



## *Thank God for Gospel Growth* Colossians 1:3-8

### I. The Need for Thankful Prayer (3)

[This one cuts across each of the following... it is the expression of the thankfulness described later.]

- When we are most thankful, it's usually for something selfish/temporal...
- He reminds us that we need to work at being thankful
- Thankfulness is a neglected area of prayer (e.g. *lacking in good books on prayer*)

**Rom 1:21** For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him...

**Psa 75:1** We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds.

**Psa 106:1** Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

**1 Thes 5:16-18** Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks...

- Scripture tells us over and over to be thankful. It reminds us to be thankful.
- Work at being most thankful for spiritual blessings
- Watch for reasons to give thanks in others
- Work at being most thankful for spiritual things
- Work at your thankfulness actually being voiced in prayer
- Communicate your thankfulness and prayers of thanks to others

**Discussion 1: The sin of ingratitude.** Read 2 Timothy 3:2-5

[**This is an important truth.** Try not to get too bogged down in conviction of sin **right now**. Encourage everyone to recognize their sin of ingratitude, confess it, and then be thankful for the Holy Spirit's conviction and granting repentance. *Encourage those who are tending to focus on their sin to go home and fall on their faces before God later...* For this meeting, we are going to focus on and live out thankfulness!]

<sup>ESV</sup> **2 Timothy 3:2-5** For people will be <sup>a</sup>lovers of self, <sup>b</sup>lovers of money, <sup>c</sup>proud, <sup>c</sup>arrogant, abusive, <sup>c</sup>disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, unholy, <sup>3</sup> <sup>a</sup>heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, <sup>b</sup>not loving good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, <sup>a</sup>swollen with conceit, <sup>b</sup>lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having the appearance of godliness, but <sup>a</sup>denying its power. <sup>b</sup>Avoid such people.

- *Have you ever noticed "ungrateful" being mentioned among these other adjectives?* [easy to miss among the "biggies"]

- *What does it tell you about how God sees ingratitude?* [It is a biggie]
- *What does it tell you about the nature of ingratitude?* [Self-idolatry, hypocrisy...]

## II. Thankful for Faith (4)

- This isn't just blind belief. Not just wishful thinking. It is a *believing trust* in something.
- The key is to see that there's an object of this faith *in Christ Jesus*
  - In his *person* – fully God, fully man, the Messiah, the fulfillment of all God's promises
  - In his *work* – in our place, he lived perfectly and died, completely taking our punishment. And he rose victoriously...
- Main point: Paul thanks God for their faith.
- We should frequently thank God for others' salvation.
- We should use that reality to fight off our aggravations, disappointments and disagreements with others.

## III. Thankful for Love (4)

- There's an inextricable connection between faith and love.
- Jesus and John both told us that the world will know that we are Christians by our love.
- Paul says the same here – their "faith" and "love" inextricably go together.
- Their faith is real, and it's truly in Jesus, and so they have love for each other.
- There's isn't just a feeling of love, but a commitment to love; it's a decision
- This is the only kind of love that can love the unlovely.
- This is the kind of love with which we've been loved in Christ.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Corinthians 13:4** <sup>a</sup>Love is patient and <sup>b</sup>kind; love <sup>c</sup>does not envy or boast; it <sup>d</sup>is not arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It <sup>a</sup>does not insist on its own way; it <sup>b</sup>is not irritable or resentful;<sup>16</sup> it <sup>a</sup>does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but <sup>b</sup>rejoices with the truth.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Peter 4:8** Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since <sup>a</sup>love covers a multitude of sins.

## IV. Thankful for Hope (5)

- Paul is connecting a lot of good things. Faith, love, and hope: what's the relationship?
- It's a cycle:
  - Faith leads to hope.
  - Faith and hope lead to love
  - Hope of heaven leads to more faith and more love.

- But it is not enough to just know and occasionally remember that we’re saved, that we have a heavenly hope. We have to think on it. Ruminates on it.

**1 Pet 1:13** *Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought at the coming of Christ*

**Discussion 2:** Thank God for Faith, Hope & Love

- *Look around the room and marvel that God would choose to graciously choose and draw to Himself (grant believing faith to) such a group. Marvel at God’s grace.* [You may need to explain to new believers how much we don’t deserve God’s favor (grace)]
- *Spend some time thanking God for the faith granted to those around you.* [You know your group... get others involved in praying, but lead out!]
- *Spend some time thanking God for the love of the brethren.* [You will have folks convicted over their lovelessness. Good! *Again, encourage them to go home and fall on their faces before God in repentance later, but for now... focus on the love that you have experienced, seen grow, etc. in those around you.* Do you recognize how unworldly it is for this odd collection of people to love one another?]

