

### Lesson 3

# Colossians 1.9–14: Prayer for the Colossians

## 1.9–12—Paul’s Prayer

Now with the new information supplied by Epaphras, Paul and Timothy emphasize again their constant prayer for the Colossian brethren. Note the unceasing nature of these prayers, even though they had heard a good report.<sup>29</sup> Paul’s prayer here should be seen as a model for Christians. Are we praying these kinds of prayers for one another? Furthermore, what kind of lesson is Paul trying to instill in the Colossians by praying for them in such a manner and writing about it?

Prayer is not only necessary during bad times or moments of correction—it’s also wise to pray for others when things are going well so that further spiritual progress can be made. We need to clearly understand that during the good times. Satan can attack with even more intensity since he lives to destroy God’s people and the efforts they are making in the kingdom. Let’s examine what Paul and Timothy prayed for:

### ***1.9—That they be filled with knowledge, spiritual wisdom, and understanding***

Both Ephesians and Colossians place a high value on knowledge and its ability to strengthen and sustain the Christian life. Here, Paul prays that the Colossians be *filled with the knowledge of His will*. Here the Colossians are placed in the passive role, with the action being done to them. In other words, God is the agent in the distribution of knowledge. In the original language, *filled* carries along the meaning of being “fit out entirely,”<sup>30</sup> or to be “totally controlled or dominated by.” Dominated by what?

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<sup>29</sup> The unceasing nature of their prayers simply means that Paul and his associates viewed everything in relation to God. When thinking about positive things and the advancement of the gospel, praise can be offered on high. When bad things arise, we call upon God because we understand His tender loving care.

<sup>30</sup> Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon...*, p. 23.

## Knowledge

Knowledge involves coming to an understanding of something in a clear and distinct way, understanding it to be true and valid. It *lays claim to personal sympathy and exerts an influence upon the person*.<sup>31</sup> Paul's intent is that the Colossians come to a deep and abiding understanding of the will of the Spirit. *The progress of Christian formation follows up rebirth with retraining*.<sup>32</sup> When one knows God better, his or her spiritual formation will proceed as it should.

The Jewish connotation of *knowledge* always connected an obedient response. A good example of this is found in Proverbs 1.2–7. Acquiring knowledge is not merely about its acquisition, philosophy, or human tradition, it involves the proper response to God. Correct knowledge should lead to correct behavior.<sup>33</sup> We are given knowledge of God not to try to master or control Him, but to praise Him, and to be mastered by Him. The call to move toward spiritual maturity and a lifestyle congruent to God's wishes is seen throughout the New Testament. This is why we see Paul construct his epistles in the way he does. Romans, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Hebrews all contain significant sections of doctrinal truth followed by practical application. *Godly living is directly linked in Scripture to knowledge of doctrinal truth*.<sup>34</sup>

## Spiritual Wisdom and Understanding

*Spiritual wisdom and understanding* are frequently found together in Scripture.<sup>35</sup> These are inseparable from the knowledge that Paul has just spoken of. *Wisdom* refers to the ability to use the things learned in Scripture with the right application.<sup>36</sup> *Understanding* takes things to the next level, by referring to the application of spiritual principles in everyday life.

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31 Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon...*, p. 26.

32 Wall, Robert W. *Colossians & Philemon*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993.

33 See Philippians 1.9–10; Romans 12.2; 15.14; Philemon 6.

34 MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Colossians*, p. 28.

35 Exodus 31.3; Deuteronomy 4.6; 1 Chronicles 22.12; Isaiah 10.2; 29.14; Daniel 2.20.

36 Bullinger, *A Critical Lexicon...*, p. 886.

## Practical Application

Think of how knowledge and wisdom is gained when we do God's will. When we submit to it and seek to accomplish it, we will gain understanding of it.

Let's return to verse 9 and how Paul prays that his readers *be filled with the knowledge of His will*. Note again *who* does the filling. It is God through the Holy Spirit. We play the submissive role. The promise is that if we will make ourselves available, God will fill us to the max with everything we need to know to live the type of life He calls us to live. Will you make yourself available to Him? How much of a priority are you placing on quiet time in the word? Not just Bible reading for the sake of Bible reading, but reading with the intent to change and conform your heart and soul to God's will?

We live in amazing times. Like no time before, opportunities for getting in the word are all around. Many local churches offer a daily Bible reading. There are hundreds of online blogs that send posts out via email. Can you take a few moments to find one and subscribe? Many congregations are embracing video technology and offer streaming worship, Bible classes, and special studies. Spiritual instruction no longer has to take place in a church building on Sunday or Wednesday evening only. You have access and opportunity every single day to allow God a few moments to fill your heart and mind with knowledge of His will.

