

Lesson 6

Overflowing with Gratitude

Introduction

One of the basic themes to the book of Colossians is thankfulness. Paul continually reminds his readers of their need for it.

- He speaks of his desire for them to express it as they reflect on God's great work of salvation in them and among them, 1.12-14.
- He speaks of how our *overflowing with gratitude* is the natural result of being connected (or rooted) to our life source: Jesus, 2.6-7.
- Again in 3.15-16 he talks of being thankful and having gratitude in one's heart.
- And finally, in 4.2 he tells us to *stay alert in prayer with thanksgiving*.

Why so much emphasis on thankfulness?

Think of how it can serve as a protection against the lying attacks of Satan. When we focus on how good God is, how gracious He is, how caring He is, it reinforces our resolve to remain true.

For what should we be thankful? An examination of Colossians reveals five things.

Gratitude for Salvation

giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In him we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins, Colossians 1.12-14.

In these verses we find four things to praise God for.

First, **he has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light, 1.12.** At one time, you were an enemy of God, a sinner separated from Him. By enabling you, God has empowered you or helped make you complete. You, who were once unworthy, have been made worthy of receiving the saints' inheritance. That is simply incredible!

Next, **he has liberated you by rescuing you from the domain of darkness, 1.13.** When you were baptized God transferred you to the place where Satan can't dwell. The *transfer* that took place describes a change in geography, place, or residence. You have been totally removed from Satanic darkness and placed where Jesus reigns.

Some have linked 1.13 to what happened with the Hebrew people in Exodus 6.6-8. God rescued them from oppression, brutality, and slavery. Even this far back in history we see God delivering, redeeming, and bringing His people to the place where He desires.

Third, **he has redeemed you through Christ, 1.14a.** You, as a sinner, were a slave to your sin. Jesus paid the price for your sin at the cross, changing your condition. You are no longer a slave to sin, but now

you are bound to God, Romans 6.22. Your allegiance to Him *results in sanctification – and the outcome is eternal life!* Praise God!

Finally, **he has forgiven and forgotten your debt of sin, 1.14b**. You, as a sinner had piled up an unpayable debt before God. You are no longer under condemnation, Romans 8.1.

- All the sins of your past have been forgiven. Your sins have been sent away *as far as the east is from the west*, Psalm 103.12. Your sins *have been cast into the depths of the sea*, Micah 7.19.
- All your present sins are forgiven. You *stand* in grace, Romans 5.1-2.
- All the sins of your future are forgiven, Ephesians 1.9-14. Jesus ever lives to make intercession for you, Hebrews 7.25.

By your obedient response to Christ, you have been brought in on God's plan of restoration, reconciliation, and mercy. If you remain steadfast in your commitment, your salvation rests on the continuous work of God who is more than committed to see His work completed in you. When you walk daily with God, your salvation is never precarious.

I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Therefore, my dear friends, just as you have always obeyed, so now, not only in my presence but even more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who is working in you both to will and to work according to his good purpose, Philippians 1.6; 2.12-13.

What tremendous reason to have a heart filled with gratitude! When we think of where we were and where we were headed, and now because of the great love and care of our God, all that has changed. The praise should simply pour out of us!

Gratitude for Growth and Progress

So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and overflowing with gratitude, Colossians 2.6-7.

Some have suggested that 2.6a is hinting at the significance of baptism and the commitment made in that action.²⁹ It certainly doesn't add to the context because a few sentences later, v. 12 specifically, Paul focuses on it in greater detail. On the occasion of their salvation, the Colossian Christians would have confessed their belief in Jesus as Christ and voiced their desire for Him to be their Lord. Think back to that day and compare who you were then and who you are now. It is important to remember and meditate on the great things Christ has done for you. You are not the same person you were then, and it is by His power that that is so. What a tremendous thing to be grateful for!

