

# Paul's Prayer (part 1)

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Date: 27 February 2019

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[ 0 : 00 ] Last week we saw Paul's Thanksgiving in verses 3-8 of chapter 1 in Colossians.

! Paul was thankful for God and to God for the Colossians' faith, love, and hope. Paul also was thankful for Epaphras' ministry to the church. And all of this thankfulness came about because of the gospel.

Remember that Paul had never visited the Colossians, but the last sentence of verse 8 told us how Paul heard about the Colossians. He was talking about Epaphras here and he wrote, He, talking about Epaphras, is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Moving into verse 9, we see what happened after Epaphras made his report. We'll actually only cover verse 9 tonight, but we need to read the entire section here to get the context.

So here are verses 9-14. They say, And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

[ 1 : 38 ] He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. So we'll begin the lesson a little bit differently tonight.

We'll take some quick polls here. How many of you have read an email or sent an email or read a text message or sent a text message today? Today?

Yeah. So everybody, I think, is in that category. How many of you have made a phone call or perhaps even a video call today? Just about everybody again.

So here's the next question. Were any of those emails, texts, or calls with God? Well, not technically.

Yeah. We had a conversation. I think his number's unlisted. You set us up there. Yeah. Not in on his email. No?

[ 2 : 39 ] I didn't set you up, but right now some of you are probably wondering what any of these questions have to do with the text that we're covering tonight. You don't have to answer that poll question.

Except for the last one, all of the questions reference some advances in communication technology since Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians. But none of these technological advances work with God.

Did you ever stop to think that today we communicate with God exactly like Paul and the other first century believers did? We communicate with God through prayer.

And of course, God communicates with us through his word. We also need nothing fancy to minister to other believers, some of whom we've never met either. And John MacArthur said this. He said, And the Bible is full of examples of God's people praying for each other.

[ 3 : 51 ] Here are just a few.

Jeremiah, how often he prayed. Jesus prayed for his disciples. The Jerusalem church prayed for Peter's release from prison. And Paul prayed for the Christians.

And of course, here in Colossians, we will see that Epaphras prays for the Colossians. And in Colossians 1, 9 through 14, Paul gives us an example of when to pray for other believers, how to pray for other believers, and why to pray for other believers.

And if Paul were alive on earth today and heard about Highland Park Baptist Church, he would pray the same type of prayer for us and for any other true church out there. That means we should be praying the same type of prayers for each other and for true believers everywhere, regardless of where they are.

So as we study verses 9 through 14 over the next few weeks, we'll break the passage into four sections. We'll see two of them tonight because they come in verse 9.

[ 5 : 17 ] And in the first section, we see the pattern recurring. So the pattern recurring is the first thing that goes into your blanks. We see that at the beginning of verse 9, and that's where Paul wrote, And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you.

So we already have talked about what Paul is referencing when he says, From the day we heard. He's talking about the good report from Epaphras that he mentioned at the end of verse 8.

So here's that last sentence of verse 8 one more time. It said, Epaphras is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

Paul is praying for them because of the many good things that are happening in their church. Sometimes it may seem unnecessary to us to pray for those who are doing well.

Much of our prayer time actually focuses on those who are struggling, those who are facing difficulties, those who have fallen into sin, or those who are in physical distress.

[ 6 : 22 ] Paul, however, knew that the knowledge that others are progressing in faith should never lead us to stop praying for them. Instead, 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.

We absolutely should pray for those who need God's help to deal with difficult circumstances. And in the biblical examples of prayer that we cited earlier, many of those examples were associated with people or even nations who were struggling.

Paul reminds us in this passage, though, that praying for people who are doing well is just as important. After all, sometimes it's easier to drift away from God in good times rather than in the bad times.

Oftentimes, when Christians hear of other Christians flourishing and prospering, they begrudge them such benefits, or even find envy rising up in them and wonder aloud why those folks are deserving of so much good for God, or from God, as if any of us deserve anything good from God. We see here, though, that that's not Paul's attitude. He was in prison when he wrote this letter, but he still rejoiced over the success and spiritual prosperity of the Colossians.

[ 7 : 39 ] He couldn't restrain his exuberance, and he lifted the saints up before God with gratitude, and he interceded on their behalf for even greater spiritual benefits for them.

You know, some people might have said something like, Hey, God, what about me? If it weren't for me, those Colossians wouldn't have even heard about you because I'm the one who taught Epaphras, and how come they're being blessed when I'm sitting here in this jail?

