

屬天眼光的感恩——歌羅西書 1:3-8  
**Heavenly Minded Thanksgiving -- Colossians 1: 3-8**

*Introduction / Outline*

- Scripture reading: Psalm 107, a psalm of thanksgiving.
- The importance of thanksgiving (1 Thessalonians 5:18); example: a sister who says ‘thank you, God’ all the time.
- "Weak believers are only thankful when things go well; strong believers are perpetually thankful." - a pastor
- Failure to be thankful is a perspective issue: worldly perspective vs. heavenly perspective. Today's text is a great example of how a heavenly perspective helps us to be perpetually thankful.
  
- **OUTLINE:**
  1. Paul's thanksgiving (v3) **【application: what is thanksgiving】**
  2. Reason for thanksgiving (vv. 4-5) **【application: give thanks for evidence of salvation】**
  3. Reason for reason for thanksgiving (vv. 6-8) **【application: give thanks for work of the gospel】**

## **1. WHAT IS THANKSGIVING**

- The meaning of ‘thanksgiving’: The word is composed of "good" and "grace" in Greek- You receive some kind of grace (gift), and you think it is very good and makes you happy, so you naturally express appreciation to the giver of the gift, acknowledging that you have received "good grace" from him.
- Thanksgiving is an important theme of Colossians: Paul expresses his own thankfulness in this verse; he prays that the Colossian believers would learn to be thankful in 1:12; thanksgiving is the key to guard against false teaching in 2:7; it is a key element to unity and love in the church in 3:15; the whole Christian life is about giving thanks to God in all things in 3:16-17; and the basic attitude of prayer in 4:2 is also thanksgiving, without which the prayer would not be pleasing to God.
- Recipient of thanksgiving: "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3). The triune God is one God in three Persons, and the ultimate source of all grace is God the Father, so our thanks should ultimately be given to God the Father (refer to v. 12).

James 1:17 ‘Every good thing given...is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, ...’

- Expression of thanksgiving: "prayer" (v. 3). In the original text, "pray" is a participle of time, and the best translation is "when we pray, we always thank God for you".

Application: Just saying "Thank God" to others without saying it to God in prayers is hypocrisy. It doesn't count.

Application: A common reason why it feels hard to persevere in prayer and to find motivation for it is because thanksgiving is neglected. In 4:2 it says "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." Without the alertness and thanksgiving, it will be hard to devote oneself to prayer. Prayer of thanksgiving is a personal discipline. No one can see it. It's a matter between you and God.

## **2. GIVE THANKS FOR EVIDENCE OF SALVATION**

- 'Faith', 'Love', 'Hope' (v4-5): The triad of Christian virtues. These are the reasons why Paul gives thanks for the readers.
- "faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 4): the faith that looks back into history. To be sure, faith also looks forward into the future, but that forward-looking faith is called 'hope' in the next verse, so the faith in this verse focuses on the past event, that is, the person and work of Jesus: the incarnation, the cross, the resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father to intercede for us this very moment. This is the foundation of our faith. It is not about "what would Jesus do," but "what has Jesus done."
- "the love which you have for all the saints" (v. 4) : the object of love is all the saints. Not that we shouldn't love unbelievers, but because of the spiritual reality, our love for fellow believers ought to be qualitatively and quantitatively different than our love for unbelievers.

The word "saints" reveal the foundation of this love: positional sanctification is the inner cleansing of the Holy Spirit, and one of the results of this cleansing is sincere brotherly love. 1 Peter 1:22 "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls (positional sanctification) for (indicating result) a sincere love of the brethren (this sincere love is already a fact!), fervently love one another from the heart (exhortation based on the fact—live out the love you already have!)." (refer 1 Thessalonians 4:9)

- "because of the hope laid up for you in heaven" (v. 5): causal relationship. The reason for "love" is "hope." It can be rendered as "This love exists because of the hope that is laid up for you in heaven.' The heavenly hope of Christians is an important motivation for mutual love. We love each other not for any benefit or satisfaction in this life, but because of our shared hope of eternal life! Our church life now is a rehearsal of our life in heaven! This hope is "for you ("you all", plural)." It's a corporate hope, not an individual one. The Triune God wouldn't be complete without all three Persons; likewise, the heavenly hope of the saints wouldn't be complete without one another. Having this hope, how can we not love our brothers and sisters fervently?

