

Colossians: Christ and the Church Part 2
Colossians 1:9-14
Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on April 23, 2023

To be a Christian without prayer is no more possible than to be alive without breathing. – Martin Luther

Time Life Books

Growing up a child in the 1980's meant growing up in the era of book series bought from television commercials. The commercials came on during your favorite reruns. Time Life Books would produce various books series and then mail you one EVERY MONTH. You would be able to keep it for free for ten days and then either keep it and pay for it or mail it back and either cancel the series or buy the next book sight unseen.

We had some from their home renovation series, the entire old west series, a few from their popular *Voices of the Civil War* set, and even one from The Seafarers.

The most memorable commercials for Time Life books came later in the 80's. They were promoting a book series devoted to paranormal phenomena. This was their *Mysteries of the Unknown*. The commercial would come on and to this day, I am convinced it only existed to scare the heebie jeebies out of me. I would watch the tv and when that commercial came on, I would grab the blanket off of the couch and use it as a safety shield. It focused on the unseen, metaphysical occurrences considered to be unexplainable to the common man. The commercials provided examples of these unseen spiritual happenings:

“A man is about to get on a routine flight. Suddenly he paused. He doesn't know why, but he's got to walk away. An hour later, the airplane goes up in flames.” And then the words would be typed on the screen, “dismissed as chance.” I would pull the blanket up to my chin as I watched.

“In Britain, a woman has a sudden image of a black mountain that is moving, with children trapped underneath it. Two hours later, a Welsh school us buried in an avalanche of coal slag. It is dismissed as coincidence.” The black and white images and the creepy music and sound effects lead me to pull the blanket up to my eyes.

And those weren't the scariest! "In the Midwest, a mother feels sharp pain in her right hand, far away at that exact same moment, her daughter screams in pain as she touches a hot pan. Just chance? Or is it telling us something about our own untapped capabilities." That one would send me over the edge, and I would run over and shut off the tv and rebuke it all in the name of Jesus. I would convince myself that things like that simply couldn't happen, these unexplainable "coincidences" and "moments of chance" weren't reality.

What I came to realize is that there was a lot happening in invisible realms that I could not see but came to realize were extremely real. And I also discovered that God would work in unique, remarkable, supernatural, metaphysical ways, especially through prayer. Not too long after I got over my paranormal paranoia, I read a story that reminded me of the power of praying Christians.

About seventy years ago, a young missionary named Raymond Edman came out of the jungle of Ecuador, extremely ill. "He'll be dead by morning," the doctor predicted. Edman's wife dyed her wedding dress black in preparation for the funeral, because in the tropics, funerals had to happen quickly after the death. However, that same evening, thousands of miles away in Boston, Edman's friend, Dr. Joseph Evans, interrupted a prayer meeting, saying, "I feel we must pray for Ray Edman in Ecuador." The group prayed earnestly, even though they had no idea of what was happening so far away.

Evans just felt that there was some sort of attack, some pressing need that required the believers to pray. And pray they did. Eventually, it was recorded that Evans cried out, "Praise the Lord! The victory is won!" Ray Edman recovered. His wife's dress did not. Dr. Edman would become the President of Wheaton College and serve in that capacity for decades. God works through the prayer of a righteous person in significant ways.

Intercessory prayer, believers praying for others, especially believers, taps into the power and might of the invisible God. Paul understood this. I invite you to Colossians 1:9-14 as we see how Paul would intercede for believers in the Colossian church. It will provide a powerful guide for our own intercessory prayers. (read text)

How Do We Pray for Christ's Body

In simplest terms, intercession is prayer offered on behalf of someone else. Petition tends to be focused on self. But intercession is coming on behalf of someone else. Jesus provided a model prayer for that is a wonderful guide to personal prayer, with focus on both submission and petition. But perhaps you have at one time, or another asked, how am I supposed to pray for the Church, the members of Christ's Body? What do I say? What sorts of things should I be asking God for and asking God to do on their behalf?

Paul provided a wonderful tapestry of intercession here. Paul teaches us to intercede first for the knowledge and then for the conduct or actions of other believers.

Of course Paul would pray for the knowledge of Colossian Christians. They were under siege by people constantly telling them they needed a better knowledge, a *gnosis*. These Gnostics were teaching that Christ was a great beginning point, but there was so much more to know and to experience. If only they would incorporate that weird Gnostic system of passwords, rites, and initiations. The believers in Colossae were made to feel inferior.

This system promised deeper, special, secret levels of understanding. That sort of thing appeals to a person's natural, elitist instinct. Over time, some in the Colossian church had fallen to this. It happens.

