

# (Colossians) Part One - Col 1:3-14

by Douglas Moo

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*Paul's letter to the Colossians emphasizes the universality of the gospel and the importance of hope as the foundation for faith and love.*

**Duration:** 52:38

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:1-9, Colossians 1:12-23

**Topics:** "Exposition"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the importance of giving thanks as a quality of a life worthy of the Lord. The speaker references the book of Colossians, where Paul mentions thankfulness as one of the qualities of a life pleasing to God. The speaker also highlights the repetition of the language of bearing fruit and growing in the text. Additionally, the speaker emphasizes the significance of knowledge in producing effective Christians. Overall, the sermon explores the components of a life that pleases God and emphasizes the role of thanksgiving in that life.

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## Transcript

such as we are given these days to talk about that word together. It's a privilege to use you as some guinea pigs for some of my ideas about Colossians. I am very interested in genuine dialogue and I hope that many of you will feel free, both individually and perhaps in the group as we have some question and answer times to come back at me as I talk about some of the things I see in the letter in contrast to some things you might see there.

I would like to have, to present to you right now, a very neat outline of exactly where I'm gonna go in the four talks for which I am scheduled, but I don't. We're just gonna kind of start in basically with verse three, chapter one, and see how far we get because I know we're not gonna get through all of the letter. To do that would have to be to skate over so much of it that we would all be frustrated.

So I have some passages I'm hoping I'll get to to dig into that I think are especially significant in the letter. We'll see how that goes. So join with me, if you would, turning to Colossians.

And I have some overhead projections I'm going to use here to talk a little bit about some of the structural things going on that I see, some of the context issues that we should be aware of. So I hope that these will be visible to you. I'm sure the first one will not be.

This is, you know, when you're learning PowerPoint, this is what they tell you. Do not do this at all costs, you know, when you're doing PowerPoint. But there is a reason I'm violating the rule here.

I need to get enough text up here so that hopefully, and the focus is gonna be a problem here with our keystoning, I guess, but. So if the bottom's in focus, the top's not gonna be. We'll maybe aim for about halfway here.

But I wanna get enough text up here to try to show you in this first section of the letter as I see it, one, three to 23, what some of the broader kinds of structural clues are to help us kind of take a look at the wood before we start getting into the trees. So I hope at least you can see some of the colors and things and I'll try to point them out as you look at your Bibles and you can see what the actual text is because you're not gonna figure that out from here, I realize. The four paragraphs that I'm dividing this into, I think, are obvious enough.

You have Paul beginning, as he so often does with his thanksgiving, verses three through eight. Note, by the way, I've deliberately taken the verses off of here. We need the verses to figure out where we are so we can talk to each other about what are turning the Bible, we understand why they're there.

But we also, I think, understand that they are often a quite serious hindrance to good reading of the text. Paul didn't stick those numbers in when he wrote the letter to the Colossians. And the reality of those numbers and chapter divisions and so forth can tend to break up a passage that is intended to be read continuously.

So I've deliberately dropped some of the numbers out here. You have Bibles and you can see what verses they are. At any rate, we're talking about the thanksgiving of verses three through eight, first of all.

Then Paul turns to prayer for the Colossians. And again, this is a typical sequence you find as Paul begins the letters. Thanksgiving for the people, introducing some of the themes of the letters, we will see.

Prayer for the people, where he also will often launch into some of the themes that the letter will develop in a more expository fashion. Then we have our famous passage about Christ, one of the great Christological passages, of course, of the New Testament, verses 15 to 20. After that, then, we have verses 21 to 23, in which Paul talks about the way God in Christ has reconciled the Colossians to himself through Christ.

Now, let's just, again, get a sort of big picture first. I'd like to point out first that there are some very obvious parallels between the opening here, the thanksgiving, and the paragraph here. And I've tried to highlight those here.

Paul talks in both of these passages about the gospel as a centerpiece of what's going on. He talks about its universality. You see, if you look up here at the thanksgiving, Paul has talked about the true word of the gospel, bearing fruit growing throughout the whole world.

