

Colossians 1:9-14, pt. 2

December 20, 2009

We began looking at this prayer in Colossians 1 last week

As you might remember, Paul is now praying for believers that he has never met

- This church has come to the attention of Paul through Epaphras
- This man most likely founded this church

There is no record in the book of Acts that Paul ever visited this area¹

- There is no mention of Paul establishing a church in this region

We find that Paul opens up this epistle with a reference to thanksgiving and prayer for this church

Let's look at this portion of God's Word in Colossians 1

- The request (1:9)
- The reason (1:10a)
- The results (1:10b-14)

Let's read Colossians 1:9-14

I. The request (1:9)

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask

In light of the report that Epaphras has brought to Paul, the apostle prays for these believers "since the day we heard of it"

- Once again, this is a group of believers that Paul has never met

Paul says that he and Timothy (1:1), along with Epaphras, "have not ceased to pray for you and to ask"

- He indicates that their prayers have been constant and steady

Paul would tell the Thessalonian believers to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17)

- He was certainly practicing what he taught

It certainly seems that things are going quite well

- Paul writes of
 - o their "faith in Christ Jesus" (1:4a)
 - o their "love...for all the saints" (1:4b)
 - o their "hope" in the Gospel (1:5a)
 - o the work of the Gospel which has born fruit and increased in the lives of these believers (1:5b-6)
 - o their "love in the Spirit" (1:8)

But as you study this book, you will see that there were some theological issues that were affecting the church

- So Paul and Timothy commit to praying for this local assembly

¹ John MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur NT Commentary, Colossians & Philemon*, 6.

The Text says that Paul has not ceased to “pray” and “ask”

- “pray” is a more generic term, encompassing a broader perspective of prayer
- “ask” is a more specific term, encompassing a narrower perspective of prayer

Both by generic and specific prayers, Paul and Timothy were interceding for these believers

- Where they had specific items for which to pray, they did so
- Where they lacked specific information for which to pray, they prayed more generically

that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

The specific request that Paul and Timothy were praying is given in the last part of 1:9, “that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”

According to Scripture, it is God’s will for us to be:²

- **Saved** – “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9)
- **Sanctified** – “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality” (1 Thess 4:3)
- **Submissive** – “Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority,¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.¹⁵ For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men” (1 Pet 2:13-15)
- **Spirit-filled** – “So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:17-18)
- **Suffering** – “Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right” (1 Pet 4:19)
- **Thankful** – “in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thess 5:18)

These are the six (6) areas that God’s Word addresses in terms of God’s will

- Granted, that does not cover every specific nuance of every single decision

But these six principles cover the major areas that would come about in the lives of believers

- If we are
 - o Saved
 - o Spirit-filled
 - o Being sanctified
 - o Submissive to the governing authorities
 - o Willing to suffer
 - o And giving thanks
- Then we can know that we are living a life that is obedient
- A life that pleases God

If I could summarize what Paul is trying to pray, it would be this

- *To know God’s will is to obey God’s Word*

It is encouraging to see the apostle Paul focus on spiritual, eternal matters when he prays for these believers at Colossae

² MacArthur, 29.

The apostle wants them to be “filled” with the knowledge of His will

- To be controlled by or influenced by
- It is an external source or person acting upon us

Consider these examples:

- When Mary poured the perfume on the feet of Christ, “the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume” (John 12:3)
- When Christ told His disciples of His impending death, sorrow “filled” their hearts (John 16:6)
- Satan “filled” the heart of Ananias (Acts 5:3)
- “the disciples were continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 13:52)
- The heart of an unbeliever is “filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice” (Rom 1:29)
- “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18)

The apostle Paul asks that we might be controlled, dictated by, and under the influence of “the knowledge of His will”

The word here for “knowledge” is not simply the pursuit of facts

- The Colossians were being influenced by some who thought that the highest end of life was a certain, “higher” knowledge
- This was the beginning of the Gnostic movement

Paul counters that by reinforcing the fact that knowledge is not an end in itself

- It is a means to a greater end

This “knowledge” is a deep, thorough knowledge

- It is a true and right comprehension of Biblical facts

The apostle Paul writes to young Timothy and talks about some who are “always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7, emphasis mine)

- Sure, they are packing their minds full of “stuff” and facts
- But they are not “able” to come to the “knowledge of the truth”

The only way that we can attain to this “knowledge” is through salvation

- Earlier in 2 Timothy, Paul tells his young protégé, “with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 2:25, emphasis mine)

The knowledge of God’s will is accompanied by “spiritual wisdom and understanding”

- Spiritual wisdom and understanding are the means by which God fills us with His will³

Both of these qualities have their source in the Holy Spirit

- These are not fleshly pursuits

So the request that Paul offers for these believers is that they would “be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”

But what is the purpose for praying this?

- That is where Paul turns next

³ D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 102.

II. The reason (1:10a)

so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects

The practical reason why Paul prays for these believers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will is simple

- The apostle wants these believers to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”

This word “worthy” only occurs six (6) times in the NT

- In speaking of how the church at Rome should receive Phoebe, Paul writes “that you receive her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints” (Rom 16:2)
- Paul exhorts the believers at Ephesus “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called” (Eph 4:1)
- Writing to the believers at Philippi, the apostle tells them to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil 1:27)
- Here in Colossians 1:10, the motivation for being filled with the knowledge of God's will is that they might “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”
- To the Thessalonian believers, Paul writes that they might “walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:11)
- The apostle John writes of the hospitality of Gaius as being “in a manner worthy of God” (3 John 6)

It basically means “corresponding to” or “in balance with”

- The idea of merit or works is excluded
- The only way that we can walk in a “worthy” manner is through a relationship with God

But Paul helps to clarify what it means to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”

- The very next phrase records these precious words, “to please Him in all respects”

So what does it mean to walk in a worthy manner?