In the 2nd and 3rd centuries, there was an extremely influential Church Father named Tertullian. He was an African apologist¹ who argued against Gnosticism. He was called the Father of Latin Christianity because he published a wealth of writings, commentaries and even some translation of Scripture into Latin. As far as existing documents go, Tertullian was the first theologian that scholars can find who used the term *trinitas* or Trinity. While the Scripture certainly teaches about God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, it was most likely Tertullian who first introduced the actual word of Trinity to define the three Persons of God.

¹ The modern Church owes a significant debt of gratitude to the African Church Fathers like Tertullian, Athanasias, Alexander of Alexandria, Clement of Alexandria, Cyprian, Origen of Alexandria, and Augustine of Algeria and then Hippo. They fought for orthodoxy at their own personal safety.

And yet despite all of this, Tertullian would give way to a popular heresy called Montanism in which spiritual leaders could provide a New Prophecy that was to be taken on par with the previously existing books of Scripture. If the Father of Latin Christianity can fall, anyone can.

That is why Paul compelled Christians to pray for other believers. Paul prayed that the Colossian believers would know God in a personal and decisive way and would then be further convinced to do God's will. That is a powerful prayer of protection.

Paul used a word for knowledge here in verse 9 that is the same somewhat technical term used elsewhere for the knowledge of God that participates in the conversion of someone to the Christian faith. While the Gnostics used *gnosis* for knowledge, Paul used *epignosis* here as sort of a reference to full knowledge. Paul wants the Colossian believers to have a fuller knowledge of God in a personal way that leads a person to be convinced to do God's will.

Paul uses language of great intensity here. From the moment that Paul received this report about the Colossian church being led astray, he began to pray constantly for their knowledge. Paul understood that their knowledge would be foundational to vibrant and growing Christian life.

Spiritual knowledge comes through the work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11). The Holy Spirit reveals Jesus Christ and gives us both a saving and also a sustaining knowledge of Jesus. The Holy Spirit utilizes the Scripture as the primary source of knowledge.

How many prayers for someone's physical health have you prayed over the years? I would wager that a significant percentage of prayers prayed concern physical health and well-being. How many times have you prayed focused, consistently, that someone would be filled with the knowledge of God's will? How often have you interceded that a friend or relative would be filled with the knowledge of spiritual wisdom and understanding? Minds and belief systems are under siege. It is time to stop praying for someone's gout and start praying for their mind. It is time to pray for our children, teenagers, young adults in their 20's and early 30's, that they might, through the power of the Holy Spirit, develop a mind that would be shaped by a framework of Biblically consistent presuppositions. It is too easy for us to get caught up lamenting how younger people are so different, and we don't like it and they need to get off of our lawns!

If you are a Christian, who has been a believer for a long time, and you aren't praying for younger generations, you are dropping the ball on intercessory prayer. Start praying these types of prayers every day for the next six months and see if God begins to transform your heart.

Do you want to know some people that you must be praying these types of prayers for every day?

- New believers. There will be people who, in the process of conversion, must make difficult decisions about social relationships and very often they will see their friendships in tension with spiritual growth. We must pray that their minds would be convinced through a full, personal, decisive relationship with Jesus to follow more deeply into full knowledge of Him and His will. Pray for new believers.
- Pastors. Pray for me and for other pastors who are trying to shepherd and lead. Pray for state and associational leadership as they try to navigate a dramatically shifting culture. Pray that pastors would be full of the knowledge of His will and His word.
- Family members. Pray for your children. Pray for your parents. Pray for your spouses. Pray for your siblings. Pray that they would have the *epignosis*, the full, convincing, personal knowledge of God.

And pray for yourself, that you would be able to filter the seductive worldly patterns of thinking through the grid of God's deep and full knowledge of His Spirit and His Word.

Praying About Lives and Actions

After Paul concerns himself with the knowledge of the Colossians, he turns his intercession to focus on their walking in a manner worthy of the Lord and fully pleasing God with their lives. We are to pray for another believer's knowledge of God and also their walk, or their obedience to His will.

Throughout the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for "walk" was used symbolically to refer to a person's conduct. This was carried over into the New Testament Greek. Paul used it a few times in Colossians. (1:10; 2:6; 3:7) For Paul, knowledge and conduct are bound together. What you knew impacted what you did.

Because of this belief, Paul calls Colossian believers (and us) to a worthy walk. In other words, you don't really know something until you do it. James said that simply listening and knowing wasn't enough.

He said that if you didn't do the things you understood and knew, you were fooling yourself. (James 1:22)

Paul prayed Colossians would walk their talk. He prayed that their knowledge of Christ would grow, and that this growth would lead to actions and conduct that was worthy of the Lord. This is how we should pray.