There is this universal advance of the gospel that Paul is concerned to highlight to the Colossians. Partly, as we will see, because he knows they're disturbed by some false teaching. And Paul's concerned to put the gospel out in front of them and its universal significance, one of the great themes of Colossians.

But you have that there. You have that again, as you can see, down at the end of our passage. The gospel, reclaimed every creature under heaven.

Quite an interesting statement in its own right, of course. I'm trying to figure out what Paul means by that. In the same way, as Paul begins thanking God for the Colossians' faith, love, and hope, he turns to their faith and their hope here again.

Tied note to the gospel, one more time, in verses 21 to 23. So I think that acts as a bit of a frame that Paul intends us to see from the beginning of the thanksgiving into the end here of this paragraph, 21 to 23. Now, moving inward a bit, Paul begins by thanking God, as you can see here.

And he then goes and returns to this idea of giving thanks down here toward the end of his prayer. Giving joyful thanks, you see here, to the Father. Thanks to the Father.

Thanks to God, the Father. I think there's a bit of what we call an inclusio. Paul beginning and ending on the same point to frame this section as well.

Finally, you see the underlining here, because I think that Paul moves from verses 12 to 14 and connects those very much with verses 21 to 23. 12 to 14 talk about God's power displayed and qualifying us to share the inheritance of God's people. Talks about rescuing us from the dominion of darkness, bringing us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

There's this transfer that's going on, you see, from the state in which we once found ourselves now to the state in which Christ has given us. And that's very similar to the point that Paul makes here in verses 21 to 22. Alienated from God, enemies, because of evil behavior, now reconciled by Christ's physical body.

And all of this then note that 15 through 20 does stand out a bit here. I'm not gonna spend a lot of time on this particular point because it's more maybe a background issue than an issue that pertains to our understanding of the text as we now have it. But I think there is indeed good reason, as most scholars believe, to think that Paul is here quoting some kind of early Christian hymn or confession.

The passage does sort of stand out from its context. It's different in style. There are differences in vocabulary that I think mark this passage out in a way that suggests Paul, at least partially, is using language, again, that has already been formulated by early Christians to describe Christ.

His concern in these verses then, I think, is to ground the point that he's making in verses 12 through 14. God has rescued us. He has done that in Christ, the son he loves.

And we can have great confidence about this rescue. We don't have to worry about that rescue. We don't have to worry about our security because of what God has done, because he's done it in and through the one who is Lord of the universe.

This magnificent figure whom Paul describes in verses 15 to 20, picking up language from what was perhaps a popular Christian hymn that the Colossians themselves would have known. Remember, as I think you might know what's going on in Colossians, Paul's writing to a church he didn't found and he's never visited before. He tells us over the beginning of chapter two that he's never seen the Colossians personally.

He is the grandfather of this church. Apparently Epaphras who gets mentioned here along the way founded the church, probably converted by Paul when he was ministering in Ephesus. So it's interesting to wonder how many churches Paul grandfathered over the years as people who were converted under his ministry would go back perhaps to their hometowns and other areas and plant churches themselves.

So Epaphras finding himself apparently in some pastoral hot water has written to Paul, his mentor, kind of SOS. I need some help, Paul. I've got some difficulties here.

Could you assist? And Paul writes the letter accordingly. But again, if Paul himself has not visited this church, if he doesn't know them personally, an attempt to establish some common ground by quoting a passage that they are familiar with would make eminent sense. I think perhaps that's indeed what Paul might be doing there.

So again, as we look over the bigger picture here in verses three through 23, we find Paul engaged in his typical Thanksgiving and prayer, but Thanksgiving and prayer that focuses on certain things that are gonna become very important in the letter, hope, the gospel, knowledge of God and insight into God's will and wisdom, the decisive transference from the old realm into the new, affected by none other than the one who is the supreme figure in the universe. These are themes that Paul is going to come back to in Colossians again and again, as we will see. All right, it gets better from here.

