



A new creation focus through Colossians ...

## **Thanksgiving and Petition**

The apostle Paul was a man of prayer. Jesus Himself, of course, was the prime example of one who prayed on a continual basis, and Paul followed his Lord's example. Early on, even, in the church's history, the apostles were known to be praying men. When the widows in the early church in Jerusalem needed assistance in being provided with daily bread, the apostles involved the congregation in appointing seven men to meet these needs. "It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables," they said. "But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the

word" (Acts 6:2,4). The word of God, in the first century, moved forward as it was bolstered by the prayers of the apostles and those faithful saints.

- ◆ **Thanks for the brethren** — As one who had labored diligently in the Lord's vineyard, Paul knew the value of one precious soul. He therefore was willing to pray diligently over the brethren in the congregations, including Colossae. "We give thanks to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," he informs them. "praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints" (Colossians 1:3,4). The apostle had an information network set up throughout the areas in which labored so that he could keep informed of the progress or problems of the saints. He had, therefore, "heard of" the faith and love of the disciples of Christ in Colossae. That did not mean that he had never been to Colossae, because Paul's letter to Philemon indicates otherwise; it simply meant that he was staying updated on the new Christians coming into the congregation and the increase of gospel in that region. The apostle was able therefore to lift up his prayers in thanksgiving for them.

- ◆ **Faith** — These prayers were addressed to the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is interesting that the apostle would use that terminology, but it gives more information concerning the somewhat complex interrelationship between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. The first on Paul's list was that he had heard of the "faith in Christ Jesus" among the brethren. Sometimes where the original language would indicate the "faith of Christ," modern translations usually render it "faith in Christ." The "faith of Christ" refers to the general system of thought connected with the new covenant, whereas "faith in Christ" is referencing the individual's own personal faith, as it is in this quotation from Colossians. The apostle is gratified to hear that the brethren each had his own trust in the Savior as revealed by the word of God and their willing obedience to King Jesus.

*The apostle Paul was rightfully thankful for their progress.*

- ◆ **Love** — God set the stage for defining love when He sent Jesus into the world, as the Lord Himself stated, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God's type of love is centered about getting people to heaven as the first priority, with other elements of joy and happiness second. This type of love in the lives of the Colossian brethren would enable them to overlook the difficulties arising from personal interaction and the occasional failures and foibles that accompany the growth of the children of God.
- ◆ **Hope** — After speaking of faith and love, the apostle Paul adds a comment on hope: "because," says he, "of the hope laid up for you in heaven" (Colossians 1:5). Biblical hope focuses on the resurrection of the dead at Jesus' second coming. When the saint recognizes the grand and eternal import of that event as it applies to him personally, all other hopes are totally secondary.

The existence of the congregation in Colossae was a result of Paul's labors — partly his own, and partly as a result of those whom he had by God's grace influenced. He was rightly thankful to God for their progress, and willingly petitioned the Almighty for continued growth of their faith, love, and hope as they followed Christ.

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