

Summary Overview of Colossians
Nov 11, 1995
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A. Overview

The whole book grows out of two summaries:

1. 1:1,2 and 4:18 are epistolary overhead.
2. Prayer: 1:3,4 introduces 1:5-20 chiastically (abc -> CBA)
 - a) 3a, Give Thanks -> 12-20
 - b) 3b, Praying -> 9-12 (12 transitional)
 - c) 4, Heard -> 5-8
3. Proclamation: 1:21-23 introduces 1:24-4:17 via unfolding (abc -> CBABC)
 - a) 21-22 Reconciled (position) -> 2:9-15
 - b) 23a Continue (practice) -> 2:4-8; 2:16-4:1
 - c) 23b Preached (Paul's ministry) -> 1:24-2:3; 4:2-17

B. 1:3-20, Prayer

This is the longest intro prayer in any of Paul's epistles, and the longest by far in %. The nearest follow-ups are Eph (17vv) and Phil (9vv); other epistles are mostly 2 or 3, with only 1 Cor getting as high as 6 vv. The prominence of prayer in the prison epistles may reflect Paul's realization that he can't do anything else!

The three parts of this prayer are a good pattern for our intercession for one another: thankfulness and spiritual supplication, based on knowledge of those for whom we pray.

1. 4, 5-8: Knowledge of those for whom we pray. His prayer is one appropriate for believers; he must know them to be believers before he can pray such a prayer. Particularly difficult here, since he did not plant this particular church and knows them only through Epaphras. Ought to encourage us to pray for those of whom we learn, even if we do not know them.
2. 3b, 9-12: Spiritual supplication. Not a grocery list of carnal concerns, but a valuing of what is important in spiritual warfare. OK to pray for worldly concerns too--casting all our care on him. But how seldom do we rise to these heights of care for one another.
3. 3a, 12-20: Thanks for spiritual blessings. Again, focus not on the spiritual blessings we have in Christ. As we approach Thanksgiving, it is appropriate for us to thank God for food, and shelter, and clothing; but let us not forget to thank him for his unspeakable gift (2 Cor. 9:15). "Blessed be God, our God."
4. The point of this prayer seems to be to show us how much we have in common with other believers, even those we have never met! We may not know their immediate physical condition or the cares that weigh them down, but we can still lift them up before the Lord,

asking for the spiritual insight that every believer needs, and giving thanks for the heritage we have in common with them.

C. 1:21-4:17, Proclamation

Paul expresses his desire that his *example* might motivate them to lead lives in which their daily *practice* reflects the *position* they enjoy in Christ. Don't miss the importance of seeing these three things together:

1. Our *position*, established by God's sovereign work of salvation, completely apart from our merit. A permanent, abiding work.
2. Our *practice*, the holiness of life that will inevitably result if we really have changed in position. Heb. 12:14, "follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." You cannot maintain this practice if you do not have your position in Christ. And if you do not show this practice, it's evidence that you don't have the position!
3. The role of a more mature *example*. We emphasize the need for each believer to relate directly to the Lord, without human intermediary other than the LJC, and this is right. At the same time, we need each other. Heb. 10:25, "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together"; 1 Cor. 11:1, "be ye followers of me, even as I am of Christ."

This time the order is unfolding: abc -> CBABC.

1. 1:21-22; 2:9-15; Our Position in Christ. Note:
 - a) The emphasis on what God has done, and the complete absence of any effort of our own. No talk of earning our salvation; no commands or prohibitions. Only historical fact.
 - b) The focus on Christ's death and resurrection as the mechanism for our salvation.
 - c) Our identification with him in his death and resurrection. We deserve to die for our sins...and in God's eyes, we have, and have risen to a new life.
2. 1:23a; 2:4-8; 2:16-4:1; Our Practice as believers.
See note for more detailed analysis of this section.
 - a) Two aspects of this godly practice:
 - 1) "continue in the faith, grounded and settled," the positive godliness that we are to show in our lives. Do not think for a moment that salvation by God's free grace is a license to sin. Such a thought, and the kind of life that results from it, is fundamental evidence that one is not saved to start with.
 - 2) "not be moved away from the hope of the gospel," warning us

against false teaching. Don't think that just because someone names the name of Christ, they speak the truth. Be a Berean; be on your guard and check out everything you hear with the Scriptures. "Let no man judge you," 2:16.

b) 2:20; 3:1; close linkage with our position. Cannot emphasize strongly enough the organic unity between these two truths. The position produces the practice, not the other way around; the practice is the necessary evidence of the position.

3. 1:23b; 1:24-2:3; 4:2-17; Paul's Example.

The point here is that even in his imprisonment, Paul is steadfast in carrying out the ministry that God has entrusted to him, and so should they be.

D. Overall Summary of the Book

Based on the common spiritual life he shares with a church he has never met, Paul encourages them by his own example to persevere faithfully in the salvation that God has freely given them.