All right, a little better. It's still not PowerPoint approved probably, but we're getting closer. As close as I can get, I guess.

Again, following your own Bibles, obviously if you're having trouble seeing the text up here, which is by the way, the today's new international version in case you were wondering what version this might be. Paul, when he gives thanks for the people to whom he writes, if you look at those thanksgivings, they are often somewhat formulaic. That is Paul does some of the same things in each of the letters.

There is a sort of pattern that he falls into, but there are also significant differences that pretty clearly have to do with the burden of the letter that he is about to write. So when we read these thanksgivings and these prayers, the beginning of the letters of Paul, we should be sensitive to some of the ideas that are introduced because we're often gonna see them developed in greater detail as the letter unfolds. Note, for instance, that Paul in an unusual way here calls God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's kind of unusual for Paul to describe God that way. But clearly running to a church that's having some problems with Christology, Paul wants to get out on the table right at the beginning, the relationship of father and son, God, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is praying about them then as he thanks God.

Why? Because he's heard of the three great cardinal Christian virtues that the Colossians are displaying. He notes that they have faith in Christ. They have love for all his people.

And this faith and love spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven. A couple observations here. One of the things that would be interesting to do as I've done in some of my texts is underline in Colossians where the word all or every appears.

You'll be surprised, I think. Again, is not sort of a major point that Paul makes anywhere in particular, but it is a thread that in way binds the whole letter together. It's a theme, a motif that Paul develops in significant ways because again, of the problem in the Colossian community.

Christ, apparently they have been led to believe, was an important figure. A critical spiritual leader. One through whom indeed, they have come to experience God's grace.

But in the syncretistic atmosphere of first century Asia minor, these Colossians had also fallen into the habit of viewing Christ as perhaps the most important, but nevertheless one among other spiritual figures. The situation in which Paul writes is a situation in which a lot of different ideas, various religions and philosophies were all jostling together. The Colossians were trying to make sense of Christ from the standpoint of that worldview.

And like many have done and continue to do, they were trying to make sense of Christ by fitting Christ into the worldview they'd already adopted, rather than allowing Christ to be the one who determines and judges that worldview. They have things backwards. It seems is what's going on in the Colossian community.

They are trying to make Christ conform to these welter of beliefs that they hold, mixture of paganism, Judaism, folk religions in the area of ancient Asia minor. One of my good friends and colleagues, Clint Arnold out of Talbot School of Theology wrote his doctoral dissertation on this whole matter, doing archeological and historical studies showing the kinds of beliefs on the street that would have been present in a place like Colossi. You can read the great classic poets and philosophers.

You can read the Jewish literature and so on. And of course, this gives you a certain perspective on the culture, but it's not until you really begin doing careful investigation of other kinds of evidence that you begin getting a better idea of what the people themselves actually believed. Imagine trying to describe the average person in Eastern Pennsylvania by quoting Declaration of Independence and the Gettysburg Address and works of contemporary philosophers.

How much help do you think that would give you in terms of what people we know and rub shoulders with and talk with actually believe? Well, some help, all that stuff feeds into what people believe, but it gets mixed up, it gets influenced by all kinds of other things and ways that are awfully difficult to predict. I think that's again the situation in the first century church of Colossi. I don't think we can pin down precisely what this false teaching was.

Scholars have written books and articles for generations trying to figure that out. No one can agree. Why? We don't have enough evidence.

Scholars hate to admit that. They always like to come to theories and to propound them and to argue their theory against someone else's theory. Spend a lot of time doing that.

And sometimes it's useful, sometimes it's not. In this case, I'm convinced people can't come to resolution because we just don't have enough evidence. Too many things going on in first century of Colossi.

Too few obvious clues in the letter. But what we can know about the situation again is that it is a situation in which the worldview of that time with its religious and philosophical syncretism was dominating the way the Colossians were understanding Christ and their spirituality. And in a sense, perhaps God in his providence has kept hidden from us some of the specifics of that false teaching so that the general contours of the problem could match so nicely the situation Christians and churches have faced through the millennium.

