

**Series:** *Colossians: The Supremacy and Sufficiency of Christ*

**Lesson:** *Persistent, Powerful Praying*

**Text:** Colossians 1:9-14 (L2)

**Date:** Sunday, January 15, 2012

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### Key



= Teacher Information



= Discussion Starter

### TEACHING TIP

- The application section of each main point provides possibly the best opportunity for discussion at the tables. This offers a time for the group to discuss how to put shoes to what was just gleaned from the text. Whereas the explanation answers the “What?” and “Why” questions, the application answers the “So what?” and “How?” questions. I usually include some applicational thoughts and a discussion question for each main point. Rather than just reading the application paragraph(s), use the discussion question to get feedback on “So what?” and “How?” Then, you can use the thoughts provided to fill in a quiet discussion or conclude a fuller one.

### NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Colossians 1:15-19 – The Cosmic Christ

### INTRODUCTION

Our prayers frequently tend to be anemic, at best, or non-existent, at worst. This passage addresses both of those weaknesses. Paul models for us prayer that is both powerful and persistent; probably, Paul's prayer was persistent because it was powerful. When something is effective, it is more regularly engaged in. Nothing hampers our prayers more than when we feel like they just aren't accomplishing anything. “Why pray?” we might think, “It won't work anyways.” And so, our prayers are inconsistent and ineffective.

Opposite that attitude is the example of Paul who arrested the attention of Almighty God when he prayed. His requests weren't small and earthy; they were weighty and eternal. I think Paul understood the incredible promise of I John 5:14-15—“And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hears us, [then] whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.”

God assures us in this passage that when we pray according to His will, our prayers will be answered. Too often, though, our prayers consist only of those personal-will requests for which we have no such divine guarantee. We pray for so-and-so to get a better job, for this person to get over her sickness, and for this individual to do well on his upcoming exam. Those prayers are certainly appropriate, but when they alone are the requests for which we pray, we may become discouraged when we see God answer in ways contrary to our own will. Such discouragement often results in faithless, weak, and inconsistent praying.

Scripture records for us many Pauline prayers. II Corinthians 12:7-10; Ephesians 1:15-23; 3:14-21; Philippians 1:9-11; 4:6-7; I Thessalonians 3:11-13; 5:16-18, 23-24; II Thessalonians 1:3-12; 3:1-5, 16; I Timothy 2:1-8; and Colossians 1:9-14 are all reflections of Paul's prayer life. What is incredibly striking about these prayers is that while Paul was always praying for people, he was praying for them spiritually, not physically. I'm sure that he prayed for their financial concerns, their family issues, their health needs, etc., but his inscripturated prayers are only those in which *he prayed God's will for them*. These were the requests for which he had the divine guarantee that they would be answered. When he asked God to give them spiritual wisdom (Ephesians 1:17), he knew God would answer that; when he prayed for them to know God's love and be filled with His fullness (Ephesians 3:17-19), he was confident that God would do that; when he requested that they have discernment so they could be blameless (Philippians 1:10), he was guaranteed that God would respond!

See, we don't always know God's will for someone's physical well-being, but God's Word clearly tells us what His will is for our spiritual well-being. Let us then arrest the attention of God by asking requests that are in agreement with His will. O, that our church might be filled with believers who interceded in this way one for another!<sup>1 2</sup>



How do we develop this mindset of always thinking about ministering to others through prayer? Consider these thoughts: "Such unceasing or recurring prayer (1 Thess. 5:17) demands **first** of all an attitude of God-consciousness. That does not mean to be constantly in the act of verbal prayer, but to view everything in life in relation to God. For example, if we meet someone, we immediately consider where they stand with God. If we hear of something bad happening, we react by praying for God to act in the situation because we know He cares. If we hear of something good that has happened, we respond with immediate praise to God for it because we know He is glorified. When Paul looked around his world, everything he saw prompted him to prayer in some way. When he thought of or heard about one of his beloved churches, it moved him toward communion with God.... A **second** aspect of unceasing prayer is people consciousness" (MacArthur, p. 25).

