

**"A Prayer For The Church"**  
**Colossians 1:9-14**

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Sixty years ago a young missionary named Raymond Edman staggered in from an Ecuadorian jungle, desperately ill. "He'll be dead by morning," the doctor predicted. Edman's wife dyed her wedding dress black, so it would be ready for the funeral. (In the tropics funerals must be held immediately). However, 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, until finally Evans called out, "Praise the Lord! The victory is won!" The rest is oft-repeated history: V. Raymond Edman recovered, his wife's dress did not, and Dr. Edman went on to become president of Wheaton College, and to minister for forty years!

This story unforgettably affirms the power of intercessory prayer. Motivated by stories like this we naturally ask--how are we to pray for the church and for other members of the body of Christ? A Classic Answer is provided by Paul in the introduction to his letter to the Colossians. Paul's prayer for the church in Colosse teaches us how to pray for other believers. In the opening verses Paul thanked God for their faith in Christ, their love for all the saints, and their hope laid up in heaven. His thanksgiving overflowed in a prayer which begins in verse 9. This prayer becomes a model for our own prayers.

Paul prayed for two great requests:

First, that God would fill them with a knowledge of His will.

Secondly, that this knowledge would produce conduct which was worthy of Jesus Christ, and in every way pleasing to Him. This is God's will for every believer.

*Let's consider first, then, Paul's...*

**I. PRAYER FOR KNOWLEDGE (9)**

The false teachers of Colosse offered these Christians a new and fuller knowledge. But Paul says, the knowledge I'm concerned that you have is that you might be filled with a full knowledge of God's will. Paul uses two key words here: The word "FILL" (play-ra-o) means to be completely filled or totally controlled. (In John 16:6 the disciples' hearts were filled with sorrow when Jesus told them of his departure. In Luke 6:11 the Scribes and Pharisees were filled with rage after Jesus healed on the Sabbath). Here Paul wants the Colossians to be completely filled with knowledge. The Greek word for KNOWLEDGE here is an intensified term (epi-gnosis) which means a deep and thorough knowledge.

An expanded translation: "I pray that you may be completely filled or totally controlled with a deep and thorough knowledge of His will."--IN ALL SPIRITUAL WISDOM

AND UNDERSTANDING. Spiritual wisdom and understanding refers to insight given by the HS in understanding the principles of Scripture and being able to apply those principles to everyday living. As we submissively study the Word we gain a knowledge of God's will. A MIND SATURATED with such knowledge is able to comprehend general principles of godly behavior. And with that wisdom comes understanding of how to apply those principles to the situations of life.

A deep and thorough knowledge of Christ and His will is essential to the spiritual life of all Christians. Having the knowledge of God's Word controlling our minds is the key to righteous living. What controls your thoughts controls your behavior.

**Illustration:** Lt. General William K. Harrison was the most decorated soldier in the 30th Infantry Division, which was rated by General Eisenhower as the the number one infantry division in World War II. General Harrison was THE FIRST AMERICAN TO ENTER BELGIUM, which he did at the head of the Allied Forces. He received every decoration for valor except the Congressional Medal of Honor--being honored with the Distinguished Silver Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star for Valor, and the Purple Heart. When the Korean War began, he served as Chief of Staff in the United Nations Command--and because of his character and self-control was ultimately President Eisenhower's choice to head the long and tedious negotiations to end the war.

General Harrison was a soldier's soldier who led an extremely busy life, but he was also an amazing man of the Word. When he was a twenty-year-old West Point Cadet, he began reading the OT through once a year and the NT four times. General Harrison did this until the end of his life. Even in the thick of war he maintained his commitment by catching up during the two-and three-day respites for replacement and refitting which followed battles, so that when the war ended he was right on schedule.

At the age of ninety, when his failing eyesight no longer permitted his discipline, he had read the OT seventy times and the NT 280 times! No wonder his godliness and wisdom were proverbial, and that the Lord used him for eighteen fruitful years to lead the Officers Christian Fellowship.

General Harrison's story tells us two things: FIRST, it is possible, even for the busiest of us, to systematically feed on God's Word. No one could be busier or lead a more demanding life than General Harrison. SECOND, his life remains a demonstration of a mind programmed with God's Word. His closest associates said that every area of his life and each of the problems he faced was informed by the Scriptures. People marveled at his knowledge of the Bible and the ability to bring its light to every area of life. He lived out the experience of the Psalmist:

Oh, how I love your law!  
I meditate on it all day long.  
Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,  
for they are ever with me.  
I have more insight than all my teachers,

for I meditate on your statutes.  
I have more understanding than the elders,  
for I obey your precepts. (119:97-100)

In verse 10 we find...