But Paul is completely different than that. We also can see something else from his pattern of prayer here. His prayer life for the Colossians is directly tied to the thanksgiving that he expressed in verse 8.

So look at Colossians 1-3 again. That is actually where the thanksgiving started. We looked at that verse last week, and it says, We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.

We'll see shortly that Paul's report of his praying will end up taking us back to the subject of giving thanks. He'll tell us in verse 12 that the culmination of his prayers is asking that the Colossians themselves will be joining him in giving thanks to the Father.

[ 8 : 52 ] Another characteristic of Paul's pattern of prayer is the consistency of it. He says, We have not ceased to pray for you. That's where we got the theme of the recurring pattern here.

And such unceasing or recurring prayer demands first and all consciousness of God. And that doesn't mean to be constantly in the act of verbal prayer, but instead to view everything in life in relation to God.

For example, if we meet someone, we immediately consider where they stand with God. Or if we hear of something bad happening, we react by praying to God to act in the situation because we know He cares.

Or if we hear of something good that happened, we respond with immediate praise to God because we know He is glorified in that case. When Paul looked around his world, everything he saw prompted him to prayer in some way.

And when he thought of or heard about one of his beloved churches, it moved him toward communion with God even more. So the first part of verse 9 shows us how Paul prayed.

[ 9 : 59 ] The last part of verse 9 takes us to the second section of the lesson. And in the last part of the verse, we see the petition requested. So the petition requested is the second piece.

Paul says that he comes before God on behalf of the Colossians, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And we'll spend the last part of tonight looking at that verse. There are no more fill-ins after that, so you can just sit back and follow the handout if you want to.

But in the first section of the lesson, we saw the close connection between Paul's thanksgiving and Paul's prayer. But to Paul, there's a distinct difference between the two.

Paul genuinely or generally distinguishes between thanksgiving and prayer like this. Giving thanks to God is one thing, and he was constantly doing that. But prayer was another thing, and he was constantly doing that as well.

[ 11 : 03 ] For Paul, prayer was asking God for something. And John Woodhouse says, The close connection between thinking and asking is strange.

He said, I suspect that in our own experience, we find thinking and asking to be alternatives. I am full of thanks to God when all is well. The more thankful I am, the less there is to ask for.

On the other hand, when I'm desperate, when I'm worried, and I'm begging God to act, then I'm least motivated by thankfulness. As I thank God for good health, I'm not usually praying for healing.

As I cry out for deliverance from some threat, you can be reasonably sure that at that moment, thankfulness is not at the front of my consciousness. Then he goes on to say, What then, if I may put it like this, is the logic of Paul's praying?

And he says, Because he was so overwhelmingly thankful to God, he did not stop asking. So the answer to his question lies in the connection between what he was thankful about and what he prayed for.

[ 12 : 10 ] In the rest of verse 9, we'll see what Paul prayed for. And Paul prayed that the Colossians be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

So that's why we can see how Paul's thankfulness to God led to his request of God. What Paul thanked God for in verses 3 through 8 was the fact that when Epaphras had come to Colossae sometime earlier and told the people there about the gospel, the Gentile Christians had heard and understood the grace of God in truth.

Then because of the hope laid up in heaven of which this gospel spoke, they came to faith in Jesus and to love for God's people, and now they were part of God's people. And more than that, this wonder in Colossae was just one place.

The wonder was taking place, though, in other places around the world, too. So the gospel was bearing fruit and growing, and that is why Paul was constantly thanking God. And that's why Paul kept asking that they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

God's will is what God's great and gracious purpose for his whole creation is. And before looking at the rest of verse 9 in detail, let's talk about God's will in general.

[ 13 : 27 ] In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul summarized what God's will is. This is Ephesians 1, verses 9 and 10. Paul said, So we can see in general from these verses that God's will is to unite all things in Christ.

This will of God had been behind the Old Testament history of Israel, all the way back to the promise to Abraham, and then to the words of the prophets.

There had been clear indications that God had intended from the beginning to bless the nations of the whole world. How he was going to do so was a mystery to them back then, but now the word of truth, the gospel, was bearing fruit and growing in the whole world.

We read Genesis 12, 1 through 3 last week to review the promise to Abraham. He was still known as Abram then, but to refresh our memories, listen to just verse 3 of Genesis 12 one more time.

That's where God said to Abram, I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

[14:50] For a prophet's viewpoint, we can go to Isaiah chapter 2 and look at verses 2 through 4 of Isaiah 2. Isaiah wrote, And many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways, and that we may walk in his paths.