## 1.10–11—What This Leads To

### A Worthy Walk

In the New Testament, *walk* refers to our daily conduct or manner of life.<sup>37</sup> This imagery is common in Jewish writing, depicting a person's lifestyle as a path he or she walks along. Which way we walk is presented as an ongoing decisive choice we must make. On the surface this may sound like a daunting challenge. *How can I walk worthily? Consistently?* Despite any doubts that may cross our mind, we find assurances throughout the New Testament challenging us to do so.

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37 See also 1 Thessalonians 2.12; Ephesians 4.1; Philippians 1.27.

For example, we have been called to live as citizens of the kingdom. Paul, writing to the Philippians said:

Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

—Philippians 1.27

Peter also wrote:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

—1 Peter 2.9–10

Can you see your identity in these two verses? How does God define you now that you are in Christ? God has exalted you to a position in His kingdom, a saint projecting light. A priest performing spiritual sacrifices. We walk worthily by doing the things He wants. We look to Jesus. We walk in the way of humiliation, sacrifice, love, and mercy. John said it this way: *whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked*, 1 John 2.6.

When we do, we aim for the promise of being *fully pleasing to Him*. We make it our aim to be pleasing to God in everything. We are totally yielded to God's Spirit who resides inside us. We consciously choose to bring the Word into our heart.

### **Bearing Fruit**

Knowledge leads to fruitfulness. Learning the truth will change your life. Note how James 3.17 is worded. Spiritual wisdom leads to *purity, peace, gentleness, reasonableness, mercy, good fruits, impartiality, and sincerity*.

Everyday our spiritual life should be becoming more productive, i.e., filled with praise, prayerful, and increasingly servant minded.

This is the idea Peter had in mind when he urged Christians in 2 Peter 1.5–7 to use all diligence to apply spiritual virtues to their life. Verses 10–11 of the same chapter detail the result of our diligence:

Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

—2 Peter 1.10–11

### **Spiritual Maturity**

Next we come to the third thing Paul mentions in v.10. Knowledge leads to the *increasing* of our *knowledge of God*. In this we're focusing specifically on **increasing**. We should always place an emphasis on growth. Right now, you are not where you can be. There is always progress to make. Progress in becoming more like Jesus. Advancement in living the way (as expressed in our attitudes and actions) God prescribes.

A great parallel passage to the idea Paul is expressing here is found in Ephesians 4.13–15, where we are told to move forward with an eye toward maturity, *to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*.

### **Strengthened with Power**

This again refers to the continuous work of God that is ongoing throughout our Christian life. We have constant access to it through the Holy Spirit who is present in us, Ephesians 3.16. In Romans 15.13 Paul wrote, *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope*. In Ephesians 1.18–20 Paul goes even further in detail, describing this power in terms of *immeasurable greatness*. The same power God exerted in raising Jesus from the dead and exalting Him to the right hand of His throne is the same power available to every Christian.

## **Endurance, Patience, and Joy**

The gift of power from God enables Christians to stand firm in the face of suffering and trial ... and will prove as a test to the quality of their faith. Trials present us with an opportunity to place God's power on display.

Let's connect this back to v. 9 and the importance of being filled with knowledge. Knowledge of God's promises help you endure suffering and disappointment. *Endurance* is where we hold on to the most basic and essential of our commitments. *Patience* is our capacity to do so.<sup>38</sup> We trust in passages like James 1.2–4 that remind us there is a purpose for the trials we endure. We hold up passages like 1 Corinthians 10.13 that instruct us God will not allow us to bear more than we can handle. We trust, that in all things, God is at work in perfecting us.

Perhaps one of the greatest biblical examples of endurance, patience, and joy can be seen in Paul when he writes Philippians 4.11–13. What fueled Paul's contentment? His assurance of God's continual strengthening and working. When we know God, know His promises and know His purposes, our endurance will keep us going.

In fact, we can respond to all these difficulties with *joy*! We know that God knows what He is doing. We know a time is coming when we will be freed from the difficulties of life. We can get through anything when we know God, His purposes, and His promises!

### **1.12—Covered in Thankfulness**

This brings us full circle back to the thanks Paul gave in v. 3. In 1.3–8 Paul expresses his thankfulness for what God did for the Colossians at the beginning of their salvation. In 1.9–11 Paul speaks of God's strengthening power for those who saturate their hearts with the knowledge of Him. Now, in v. 12 he gives thanks for what God *has done* and *continues* to do in working to ensure their salvation.