**V. Thankful for the Gospel (5)**

- The gospel = good news – the message of the person and work of Christ, particularly what he accomplished in his perfect life, complete death, and victorious resurrection for our sins.

**1 Cor 15:1-4** *Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved... For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures...*

- Notice the progression of the saving experience (what we call conversion)
  1. the gospel “comes to you” (6a)
  2. you “hear” it (6b)
  3. you “understand” it (6b)
    - ... to be “truth” (5b)
    - ... to be “grace” (6b)
  4. it is received by “faith” (4)
  5. it results in “hope”
  6. it results in “love”
- Paul never tires of giving thanks to God that he’s been saved.

- Paul never tires of giving thanks to God that others have been saved. It's never a given.
- It's never something we should get used to. Not even in the new heavens and new earth (Rev 5)

## VI. Thankful for Gospel Growth (6)

**V 6** - *"the gospel has [not only] come to you..., it is bearing fruit and growing among you, as it has since the day you heard and understood it"*

- There are two ways the gospel grows and bears fruit (broader and deeper)
  1. It spreads to new hearts
  2. It increasingly grows and bears fruit in the hearts those who are already Christians
- It's not shocking or odd for a Christians to hear that the gospel is supposed to spread to new people
- It's not shocking or odd to hear that Christians are supposed to grow and bear fruit (2 Pet 3:18)
- What is shocking and odd to some of us is to realize that Paul specifically says that *the gospel is the thing in us that is growing and bearing fruit.*
- The Gospel is still for Christians (Rom 1:15)

**Romans 1:15** *So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.*

We never outgrow the gospel; we never stop needing the gospel. We continually need the gospel because there's still a wrestling with sin and guilt.

We never "get beyond the gospel" in our Christian life to something more "advanced." The gospel is not the first "step" in a "stairway" of truths, rather, it is more like the "hub" in a "wheel" of truth. The gospel is not just the A-B-C's of Christianity, but it is the A to Z of Christianity. The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we all make progress in the kingdom. We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience but the gospel is the we grow (Gal. 3:1-3) and are renewed (Col 1:6). It is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier (Rom 1:16-17). It is very common in the church to think as follows: "The gospel is for non-Christians. One needs it to be saved. But once saved, you grow through hard work and obedience." But Colossians 1:6 shows that this is a mistake... All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel. Thus when Paul left the Ephesians he committed them "to the word of his grace, which can build you up" (Acts 20:32). The main problem, then, in the Christian life is that we have not thought out the deep implications of the gospel, we have not "used" the gospel in and on all parts of our life.

**Tim Keller**

- The Bible tells us to preach to ourselves (Psa 42)

**Psalm 42:5-6** *Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence. <sup>6</sup> O my God, my soul is in despair within me; Therefore I remember You*

- That's what the Lord's Supper is for
  - o It preaches the gospel to us
  - o It demonstrates that our hope is outside of us and our hope is settled in the death of Jesus

**1 Cor 11:26** *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*

- The Gospel is the root of the Christian life (Gal 2:14)

**Galatians 2:14** *But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"*

- Paul says that the Colossians were bearing gospel fruit, and the gospel was growing in them.

### Discussion 3: Gospel Fruit Inspection

- *Is your fruit "gospel fruit" or the trumped-up fake fruit of your own strength, your own efforts, and often to your own glory?*
- *Am I pursuing holiness in a way that is a conscience expression and living out of the gospel?*

[It's so easy to think that we're bearing fruit because we're doing this or doing that...but we may be doing what we're doing out of a motivation of **guilt**. How ironic! It should spring from the freeing love of the gospel and instead is done to earn points with God. Oh, maybe not done to earn salvation, maybe only done to earn his "blessings." God help us. We have no hope but the blood of Jesus. ]

## VII. Thankful for Gospel Messengers (7-8)

- Paul expresses his thankfulness specifically for Epaphras - *probably the messenger to bring Paul's gospel to Colossae and other surrounding cities.*
- We should give thanks for messengers
  - o Those who first shared the gospel with us
  - o Those who taught us Bible basics, perhaps in our childhood
  - o Those who continue to help us learn and grow in the gospel
- We should be messengers ourselves
- Together, we should talk frequently, thoughtfully, and worshipfully talk about what God is doing.



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