Think of the situation in which we minister here in North America. Very interesting. Maybe you've done this.

Survey your congregation. Give them some kind of a questionnaire or do some kind of oral exam. What are your base worldview beliefs? And then try to track what's influenced them in those beliefs.

And can you imagine the rich variety of responses you would have? Well, that's the context in which we are ministering week by week. We can't figure out what everyone we speak to believes and exactly what worldview they're coming from. But what we can do is what Paul attempts to do in Colossians that is establish a robust Christocentric worldview that will take care of any problem that these people might be having along these lines.

We'll see how that develops again as the letter unfolds. But we need to see that, I think, as we look at some of the emphases that Paul has here. And all of that was a very nice exposition of the word all.

That's not all gonna appear in the commentary. So you're getting a real benefit here because my editor would scratch all that out if I tried to pack all of that into an explanation of the word all here in verse four or whatever it is. Faith and love.

What's particularly interesting here is the way hope appears. And that's why I've highlighted it. Nowhere else in Paul does he use the combination in the way that he does here.

Again, the TNAV has taken a particular interpretation of the language, which I think is pretty much on target here, suggesting that faith and love rest on or spring from hope. Now that's an unusual way to put it, isn't it? Again, Paul never puts it that way anywhere else. New Testament never puts it that way anywhere else either, making hope in some sense, the foundation for faith and love.

I mean, we would perhaps, if we were, you know, ask ourselves, we would not put it that way. We would say faith is basic and faith leads to my love for others and faith in turn is what is the foundation for my hope. Certainly be a natural way to think of the relationship of these three.

But Paul startles us by not putting it that way here. And clearly his intention is to draw our eyes to this word and its significance. Somehow it's important for Paul to talk about hope in this context that he's addressing.

That hope is fundamental and the basis for their faith and their love. Why? Because it's hope stored up in heaven. The reality and security of the hope we have that enables us to believe and to love as we should.

You see, by calling it hope that is stored up for you in heaven, Paul makes clear that the hope here is not our subjective hoping. Oh, I hope that I will merit God's favor one day. Oh, I hope that I will get to heaven.

Oh, I hope that I win the lottery. No, it is not the subjective hoping on our part that Paul focuses on here. It is the objective reality of hope that is there in heaven for us.

It's already there, stored up for us. We don't have to wonder whether we're going to get to glory. We don't have to wonder about what the outcome is going to be because God has already secured that for us and has worked for us in Christ through his death and resurrection.

And he's, as it were, put that hope up in a treasury for us. It's like a bank account that's up there that we can draw on when we need it. So it is that security that we enjoy as God's people, Paul suggests, I think, that have enabled the Colossian Christians to love other people, to step out perhaps and do some things that are uncomfortable and difficult in showing that love, sacrificial love that can give because of the

security that we have.

And our faith that Paul talks about, our faith in Christ Jesus also is increased and deepened and able to express itself when it rests firmly on a belief that what God has done for us has been accomplished. It's there, it's a reality, and our faith therefore will not disappoint us. Think of Romans 5 in this regard where Paul makes some similar points.

Going on with the Thanksgiving, the connection here is with hope. Paul picks up that word now, says, okay, you've already heard about this hope in the word of the gospel, the good news. One of the points that I think emerges from these verses is the very high regard that Paul has for the power of God's word, the gospel.

Note how he describes it. He says the true word of the gospel, true, authentic, real, reliable are flavors of the word Paul uses here. This gospel has come to you and he will talk about how it came to them.

Epaphras, our fellow servant, faithful minister. But note that Paul says this gospel is not something that only pertains to you Colossians. This is not some local folk religion.

And again, in the context of the first century world, this would have been a particularly significant point to make perhaps. First century world had their big religions that we read about and study sometimes that perhaps would have some degree of widespread acceptance. But the ancient world was also riddled with various folk religions.