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38 Wall, Robert W. Colossians & Philemon.

The giving of thanks is a central theme in Colossians.<sup>39</sup> In many ways, thankfulness summarizes the reality of our spiritual existence. When we give thanks, we are acknowledging the receipt of a gift, not something we have earned. May we always remember we are saved by faith and stand in grace, Romans 5.1–2. This theme is especially important when considering the overall context of Colossians where false teachers were beginning to assert that a person’s salvation depended on something else (Judaism/Greek philosophy) + Jesus. As you take v. 1–12 into consideration as a whole, see the all-sufficiency of the gospel to save and the work of God required to make it all possible.

### **God Has Qualified You**

The foundation for our spiritual existence rests with the Father, who has graciously provided what every sinner needs to be considered worthy to be a part of His people. God has *qualified* you. The word means “to make sufficient; to be empowered, to be made complete.”<sup>40</sup> The person who falls back on the feeling *I’m not worthy*, needs to embrace the teaching here: **God has made you worthy by His power, not your own.** Because of His work, you get to *share in the inheritance of the saints in light*. Just like the Israelites of old, we each get a share in the eternal and heavenly *promised land*.

## **1.13–14—Three Reasons for Thanksgiving**

The Father’s act of *qualification* has resulted in three things which serve as ongoing realities in our spiritual life:

### **1.13—We are delivered from the domain of darkness**

MacArthur<sup>41</sup> refers to this as “spiritual liberation.” We have been literally rescued from Satan’s kingdom and brought unto Jesus himself. This is what Douglass Moo<sup>42</sup> refers to as “rescue by transference.” We now have the ability

<sup>39</sup> See 1.3, 12; 2.6–7; 3.15,17; and 4.2.

<sup>40</sup> Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones, and Roderick McKenzie. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 825. Subsequent citations will be identified as LSJ.

<sup>41</sup> MacArthur, John F., Jr. *Colossians*, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup> Moo, Douglas J. *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008, p. 102.

to jointly participate with the King under His reign and to bring His lordship to bear in the world.

Our transference happened upon our baptism, Romans 6.2–7, 11. Spiritually, you no longer live where Satan dwells. You are a new creature, 2 Corinthians 5.17. Paul refers to this as having been *transferred*. Think total removal. A change in geography, i.e., from the realm of Satanic darkness to the indescribable light of God’s kingdom.

Some have linked this passage to the writing in Exodus 6.6–8 concerning God’s rescue of the Hebrews from Egypt:

Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will **deliver** you from slavery to them, and I will **redeem** you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. **I will take you** to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. **I will bring you** into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.’”

—Exodus 6.6–8

Note the bold words. God “delivers.” God “redeems.” And finally, God “brings” His people into a place of inheritance. The Colossians account brings all of these concepts into the spiritual realm of application.

### **1.14—We have redemption**

Jesus purchased your redemption at the cross, Romans 3.24–26; Ephesians 1.7; 1 Peter 1.18–19. Jesus literally bought sinners back from Satan by offering His own life as a ransom.<sup>43</sup>

### **1.14b—We are forgiven**

Transference into the kingdom brings pardon. We are no longer under

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<sup>43</sup> See Mark 10.45.

condemnation, Romans 8.1. God has sent your sins away, *as far as the east is from the west*, Psalm 103.12. Your sins *have been cast into the depths of the sea*, Micah 7.19. The forgiveness granted at the cross is sufficient to cover our past, present, and future sins. While we still sin as we await our departure to heaven, as long as our hearts remain true to Him, we can rest knowing that Jesus ever lives to make intercession for us, Hebrews 7.25. Our salvation is never precarious. It rests on the continuous work of deity who are more than committed to see their work completed in us.

And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

—Philippians 1.6; 2.12–13

## For Thought and Reflection

1. What does *filled* refer to in 1.9?
2. What is the purpose of knowledge?
3. What is spiritual wisdom and understanding?
4. What are some things you can do to increase your spiritual knowledge?

5. What does it mean to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord?
  
6. For what is God strengthening you with all power?
  
7. What does it mean that God has *qualified* you?
  
8. What does it mean to have been *delivered* and *transferred*?
  
9. By dying on the cross, what did Jesus accomplish that you could not do for yourself?
  
10. How expansive is the forgiveness we have been given?