

## Grace at Work—Thanking, Praying to, and Praising God!

5<sup>th</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 7/10/22 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Colossians 1:1-14 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 2, Paul writes to “the saints...at Colossae”, and to the saints at MCLC in Ft. Lupton as well today and promises this: **“Grace to you and peace from God our Father.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ This Reading today is the beginning; the “introduction” if you will, of St. Paul’s letter written to the new believers in the city of Colossae in the upper Mediterranean region of ancient Asia Minor.

→ And as new Christians, Paul finds out that these Colossian believers are having their faith challenged by the culture around them. In chapter 2:8, Paul says to them, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ”.

→ These false teachers, whose ideas later developed into the heresy known as Gnosticism, used philosophical arguments to say that anything physical – that is our bodies and pretty much all of the physical components of God’s creation – was evil. So, they believed that the only way to find “true enlightenment” was by acquiring a special “secret knowledge” in the spiritual realm.

→ As Paul says, the culture was promoting empty lies (2:8) that centered on warm and fuzzy platitudes and denied Christ as the Son of God in human flesh, and therefore discounted His saving work on the cross as being of no value at all.

✘ Hopefully you see how much this is like what we face in our culture today, where political and social leaders and movements try to convince us that they have some special, more enlightened truth than what God Himself has directly given to us in the Bible.

→ Like the false teachers in Colossae, our culturally popular leaders use deceitful phrases like “pro-choice” or “women’s health” to candy-coat their fight for the right to murder unborn babies. Or they throw out phrases that sound good, and we even agree with, if you take the words by themselves, like “Jesus loves everyone as they are” to side-track us from their real beliefs which reject God’s clear Creation of all people at conception as either male or female, and His gift of marriage as the only true bond of one woman and one man into one flesh.

### **I. We Need God’s Reminder**

✘ And so, just as with the Colossians in today’s text, our culture today tells us and our world that if you actually believe God’s Word is true, then “you’re out of touch; your ignorant and unacceptable”. And for you or me to think that God actually took on human flesh to save us...well “that’s the ultimate expression of shame and foolishness”, they say. But sadly, more and more Christians today – especially in the younger generations, are falling prey to these deceitful lies around us.

→ Why? Because we Christians have in fact “lost touch” and we too often forget the great things God, our Heavenly Father has done for us and lovingly revealed to us in His Word and through His Son and Holy Spirit. Too many of us are even losing what we’ve been taught so that we are no longer clear as to how, and through whom God has done these things for us, so that we are now ungrateful and thankless Christians “in name only”.

✘ The facts speak for themselves: we are infected with our world’s dependence upon what they call the virtues of self-reliance and self-sufficiency – even in things spiritual. And we’ve become embarrassed by our faith and intimidated into silence, so that now our numbers as Christians are dwindling and our faith is at risk of becoming weak or non-existent within us.

→ This means then that our prayers to the Lord become far fewer and much more superficial and self-serving, and our complaining toward God becomes more common and more frequent than our praising of Him from whom all blessings flow.

✘ When you add all of this up, what does it mean for the kind of witness that we Christians give to our world today? Is it any wonder that our culture has become much bolder in proclaiming and spreading their false, anti-Christian ideas, and that more and more people are joining their ranks than those who are connecting to Christ and His Church? Folks, when we stew or cower in silence, there's really only one message left for our world to hear.

→ And so, we need a reminder! We need the same proclamation that Paul gives to the Christians in Colossae, that God's grace and peace are real and at work in us and among us and through us, so that we do not just sit in our pews, or our living rooms, in silence but we actively see and 1) give thanks to God, while we also 2) pray to God with much more purpose and depth, and we 3) praise our God publicly and proudly.

→ Those are the three things; the three ways that Paul says God's grace works within us as believers in Christ. So let's explore them for a bit here – one at a time.

## II. We Thank God!

✘ In verses 3-8 Paul sets the example for us when he lists out a number of reasons that he and the other leaders of the Church “always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v.3).

→ The first reason is so obvious that many of us forget to acknowledge it and thank the Lord for it. That is bringing us to faith in Christ. But Paul reminds the Colossians, as he does you and me by extension how important it is to thank God for our faith in Christ. For it is the people's 1) faith that Paul says leads into 2) their love for all of the saints that stems from their 3) hope that is laid up for them in heaven (vv.4-5).

→ Friends, these are the things that set us apart from the rest of the world – our faith in Christ, our unconditional love for each other that we've learned from Christ's unconditional love for us, and our confidence and eagerness to enter into Christ's glory with Him in our eternal heavenly home. These define us as Christians. They set us apart and they should excite us to live in an attitude of gratitude every single day.

✘ The next things that Paul lists as reasons for giving thanks to God are the wonderful ways in which He gives us these very gifts. With the Colossians, God brings us to faith through the “word of the truth, the Gospel” (v.5) – that is the Good News of Jesus in Holy Scripture. Romans 10:17 says, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ”.

