

I attended a wonderful meeting for prayer last Friday night! I don’t know how it was for others, but I was overwhelmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit from the very start.

One of the things I like to do is to present a passage of Scripture for us to consider before we pray. If I don’t think about God’s Word before praying, I tend just to wallow in myself, my feelings, my longings. But the Word of God has the power to LIFT me above the smallness of my thinking to the largeness of God’s vision and plan.

So we take about ten minutes to read, and think, and meditate on a given passage, marking up the page with notes about impactful words and images. I usually offer three or four questions to guide our reflection. They are:

1. What does this passage tell me about God?

2. What does this passage tell me about myself?

3. What does this passage tell me about others?

4. What does this passage motivate me to do?

Then, we pray aloud about the things we have noticed.

The passage we examined on Friday was from the beginning of Paul’s letter to the church in Colosse (south of Istanbul, in modern Turkey). Although Paul had never visited the church, He was responsible for its founding, through Epaphras, a native of that town and one of Paul’s disciples during his 3-year tenure in Ephesus.

During Paul’s first imprisonment in Rome, at the request of Epaphras, he wrote this letter to confront a cultic false teaching that threatened the church. The false teachers suggested that Jesus was not fully God, nor fully man, but some kind of semi-divine being who served as an intermediary, and therefore, lacked real authority to meet the needs of the church. Instead, they recommended rigorous self-discipline in order to gain the secret knowledge that was required for spiritual development.

Paul, of course, had a different story to tell—one of supreme deity and ultimate sufficiency, in Christ.

*NLT-Colossians 1:15Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.*

*He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,*

*16for through Him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth.*

*He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—*

*such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.*

*Everything was created through Him and for Him.*

*17He existed before anything else, and He holds all creation together.*

*18Christ is also the Head of the church, which is his body.*

*He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead.*

*So He is first in everything.*

*19For God in all His fullness was pleased to live in Christ,*

*20and through Him God reconciled everything to Himself.*

*He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross.*

Paul firmly set forth the preeminence of Jesus, listing Christ’s seven superiorities:

1. *“the visible image of the invisible God.”*

2. the pre-existent Son, *“supreme over all creation.”*

3. *“through Him God created everything.”*

4. *“He existed before anything else.”*

5. *“He holds all creation together.”*

6. He is *“the Head of the church.”*

7. He is *“supreme over all who rise from the dead.”*

Contrary to the false teaching that was circulating in Colosse, Paul wrote, *“It was by God’s own decision that the Son has in Himself the full nature of God”* (*Today’s English Version,* v. 19). Through Him, God is at work reconciling all of the disharmony in His creation.

**Praying the Word**

One thing I am painfully aware of in the church, is many people’s unfamiliarity with expressing verbal praise to God. Pastor Jack Hayford used to describe a 17-second period of spontaneous praise, after which many Christians have run out of things to say about God. It betrays a frightful lack of familiarity with the Bible.

Try this: Make a list right now of words you would use to praise God—not sentences, just individual words that are appropriate. Can you write 25 words in 60 seconds? (Many cannot.)

Did you get some words from the passage we just read? If so, then you can see how reading the Word can stimulate praise and populate your vocabulary. I’ll bet you could praise God non-stop right now for 30 seconds by using your list of words, and leave Hayford’s crowd in the dust!

Read the Word, and praise the Lord! Try it, you’ll like it!

**He Reconciled You**

Now, Paul shifts from the universal realities of Heaven to the personal realities of our redemption.

*Colossians 1:21This includes you who were once far away from God. You were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22Yet now He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result, He has brought you into His own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault.*

As I read this the other night, I found myself praying, “God, I want to understand what You mean by ‘reconciled.’” We recently read in our devotions (Proverbs 14:9), *“Fools make fun of guilt, but the godly acknowledge it and seek reconciliation.”*

The phrase swelled in my imagination. *“He has reconciled you.”* Here’s what I saw in the passage:

*“Once far away”* – We used to live at a great distance from God. Not a physical distance, for He is everywhere, but a moral and spiritual distance. There was a wide gulf between us. Even if we were religious or “spiritual,” our manner of life was self-determined, not God-dependent. Still He knew us.

*“His enemies”* – We were not God’s friends; we were His enemies, living at cross-purposes with Him (if not in attitude, at least in aims). Instead of building His church and kingdom, we were busy building our own. Still He loved us.

*“Separated from Him, by your thoughts and actions”* – We ignored God; we thought and acted as though He didn’t exist, as though His thoughts and actions were inconsequential (didn’t matter to us). Still He cared for us.

*“Yet”* – What a BIG little word! In spite of moral distance, cross-purposes, and disrespect, God has been good to us, working on our behalf, protecting our souls, and championing our destiny!

*“Now”* – Something has changed! The old is done and the new has come! God bridged the gap that we had built and maintained. He came into *our* world in human form to redeem sinful humanity.

*“He”* – This was entirely *His* idea, His plan. He was not responding to our plea, nor depending on our agreement. His own right arm procured our salvation. He is a Mighty Savior.

*“Reconciled you to Himself”* – Not only did God bridge the distance, but He overcame the offense. He made us right in His own eyes. He calls us “friends.” This is what the Amplified Bible calls *“the peace of reconciliation”* (Romans 5:1).

*“Through the death of Christ in His physical body”* – No other substitute could qualify. No other method could achieve it. A declaration alone could not reverse the damage that had been done. *“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”*

*“He has brought you into His own presence”* – Not only did God cancel our debt, but He has brought us near, received us in His own arms. He has made us welcome and Himself accessible to those He has redeemed.

*“You are holy”* – Wait! What? Okay is not enough. He calls us holy, because He is holy. It means “set apart,” which is to say, we have become God’s special possession. We are his, and He is ours.

*“Blameless”* – No residual guilt. No record of wrongdoing. He is not adding up our sins against us. He is not policing our behavior. That’s not to say our behavior is insignificant to Him, but that is not a dealbreaker, and He is not threatening us with judgment.

*“You stand before Him “* – His welcome is not offered “if you grovel,” or “if you abase yourself.” You can stand in the presence of the King of kings and Lord of lords. You have privilege in His eyes, because of Christ our Savior.

*“Without a single fault”* – And before Him you are faultless. He is not clueless about your waywardness, but He doesn’t hold it over you. He sees you in your completed destiny—as you will one day be—in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ.

There is just one caveat:

*Colossians 1:23But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don’t drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.*

Drifting is a danger to everyone who is not rooted and anchored to Jesus and His words. When you are not actively depending on His truth of His Word and the leading of His Spirit, you are in danger of drifting away.

*2 Corinthians 5:18And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him. 19For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people’s sins against them. And He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.*

Now, it’s our turn to pass on this wonderfully Good News! Others are waiting to see it in you and hear it from your lips.

*“We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making His plea through us. We plead with you on Christ’s behalf, ‘Be reconciled to God!’”*