And often one town would be distinguished from another by the God they worshiped or by the temple that was located there or by particular local traditions or superstitions. And one of the points that obviously Paul is making here is that in contrast perhaps to some of the other options the Colossians are dallying with, these religious and philosophical options that they're apparently being tempted to adopt, the Christian faith is something that is universal in its focus. It comes from the one God through his one son and is by definition therefore for all people, not for one region, one town, one people, but for all.

Paul will talk about that later in Colossians 3 verses 9 through 11, which you might wanna look at sometimes because it's very doubtful that we're gonna get there ourselves. This gospel, Paul says, is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world. Bearing fruit and growing.

Where do we hear that kind of language elsewhere in scripture? Two places that come to my mind. What do you think of? Okay, that was one of them, parable of the sower or the seeds, however we describe it. The parable, of course, of Jesus is the sower of the word of God who goes out and scatters it.

And of course the growth comes or not as the case might be. And where else? John 15, that's possible, but that's not the right answer. Oh, this is okay.

This is a bigger kind of bread box sort of thing here. We'll get into it. He's gonna narrow me down here.

Nope, nope, nope, wrong answer. Nope, wrong answer. Nope, wrong answer.

Well, it's obviously not so obvious, is it? I'm thinking of Genesis one. Why are you laughing, Fred? That's not very nice. You're supposed to be supporting me.

Well, I might be off base on this, but I do think that there is an illusion here to Genesis one of the creation story as well here. This language of bearing fruit and growing is something that God talks about in terms of

his original creation. It's a very interesting story as you pursue it through scripture, in fact, because what God was hoping to accomplish in a sense in his creation is a mandate that comes to Israel.

And the same language is then used to the people of Israel, how they grow and bear fruit and so forth. And of course they ultimately fail. And then that same language is picked up in the book of Acts where Luke gives that refrain six times about how the word of God or the church grew and bore fruit and so forth.

So it's a rich biblical theme that Paul is tapping into here. But I think it reminds us that the gospel is something which has built into it this intrinsic power. Look what Paul says here, in the same way, your choruses are bearing fruit, no.

Your preaching is better, no. Your ministry, no. The gospel is bearing fruit and growing.

As I have taught Colossians on other occasions, one of the points that I have made, particularly in churches struggling to find their identity and there are a lot of churches like that these days. They bought into this myth that you've got to spend years and years writing your bylaws and figuring out who you are and what your mission statement is and so forth. Some of which is helpful, I admit, but a lot of which is, I think, time wasted if this central point is not put in place first.

That our church, our ministry is to be an instrument by which God's word can accomplish the purposes he's designed it to accomplish. That's where the power is gonna be. Not in my PowerPoints, not in my eloquence, not in particular strategies that may or may not be helpful.

What's going to proclaim and be an effective instrument of the gospel should be the question uppermost in our minds, it seems to me. Again, bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world since it has been doing and you heard it and truly understood God's grace. Now, of course, as Paul makes clear here, the gospel of God has this power only as people receive it.

They have to hear it, they have to understand it. So clearly God needs to work in the hearts and minds of people in order to make the gospel that which will affect them and become something that will be transforming for them. But this in no way takes from the point of the intrinsic power of the gospel.

Now, in 9 to 14, let me just try to keep this up here for a moment. What's interesting to me, first of all, is the striking repetition of this language of bearing fruit and growing. Okay, just seen that here in, and I see this is the problem, you don't have the verses.

Whatever verse that is, is that verse six? Okay, and then down here again in verses of 10 or 11? 10, thank you. See, that's why I know you have to have the verses at some point, but boy, they sure get in the way too. Bearing fruit and growing, bearing fruit and growing.

So clearly Paul is kind of linking these paragraphs together with that language. As Paul prays for the Colossians now, his prayer for them takes the form that we might expect, granted the situation that he's confronting. His prayer focuses, especially on the wisdom and understanding and insight that he knows the Colossians so badly need.

