

The Colossians Prayer  
Colossian 1:9-14

Turn to Colossians 1 please. I discovered this prayer last July, and since then I have prayed this for myself and for our church more often than any other prayer. I found this prayer awkward at first. The Psalms are poetic, and sometimes Paul is too, but not here.

But I grew to love what Paul was asking for, and I could see that if God would do this for our church, that would be very good. And by now you should hear it too.

Why does the Bible tell us prayers like this? Paul prayed this way, but he did not need to write it out for the Colossians for his prayer to be answered. So why did he write it out? Why does the Bible tell us what the apostles prayed? At least three reasons:

1, Biblical Prayers teach us How to Pray, and What to Ask for.

In prayer we pour out our hearts to God, and that's how it should be. Prayer always includes that, but not only that. These prayers teach us how to pray. What should we ask for when we pray for each other? The Bible's prayers guide our prayers.

These prayers show us what's Important to God.

Our prayers are usually about immediate needs, I need this now, someone I love needs this, and immediate joys, something good just happened, so we thank God. That's all good, don't stop.

But there's more. God has bigger concerns than our immediate troubles and joys. We are God's servants, and he wants about *his* business. Seek first the kingdom of *God* and *his* righteousness, says Jesus. God shows us what's important to *him* so we can be about *his* business. Biblical prayers show us what's important to God.

These prayers show us what God does for us.

If it is a prayer, that means these are things God will do. I am often happily surprised by the things God does for us, because God does things that I thought were just up to me. The Colossians prayer includes good works, and it includes endurance, and it includes thankfulness. I thought good works and endurance and thankfulness were my job.

You and I do have a part to play in these things, but it is not just up to us. Paul prays to God that God will make these things increase in that church. That's good news, because if God is ready to do that for Paul's church, he's ready to do it for ours. That's why I like these prayers.

If we ask for these things, God will do them. These requests are important to God, these are prayers he gave us, he wants to do these things for us. Somehow, us asking him for this takes us forward in these things. Now to the Colossians prayer.

Filled with Knowing what God Wants (Colossians 1:9)

*For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all wisdom and spiritual understanding.*

Knowing God's will here is not really about the big decisions. In the Bible, the will of God is more about we should live. What kinds of things are important to God? When God looks at you and me, what does he want to see? When he looks at our church, what does he want to see? That's knowing his will.

We get fooled about this. Some bad teaching was taking root in the Colossian church. In the name of God, people were urging new Colossian believers to keep rules that God did not care about. The covid years are not that far behind us. During that time, faithful believers differed about what God wants to see in his people.

If we had all been filled with knowing what God wants, that would not have happened. Let's pray this for ourselves and for each other. That we would all know what he wants to see in us. The rest of this prayer tells us the core of what God wants to see.

Live Worthy of the Lord, Please the Lord

*We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all wisdom and spiritual understanding, **so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way:***

“Live a life”: first of all, the will of God concerns how you and I live our lives. It is not about a particular job or career choice, nor any one decision. How do we live our lives? That's what pleases God. And what pleases God is when we live our lives worthy of the Lord, in a way the pleases the Lord.

We say, “God, what's your will for me?” God says, “my will is how you live your daily life, and for that, look at my Son Jesus. Live your daily life following him and pleasing him. That's my will for you” Remember the paragraph about “calling” in 1 Cor 7? Where you are, right now, is your calling, and God's will is that you and I would follow Jesus in our assignment right now.

We do have to make big decisions sometimes, and they can be frightening. I've done that. Of course we ask God to help us make these decisions. But when the Bible talks about the will of God, it is how we're living our lives right now.

And now Paul gives three specifics of what he asks God to do for believers,

### One, In All Kinds of Good Works, Bearing Fruit and Growing

*I pray that in every kind of good work you will bear fruit and grow in the knowledge of God.* In our daily lives, let's do good things for people. Galatians 6 says, "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially the household of faith." You people do lots of this, with each other and with others. That's just right. The good things we do for each other and for others are what we do when we are filled with knowing what God wants, and when we are pleasing the Lord. THAT is a life worthy of the Lord.

The Galatians line says, "as we have opportunity." The enemy can turn the Lord's instructions into a burden, so that suddenly we think the Lord runs around with a clip board checking off our good works and seeing if our daily total is enough. What nonsense! There's no clipboard, and he's not counting. These are things God likes to see. It pleases him to see these things.

As we have opportunity. Everyday little things come up, or not little, and we say, "I could do that." There are things that good pastors do but I can't do them. I just can't get there. I wish I could, but I don't have that grace, so I don't. And you are gracious with me. Things cross your path that you could do if you were a different person, but you're not a different person, you're you. Let it go. As we have opportunity means, "I could do that," and then we do it.

*In every kind of good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God.* These good things mean our knowing what God wants is bearing fruit. The knowledge of God's will is bearing fruit in these small or great actions. And not only are we bearing fruit, but we are growing in knowing God.

Putting what we know into action brings us closer to God. We will grow in our understanding of God. Knowing God comes as a result of praying for it, and as a result of an obedient life. Have you noticed that Paul does not pray that they'd do fewer bad things. He does not pray against what's wrong. He prays that what's good would grow. I like that.

### Two, With All Glorious Power being Strengthened for Endurance

*I pray that with all power you will be strengthened according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.*

What will God's great and glorious power look like in our lives? How will our lives parade God's great and glorious power? I don't know what kind of answer you expect to questions like that, but the answer is not what I expected: great endurance and patience.

