

Colossians 1:3-14
THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, [ever] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope, which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before, in the Word of the truth of the Gospel which has come to you, as it has also in all the world and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Sometimes when circumstances change, the change is insignificant. Other times, the change is dramatic! That's when people say, "This changes everything!" Such is the thought of our text.

The verses are from the first part of Paul's letter to the church at Colosse, a congregation which Paul had not started—perhaps started by Epaphras—which Paul had not yet visited. He wrote as a dear friend, a shepherd and pastor in Christ. He was seeking to build up the people in their day to day conduct, love, and actions for the Lord. It's a letter that could be written to us—here at St. Luke's. The people at Colosse were like us—sinners with troublesome issues in life, yet sinners rescued through Christ for eternal life.

Paul says *We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, [ever] since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints.* Paul gives thanks to Jesus for this congregation "always." Are your prayers "one and done," as if something to check off a list? Pray again. Paul gives thanks for their faith in Christ and for their self-sacrificing love for other Christians. Isn't that what God wants?—that Christians give thanks for other Christians—for their saving faith in Jesus and for their love shown to fellow saints—that is, believers, those declared "holy" through Jesus. Paul's heart was filled with joy. Does it give you joy to know that your fellow members at St. Luke's have faith in Christ for forgiveness and for eternal life? Does it also give you joy to see the love they show to others? I hope you are not bitter about fellow members at St. Luke's--fellow heirs of eternal life. Give thanks for them. Similarly, give thanks to God for fellow Christians in the CLC—who stand with you in your confession of the Truths of God's Word, striving not to let parts of the Word slide, because of popular opinion. Give thanks for your fellow CLC members' faith in Christ and for the joy they share with you, for the love they have for you—whether they even know you by face or by name, or not. If a disaster struck at St. Luke's, they would reach out to help. Finally, give thanks and pray for Christians around the world. It's a joy to know that we are not the only believers on earth. Paul prayed for the saints/the believers at Colosse since he first heard of their faith in Christ and for their love and concern for believers. Pray for one another—a part of Christian life.

How was it that the Colossians had faith in Jesus and had self-sacrificing love for others? Were they just "great" people? No. It was because of the message of "heaven in Christ" that had come to them! *Because of the hope, which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before, in the Word of the truth of the Gospel which has come to you, as it has also in all the world.* They had faith in Christ and love for others because of the message of the Gospel of forgiveness in Christ which had come to them. It was a message of Good News and a treasure stored in heaven for them—eternal life itself! When you know there is a treasure laid up for you, it keeps you going. If you were walking, say for ten miles, on a hot day because your vehicle quit, and you knew that cool water and help awaited you, you at the end, you would keep pushing to get there. Likewise, because of the sure Gospel message of forgiveness and eternal life which awaits you in heaven, you keep pushing ahead in life, come what may, in faith in Jesus and in love for others. The Gospel Word has come to you, not by good fate or good luck, but the Lord in His love has brought the Word to you. Do you ever wonder how it is that you are an heir of heaven in Christ, for that you are a member of St. Luke's? By God's doing. God brings the Good News to people past and present at the right time.

His Word produces fruit, fruits of Christian good works in the lives of Christians. It begins immediately. *And is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth.* The great message of pardon and new life in Christ changes everything for believers around the world and for you—right away! If you were stranded on a roof top in a flood, unable to swim the current, with the house shuddering from the force of the water, and feeling quite hopeless and lost; everything changes immediately when you hear or see a rescue squad headed your way. . Your thoughts and heart change immediately. So then, to hear of the “grace of God in truth through Christ” changes everything! Grace is undeserved love—as when the bank extends a grace period to you for a payment. The pressure of the deadline is lifted. A great change! It would be a slap in the face to slight the bank and not strive to meet the new deadline. When one knows that Christ has paid in full the debt for sin, that the wrath of the Father and His sentence of “Guilty!” is lifted, life changes immediately. Immediately love and thanks flow into the heart and one begins to serve the Lord willingly with the “new man” in the heart. This is what lies behind the life, words, and actions of a Christian.

Paul’s prayers of thanks for the faith and love of the believers [saints] at Colosse also include prayers for spiritual growth. *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.* Paul wants them to get closer and closer to the Lord of salvation. He prays that they be filled with the knowledge of God’s will. Was Paul hoping that a delivery man would come by and pump them full of knowledge of God’s will? To be filled with the knowledge of God’s will comes by Scripture study. One cannot expect to grow in knowledge of “American history” except by devoting time to reading, researching, and listening to others. So it is with growth in understanding God’s will for Christian life--“What does God want me to do about this? and to think about that?” The deeper one gets into God’s Word, the easier it is to move ahead and with less haphazard thoughts. It isn’t just “knowledge” for which Paul prays, but *wisdom and spiritual understanding*--knowing how to apply Scripture to life and gain a spiritual perspective, not just a physical one. How to handle, things like the combine burning up or the doctor’s report stating that your injuries are very severe. Rather than reacting with, “Stupid mistake! Bad luck!” react with, “The Lord is teaching me not to trust things or myself, but to trust Him and His love for me in Christ my Savior.”

That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. The daily walk of life has many paths to travel.. Whatever comes, walk worthy of the Lord. Have you ever heard of a soldier being a disgrace to his uniform? Do not walk through life with actions and words that are a disgrace to the Savior. Grow, and be fruitful. It’s easy to think, “I don’t need to grow any more in my relationship with the Savior. I’m good where I am.” Beware! To “stay the same” is to lose ground. To rest on what you learned years ago in confirmation class and to call it good, is the devil’s ploy. Too much *uc* is forgotten. Too many ties grow weaker.

Paul wants the Christian to have a greater knowledge so as to be *strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.* Through God’s Word (like with exercising) one is strengthened. His amazing power will get you through the impossible. Perhaps you say, “It hasn’t yet! I have and I have had many negative struggles and losing battles in life. Where is His power?” But don’t forget the big one—death! With forgiveness in Jesus--forgiveness!—you will conquer death! Impossible? Not in Christ who died for your sins and rose again. The God of such power will give you *all patience and longsuffering [endurance] with joy* as we stumble ahead. How sorely we need patience—dealing with people, machinery, or the weather. Patience and endurance with joy--not with grumbling—moves us ahead in our Christian life. There is real joy in trusting your Savior, who knows all and can do all. *Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,* Strengthened by the Word, give thanks daily in each and every situation. The “new man of faith” in Jesus lives daily with love and thanks to God—whether it’s a conscious thought or not. Jesus, the beloved Son of God, has qualified you, made you fit, for the kingdom of life and light—away from the kingdom of darkness and death.

In Paul’s prayer the bottom line behind all is: *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins!* That’s the Bible’s message from Genesis to Revelation. People everywhere are in trouble because of their daily, hourly, sins before God. Physical death awaits and eternal death and separation from God in the pangs of hell awaits. BUT Christ has redeemed! He has paid the punishment price with His blood and death on the cross. You are “bought back.”—redeemed—sins are forgiven forever.

This fact changes everything!

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---