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, you see. Through wisdom and understanding that the spirit gives. Again, another somewhat interpretive rendering there that's trying to get at this idea of spiritual, but spiritual as my colleague on the translation committee, Gordon Fee never tires of telling us, is a tired, worn out and very ambiguous word in our culture.

People mean all sorts of things when they use the word spiritual as they do when they use the noun spirituality, which can be a good thing if you define it the right way, and it can be a pretty bad thing if you define it in other ways, because it can become a sort of amorphous, oh, let's all feel good about having some kind of contact with a different world than ours sort of experience. So I think there is benefit when we come to this word spiritual in the New Testament to be very careful about how it's gonna communicate in our modern context. And again, as my colleague Gordon Fee, who's written that wonderful book on Paul's view of the spirit God's empowering presence, as he points out there in Paul, particularly language of spirit is a reference to God's Holy Spirit.

Spiritual relates to God's Holy Spirit. It's all tracked back to that fundamental point and hence translating spiritual here as what the spirit gives, I think gets at the point Paul is interested in getting at. He prays that they might have that knowledge and wisdom and understanding, but it comes through the spirit and the spirit's ministry in and among the Colossians.

Now, as typically, of course, we find in the New Testament, prayer for knowledge and wisdom and understanding is a prayer that that knowledge might lead to practical works of service to God and his people. Knowledge and behavior are always linked in scripture. Indeed, it is fair to say that the concepts of knowledge and wisdom, especially as we many of us will know, have in the scriptures a very practical side to them.

Wisdom especially is the ability to understand God and his ways in a way that enables us to live before him successfully. It's applied knowledge. It's practical understanding.

So it's again, a very short move indeed to go from a prayer that we might have understanding of God's will, insight into what he's doing and accomplishing to the life that we are to lead worthy of the Lord. Now, this knowledge and wisdom and understanding or insight, however our versions translate, Paul uses several words to try to get the idea before us here and make sure we understand what he's after. This of course, in this context involves what we might call the big picture.

Paul is here is talking about our understanding of what God is doing through Christ, with his people, where we stand in a sense in the history of God's redemptive purposes for the world and how we fit into those purposes. The analogy has become popular of late. And I think it's a very useful analogy in many ways to think of ourselves as Christians, as actors in a play.

The play has been going on for some time. We've been there to see act one and act two and act three. And now suddenly we're called on the stage in act four and we've read the play.

And so we know what act five is going to be. And our job, obviously, and faithfulness to the playwright is to enact our parts faithfully in the spirit of the play. We think of creation as act one, the fall is act two, the history of Israel is act three.

I'm mixing up my acts. Jesus is act four. We come on the scene as God's people in act five, knowing what act six is gonna be, where this whole play is gonna end, what the climax, what the goal is, as God receives glory ultimately for his reestablishment of full sovereignty over his creation.

Our job as actors on the stage is to faithfully fulfill our roles in act five. And to do that, we need to know the big picture. We need to have an understanding of what God's plan is, where it is and its fulfillment at this point in time, how we relate to that plan and fulfill our roles accordingly.

So understanding God's will, particularly in this context, is not a matter of the specifics. It's a matter of the big picture without which the specifics are going to be impossible ever to figure out. In verse six, as we saw, bearing fruit and growing is something the gospel does.

Well, here, in a sense, we have the other side of the coin, because this life worthy of the Lord that pleases him in every way will involve our bearing fruit and growing. Of course, the two are intimately tied to each other. The gospel bears fruit and produces growth in and through the people that the gospel claims, in and through the people who bow their knee to Christ, in and through the people who understand and respond to the gospel, receive it into their hearts and their lives so that it becomes a transforming presence.

We will bear fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. There's that knowledge language again, you see. I'm sounding too much like a college professor now, I guess, talking about knowledge all the time, but that's what Paul's talking about.

Scripture often talks about, cannot hope to produce effective Christians without knowledge of the right kind. What Paul is doing here, you see, and I've underlined these four participles, is that he is unpacking this life worthy of the Lord. In fact, he's saying, what is this life that God wants us to lead? What does it look like? What are its components? What are some of the parameters? Well, Paul, of course, is not attempting to give a full description here, but he does mention these four things, bearing fruit, growing, being strengthened with all power.