## **II. THE PURPOSE OR RESULT OF A KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL (10)**

Verse 10: "And we pray this so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way." The goal of knowledge is conduct as far as God is concerned. Not knowledge for knowledge's sake. We see this in the field of education. There are many who are in pursuit of knowledge for the sake of knowledge. But for the believer it is not knowledge for knowledge's sake. The end of knowledge is conduct. That you may walk worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.

"Worthy of God" was a popular formula archeologists have discovered on ancient pagan inscriptions to their gods. If pagans appreciated the importance of lending worship which was worthy of the deities to whom they were devoted, how much more should Christians render the spiritual service of obedient lives to the living and true God and to His Son Jesus Christ!

"To please Him in every way." means: "to anticipate and to do His will in every aspect of life." It refers to perfect, implicit obedience. It implies a radical commitment to the authority of Jesus Christ in every sphere of life." Bishop J.C. Ryle has written: "Zeal in religion is a burning desire to please God, to do His will, and to advance His glory in the world in every possible way....A zealous man...is pre-eminently a man of one thing. It is not enough to say that he is earnest, hearty, uncompromising, thorough-going, whole-hearted, fervent in spirit. He only sees one thing, he cares for one thing, he lives for one thing, he is swallowed up in one thing; and that one thing is to please God."

**In the following verses Paul uses four participles to define what it means to live a God-pleasing life or to walk worthy of the Lord:**

### **A. FIRST, TO WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD IS TO BE BEARING FRUIT IN EVERY GOOD WORK (v. 10)**

The Bible defines fruit in various ways. Here Paul speaks of bearing fruit in every good work. Good works are always viewed as the FRUIT not the ROOT of grace. Ephesians 2:8-10 is his own commentary on this truth: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

We are God's workmanship. That is the truth about us all as Christians. We were "created in Christ Jesus unto good works" Good works are the evidence of our relationship with Christ and of his grace operating in us. They are the outworking of Christ's life in His people.

**Illustration:** Dr. Louis Evans, a well-known Presbyterian pastor in the United States, was once invited to a mission station in Korea by a medical missionary friend. There he witnessed an operation involving major surgery in a makeshift tent in an out of the way area. The heat was stifling. The odors were oppressive. Hour after hour the steady, calm, determined surgeon worked on an old peasant woman. After 7 hours, the doctor stood up, drew back his mask and sighed, "Well, the job is done." Together they returned to the modest missionary's office where Dr. Evans asked, "I'm curious, how much do you get paid out here in Korea for an operation like this?" The surgeon answered, "To begin with, I get this," and he picked up a dented copper coin. He said, "This poor old woman came in here some time ago with this old coin and said, "Doctor, do you suppose this would pay for the operation?" I answered, "It so happens that is just enough." So to begin with, I got this piece of change. Sitting down, with tears beginning to fill his eyes, he added, "But most of all, what I get is the wonderful realization that for 7 hours Christ is living in these 10 fingers! I have the priceless awareness that these hands become the hands of Jesus Christ healing one of His children." Application: There is a person who understands who he is in Christ and what it means to be God's workmanship!

## **B. SECONDLY, TO WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD IS TO BE INCREASING IN THE FULL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD**

One of the fundamental laws of spiritual growth is that there is a cause-effect relationship between knowing and doing. Truth is something you live. The more you serve him the more you open yourself to knowledge of him, and the more you know of Him, the more you want to serve Him. As we continue bearing fruit in every good work, we grow in the knowledge of God.

Prov. 4:18 "The path of the righteous is as the dawning light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day."

Psalm 84:7 "They go from strength to strength."

### **There are several marks of a growing relationship with God:**

Deeper love for God's Word. "Oh how I love thy Law! It is my meditation all the day."  
Psalm 119:97

Second, growing relationship with God is reflected in a more perfect obedience. I John 2:3-5: "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him."

Third, growing relationship with God will result in an enlarged faith. II Thess. 1:3a "We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more..."

A fourth mark of a growing relationship with God is a greater love. "and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing." II Thess 1:3b

**C. THIRDLY, TO WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD INVOLVES BEING "STRENGTHENED WITH ALL POWER, ACCORDING TO HIS GLORIOUS MIGHT, FOR THE ATTAINING OF ALL STEADFASTNESS AND PATIENCE (v. 11)**

As we grow in the knowledge of God, our strength increases. "Being strengthened" is a present participle---signifying a continuous, steady supply. And this strengthening is on God's own scale: "According to His glorious might."