It was this line that won me to this prayer, because it is so counter-intuitive. It is exactly what we'd *not* expect. Great endurance and patience is not glorious, it is exhausting and distressing.

And if there was any great strong power around, it would fix the wretched situation so I do not need to be patient and enduring. That's how I want to think.

*I pray that with all power you will be strengthened according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.* I remember some years ago Dave the builder had a terrible customer who made his life miserable. Dave bore this as graciously as he could, but he was in distress.

When we go through times like that, everyone in the *invisible* world sees a remarkable demonstration of God's power. What if everyone in the *visible* world saw God's glory so brightly they could hardly watch it? There are people in our church who are enduring difficult and distressing situations. They show patient endurance because we pray for them and God answers.

We should notice that in their troubles, Paul prays for God's power to endure, not God's power to rescue or fix. How about that.

Three, With Joy Thanking the Father who Included you in the Inheritance of his Holy People

Paul asks God to make them joyfully thankful, that's his third request. He wants them to be thankful for three things, and we'll go through them. The common denominator seems to be the Exodus story. The Colossians believers were Gentiles, as we are. We don't think the Exodus story is our story, it is Israel's story of being rescued from slavery in Egypt and being led into the promised land.

Thanks part 1: Included in the Inheritance of God's Holy People

This prayer shows us how we also have an Exodus story for which to thank God. In Exodus, the inheritance of the Israelites was the promised land. They were slaves, who own nothing and inherit nothing. God told Moses at the burning bush, "I'm going to bring them into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey." For those slaves, the land was their inheritance.

God offered them to be his holy people. If you will serve and obey me, you will be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Paul asks God to make *Gentile* believers thankful that *they've* been included, *we here* have been included. God has qualified *us* to share in the inheritance of his holy people.

The inheritance has actually gotten much better, but the basic idea is that we Gentiles are now God's holy people and qualified to get our share of the inheritance. Paul ask God that Gentile believers would give joyful thanks for this.

## Thanks part 2: He Rescued us from the Dominion of Darkness

Paul asks God to make us thankful for rescuing us from the authority of darkness. In the background, we need to picture Israelites as miserable slaves, crying out under their cruel oppression. As far as the Bible is concerned, people in our world without God are in a much worse situation. Every single person that is a child of God, every person that confesses Jesus as Lord, has been rescued from the oppressive and blinding authority of darkness.

This prayer asks God to make us thankful for rescuing us from something we never even really saw. This prayer educates us about the spiritual world in which we live. We have no idea how much rescue has already taken place just so that we can be gathered here on the Lord's Day to worship him and pray to him. This prayer asks God to open our eyes about how fortunate we are.

The Jewish leaders said Jesus cast out demons by power from the prince of demons. Jesus told them they weren't making any sense, and then he explained what was really going on. Jesus said that if you want to plunder a strong man's house, the first thing you have to do is go into the house and tie up the strong man so he's helpless. Then you can plunder his house.

So Jesus went into the strong man's house and tied him up. There's a story behind that line, but we don't get the details. Then Jesus plundered that house. Do you know who he led out of that house? You. And me. He led out the strong man's slaves. Every single child of God was at one time in that enemy's house, and is a child of God because Jesus went in there, bound the enemy, and led us out.

We pray that God lead us to give him joyful thanks that we've been included in the inheritance of his holy people. May we be thankful that God rescued us from the authority of darkness, and ...

## Thanks part 3: He Brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he Loves

God rescued us from the authority of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. That's what our inheritance is – the kingdom of the Son he loves. Our inheritance is the kingdom of God and of Christ.

The kingdom has already begun, we enjoy many benefits now, but it is not yet fulfilled. It will be fulfilled with the Lord returns. The point is: we are now in that kingdom! It is ours, we are full citizens of that realm. The transfer from the authority of darkness to the kingdom of God's Son is complete, and it is the most amazing thing that could happen to any person on earth.

In this prayer, we ask God to open our eyes to see this, to see what's actually happened to us, where we were, and where we are now, how rescued we are and how fortunate we are. We ask God to help us see, and to lead us into joyful thanks, the only response that makes any sense.

He Brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he Loves, in Whom we have Redemption, the Forgiveness of Sins.

“Redemption” is another slavery word. To redeem someone is to buy them out of slavery. The Son redeemed us, he gave his life as a ransom price to redeem us, that’s how he got us out of the strong man’s house, that’s how he got us away from the authority of darkness and into his kingdom.

Praying this prayer drags us out of the little picture, what I feel and experience right now, and plants us firmly in the big picture, the landscape. This prayer remembers our past and speaks of our future.

I am sure God puts these prayers in here for just that reason. It’s a prayer. God invites us to say this to him. This prayer isn’t here so we can pass a test on what to pray. It’s here so we’ll pray it. Let’s pray.

PRAYER: God, fill us with knowing what you want, show us what kind of things matter to you. Help us live our lives in a way that’s worthy of the Lord, lives that honour and please him. Lead us into all kinds of good works, so that this knowing your will can bear fruit and can grow. O God, strengthen us with all your power, all your glorious might, so that we can show great endurance and patience.

Lead us to give joyful thanks that you’ve included us in your holy people, and that we also get a share of the promised inheritance. Lead us to thank you that you rescued us from the authority of darkness, a slavery, O God, that we did not see or feel, and to thank you that you brought us into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of your Son. O God, the best thing that could happen to any person has happened to us, by your kindness we have won the eternal lottery. We are the most fortunate of all. Eternal thanks to you. Amen.

DOXOLOGY: To him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen. Go in God’s peace to love and serve the Lord.