→ And that perfect Word Paul says in verse six “bears fruit” when we spread it through out “the whole world” and it then “grows” both within us individually the more we study and connect to His Word and it grows in our culture the more we proclaim it and share it unabashedly with others.

→ Paul highlights what I think is one of the saddest things among us in the Christian Church today. In the Bible, God has given us the most powerful and most valuable and most precious tool and gift possible. It is God's very own, personal revelation of Himself and of His grace-filled work throughout history and right now this very day...for each of us and for all of mankind. And yet we Christians have just allowed our world to bash it, ignore it, and shame us to the point that we are embarrassed and unwilling to embrace and live in and share God's Word with others anymore. Yet as Paul says, he does – and we must – give thanks to God for His Word of truth and come back to using it every day in our lives. The Bible is that important! It gives us life. It

guides our lives. It sustains us and comforts us and strengthens us and saves us because it connects us to our Savior in all things.

- ✘ Paul also reminds the people in verse seven to give thanks to God for a man named Epaphras who was the “faithful minister of Christ”; the one who taught Gods’ Word to them and led them to Christ and encouraged them as they grew in their faith.

### III. We Pray to God!

- ✘ Moving on – in verses 9-12a, Paul models for us and the Colossians how important it is that all Christians are actively in prayer with God. Yes, prayer is a fruit of God’s grace at work in our lives. Notice how Paul says, “From the day we heard (of your faith), 1) we have not ceased to pray for you, 2) asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...”.

→ We just talked about how important and powerful it is for us to “hear” God’s Word and continue to grow in it. But Paul shows us here that he understands how perilous life is in this sin-infested world. While the free gift of salvation is a gift that lasts into eternity once you and I have it, the Bible is also clear that until the moment of our death, we all have the free will to refuse the gift and fall back into unbelief and condemnation at any time.

→ So Paul and we need to be in ceaseless prayer that God will protect us from such evil and constantly fill us and grow us with His wisdom and understanding.

- ✘ Why? That’s what we find in verses 10-12a. “So as,” Paul says, 1) “to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”, that is a life where we 2) “bear fruit” in all kinds of “good work” and 3) increase in the knowledge of God (do you see the pattern here – God wants us growing; always growing in His Word) and thereby 4) increase in the strength of our faith and 5) again give thanks to God the Father for all of it!

→ Notice in 11 what the added benefit is for us when we grow in God’s Word and become stronger in our faith. He says that our endurance and patience in the struggles we all face in life increases as does our joy! And who doesn’t want more joy in their lives every day?

### IV. We Praise God!

- ✘ In the closing two and a half verses of our text Paul shows us by example, how God’s grace works in us to proclaim and celebrate our relationship with the Triune God in praising Him for His works whenever and wherever possible.

→ Paul reaffirms the indisputable Christian fact that our place in God’s family and Church are due always and only to His work of grace and not ours. He says in 12b that it is the Father “who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light”.

→ Likewise, He’s the one in verse 13 who has “delivered us from the domain of darkness” – that’s our earlier life in unbelief where the devil works to darken and obscure our ability to see Jesus (Eph. 6:12), and has “transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son...”.

→ Paul uses the image of darkness and light as an apt way for us to understand our conversion from unbelief into faith and eternal salvation. Remember, before God created anything darkness covered the entire earth (Gen. 1:2) and He alone then created light and life by speaking it into existence with His all-powerful Word. So it is that those without saving faith are darkness and those of us with God’s gift of faith are light in the Lord. Now, in faith, we reside in Christ’s kingdom – in part today, as Satan continues to work at trying to draw us away, but upon our death or Christ’s return we then bask in the fullness of His brightness and glory!

⌘ And the final reason for us to proclaim our God's praise in verse 14 is perhaps the most important truth for us to share loud and proud to the ends of the earth. Paul uses what's called the present active tense in the original Greek when he says that it is in Christ that we "have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" today.

➔ Those two things – redemption and forgiveness are synonyms because they both speak of Christ's blood dealing with and removing the problem of our sin. "Redemption" is the idea of a financial transaction that literally means "to buy back". And it was not with silver or gold, but with Christ's holy precious blood that that you and I have been bought back from our slavery to sin to live forever as sons and daughters of God in His kingdom.

➔ The term "forgiveness" literally means "to remove from debt or punishment". Because of our sinful nature and our constant actual sin, the punishment we deserve and the debt we owe is impossible for us to ever meet or fulfill in either instance. But Jesus' death in our place – because of His perfect and sinless life, means that our punishment and our debt is completely paid for. Our record in God's eyes is perfectly clean!

## **Conclusion**

⌘ What more could we ask for than all of that? Nothing! God's grace, in His Son Jesus, has done it all and given us all that we could ever want or need!

➔ Why wouldn't we follow Paul and respond to His threefold reminder and encouragement? And so Christians, we thank God! We pray to God! And we praise God for all things; in all things; and to all the world! Amen.