- To live a life that is pleasing to God

Let's keep something very basic in mind

- This section of Colossians is a prayer
- Specifically, a prayer for a group of believers that Paul has never met

Paul's concern and prayer was for their motivation for living the Christian life (and for us as well)

- Are your words pleasing to God?
- Are your thoughts pleasing to God?
- Are your actions pleasing to God?
- Are your goals pleasing to God?

If you are pursuing your own goals and aspirations without consulting God or desiring to please Him, then you are not walking in a “worthy” manner

How do we know what pleases God?

- Once again, this prayer answers our question
- To know what pleases God when we are “filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”

If we are focusing on God's Word, then we will be meditating upon Truth

- Truth is what sanctifies us and conforms us to the image of God

For these believers here in Colossae, they were beginning to be tempted by error and lies about Christ Himself

- Obviously, an erroneous view of Christ doesn't bring pleasure to God

What does it look like to live a “worthy” life that is pleasing to God?

- *That is where we turn now*

III. The results (1:10b-14)

The apostle Paul lists four (4) characteristics of a “worthy” walk

- Bearing fruit
- Increasing in the knowledge of God
- Being strengthened with all power
- Giving thanks

Each of these qualities is a present tense participle

- That means that these should be ongoing, habitual characteristics of our lives
- Not sporadic, but regular, demonstrations in our lives

bearing fruit in every good work

We know that works do not save us

- It is by grace that we have been saved, “not as a result of works, that no one should boast” (Eph 2:9)

But works are an important part of our Christian life

- That same passage in Ephesians 2 goes on to say, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (2:10)

Good works are “the fruit, not the root, of a right relationship with God”⁴

The kinds of works and degree of works will vary in the life of a believer

- But works will definitely be a reality in the life of every believer
- *A life characterized by the lack of godly fruit does not bear testimony to saving faith*

In John 15, as Christ speaks to His disciples, the term “fruit” is mentioned eight (8) times

- A branch of a tree without life will not produce fruit because it is dead
- But those branches that have the life of the tree flowing through them will bear fruit as evidence of their connectedness to the tree

When you and I bear fruit, it manifests the reality that the Life is at work in our lives

- That we are in the Vine

The apostle Paul uses a present tense verb to describe this “bearing fruit”

- The expectation is that you and I will bear fruit as a regular part of our lives
- Look back at Colossians 1:6 to see the result of the Gospel infiltrating their lives

Is this something that you pray for on a regular basis?

- Do you intercede for others with the prayer that they will bear fruit?

⁴ Curtis Vaughan, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Colossians*, 178.

and increasing in the knowledge of God:

The apostle doesn't stop with merely bearing fruit, even though that is extremely important

- He goes on to pray that these believers will be “increasing in the knowledge of God”

A “worthy” walk in one characterized by an increasing knowledge of God

- We must never grow stagnant or complacent in our knowledge
- We must never think that mere knowledge is an end in itself

Let's remind ourselves of what Paul has prayed for

- He has prayed that these believers will be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding
 - o That knowledge will cause them to live a “worthy” walk, one that is pleasing to God
 - o That knowledge will cause them to bear fruit
 - o That knowledge will also cause them to increase in the knowledge of God
- Do you see how we have gone full circle?

The more that you pursue God's will through His Word, the more that you and I will please God

- The more that we please God, the more knowledge that you and I will seek

¹¹ strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience:

A few weeks ago, we looked at the prayers in Ephesians 1 and Ephesians 3

- These were prayers that referenced the power of God that is actively working in the lives of believers

So often when we think of God's power at work, we think of creation, the resurrection, or miracles

- But Paul has another truth in mind

When we are being strengthened with God's power, Paul says that we will attain to “all steadfastness and patience”

- Does that surprise you?

The idea is of a spiritual stamina and fortitude that endures instead of giving up

- These two words summarize the patience that should characterize the life of the believer

If you haven't caught on by now, it is impossible to have “steadfastness and patience” without God's power

- We are, generally speaking, a very impatient group of people aren't we?
 - o We have drive-thru fast food
 - o We have drive-thru car washes
 - o We have drive-thru banking

- But we don't have a shortcut to patience, do we?

A life that pleases God is one that looks to God for His power in dealing with various situations in the Christian life

- “steadfastness” is one’s attitude toward enduring things
- “patience” is one’s attitude toward enduring people⁵

joyously ¹² giving thanks to the Father

A worthy walk is one that

- Bears fruit
- Increases in the knowledge of God
- Is strengthened by God’s power

Fourthly, a worthy walk is one that is marked by giving thanks

- An attitude of gratitude

As we saw last week, it was Paul’s normal practice to begin his epistles with the note of thanksgiving

- 11 of the 13 Pauline epistles begin with this note of thanksgiving

But we are not talking about writing letters

- We are talking about our prayer lives

Is there an echo of gratitude in your prayer life?

- Thanks for what the Lord has done in your life?
- Thanks for what the Lord has done in the lives of others?

The Bible teaches that we should give thanks “in” all things (1 Thess 5:18)

- It also teaches that we should give thanks “for” all things (Eph 5:20)

who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

The ending of this prayer is actually a praise to God for His redemption

- We don’t have a lot of time to examine this, but it is a great passage to meditate on

God has delivered us from the domain of darkness

- He has forgiven our sins
- He has redeemed us

For us not to show gratitude shows that we have not understood His work of grace in our lives

- That we have misplaced priorities in our lives

This is a highly practical prayer that I trust you will implement in your own prayer life

⁵ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary, Colossians*, 59.