We should also be thankful for the stability Christ provides. *We have been rooted and built up in him and established in the faith*, 2.7. There is a combination of imagery in this verse. Paul is saying we have sunk our roots into Christ. This happened at baptism. And every moment afterward, He continually supplies our spiritual life. He is your spiritual life source, providing spiritual nourishment, growth, and fruit. As

²⁹ Wright, N. T. *Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 12 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986, p. 103.

you walk in Him, you are continually being *built up in Him and established in the faith*. God is the one who provides us with a firm foundation for our faith to grow into a healthy spiritual life. Into what has God grounded us?

- Our understanding that He is in control, Romans 8.28; Psalm 42.6-7.
- Our realization that the trials of life have purpose, James 1.12.
- Our increasing dependence on God to supply all our needs, James 1.5, 17-18; Philippians 4.19.
- Our growing likeness of Christ, our daily transformation to where we respond to life as He would, not the way our old self would, Colossians 3.10-11.

When we contemplate these things, we can't help but overflow with gratitude!

Fellowship with Christ and His Church

And let the peace of Christ, to which you were also called in one body, rule your hearts. And be thankful, Colossians 3.15.

The peace Paul mentions at the beginning of this verse is both a state and an experience. You should be very thankful for the state of peace you now enjoy with our Lord. Once you were an enemy, Romans 5.10, but now you have been reconciled, Colossians 1.19-20. You are now “in agreement” with Him. You are now inside a relationship with Him. This leads to an experience of peace, inner rest, and calm. As you meditate on this, we realize that the King of the universe is assisting in and directing our life. He calls the shots and will never lead us off the path.

Along with this, you are never alone. You have been *called into one body*. You now get to do life together with other believers, who help hold you up. It is so important to see the church in a positive light, seeing and appreciating our essential connection with our spiritual family. We need to see the value of the local church.

The *thankfulness* described in this verse is the defining characteristic of the believer. Ingratitude defines the unbeliever, not the child of God, Romans 1.21.

Opportunities to Serve

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him, Colossians 3.17.

This verse is written in the context of our personal relationship with people inside the body. Whatever we do in service to others becomes an opportunity to bring glory to the name of God. This is really something that should become a pleasure for us. As we serve others, we are filled with joy when they are filled with joy.

Colossians 3.17 completes the thought Paul began in 2.6 ... *continue to walk in Him*. We represent Jesus in everything we do. He empowers us to do good to others. Remember, He is our life source and provides us with the spiritual energy to accomplish His work. We comply with the direction of the Spirit with an attitude of thanks. God has done so much for us by placing the people in our lives so we can serve them.

Answered Prayer

Devote yourselves to prayer; stay alert in it with thanksgiving, Colossians 4.2.

This verse describes three aspects of our prayer life.

First, **we make intercessions to our God**. This is the action of casting all our cares upon the God who cares for us, 1 Peter 5.7.

Next, **we watch for His answer**. *We stay alert in it*. In other words, we live in anticipation as to how God will answer our prayer. We trust God and will not go around filled with anxiousness and worry. So, we wait and watch as to how God will move.

Finally, **we are filled with thanksgiving when He answers**. We do so, however He answers, with the spirit of gratitude and thankfulness. God is with us. God provides for us. He forgives us. He promises an inheritance and works things out for us as we move forward on our spiritual journey. Truly, God is an amazing God!

Conclusion

God is so good. We all have so much to be thankful for! No one can receive anything unless it has been given to him from heaven, John 3.27. God has you. He has your back. He has saved you. He is filling your life with blessings. He is leading you home. For what more could you ask?

For Thought and Reflection

1. What makes you most thankful about your salvation? Why?
2. Since your baptism, what are you most thankful for in your transformation? Where do you think God has accomplished the most in changing who you are? How does this make you thankful?
3. Why is it so important to see the church in a positive light?
4. What is the defining characteristic of the believer?
5. What is so joyful about serving others?
6. Thinking about the prayers you have prayed, how has God answered them? What are you thankful for?