<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur writes about the incredible reality of prayer: "Even without the benefit of sophisticated scientific equipment or technology, every Christian can minister directly to the spiritual well-being of other believers without seeing or speaking to them. We can play a role in their spiritual growth, and even secure God's blessings for them. The amazing means is prayer.... It may seem unnecessary to pray for those who are doing well. Much of our prayer time focuses on those who are struggling, facing difficulties, or fallen into sin or physical distress. Paul, however, knew that the knowledge that others are progressing in the faith should never lead us to stop praying for them. Rather, it should encourage prayer for their greater progress. The enemy may reserve his strongest opposition for those who have the most potential for expanding God's cause in the world" (Colossians. Chicago: Moody Press, 1996, pp. 23, 25). Cf. II Corinthians 1:11; Philippians 1:9; Ephesians 6:18

<sup>2</sup> To summarize this I John 5:14-15 idea of praying—(1) As we interceded for believer's physical needs, we should do so, praying "if the Lord wills" and asking for what God does will in that situation, i.e., their growth in Christlikeness, etc.; (2) We should regularly pray for believers' spiritual development, since this is what Paul consistently modeled, and we have biblical assurance that this is God's will.

To help cultivate a culture of persistent, powerful prayer in our church, we're going to walk through Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-14 this morning. We'll certainly learn some Christian-life principles from this passage, but let's do so in the context of praying God's will one for another.

Before we jump into this passage, consider the following translation of Colossians 1:9-14 from the original language. The translation has been structured into a block-diagram that shows the relationship between phrases. Such a Bible study method allows us to easily follow and organize Paul's thought-flow.

#### Colossians 1:9-14

*Because of this,<sup>3</sup> we also, from the day we heard [about your faith, love, and hope], have not ceased praying for you and asking<sup>4</sup> that*

*you may be **filled** {verb} **with the full knowledge of His will** in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*

*[so that you might] **live** {infinitive} **worthily of the Lord** unto all pleasing*

***bearing fruit** {participle} in every good work,*

***growing** {participle} in the full knowledge of God,*

***being enabled** {participle}... ..for all steadfastness and patience,*

*...with all power according to His glorious might...*

***giving thanks** {participle} with joy to the Father*

*who **qualified** you for the share of the saint's portion in the light,*

*who **rescued** us from the authority of the darkness,*

*and **transferred** [us] into the kingdom of His beloved Son,*

*in whom we have redemption,*

*the forgiveness of sins.*

Structured this way, we can easily see that Paul's prayer features one main request (i.e., knowledge) that will have one primary result (i.e., a worthy walk) manifested in a variety of ways (i.e., fruit-bearing, growth, enablement, and thanksgiving). Notice also that Paul prayed for these Colossian believers, whom he had never met, "from the day [he] heard" about their salvation, and

<sup>3</sup> "This" refers back to his reflections on what God is doing in and through the Colossians. It refers back to his thanksgiving for those believers. Paul demonstrates that thanksgiving shouldn't close out our prayer; it should stimulate our prayer. We should be thrilled at what God is doing in someone's life, and we should ask Him to continue it. This is one way in which we can minister to the Christian community on a daily and private basis, breaking us out of the public and weekend ministry mentality.

<sup>4</sup> Prayer is not all asking, but it is asking" (Alistair Begg in a sermon entitled "The Apostle's Prayer, Part One" preached on 2/12/84, available at <http://bit.ly/y7gTWi>). We've already seen, and will see again in verses 12-14, the importance of thanksgiving in prayer. Prayer is supplication, intercession, communion, praise, worship, exaltation, surrender, thirsting, etc.

he had “not ceased praying” for them.<sup>5</sup> In this passage, then, we have modeled for us persistent, powerful prayer.

### PRAYER THAT THEY WOULD KNOW GOD’S WILL (v. 9)

It is no surprise that Paul’s primary request was that the Colossian believers be filled with knowledge. Knowledge is foundational to what God is accomplishing in us through Christ. We saw in Titus 1:1-4, that knowledge is the basis of faith and godliness, and we discovered last week that the knowledge of hope is the foundation for faith and love (Colossians 1:4-5). The Bible makes it very clear that knowledge is crucial to Christian living (Proverbs 19:2; Isaiah 5:13; Hosea 4:6; I Corinthians 14:20; Ephesians 4:13-14, 18), and Paul frequently prayed that believers would grow in knowledge (Ephesians 1:17; Philippians 1:9). Cf. Jeremiah 9:23-24

Unlike those promoting the Colossian heresy, this knowledge was not esoteric, mystical, experiential, or humanly-based; rather, it is found in Christ and is a part of the birthright of the gospel (cf. Colossians 2:2-3; 3:10).<sup>6</sup> Several considerations within this verse helps us understand the nature of godly knowledge.

- The passive form of the verb, “you may be filled,” demonstrates that it is God Himself who imparts to us this knowledge. While this knowledge has already been given to them in Christ (Colossians 2:2-3), Paul wants it to fill them up to completeness (cf. same word in Colossians 9-10) or control them (cf. Ephesians 5:18).

