

Gratitude in Colossians: Always be Thankful

Turn to Colossians 1 please. Colossians is one of the letters that Paul wrote from prison. He did not start the church in Colosse, he had not been there, but one of his fellow prisoners was from Colosse and had started that church. The fellow prisoner was Epaphras, and we assume that most of what Paul knows about the Colossian church, he learned from his prison time with Epaphras.

This short letter mentions thankfulness a lot of times. In proportion to its length, Colossians mentions thankfulness more often than any other New Testament letter. It comes up seven times in Colossians, and we will look briefly at every one. We'll do a tour of gratitude in Colossians.

1 I Thank God for what I Hear about You – Colossians 1:3–5

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people— the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven and about which you have already heard in the true message of the gospel that has come to you.

We always thank God, says Paul. Why? Because we've heard of your faith in Christ, your love for the saints, and your confident hope in what God has stored up for you. So, my brothers and sisters, do you have people around you that have faith in Christ, and love for God's people and hope in God's future? I have people like that around me, and I have started thanking God for them more regularly.

We always thank God for people like this, because when people have faith and love and hope like that, it means God is working. They're not like that because they are good people. They are good people because God is protecting them and keeping them going.

"You heard about these things," Paul tells the believers in Colossae, "in the true message of the gospel that has come to you." There was some bad teaching going on in the Colossian church. This goes back to our first message on creeds, when we looked at different New Testament paragraphs that summarized what believers were taught about Christ. Epaphras had taught the Colossians the right things about Christ, when he began that church.

But since then, other voices had come into the church that wanted a different Christ Jesus, a smaller Christ Jesus. The new voices had a Christ that fit more with the philosophies of the time. Paul writes to get them back on track, to get them to stick with what they heard at the start. That's why he says, "you heard about these things in the true message of the gospel that has come to you."

2 Give Joyful Thanks for what the Father has Done for Us – Colossians 1:12–13

Give joyful thanks to the Father, who qualified you to share in the inheritance of his saints in the light. For he has rescued us from the authority of darkness, and brought us safely into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

Here are the central words: *Give joyful thanks to the Father, who rescued us from the authority of darkness and brought us safely into the kingdom of the Son he loves.* Paul here uses the story of Israel being slaves to the authority of the Egyptians. God rescued them from that authority and brought them into Canaan, the promised land.

Every believer has been rescued from an authority far darker and more terrible than the Egyptians, and has already been brought into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of God's much loved Son. People of whom this is true, like us here, are the most fortunate people on earth. Nothing good can happen to anyone that is nearly as good as this.

In the rest of Colossians, we'll hear about being thankful, but we won't be told why. Why we are thankful comes back to Colossians 1:12–13. When the New Testament encourages us to be thankful, it is almost always because of what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. We read that in other short Scriptures like this. The first 14 verses of Ephesians are a real whopper, a thanksgiving that breaks down our salvation into 7 different parts. That is a totally encouraging Scripture, describing what God has done for us in Christ.

Let's give joyful thanks to the Father, who rescued us from the authority of darkness and brought us safely into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

3 Stay with what you Learned about Christ, and be Thankful – Colossians 2:6–7

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

“Just as you received Christ” is how they spoke of a tradition being passed down. Paul is saying, “stay with the Christ you received at the start, stay with what you were taught, stay with the true Christ tradition.” Evangelicals don't always like the word “tradition,” but we need to remember that there are good and bad traditions.

2 Thessalonians 2:15 *So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.* 2 Thessalonians 3:6 *In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the tradition you received from us.*

So Paul tells the Colossians, “stay with the Lord Jesus Christ you received, be rooted in him, be built up in him, be strong in the faith you were taught, and overflow with thankfulness.”

Why overflow with thankfulness? Because the Christ Jesus we received, the Christ Jesus we were taught, is such good news.

4 Let the Peace of Christ Rule your Hearts, and be Thankful – Colossians 3:15

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

When I hear, “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,” I imagine a wonderful inner calm and tranquility. But the second half of that sentence tells us that Paul has something else in mind: “since as members of one body you were called to peace.”

“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.” Our hearts are the very center of our being. The peace of Christ is like an umpire, a referee. When my heart is ready to attack or to despise another member of the one body, the peace of Christ which rules in my heart tells me, “no, don’t do that, Ed. You steer your heart toward peace.” And if the peace of Christ rules in my heart, I will find a way to treat that sister or brother peacefully, the way the different parts of my own body treat each other.

“And,” Paul adds, “be thankful.” Thank God that the Spirit has made us members of one body, and that we’ve been called to peace. It is a very good thing. God has not just saved us individually, he has also brought us into an incredible family. He has made all of us together a single body, and Christ is the head of that body. Our lives are blessed, day after day and week after week, by being members of the body of Christ. Be thankful.