What does God's glorious might enable us to do? It enables us to stand firm in the face of trial and opposition and everything else that may come to test the quality of our faith.

"strengthened...for the attaining of all **endurance** and **longsuffering**"

**Endurance is "staying power"**--the ability to deal triumphantly with difficult circumstances, to hold your position in battle."

Illustration: Near the end of a great life of public service, Sir Winston Churchill was invited back to his alma mater to address the students. When the five-foot five-inch "bull dog of a man" took the platform, everyone waited breathlessly upon his words---and they would never forget what they heard: "Young gentlemen, never give up. Never give up! Never give up! Never! Never! Never! Never! With that he sat down.

Paul would have liked that. Endurance is perseverance in the performance of a God-given task in spite of every hardship and trial.

**To endurance Paul added patience.** The Greek more literally says "long-suffering."

ENDURANCE has to do with difficult circumstances.

PATIENCE has to do with difficult people.

William Barclay: "It's basic meaning is patience with people. It is the quality of mind and heart which enables a man so to bear with people that their unpleasantness and maliciousness and cruelty will never drive him to bitterness, that their unteachableness and foolishness will never drive him to despair, that their folly will never drive him to irritation, and their unloveliness never alter his love."

So Paul prays, Lord may they increase in their knowledge of you so that they will be enabled to persevere in difficulties and be patient with people. When King David controlled himself as he was maligned by Shimei, it was a greater victory than his killing Goliath. (II Sam. 16:5-13). "Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." Prov. 16:38

So Paul's prayer teaches us how to pray. Here are some of the things we ought to pray for each other and for ourselves:

that we might have an increasing understanding of God's will  
 that our walk might be worthy of the Lord  
 that our service might be fruitful  
 that our knowledge of God might be increasing  
 that our Christian character might be strengthened

*One final way that we walk worthy of the lord is by giving thanks...*

**D. A WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD IS A THANKFUL WALK**

"Joyfully giving thanks to the Father." This is the summit of the prayer. We cannot walk worthy of God without constantly giving joyous thanks.

ILL> Many years ago Northwestern University in Chicago had a life saving team that assisted passengers on Lake Michigan boats. On Sept. 8, 1860, the Lady Elgin foundered near campus, and a ministerial student named Edward Spencer personally rescued seventeen people. The exposure from this episode permanently damaged his health, and he was unable to continue preparation for the ministry. Some years later when he died, it was noted that not one of the seventeen people he had saved ever came to thank him. Thankfulness is the opposite of selfishness. The selfish person says, I deserve what comes to me! But the mature Christian realizes that the blessings of life come only from God's bountiful hand.

Paul lists three specific reasons for giving thanks in verses 12-14:

First, we are to be joyously giving thanks to the Father because he "has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." I Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

Secondly, we are to be joyously giving thanks because "he has rescued us form the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves." The word "brought" is translated "transferred" in the NASB. It is used in other places to describe a mighty king who picks up a whole population and deports it to another realm. That has been accomplished. God has deported us into "the kingdom of the Son he loves." From the dominion of darkness to the kingdom of love.

The final reason for giving thanks is in verse 14: "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

We were slaves. He came a purchased us from the slave-market. Our sins have all been sent away. Why? Because we are in him.

Illustration: There was an elderly man that had a little piece of property that over the years became extremely valuable. Finally a real estate developer told his agent I want to buy everything on that block--every piece. The agent discovered this man had this little

tiny piece of property--finally made a deal with him --to buy the property at a very good price that totally surprised the elderly man. He asked, "When do they want the property?" In about a month. So he hastily did everything he could to refurbish his house located on that lot. Had it painted, fixed up the windows. Did everything he could and when time came to sign over the property he asked the agent "What do you think of the house." Do you think it will be more enjoyable for the person? Happy about what he had done. Look, we are not interested in that house. We are going to tear it down. We didn't buy this property for what was on it now, but what we are going to put on it.

Application: That is why God redeemed us. He redeemed us not because of what we have in ourselves but for what he intends to do with us. We are the objects of his love. He has qualified us by what Christ has done to transform us completely and make us like the Son of God.

### **CONCLUSION**

Interceding for other Christians, as Paul did for the believers in Colosse, is one of the greatest things you can do. When God calls people to pray and they obey, great things happen. Let's covenant to pray for one another the way Paul did for the believers at Colosse.

that we might have an increasing understanding of God's will  
 that our walk might be worthy of the Lord  
 that our service might be fruitful  
 that our knowledge of God might be increasing  
 that our Christian character might be strengthened

A church which is growing in the knowledge of Christ and His will, and is walking worthy of him, will do great things.

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