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<sup>5</sup> “Once you got on the Apostle Paul’s prayer list, you were on it for good” (Begg). Believers should (1) strive to be unceasing in prayer for fellow believers, allowing the work of God in others to motivate them to pray for its continuation, and (2) be careful about promising to pray for the multitude of requests that come their way without following through in actual prayer. Concerning this second point, it is best to say, “As you come to my mind, I will be praying for you” or to say, “I will pray for you” and then pray for the individual right then. On the one hand, we must be careful to avoid dishonestly in our genuine desire to pray. It is best to not commit to pray, rather than to commit to pray and not do so. On the other hand, our human weakness in remembering people and disciplining ourselves to pray should not excuse our lack of prayer.

<sup>6</sup> The false teachers promoted a special knowledge that occurred through a mystical experience with God. Such a knowledge was to be desired of all Christians, for while Christ was okay, this experiential knowledge was a better initiation into one’s awareness of God. This Colossian heresy erred in that it got the source and purpose of knowledge wrong. According to these deceivers, this special knowledge was limited to those who had a certain divine initiation and was purely experiential and intellectual. God’s Word teaches that while knowledge played a role in our salvation, as we were taught the truth of the gospel, it was God’s grace that brought us to Himself and delivered us (Romans 10:17; Titus 1:1; 3:5; Colossians 1:5, 6). We were not saved because we knew the right things or experienced some intellectual initiation, but because Christ did what we could not and graciously credited His work to our account. Knowledge simply gave us the understanding of what Christ had done so that we might express personal faith in that and be saved by grace. Knowledge in and of itself is of no benefit, nor is it the means of salvation. Rather, Christ is the source (I Corinthians 1:5, 30; Colossians 2:3), content (Philippians 3:8-11; Colossians 2:2), and goal of true knowledge (Colossians 3:10).

- The word for “knowledge” (*epignosis*) is an intensified form of the normal Greek word for knowledge (*gnosis*). This form stresses a full, deep, and personal knowledge. Paul doesn’t just want their heads to be filled; he wants their hearts to personally and relationally know Christ as they walk with Him in His Word. The difference is between knowing someone’s hobbies, likes, and dislikes and knowing what someone is thinking, how he would respond to a particular situation, what his goals and objectives are. The former can be learned in a brief Q&A session; the latter are learned through a relationship with the individual.
- The content of this knowledge is “God’s will.” This proves that this knowledge is not special, reserved, hidden, or mystical, for God has clearly made His will known in His Word. We specifically know that His will is that people be saved (I Timothy 2:4; I Peter 3:9), Spirit-controlled (Ephesians 5:17-18), sanctification (I Thessalonians 4:3), submissive (I Peter 2:13, 15), steadfast in suffering (I Peter 4:19), and thankful (I Thessalonians 5:17)
- This “knowledge” in demonstrated “in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Taken together, “wisdom” and “understanding” communicate the maturity of comprehending biblical principles and then the applying them in daily decision-making. This phrase contradicts the Colossian heretics who simply pursued knowledge for knowledge sake. Paul understands that the purpose of godly knowledge is to aid the believer in godly living. The knowledge of God’s will through communion with Him in His Word will change the way one lives, because it will transform the way he thinks and reasons. That’s what verse 9 is all about; it states Paul’s prayer for the mind and thought-processes of the Colossian believers.<sup>7</sup> Such wise thinking will result in the living of verses 10-12.
- This knowledge and resulting wisdom is Spirit-given (i.e., “spiritual,” cf. I Corinthians 2:11-13). It is not attained through one’s own self-effort or natural aging, but only through one’s submission to the Spirit through His Word (cf. Ephesians 5:18 with Colossians 16).

To summarize the idea of verse 9: “Believing, submissive Bible study leads to the knowledge of God’s will. A mind saturated with such knowledge will also be able to comprehend general principles of godly behavior. With that wisdom will come understanding of how to apply those principles to the situations of life. That progression will inevitably result in godly character and practice.”<sup>8</sup> What a tremendous prayer request to pray for other believers!<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> “Having the knowledge of God’s Word control our minds is the key to righteous living. What controls your thoughts will control your behavior. Self-control is a result of mind control, which is dependent on knowledge” (MacArthur, p. 28). Cf. Romans 12:1-2

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>9</sup> Peterson paraphrases the request as follows, “... asking God to give you wise minds and spirits attuned to His will, and so acquire a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works” (*The Message*).



