

Prayer

Almighty God, may we always be ready for the release of Your power through the Gospel. Give us a longing to see You at work in our midst, and an expectation that great things will be done! Give us a desire to join with You in the work of salvation and deliverance by which Your Kingdom comes on earth. We rejoice to work together with each other and with You in this great task. Thank You, Almighty God; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Travel

Pray for the car industry, and its impact on the world economy, and how people travel and spend their money. Pray for wisdom amongst those who design and make cars.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the success of attempts to build world financial stability*
- *Give thanks for the assurance of salvation, available in Christ*
- *Pray about issues of privacy and information kept by governments*

Meditation

When life is quiet, Lord, fill my mind with what is good;
And keep the enemy away from my thoughts and feelings.

When life is routine, Lord, give me the concentration I need
To attend to the detail of what I do, and honour You in my work.

When life becomes difficult, Lord, save me from panic;
Help me to focus on You, and trust Your spiritual guidance.

When life is horrendous, Lord, draw me ever closer to You;
To gain the spiritual energy I need to find my way through trouble.

When life is easier, Lord, may I not forget You or Your love;
But remember Your faithfulness through good times and bad.

When life is quiet, Lord, fill my mind with all that is good;
Keep me alert, and prepare me for all that is yet to come.

Bible Study - Colossians 1:21-29

²¹ *You who were once cut off, mentally hostile, and doing evil deeds,* ²² *He has now reconciled you through the death of His physical body to enable you to stand in His presence as holy, faultless and above reproach,* ²³ *providing you continue in faith, grounded and firm, and not shifting from the hope of the Gospel you have heard which has been made known to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.*

²⁴ *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, completing in my flesh what is needed of the sufferings of Christ, for the sake of His Body which is the Church.* ²⁵ *I am a servant of the church according to the task God gave me to do, which was to make the full Word of God known to you,* ²⁶ *so that the mystery hidden*

throughout time and the generations, should now be revealed to His saints.²⁷ Amongst the nations, God chose to make known to them the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is 'Christ is in you, the hope of glory.'²⁸ We proclaim Him, warning and teaching everyone with all wisdom so that we may present everyone complete in Christ.²⁹ For this work I struggle with all His strength which is so powerfully at work in me.

Review

After the amazing description of the Cosmic significance of Christ explained just previously (1:15-20), the letter to the Colossians continues with Paul's breathtaking explanation of the Christian Faith in this passage. He may have been writing in order to correct dangerous teaching at Colossae, but this forced him to give a compelling explanation of the Faith, drawing on his consistent teaching about the work of Christ but also expressing it in fascinating and original ways.

New expressions of the living Faith For example, this passage of Scripture is focussed on the main theme of nearly all Paul's teaching, which is the death of Jesus on the Cross for our sins. Paul says; 'He has now reconciled you through the death of His physical body ...' (1:22); but because of the situation at Colossae he was addressing, he expressed the Faith in wonderfully fresh ways, talking of 'this mystery, which is "Christ in you, the hope of Glory!"' (1:27). The basis of what Paul said was not new, for example, Jesus Himself talked about revealing the mysteries of God (see Luke 10:21), and Jesus was also named 'God with us' (Matt 1:23); and many other Scriptures talk of Jesus as our 'hope' for reconciliation with the Father (Rom 6:4). But providing we do not forget their basis in the New Testament, it is so much easier for us to remember Paul's powerful words: 'Christ in you, the hope of Glory!' (1:27)

The example of baptism Paul had previously explained the great significance of Christ as the only mediator between God and the fallen world, but in this passage, he appealed to the Colossian church community to take this clear message to heart. Nothing should stand in the way of the unchanging truth of the Gospel. Whilst Paul mostly addressed the Colossians as a community (this is why he used 'you' in the plural), much of what he said would be familiar to the Colossians from the profoundly personal experience their Baptism. For example, he told them to 'stand in His presence as holy, faultless and above reproach' (1:22), and this is thought to be similar to words said after a candidate had been prepared and stood awaiting baptism (see also Rom. 12:1). This was no claim that such a person was sinless, but that after repentance of sins, they were baptised on the basis of what Jesus had done for them; as is true of baptism and confirmation services to this day. Paul's words were an appeal to the Colossians to stand firm in the Faith (1:23) of their baptism, and not compromise it by philosophising about it!

Paul's appeals Paul's appeal then moved on as he justified his words. He is often criticised today for the way in which he told his readers frequently about himself and his call to ministry, as in this verse: 'I am a servant of the church according to the task God gave me to do' (1:25). He is also criticised for talking about his own suffering for the sake of the Gospel, as in 'I now rejoice in my sufferings for you ...' (1:24). None of us, however, can fully appreciate the situations in which Paul preached or wrote these words. Paul was pioneering the Gospel, and he had to expect that in many situation in which he spoke, he would not be accepted. It was a good way for him to begin if he spoke about himself, because this enabled people to interact with him, and perhaps jeer or question him. Any response served to help him draw a crowd and begin to preach! Eventually, however, Paul needed to justify himself by making it plain that what he taught about service through suffering and the revelation of God's mysteries through Christ was something that was not

merely 'talk', but the true experience of His life which was open for all to see. This is the spirit of these words, and, I believe, the reason why Paul said such memorable things (see 1:27, quoted above). Paul preached total commitment to Jesus and the Gospel, and he lived it.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you find it easy to think of Jesus dying on the Cross for You? Whether it is difficult or not, how does verse 22 make you feel?
2. In what was do we suffer today so that the Gospel can be preached and delivered to the rest of the world?
3. Is it possible for us to know that Christ is 'in us' in the way that Paul talks about faith in verse 27?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I suggest that there are times when we all need to take stock of the different things that we believe and test them against the touchstones of faith, such as the words of Paul within a text such as this. I have found people in church who believe that you cannot possibly be a Christian if you are a formal member of a mainstream Christian denomination, and others who believe the total opposite, for example. This text is a challenging scripture, and it asks all of us to measure ourselves against standards of faith.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *What beliefs, if any, have crept into your own life that have little to do with the saving work of Christ freely available for all who will believe in Him? This can be hard to answer, but we must engage in self examination from time to time!*
- *Pray for all those who find it hard to 'pin down' what they believe and express it in words. Pray that God's people will accept the challenge to be vocal; in the expression of their faith.*

Final Prayer

Stay with us, Lord, through all the dangers and perils of this day. Hold on to us as we hold on to You. Give us such a firm grasp of You that we do not let you down, and hold on to us with all the strength of Your love, we pray. Then, when our trials are over, and we can take our rest, restore us by Your Spirit, we pray: AMEN