

Growing Up: Thanksgiving in Christ

Goldstone Church – 17-Jan-16 10:30am

Colossians 1:3-12

Introduction

We're continuing our series looking at the book of Colossians. Having completed the introductions (Colossians 1:1-2), this is the *real* start of Apostle Paul's letter.

Paul starts with giving thanks for what Christ has done in the lives of the Colossian Christians. Significantly, he doesn't begin with negative comments, but starts by *encouraging* the Colossian Christians.

1. THE REASONS FOR THANKSGIVING (COLOSSIANS 1:3-8)

In the original Greek, Colossians 1:3-8 are one long sentence. Paul can't help himself, overflowing in his thankfulness to God for the Colossian Christians.

He is thankful because:

a) [The Church had] **Heard the Gospel** (v.5b-7)

"you have already heard in the true message of the gospel"

The word "gospel" refers to the good news that Jesus Christ has solved the problem of sin through His life, death and resurrection.

The *key ingredients* of this Good News are:

i. **The Gospel focuses on a Person – Jesus Christ.**

The Gospel is not a philosophy, not a doctrine, not even a religious system. The Gospel is the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

ii. **The Gospel is the Word of Truth** (v.5b)

"the true message of the gospel"

The Gospel came from God and can be trusted completely.

Quote: *"There are many messages and ideas that can be called 'true', but only God's Word can be called 'truth'."* The Word of God is truth.

iii. **The Gospel Message is of God's Grace** (v.6b).

The Gospel is the message of God giving His love and compassion and favour to sinners who do not deserve His love and compassion and favour.

iv. **The Gospel is for the Whole world** (v.6)

'Eternal Life' is the only gift that is suitable for the whole world. The good news of the Gospel is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

b) [The Church] **Believed in Jesus Christ** (v.4)

John 3:14-18: only those who *believe* in Jesus Christ will receive God's gift of eternal life. Not saved by just having a faith. This is more than just believing in something. Having faith 'in faith' doesn't do anything.

Neither is it having faith in a code of conduct, or a set of rules and regulations, or in

an organisation or institution.

Apostle Paul was thankful because the Colossians *believed* and had a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

c) [The Church] **Were Discipled** (v.7a)

Epaphras taught and established their faith.

Word “learned” is related to the word ‘disciple’, i.e. a learner.

The “Great Commission” (Matthew 28:19-20) is not just about salvation; it includes the command to teach and nurture and disciple followers for Jesus Christ.

d) [The Church] **Became Faithful in Christ** (v.6,8)

As a result of Epaphras’ efforts, the church had grown in faithfulness in Christ.

Paul’s words about ‘growing’ and ‘bearing fruit’ are a wonderful picture language and a common theme in the New Testament:

- i. Word of God is a *seed* (Luke 8:11)
- ii. Word has life; it is *living* and active (Hebrews 4:12)
- iii. When planted, the seed produces *fruit* (Colossians 1:6)

Faith is one sign/evidence that this “Word seed” is growing. Faith in Jesus Christ.

- We live and walk by Faith (2 Corinthians 5:7)
- We work and labour by Faith (1 Thessalonians 1:3)
- We have power to pray by Faith (Luke 17:5-6)
- We are shielded and protected by Faith (Ephesian 6:16)

Paul was thankful because the church in Colossae were growing in their faith in Jesus Christ – and he could see that this was happening.

2. THE RESPONSES TO THANKSGIVING (COLOSSIANS 1:9-12)

Apostle Paul says (v.9a) “*for this reason*”. i.e. because Paul is able to give thanks for them, he is able to pray for them. It is easy for one to flow into the other; giving thanks easily flows into prayer.

Note this is *unceasing* prayer. In the same way that Paul couldn’t help himself with the one long sentence of thanksgiving, Paul couldn’t stop himself praying for the Colossians.

What Paul prays for, is not vague or unclear. He knew of the false teachings that were threatening the church, so he focuses his prayers on this situation. Paul prays for:

a) **Spiritual Intelligence** (v.9)

“*to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives*”.

Spiritual Intelligence, is to have wisdom and insight into who God is and what His will is.

The words “knowledge”, “wisdom” and “spiritual understanding” would have been

the same vocabulary that the false teachers would have used. Paul reclaims these phrases and includes them in his prayers.

Paul tells the Colossians that they do not need a *new* spiritual experience; they need to grow in the experience they've already had. He prays that the Colossians will grow in their wisdom and knowledge of God, and grow in their understanding of what God is doing.

b) **Practical Obedience** (v.10)

“to live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way”

The false teachers taught that ‘spiritual knowledge’ did not affect to the realities of daily life. But in Christianity, learning and living go hand-in-hand.

True spiritual wisdom follows through and affects the daily life; knowledge and obedience go together. *“All Bible truths are practical, not theoretical”*.

In response to God’s love for us, as Christians, we live lives that honour God.

c) **Moral Excellence** (v.11-12)

v.11b *“that you may have great endurance and patience”*

Spiritual wisdom and practical obedience must be complemented by wholesome, core life values. We need to be people who are upright, and beyond criticism.

Paul’s prayer for the Colossians are equally valid for us today.

We need **Spiritual Intelligence**, so that we will deepen our relationship with God.

We need **Practical Obedience**; to put into practice what we know in our spiritual lives.

We need **Moral Excellence**; to conduct ourselves and hold core life values that are consistent with being a Christian and follower of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

These verses are a stimulus and a challenge to our prayer lives today, both individually and at Goldstone church. As we pray for each other and for the situations and genuine concerns that we have, this passage presents prayer in a slightly different light.

Perhaps, like Paul, we should start our prayers with Thanksgiving.

As we pray for someone, we start by thanking God for who they are.

If they are not a Christian, we can still thank God that He has not forgotten them, that He still loves them and that He still seeks to have a relationship with them.

If the person we are praying for is a Christian, thank God that they have:

- **Heard** the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- **Believed** in Jesus Christ
- Are **learning** and being a disciple for Jesus Christ
- **Faithful** in their Walk with Jesus Christ

Having given thanks to God, let us pray for:

- **Spiritual Intelligence.** That we will have wisdom and insight into who God is and what His will is.
- **Practical Obedience.** That our knowledge of God will be expressed practically in our daily lives.
- **Moral Excellence.** That we will hold and develop a personal character that is more and more Christ-like.

We have condensed the church vision to 6 words:

Growing Up, Growing Out, Growing Together.

This is a declaration of what we believe God is wanting here at Goldstone church.

This vision starts with prayer – and is achieved through prayer.

Prayers of thanksgiving, flowing into Prayers of Petition.

As we pray this week (individually or in groups), let us pray wholeheartedly with **Thanksgiving in Christ.**

AMEN