**Application:** Understanding how knowledge relates to Christian living, how should we apply these considerations? (1) *Commit yourself to live out God’s will each day—this will need to be recommitted to each morning, since within us wages a spiritual battle—this is the concept of “godliness” or “the fear of the Lord” which is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10);* (2) *Study God’s Word, not as a source of information but as a channel of communion in your relationship with God—look for [a] God’s person as it is revealed in Scripture, keying in on what His heart and thoughts are, and [b] principles through which wisdom can operate in daily choices and emphases;* (3) *practice applying God’s Word, by thinking principally about decisions and issues (Hebrews 5:14);* (4) *pray this prayer for other believers at your church.*

**Transition:** Paul’s primary request for the Colossian believers was that they be controlled in their thinking by the application of the knowledge of God’s will. As he continues praying, he asks God to grant to them the blessed result of such understanding. So, having petitioned God to enable them to know God’s will, Paul now prays that they would live God’s way.

#### PRAYER THAT THEY WOULD LIVE GOD’S WAY (vv. 10-14)

Paul moves into this second point with an infinitive: “...filled with the full knowledge of His will...to walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing.” The infinitive should be translated with a purpose or result idea. In other words, the goal of knowledge is to affect one’s walk or lifestyle or conduct. God’s will is that His children walk in a manner that fits with His gracious work within them (Ephesians 4:1; Philippians 1:27; I Thessalonians 2:12; Titus 2:10) and that pleases Him fully. Such a walk is described by the following four participial phrases. Remember, while the believers should strive to live this way in faith-filled obedience to God, the context of this lifestyle is in a prayer to God to cultivate this within the believers.

#### 1. They live God’s way by bearing fruit (v. 10).

The first result of a personal knowledge of God is a life that is “bearing fruit in every good work.” Having recently completed our study through Titus, we cannot help but notice in this passage the God-ordained connection between the gospel and good works. In verse 6, Paul praised God that the gospel was “bearing fruit” in the Colossian believers. He uses that same Greek word in verse 10 to pray that the believers would “bear fruit” in good works. So, the good works that these believers were engaging in were fruits of the gospel believed. (cf. Titus 2:1-14; 3:1-8; Ephesians 2:8-10). When the gospel is believed, godly good works



What is the connection between “bearing fruit” in verse 6 and verse 10? See explanation.

will be its fruit, for one cannot experience God’s grace without being compelled to imitate it (cf. James 3:17; II Peter 1:5-8). God is well-pleased with such fruit (John 15:2, 5-6, 8), which may be our evangelistic endeavors (Romans 1:13), worship (Hebrews 13:15), giving (Romans 15:26-28), and general godliness (Hebrews 12:11; Galatians 5:22-23).

#### 2. They live God’s way by growing (v. 10).

According to John 15:4-5, fruitfulness only occurs as one stays connected to Christ. Therefore, we are not surprised to discover that Paul prayed secondly for these believers to be “growing in [or by] the full knowledge<sup>10</sup> of God.” The phrase “in the full knowledge of God” is in the Greek dative case and seems best to be taken instrumentally. In other words, their growth will occur in proportion to their relationship with God (cf. II Peter 1:2-8; 3:18). The word for “growing” is again the same word used in verse 6 to describe the Colossians response to the gospel. Perhaps we are to recognize that the gospel will spread from us only as much as we are being impassioned to do so by our relationship with the Savior Himself (cf. II Corinthians 5:14-15).



What might be the connection between “growing” in verse 6 and verse 10? See explanation.

Concerning both of these first two responses of godly knowledge, it’s helpful to recognize again that Paul thanked God that the Colossians were “bearing fruit and growing” in the gospel, and now he prays that such increase would continue. This is a model for us in our prayers for one another.

#### 3. They live God’s way by enduring (v. 11).

Since the follower of Christ by grace through faith has entered into a lifelong relationship to and service for Jesus, he cannot choose when to live godly and fruitful and when not to. No, he must daily strive to “walk worthy of the calling with which he’s been called” (Ephesians 4:1), no matter what trials or temptations he may encounter. Thus, a third result of applied knowledge for which Paul prays is divine enablement for their endurance. Literally, he prays for them to be “enabled with all power according to His glorious might for all steadfastness and patience.” The word “enabled” is a present passive participle stressing (1) continuous enabling (present tense) (2) by an outside source, namely God (passive mood). We need not fear our own ability to persevere, nor doubt God’s ability to daily enable us to be steadfast and patient in any situation,<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> This is the same Greek word that was used in verse 9 to refer to full, deep, personal knowledge. It is not mere intellectual recollection; it is relational understanding.