5 Let the Message of Christ Dwell Among You, and Sing your Grateful Praise – Colossians 3:16

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly, as you teach and correct one another with all wisdom, through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

“The message of Christ” is the basic story about Jesus that they heard from Epaphras. There were voices in the church that were taking them away from this. Paul tells them, *Don’t let anyone capture you with empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking and from the spiritual powers of this world, rather than from Christ* (2:8, NLT).

So in Col 1:5 the right teaching is called, “the true message of the gospel that has come to you.” In 2:6 it is “what you received about Christ Jesus as Lord.” In 2:7 it is “the faith as you were taught.” Here in 3:16 it is “the message of Christ.” All these phrases speak of the same story about Christ that was part of gospel preaching.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and correct one another with all wisdom.

So, we teach and correct one another based on the message of Christ, the faith as we were taught it. And how do we teach and correct one another with all wisdom? *As you teach and correct one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.*

We do it with songs. We're not sure what exactly these different terms mean, "psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit." Psalms will mean Old Testament psalms, but the other terms are not clear. But the thing is that we're singing songs that teach and correct each other.

We sing, "we are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, we are one in the Spirit we are one in the Lord." The different verses of that song are great teaching on body life. When we sing that, we are teaching and correcting each other.

We sing, "he came from heaven to earth to show the way, from the earth to the cross my debt to pay, from the cross to the grave, from the grave to the sky, Lord I lift your name on high." That is a classic summary of the gospel. We teach each other by singing that together.

"We have come into this place, and gathered in his name to worship him, Jesus Christ our Lord." These songs pull us together to the centre of our faith.

"Jesus loves me, he who died heaven's gate to open wide. He will wash away my sin, let his little child come in. Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Jesus loves me he will stay close beside me all the way. He's prepared a place for me, and one day his face I'll see. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. The Bible tells me so." That whole song is profound. When I drive some distance in my truck, I sing "Jesus loves me," three verses, over and over.

A couple weeks ago, when Bantels led the service, we sang a hymn that was Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd," arranged as a hymn. All of these songs are built around the story of Christ, and when we sing them, we are teaching and correcting each other. I have listed four common choruses and Psalm 23, and there is a remarkable amount of faith teaching in there. Hymns and songs have always been an important part of church teaching, and of passing on the right Christ tradition.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and correct one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. There is much good news just in the common songs I've listed here. There is much good news in the simple basics of our faith. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts. I think quite a bit of this goes on. And when we sing good songs together, we are actually teaching and correcting each other, and thanking God.

6 Do Everything as One who Calls Jesus “Lord,” and Give Thanks to God – Colossians 3:17

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

“Do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” That does not mean I go through the day muttering “in the name of Jesus” every time I move or open mouth. Rather, it means “do everything as one who calls Jesus ‘Lord.’” Always act and speak as someone who says Jesus is their Lord.

And part of calling Jesus “Lord” is giving thanks to God our Father. In quite a few of these calls to be thankful, we’re not told what exactly we’re grateful for. An inescapable part of the Christian life that Jesus is Lord of all, and we keep thanking God our Father.

7 Cling to Prayer. Be Alert. Be Thankful – Colossians 4:2

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.

People, keep praying. Don’t stop praying. We’re told that often in Scripture. In Luke 18 we read, *Jesus told the disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.* Jesus wanted to make sure that his followers pray and not give up. Cling to prayer.

I don’t know how prayer works. Sometimes we quickly get what we ask for, and often it does not seem God heard us at all. But based on what Jesus teaches in the beginning of Luke 11, God never does nothing. When we ask, God always acts in some way at that time. God always responds with something good. God never does nothing. Cling to prayer.

And be alert. In Matthew 26, Jesus said to his disciples, *Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation.* We don’t have to be strong, but we need to be alert. We don’t have to be wise, but we need to be alert, be watchful. When you see something not right, pray. And...

Be thankful. Why? God our Father has already rescued us from the authority of darkness. Our Father has already brought us into the kingdom of his Son. He has already given us our place in the inheritance of light. Cling to prayer. Be alert. Be thankful.

I’ll conclude by reading over these Scriptures again.

1:3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God’s people— the faith and love that spring from the hope stored up for you in heaven.

1:12–13 Give joyful thanks to the Father, who rescued us from the authority of darkness and brought us safely into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

2:6–7 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

3:15–17 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and correct one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. Amen.

PRAYER: We thank you, Father, that we have believers around us who trust in Christ Jesus, who love your people, and who have confidence in their future with you. Your gospel and your Spirit have made this happen, and we thank you for those people. Father, you have rescued us from the authority of darkness, and you have brought us safely into the kingdom of the Son you love. The best thing that could happen to anyone has already happened to us. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.