

Grace, mercy and peace are yours in abundance through faith in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ² To the holy and faithful brothers in Christ at Colosse: Grace and peace to you from God our Father.

³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

⁹ For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. **This is God's Word.**

Dear Fellow believers in Jesus,

For the past few days the news has focused on the tragedy in South Carolina. Nine Christians were shot as they studied God's Word in church. Some call it a massacre and some call it terrorism and some call it a hate crime but no matter what you call it, it is evidence that there is evil in this world and this evil attacks people and Christianity in many different ways.

I would guess many of you have prayed for the families who lost loved ones this past week and that is proper – to ask God to help the families of fellow Christians. And as we consider the words of Paul before us this morning we want to consider Paul's prayer of thanksgiving for the Christians in Colosse. How he thanked God for their faith and for their love and then we want to ask ourselves how does our prayer life compare to Paul's?

I. Some people don't like Paul or anything he wrote, especially his letters contained in the New Testament but he was called personally by Christ and sent out, once again, personally by Christ with the Gospel message. It was God who directed Paul to write these words for our benefit. And this portion of scripture is written for believers. Paul calls them the holy and faithful believers in Christ at Colosse.

He wishes them God's grace and peace and then he tells them, **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴ because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints— ⁵ the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel ⁶ that has come to you. All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth. ⁷ You learned it from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf, ⁸ and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.”**

Paul was in prison and so he had a lot of time and he spent his time writing and praying. He thanked God for the faith of his fellow believers and the hope this faith brought to them for this life and the life to come.

Paul had that very same faith and hope himself. The very same hope and faith you and I have. We know Jesus as our Savior and have experienced his love in our lives. This love of Christ has brought us to faith and assured us that this very same faith in Jesus will carry us home to heaven someday. Our lives are all about what Christ has done for us.

One of the most comforting parts of this portion of scripture is that Paul is praying for his fellow Christians. He is thanking God for them and their faith – the fact that they have been saved by God's grace.

So how do your prayers compare? Have you ever thanked God for the faith of a fellow believer – thanked God that they believe and that they are a Christian? I pray for different people at different times in my personal prayers, and that includes prayers for many of you, but as I think about how Paul prayed, I have to admit I haven't thanked God for your faith. I haven't thanked God for extending his grace to you and giving you the faith to believe in Jesus Christ.

Many times I will ask God to help you through difficult times or sickness or surgeries or various other things but I'm beginning to realize my prayers of thanksgiving are somewhat lacking.

In so many of his letters Paul mentions how he has been thanking God for the gift of faith bestowed on those people and how they are letting their faith shine in their lives. Do you know how comforting that is to know that someone is praying for me and thanking God for calling me

to faith and for helping me to live a Christian life? Don't get me wrong, I don't want you to do this to swell my pride but as a way of caring for me and for your fellow Christians.

We all need each other's prayers. It is comforting to know that you are praying for me and for the person sitting in front of you and for the person next to you and for those Christians in South Carolina who are hurting over the loss of their fellow Christians. Thank God for the faith he has given them and the faith he has given you.

It's the Gospel that enables us to express God's love in this way. For if we, ourselves, had not experienced God's love in our own hearts than we would not be able to pray for our fellow Christians and to share this good news about Jesus.

II. That takes us to the second part of Paul's prayer. "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. ¹⁰ And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. ¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

I pray that God will fill you with wisdom and understanding too. I pray that God will be with you and help you to live your life for him. That was Paul's prayer for the people and an example of prayer we all want to follow.

In order for this prayer to be fulfilled, we must be in the Word – in Bible Study and church so the Holy Spirit can change our hearts and fill us up with God's love through forgiveness and a yearning to do God's will and to live a life worthy of the Lord. And I ask God to help me live God wants me to be perfect and I know and you know too that I am far from perfect – all of us are far from perfect. So how do we live a life worthy of the Lord?

That last part – to live a life worthy of the Lord – is a part that bothers me. It is part of Paul's prayer and something I certainly want to do but God wants me to be perfect so how can I live a worthy life?

Paul answers that by reminding us that God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his Son and in him, God's Son, we have redemption – forgiveness for our sins. Because of what Christ has done for us we can stand before God declared not guilty of our sins and thus we appear worthy before God.

The result is to live a life of thankfulness and service. Which takes us back to things like serving in the church, and faithfully serving as loving parents and grandparents, and faithfully serving as good citizens and faithfully giving praise to God in everything we do by doing it to the best of our ability.

So consider your life, your prayer life and the contents of your prayers. Are you giving thanks for the faith of your fellow believers? Are you asking God to help them grow in their faith? Are you in the Word yourself so that you can grow in the wisdom and knowledge of God's salvation for you? Are you letting the power of the gospel work in your heart on a regular basis?

The events in South Carolina were a tragedy and yet those nine Christians were in God's house gathered around God's Word when their life ended. We thank God for their faith that carried them to heaven and the faith of their relatives that is able to even forgive the man who took the lives of their relatives and friends. May their faithfulness remind us and encourage us in our prayer lives and our yearning to keep Christ and his Word at the center of our lives too. Amen.