<sup>11</sup> “*Hupomone* (steadfastness) and *makrothumia* (patience) are closely related. If there is a distinction, it is that *hupomone* refers to being patient in circumstances, whereas *makrothumia* refers to patience with people (Richard C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], p. 198). Both refer to the patient enduring of trials” (MacArthur, p. 32).

because His might (*kratos*) is glorious (I Timothy 6:16; I Peter 4:11; 5:11; Jude 25; Revelation 5:13). This was the power displayed in the resurrection of Christ (Ephesians 1:19-20) and is ours through our relationship with Christ (Ephesians 6:10-18) and the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:16; Romans 15:13). When you don't think you can endure, look to God for the enablement that He promises.

#### 4. **They live God's way by giving thanks (vv. 12-14).**

Interestingly, Paul bookends his prayer in a whole lot of thanksgiving. He thanked God in verses 3-8, and he again thanks God in verses 12-14. The fourth result of wisdom for which Paul prays is that the Colossians would engage themselves in "giving thanks with joy to the Father." MacArthur explains Paul's emphasis on thanksgiving in these first fourteen verses:

*Giving thanks is too often demoted to a secondary place in the prayers of Christ's people. Our attitude in approaching God is often reminiscent of the leech's daughters: "Give, Give" (Prov. 30:15). We are quick to make our requests and slow to thank God for His answers. Because God so often answers our prayers, we come to expect it. We forget that it is only by His grace that we receive anything from Him.*<sup>12</sup>

When a believer is controlled by an applied knowledge of the Person, work, and will of God (v. 9), he will be a thanksgiving-filled believer, for there is so very much for which to be thankful (II Corinthians 9:15). In verses 12-14, Paul was rejoicing in the God's gospel work in and through the Colossian believers; now, Paul simply basks in that gospel work itself and the One who orchestrated it. Paul rejoices in three specific aspects of salvation.

#### (1). **God qualified us for an inheritance (v. 12).**

The word "qualified" means "to make sufficient, to authorize, to make adequate." We were insufficient in ourselves for any heavenly portion (i.e., a portion in "the light"), until God our "Father" adopted us into His own family through the payment of Jesus Christ's death on our behalf. While we already have that inheritance (Ephesians 1:11; Romans 8:16-17), our full possession of it is future (I Peter 1:4; Hebrews 9:15). God the Holy Spirit within us is the downpayment that guarantees that inheritance (Ephesians 1:13-14) of eternal life (Matthew 19:29), a restored earth (Matthew 5:5), and the realization of God's promises (Hebrews 6:12).

#### (2). **God rescued us from darkness (v. 13).**

God "rescued us from the authority of darkness." The same phrase is used before the crucifixion in Luke 22:53, and was revealed through the resurrection to be an inferior authority to the power of Christ (I John 4:4)! Though the incarnation and crucifixion, Christ did "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). Therefore, sin no longer has dominion over us, a reality that we must daily consider to be true in our thought-processes and decisions (Romans 6:2, 7, 11).

#### (3). **God transferred us to His Son's kingdom (vv. 13-14).**

God changes our citizenship from the kingdom of darkness, death, and the devil to the kingdom of the Son whom He loves (cf. Luke 12:32). Paul reminded the Thessalonians of the incredible responsibility of those who are subjects of Christ's kingdom and representatives of the King (I Thessalonians 2:12). Nonetheless, we have already been "fit" for Christ's kingdom because we have received "redemption" and "forgiveness of sins" through Christ. Christ's death was the ransom payment that freed us from slavery to sin (cf. Romans 3:24; I Corinthians 1:30; Ephesians 1:7) and thus provided for our pardon (Psalm 103:12; Micah 7:19). Such incredible citizenship demands an appropriate response: "Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe" (Hebrews 12:28).

**Application:** "When we contemplate all [God] has done for us, how can we do any less than pray to be filled with the knowledge of His will?"<sup>13</sup> If you are slow to pray for God to help you or others know His will and live His way, it may be because you are not basking in His work.



What aspects of His salvation from verses 12-14 are you especially moved by? *Various answers.*

#### CONCLUSION

We started this lesson by considering the promise of I John 5:14-15—"And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hears us, [then] whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." Paul was a man of persistent and powerful praying, because He prayed according to the will of God, knowing that God would answer. Let us uphold one another in prayer this week, that we would know God's will and live God's way, being empowered by His gospel work.

<sup>12</sup> MacArthur, pp. 32-35.

<sup>13</sup> MacArthur, p. 41.