

Theme: The fruit of our deepening understanding of the riches of God's grace and our probing of the mysteries of the gospel revealed in Christ Jesus, is a greater love for one another in the church, and a deeper love and desire for those "outside" to know the hope of eternal life and the joy of salvation in Christ.

Background: In Colossians we have had deep, rich theology revealed. We have explored the implications of the mystery of Christ in us; we have seen the application of our new life in Christ; and now we are brought to the fruit of that theology and life in Christ.

Introduction: Want to make Christians feel guilty and ashamed? Talk about prayer or witnessing. Three things I hope to accomplish today:

1. Spur us on in prayer - without shame or guilt
2. Assuage some of our guilt over our "witness"
3. Show that sound theology leads to Christian love

I. Steadfast Prayer

A. A natural response (4:2)

1. With thanksgiving for His Word
2. Life reordered!
 - Despair to hope
 - alienated - reconciled
 - condemned - forgiven
 - dead in sin - alive in Christ

B. The call to prayer - an invitation!

1. Continue steadfastly ("devoted" - Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; Romans 12:12)
 - This is a privilege! (1:3&9)
 - It is not impossible - Paul at Prayer (1:9)
2. Being watchful
 - a. Actually being awake!
 - b. Alert to what is happening, and what is going to happen
 - He is preparing for his return (3:4)
 - Alert to the realities of Christ's work
 - c. Jesus said "Stay awake" (Mark 13:35-37; Matthew 24:42)
3. With thanksgiving!
 - A pervasive theme in this letter! (1:3&4; 1:12; 2:7; 3:15-17; 4:2)

C. The plea for prayer

1. For himself - and those who served with him?
2. For open doors
 - Not prison doors - but doors that imprison
3. The mystery of Christ made known (1:27; 2:2)
4. Clear speech (1:28&29)
 - Not caught up in speculative questions/issues
 - 1 Corinthians 2:2

D. Gospel Labor (Epaphras; 4:12&13)

- Working hard for you in his prayers!

You don't need to feel guilty to pray well. You need to be thankful if you will learn to pray!

II. Ready to Share?

A. The tension

1. Biblically
 - One side: The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19&20; 2 Corinthians 4:13)
 - Other side: Pray for evangelists. But it is hard pressed to find a passage telling all believers they are to be evangelists
2. Personally?
 - I can't hide my faith
 - Approaching strangers is really tough
- B. Our walk (Literally, "walk in wisdom") (4:5)
 - Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord (1:10)
 1. In wisdom
 - Walking in the knowledge of God's will (1:9)
 - Not bending to the ways and ideas of the world
 2. Toward "outsiders" (1 Corinthians 5:12&13; 1 Thessalonians 4:12; 1 Timothy 3:7)
 - A distinction between those "inside" the church and those "outside"
 3. Using time wisely
 - Sense of urgency - time is in short supply
- C. Our witness
 1. Our speech
 - It is not just "gracious" speech (i.e. "polite")
 - Our speech with "outsiders" should be "grace-full!"
 2. Seasoned with salt!
 3. How you answer
 - a. A Significant distinction:
 - Paul - "how I ought to speak"
 - Them - "how you ought to answer each person" (1 Peter 3:15&16)
 - b. Significant opportunities
 - Can't remove all responsibility
 - Paul clearly believed there would be lots of opportunities

III. A Bond of Love

- An intimate bond is established between Paul and the Colossians

IV. The Word Remains

- The "richest of fare" (Isaiah 55:2) in the depth of the riches of the knowledge of God's work in Christ, has brought forth the deepest of love
- Let your study of God's Word and truth bear the fruit of a faithful walk and sweetest of fellowship - resulting, most naturally, in great thanksgiving!