Can't grow and bear fruit very well if you don't have some strength to rely on. And that strength comes from God himself. He supplies the power in accordance with his glorious might.

Again, Paul piles up the words here to make sure we get his point. Strengthened, power, glory, might. By the way, I don't like the translation glorious.

I don't want to be accused of being a slavish defender of the TNAV. I don't like the translation glorious here, the might of his glory. And I very seldom in scripture like it when we take the idea of glory and turn it into an adjective like this.

I think almost all the English versions do here. I'm not sure there's an exception indeed. So it's not the TNAV that's an outlier here, as it were.

But it tends to me to detract from the significance of that word as a way of describing God, the glorious one. I would prefer to translate something like the might that belongs to God's glory, the might that belongs to him as the glorious one or something of that sort. Because I think that gets more the flavor of the word here.

At any rate, interesting that Paul says the strengthening is so that we might have great endurance and patience. Kind of an odd thing for him to say here in some ways. Why that particular emphasis at this point in the letter? Why not talk about the strength God gives to produce other Christian virtues? Why these? Well, again, perhaps Paul has one eye here on the situation of the Colossian community in which they are being tempted to fall back from a full, strong Christian conviction by the pressure being put upon them and their culture.

And they need patience and endurance. Whether these words are distinct in meaning is a good question. This is we know very often in our own English language and in the language of scripture, words like this will overlap considerably meaning.

It's not that they're always gonna be distinct, but there is a tendency in the New Testament to use these in slightly different directions. In a sense, we are patient with people that we have a hard time with and we endure circumstances that we're having a hard time with. There's a little bit of a different focus in those words, maybe both are included here.

Another interesting emphasis is this giving joyful thanks. You see, as I've suggested, Paul is sort of giving a very simple sketch here of four qualities that pertain to this life worthy of the Lord. I dare to say that if you were asked to give four simple descriptions of what that life that pleases God looks like, the giving thanks might not make the list.

It's particularly interesting because Paul comes back to this matter of thanksgiving at several times in Colossians in places where it's kind of surprising. If you flip over quickly to chapter two, for instance, Paul's doing something very similar there, talking about this life that God wants us to lead and using four verbs to describe it. And again, thankfulness is in the list, two, six through seven.

Paul says, continue to live your lives in Christ, rooted, one, built up in him, two, strengthened, does that sound familiar? And four, overflowing with thankfulness. How is it by chance that the last two in both these lists are the same? Strengthened and thankfulness. I don't think so.

Paul, again, tailoring these points to the Colossian situation. We need the strength, of course, that God gives to endure, to maintain our strong Christian conviction in the midst of the welter of opportunities and options that we have around us. But we also need to be giving thanks to God as a kind of offensive measure.

Because as we give thanks to God, we are reminded of what he has done for us. We are immediately brought into a situation in which our relationship to God, our creator and redeemer comes right to the forefront. As we give thanks, we recognize that we are creatures.

He is the creator, that we owe everything we have to him, and that helps to produce a perspective on our faith in, again, the situation of testing and tempting from other religious and philosophical options. That's the only explanation I can think of as to why Paul, interestingly, focuses on this theme of thanksgiving so often in the letter to the Colossians. Finally, as he concludes the prayer, you can see Paul's kind of getting further away from the original prayer up here, which is this typical pattern.

Having begun a sentence, Paul has difficulty bringing them to an end, for which we should be very grateful, by the way, because there's some great stuff in those long sentences. But pray you might have knowledge that you might live the right kind of life, knowledge that will translate into behavior pleasing to God, that behavior looks like this, and that behavior, as it looks like this, comes from God in Christ. So now the transition, the father, and in verses 12b to 14, we have Paul talking about what the father in Christ has done to bring us into this new stage of existence.

