

Workbook: Session Five

Colossians 1:3 – Structure of Paul’s Letters

ZChurch Online Bible School

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Lesson Focus:

- Understand the typical structure of Paul’s letters
- Explore the significance of Paul’s thanksgiving and prayer opening
- Learn from Greek word studies in Colossians 1:3
- Develop a deeper appreciation for close reading of Scripture

Scripture Reading

Colossians 1:3 (KJV)

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you."

Structure of Paul’s Letters

Paul often begins his letters with a clear identification of himself, the recipients, and a theological greeting. This is followed by thanksgiving and prayer, which establishes both the tone and direction of the letter.

Modern-Day Comparison

A helpful modern analogy is the structure of a business communication like the 'One-Minute Manager': a leader gives clear goals, defines relationships, and sets expectations from the start. Likewise, Paul starts his letters with a purposeful structure—clear, theological, and pastoral.

Greek Word Studies

Always (Greek: pantote)

- Not just frequent, but continual.
- Scholars agree 'always' modifies 'giving thanks' rather than 'praying.'
- It emphasizes gratitude as the foundation of Paul’s intercession.

For (Greek: peri)

- Means 'concerning' or 'about.'
- Paul’s prayers were not general but specific—focused on the needs and struggles of the Colossians.

Praying (Greek: proseuchomai)

- A verb reserved for direct prayer to God.
- Rooted in reverence, intimacy, and specificity.
- Emphasizes face-to-face communion, not casual or distant petitions.

Word Placement and Syntax

Syntax is the grammatical structure that shapes meaning through word order. In Colossians 1:3, the placement of 'God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' directly affirms Christ's divinity and the relational unity between Father and Son. This directly counters Gnostic claims that distanced Jesus from God.

Close Reading Insight

Close reading requires examining the text in detail—grammar, vocabulary, and context. This verse teaches that not only what is said, but how it is said, shapes theology and interpretation.

Personal Application

- How might you strengthen the clarity and structure of your spiritual communication?
- Are your prayers general or specific? What can you learn from Paul's example?
- In what areas of life do you need to cultivate deeper gratitude?

Final Reflection:

Paul's structure is intentional and theological. His prayers, word choice, and grammar all serve the purpose of glorifying Christ and edifying the church. Following his pattern deepens our understanding of Scripture and strengthens our spiritual discipline.

Personal Prayer:

Lord, teach me to approach Your Word with attentiveness and care. Help me to notice the structure, tone, and spirit of the Scriptures, and let my life reflect the same clarity and intention Paul modeled in his writings. Amen.