The logical relationship of faith, hope, and love: faith brings hope, and hope fuels love. Hope is the link between faith and love.

Application: If love lacks motivation, perhaps hope is misplaced. Examine yourself, are you really hoping for the things above? Or the things that are on earth? We must see things from a heavenly perspective.

Application: Since hope is so important, can you clearly articulate the content of your heavenly hope? What does the Bible reveal about the future for believers? Please share it with your family, brothers and sisters to encourage one another.

Application: Paul often thanks God for the salvation of believers, even when they have many problems and a long way to go for sanctification. When we see problems in our brothers and sisters, would you try first thanking God for the changes He has wrought in them?

- "of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel" (v. 5): Looking back on the initial work of the gospel among them, Paul's thanksgiving goes further: He not only sees the current state of their faith, but also the deeper fact that this is the wonderful work of the gospel truth. This leads to the next point, thanksgiving for the wonderful work of the gospel.

'The word of truth, the gospel': Three nouns emphasize the essence of the gospel message. 'Gospel' emphasizes that this is good news and benefits us. "Truth" emphasizes that it is true. In Colosse, which is full of heresy, it is very important to distinguish between the true and the false. "Word" emphasizes that this message must be verbally conveyed. At the same time, "Word" also points to Jesus Himself (John 1:1, 14). The work of the preached word (gospel) is the work of the incarnate Word (Jesus)!

### **3. GIVE THANKS FOR THE WORK OF GOSPEL**

- "come to", "bearing fruit", "increasing" (v. 6): three personal verbs describing the work of the gospel. The word "come" means "to go/be somewhere in person" and is almost exclusively used with humans. To "bear fruit" is a metaphor for living out the good conduct that pleases God. To "increase" originally refers to reproductive activity, here it refers to the spread of the gospel and the increase of believers.

The subject of all three personal verbs is "gospel", indicating that the gospel is not just a message, but it is living and powerful - our life is a living testimony!

- "all the world" (v6): a wider perspective. The gospel "has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing (in all the world), even as it has been doing in you." From Colossae to the world, and from the world back to Colossae, Paul sees their place in the entire plan of salvation.

God's will is that the gospel be preached to "all the world" (see Genesis 12:3, Isaiah 49:6; 52:10, Matt 24:14, Acts 1:8). What Paul sees in the Colossian church is the advancement of God's will.

Application: The salvation of individual believers are not isolated events, but an integral part of God's entire redemption plan. Learn to see your brothers and sisters in the big picture of God's kingdom plan, and it'll not be too hard to give thanks.

- “even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth” (v. 6): the starting point of the gospel's work on individual believers.

“understood the grace of God” is equivalent to saving faith, but it expresses the essence of saving faith - to know the amazing grace of God from the gospel!

"understood ... in truth" means detailed and profound knowledge, and the content of that knowledge is the grace of God. The core of the gospel is to know God. John 17:3 “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

- “Epaphras, ... a faithful servant of Christ” (v. 7): The gospel uses believers to accomplish its work. The faithful ministry of Epaphras became part of the salvation testimony of the Colossians. Reflecting upon these true stories, Paul's heart is full of thanksgiving.
- “Love in the Spirit” (v. 8): echoing verses 4-5, but omitting faith and hope. The life of a believer, summarized in three points, is: faith, hope, and love (1 Corinthians 13:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:3); summarized in two points: faith and love (1 Thessalonians 3:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 1 Timothy 1:14; Philemon 5; 1 John 3:23); summed up in one point, it is love (1 Corinthians 13:13 "the greatest of these is love"; 1 Timothy 1:5 , "<the goal> of our instruction is love"; 1 John 3:14; Hebrews 6:9-11)!

Concluding application: Paul's thanksgiving prayer for the believers is filled with heavenly perspective. Shouldn't that affect our prayer life too? May we practice this heavenly minded thanksgiving regularly in our personal prayer life.