Here, qualified you, a share in the inheritance of his people. Paul here is picking up Old Testament language, as he so often does, of course. The idea of share and inheritance, these words are used consistently in the Old Testament to talk about the allotted plots of land for the tribes of Israel.

As they come into their inheritance of the land, each tribe is given a share in that land. And that's where the language is consistently used, if you look back at the Greek Old Testament here. So Paul picks up that language, of course, and in his typical fashion, transfers up to the experience that we enjoy as Christians.

We have an inheritance too, that hope stored up in heaven. And we each have a share in that inheritance. And you remember how poignant this point would be when we remember that Paul is writing to Gentile Christians here.

Those who, as Paul describes them in Ephesians two, were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, estranged from God. They didn't have any place in Israel as constituted in the Old Testament, or only with difficulty or in an unusual way did they have a place. Now, in God's new covenant administration, that door has been opened to the Gentiles like the Colossians that they can have a share in the inheritance.

It's no longer confined to Israel. And no longer, of course, does it focus on a land. Now it focuses on a people and a relationship.

The inheritance of the people in the kingdom of light, hard to know how that light language fits in there. I'm gonna skip that for a moment. Then again, verse 13, this transfer imagery, which I think is so fundamental in scripture.

I'm just teaching a New Testament theology class right now at Wheaton. And I've outlined the whole class in terms of old realm, new realm concepts that I think get at a lot of what's going on in the teaching of the New Testament, the contrast of old realm and new realm. But the New Testament is filled with the kind of language we have here about the reality of human beings outside of Christ living in a realm of darkness, the realm of Satan, the realm of sin, the realm of death, the realm of despair.

That's what I added in this New Testament never uses that exact word, but comes close a number of times. There's this dominion that exists, this realm that people are in because of Adam, who is the inaugurator in a sense of that realm. We all belong to Adam and we find ourselves in that realm.

In God's grace, he transfers us from that realm, dominated by sin and death, inaugurated by Adam, into the realm inaugurated by Christ, dominated by life and righteousness and grace. And this imagery of the transfer of one realm to another, again, is a fundamental New Testament conceptions that Paul, you can see, ties into here. From the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Now, the language of redemption, as many of you will know, is a word that's picked up from the Greco-Roman world, applied to the slave who had gained his or her freedom by the pain of a price. And this is an imagery for the work of Christ, of course, that occurs in a number of key places in the New Testament. But as is so often the case, when we begin looking at these things, while the language of redeem and redemption and ransom certainly would convey that picture, slave paid a price to be released in the ancient world, the language also would have communicated some connections with the Old Testament again.

Two particular episodes in the Old Testament would immediately come to mind. The Exodus, because this language is quite frequently used to describe what God did for Israel when he brought them out of Egypt. I have redeemed you, I have brought you out with power, and I have redeemed you.

Indeed, I think there's one verse in Exodus 6, 6 or 10, something, it's there somewhere in Exodus, trust me. Uses this language of rescue and redemption right next to each other to talk about the Exodus. So likely there is some tie-in here to that experience, but this language also very significantly gets used an awful lot to talk about what God is going to do for Israel in bringing her out of exile.

If you look at the latter chapters of Isaiah, Isaiah 40 to 66 that were so formative for Paul. This is, you're not supposed to have favorite books, right? Okay, well, that was Paul's favorite Old Testament book because he obviously derives a lot of his key ideas and language from Isaiah 40 to 66. But you remember the situation, Israel is in exile.

Darkness is the word used again and again to describe the situation of Israel in exile. And God is going to rescue Israel, bringing her out of darkness into light in an act of redemption. God in Christ has brought his people out of the ultimate exile, the darkness of sin.

And he has redeemed us through a new act of power through Christ his son to bring us into the new promised land and given us a share in that land. And this again, we have to see how that would resonate so strongly with these Gentile Christians who as Gentiles had not had that kind of place in the people of God before. Well, thank you for paying attention.

I got further than I thought, but not as far as I hoped, which is a parable for our lives pretty much, isn't it? All right, Fred, you have instructions for us.

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