what the gospel is? Because anybody could put anything in there. This is where I think a personal study of the book of Acts becomes really crucial. If you would take the sermons of Acts, start with Peter, go to Stephen, go to Paul, take the sermons in Acts and outline the doctrinal content of the main apostle to the Jews and the main apostle to the Gentiles and one of the most spirit led of the six.

And as you see how they present the gospel to Jewish groups, non-Jewish groups, you begin to get the major truths for which the church must stand. Everything we believe is not in those gospel presentations. Everything we believe is not the heart of the gospel.

But there are some main pillars and those are the things we must cling to as words of truth. Now in verse 6 it says, and all the world. I was looking at my notes this morning and I call this a hyperbole and it certainly is because Paul is speaking of the Greco-Mediterranean Roman world of the first century.

I don't know if Paul had knowledge of Tibet or Mayans or whatever. He's talking about his known world and he calls it all the world. But you know what's amazing to me? The gospel of Jesus Christ given in the great commission of Matthew 28, 18 through 20, go into all the world.

The gospel in Luke 24, 46 and 47 that this gospel will be preached in all the world and Acts 1, 8 go into all the world starting with has turned Paul's hyperbole into absolute reality. Amen. And now today, and I don't know what time or where the day starts, but for the last few hours around the world, I don't care what village or Hamlet you're in, God's people have gathered to worship him from the rising of the sun to the setting around this whole globe.

Hallelujah. And now the hyperbole of verse 6 has become the reality of the great commission and may it overflow. Man, what a neat deal.

Hyperbole into reality. And of course the next little phrase, constantly bearing fruit and increasing. Now, I never want to burden you with grammatical forms.

First place, I'm not all that grammatical myself. You could take that two ways, but don't. The first one of these verbal participles is middle voice and the second one is passive.

Now, in Koine Greek, middle and passive were kind of coming together. You just can't lock things down on this. But there is a thought here that I want to make to you.

And it is a constant thought that I try to bring and that is, is God sovereign or must human beings respond? And I continue to say to you, absolutely. Now, we have divided this theologically in denominational emphasis. But I think what this is, is an emphasis on the covenant idea which I think unites the Old Testament and New.

The covenant must be initiated by God. God is sovereign. Have you read Romans 9 lately? I'm God.

Sit down and shut up. That's Romans 9. I'll do what I want to, thank you. I mean God's the Creator, isn't He? There's no place that's a start.

But this Creator God has said, I want you to. So He has mandated a response from those who claim to know Him, love Him and trust Him. And it's not an initial response only, it's a continuing response.

So the middle voice emphasizes the subject, which would be the human element here, my need to continue. My need to trust. My need to love.

My need to hope. My need to respond in faith. That's the human side of this.

But the passive voice emphasizes an outside agent. There's no fruit in the Christian life without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Amen? There's no salvation.

There's no teaching. There's no revelation. We cannot do it without the sovereign presence of the Eternal God.

Nothing spiritual happens without His initiation. That's that passive voice. Somehow, somehow, these things must be held together.

These things must be intertwined. These can never be either or. These always must be both and.

So the bearing fruit, there's the middle voice possibly, the sharing of the Gospel, the going of missionaries even early. But the increasing, don't you think of Paul's words here in Corinthians where he says, I plant Apollo waters but God gives the increase. Amen? There will be no increase without the passive voice, without the presence and purpose of God.

Now the word understood, I want you to look at that with me for a minute, because this is really an important word. This of course is the word to know. We get the word Gnostic from it, Gnosis.

But it's got a prepositional addition to it. And that preposition intensifies this word into personal experience of. Personal experience of.

Salvation is not a mental truth. It bothers people to say, well I believe Jesus lived. I believe He was killed under Pontius Pilate.

I believe He was racially Jewish. I believe His mother's name was Mary. Friends, you can believe all that and be lost.

Salvation is not a good history in your mind. Salvation is not even affirming that you believe historical truths about Him. Salvation is a total reliance upon Him.

It is a faith commitment without reserve. We've got to come back again and again to. I guess it is a cliché, but it's become a powerful one for me.

Salvation is a person to be welcomed. A truth about that person to be believed. And a life like that person to be lived.

I can't know about Him. I need to know Him. This is the intimacy of the Hebrew word to know.

Genesis 4.1. Adam knew Eve. Jeremiah 1.5. Before you were born I knew you and appointed you to be a prophet to the nations. What I need is not information about God.

I need God. I'm always amazed that Job never found out why his family was wiped out and he was sickened. Job did not need information about why.

Job needed to embrace who. The big issue of Christianity is not a creed, but a who. It's an intimate, dynamic, prayerful, trusting, personal, daily relationship.

Notice the next little phrase. The grace of God in truth. We're right back to the issue about truth.

I do believe when I stand before God and He asks me, this is of course hypothetical, why should I let you into my heaven? Do you think I'm going to give Him my Baptist resume? Well, I went to certain schools. I did certain things. No.

Yuck. So what am I going to trust in? The unchanging, merciful, true God. I trust in the character of the God who promised.

Doesn't that sound like Malachi 3.6? Oh Israel, I do not change, therefore you are not destroyed. My hope is in the unchanging character of God manifest in sending His only Son to die in my place and then wooing and drawing me to that truth through the power of the person of the Holy Spirit. This is a receiving deal.

And once we receive it, we cannot be the same as we were before. Now in verse 7, I just want to move on quickly here. Talk about epiphoras.

In verse 8, your love in the Spirit. Wow. Now did you know this is the only place in the whole letter of Colossians the Holy Spirit is mentioned? Isn't that surprising? Well, maybe so and maybe not.

This is a book because of the heresy of the false teachers, this is a book about the person and work of Christ. I just cannot wait to get to preach to you the rest of chapter 1. Gives me goose bumps to think about the rest of chapter 1. This is a book on who is Jesus of Nazareth really. Man he's something.

So we're not emphasizing in this book the person of the Holy Spirit. Now some of us said well in verse 9 he's implied, in chapter 3 verse 16 he's implied, but when I look at that, I'm not sure he's implied there. Just because the Holy Spirit's not mentioned doesn't mean the Holy Spirit's not active.

But I tell you one way maybe, one way you can know the presence of the Holy Spirit is not that his title or noun appears, but that your love is present. No love without him, with him there must be love. You want the characteristic of the people of God, do they love one another? You want the first commandment that you love one another even as I have loved you, Jesus said.

Do you want a witness? They'll know that you've been with me because you love one another. We're not looking for his name, but we are looking for his influence. So I'd like you to bow your heads just for a moment.

I'm going to remind you of a couple of truths I've mentioned. Number one, have you prayed today? Have you prayed today? Number two, have you thanked God today? Number three, have you loved today? Now this prayer is talking about those three kinds of things. They need to be recurrent emphasis, moment by moment, existential experiences of the radically new people of God.

We need to shine as light in a darkness. We can only shine if we pray, if we thank, and if we love. And of course the other one is if we trust, have faith and faithfulness in him.

Paul prayed for the faith and faithfulness at the church at Colossae in Hierapolis and Laodicea. I pray for the faith and faithfulness of Lakeside be manifest in the personal experience of its members that radically transforms its witness in the community. May we stand together please.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/22/SID22522.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/bob-utley/colossians-02-paul-thanks-god-for-the-colossians-part-ii/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net