Paul called the Colossians (and us) to a knowledgeable walk. That would continually increase in our knowledge of the Lord. That our knowledge of God would continue to shape us and move us to truly serve Him. And in truly serving Him, we would then experience a deepening of our knowledge of God and His will which would then lead us to be further shaped and moved to serve the Lord, which would then further deepen our knowledge which would then lead us to better conduct which would then...you see what Paul was getting at right?

This leads us to Paul's prayer that Colossian believers (and us) would experience a powerful walk. Pray for an immense strengthening that never ends. This is a steady supply, and the power is measured by God's scale: "according to his glorious might."

Pray for a believer's endurance; that they would stand when others fall; that they would continue when others quit; that they would persevere when it is really difficult; pray that they would speak out for the Lord when others remain silent.

Pray for a believer's patience. Paul used the Greek "long suffering." Endurance means dealing with difficult circumstances. Patience means dealing with difficult people. Christians need a deep supply of both. Because life is full of both bad times and bad people. Pray that your brothers and sisters in Christ would experience this beautiful spiritual combination of both endurance and patience through the glorious power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul prayed that Colossian believers (and us) would live a thankful walk. As we reach what is sort of the summit of Paul's prayer, we see thanksgiving informing all of it. We cannot walk worthy of God without constantly giving joyous thanks. On September 8, 1860, a college student from Northwestern University who had been trained to assist passengers on Lake Michigan, Edward Spencer, saved the lives of seventeen people after the ship they

were on sank. The exposure that day would permanently damage his health and he would have to leave school and ministry preparation behind. Some years later when he died, it was noted that none of the seventeen people he had saved ever thanked him.

Believers, those who have been saved by Christ, walk worthy of God when they give thanks to God for their salvation. We are to be thankful in the present understanding that we are walking in the light of God because of our salvation. We are to be thankful for the future reality in which the light we will walk will be perfect and complete.

And we are to be thankful because as believers, we've been transferred. The mighty King of Heaven and deported us from death to life. We are now citizens of the Kingdom of God's Son.

And Paul calls the Colossians (and us) to be thankful that because we have been purchased from the slave market of Sin and are now in Christ. That is our present reality, and we should be thankful and pray prayers of thanksgiving that God has done that for those we care about.

Far Away or Up Close

Joseph Evans in faraway Boston experienced the mysterious urging of the Holy Spirit to lead his congregation to pray for a missionary by name in a jungle thousands of miles away, completely unaware of what was happening in the man's life. They had no way of knowing what was going on with his health, his heart, his family, his ministry or his mind. But God knew everything. And God led that congregation to pray for a man and when they did, they extended the invisible and sovereign hand of God to Ray Edman.

Let's follow Paul's teaching the Joseph Evans example and covenant to pray for both the knowledge and the conduct of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Imagine what a church that is growing in the full knowledge of God and walking in a manner that is worthy of Him would do! Let's challenge ourselves to become Holy Spirit-sensitive, fervent, consistent, earnest intercessors for other believers.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

Take time and walk through Colossians 1:9-14 and thoughtfully pray through the text according to Paul's teaching.

Pray for the knowledge of believers. Focus first on new believers. Then family. And then for pastors and church leaders.

Pray for the conduct of other believers according to the text.

Pray with thanksgiving for all God has made possible for you and other brothers and sisters in Christ.

Take time to jot down some prayer notes as you do this. Write down what names God placed on your heart.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Wednesday Bible Study: 10:30AM – The Book of Mark. All are welcome.

Silver Wings Trip: Silver Wings Ministry is going to see *Hello Dolly* on Friday, July 21st at 2:30PM. Cost is \$38 per ticket, and this needs to be paid to the church office by Wednesday May 31st. They will carpool and leave the church parking lot at 11:30AM and enjoy lunch together before the show begins.

The Constitution and Bylaws Committee has proposed a new constitution and bylaws to replace the current edition being utilized by the church. The church family is invited to read, prayerfully reflect on changes recommended, and vote on at the next business meeting. If you have a smartphone, you can find the new constitution on the church's app.

Pastor Craig, the deacons and finance committee recommend the transitional hiring of Richard Marsh as our Financial Administrator.

Richard has degrees in accounting and has served as both an accountant in the secular marketplace and as an Executive/Administrative Pastor in a sister church in our community. Pay would be a continuation of what is currently budgeted for that position. We are excited to see how God uses Richard to help lead us in the days ahead.

Quarterly Business Meeting tomorrow at 6PM.

VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL: JUNE 19-23 – 6-8:30PM This is for all children Pre-K through completed 5th Grade. We still need volunteers, and we will also need donations for snacks, volunteer suppers, crafts, and decorations. The donation boards will be posted in a few weeks.

Colossians Scripture Journals are available for \$7. It is the CSB version and will allow notes to be taken while looking at Scripture. Check with Pastor Craig about getting yours today!