For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks.

Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. So the gospel bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, including Colossae, was a realization of God's will from the beginning of creation.

Now that we've seen in broad terms what God's will is, let's spend some time looking at how deeply Paul wants the Colossians and us to understand God's will.

Then we'll look at what God's will is for individual lives. Paul says that he wants the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

[16:22] Filled here means to be completely filled, or in other words, totally controlled. Here's some passages in the Bible that use that same type of terminology. The disciples' hearts were filled with sorrow when Jesus told them of his departure in John 16.6.

Then Luke 5.26 tells us that the crowd was filled with fear, after Jesus healed the paralytic. The scribes and the Pharisees were filled with rage, after Jesus healed on the Sabbath.

Then the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, in Acts 4.31. And Stephen was full of faith, in Acts 6.5. In each case, they were totally under the control of what filled them.

The word translated as filled here also carries the idea of being fully equipped. It was used in secular writing to describe a ship that was ready for a voyage.

The believer has all that he needs in Christ for the voyage of life. And Paul is painting that picture as well. Here in verse 9, Paul said he wants the readers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, like we said.

[17:36] And the acquisition of that knowledge is a common human pursuit, or at least the acquisition of any knowledge is. It should be more common, we hope, that they would actually want knowledge of God's will.

But think about this. What you know can actually distinguish you from others. It might qualify you to do a certain type of work that others can't do, because they don't know what you know.

Often, knowledge is power. And even though we hear otherwise, ignorance is rarely bliss. But if God is blessing the whole world through the word of truth, the gospel, then Paul says, I really want you to know this particular truth, this reality, and know it fully.

And he says to the Colossians, I'm constantly asking that you be filled with that knowledge of the gospel. The word translated knowledge here consists of the normal Greek word for knowledge, but it has a preposition added onto it, which intensifies the meaning.

And the knowledge that Paul wants the Colossians to have is a deep and thorough understanding, and a deep and thorough knowledge. We know that knowledge is a central theme in many of Paul's writings.

[18:48] Here are just a few other places he talks about the importance of knowledge. He said of the Corinthians, That's 1 Corinthians 1.5.

Then he prayed that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, would give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.

That comes from Ephesians 1.17. Then to the Philippians, he wrote this in Philippians 1.9. He said, This I pray, Later on in Colossians, we'll see in verse 3 of chapter 2 that all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ.

And then in chapter 3 of Colossians, verse 10 will tell us that our new self is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. So you can see why knowledge is such a big theme in Paul's letters.

It's not something new he's talking about here. Consider, though, what it's like in our day because we see the denial of absolutes, particularly in the area of morals, and that characterizes our society.

[20:02] Without a source of authority to provide absolute standards, virtually anything goes. What moral values are enforced are often arbitrarily done based merely upon human opinions.

But for the Christian, the authority of the word of God provides absolutes. And those absolutes are the basis upon which all truth that God tells us stand, and the standards and faith and conduct are set on those.

Because knowledge of these absolutes is the basis for correct behavior and ultimate judgment, it's crucial that Christians know God's revealed truth. So as we said before, ignorance is not bliss, nor can anyone please God on the basis of principles they don't know.

The Bible also tells us about the consequences of lacking knowledge of God's will in the Bible. We see even more than from these examples why knowledge is important, so let's look at some of the verses that highlight the consequences of lacking knowledge about what God wants.

Proverbs 19.2 says this, Desire without knowledge is not good, and whoever makes haste with his feet misses his way.

[ 21 : 19 ] Isaiah 5.13 says, Therefore my people go into exile for lack of knowledge, their honored men go hungry, and their multitude is parched with thirst.

In our study of Hosea on Sunday mornings, we saw these words in Hosea 4.6. Hosea said, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

Because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. That's a pretty scary passage right there, isn't it?

But it's not just the Old Testament that warns us about the lack of knowledge. 1 Corinthians 14.20 has this warning. Paul wrote, Brothers, do not be children in your thinking.

Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature. And then back in Ephesians again, listen to Ephesians 4.13 and 14.

[ 22 : 22 ] Paul said, Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.

And of course, in what we just finished studying on Sunday nights, we see what happens when people lack knowledge and they get tossed to and fro by deceitful schemes. So we can tell here that the knowledge Paul speaks about is not just for the elite, the clever, or the academics.

The knowledge with which Paul wants every believer to be filled is not a complex matter that only a few can grasp. It's not an abstract matter either that only some minds can manage.

It's not a knowledge that you have to go to a theological college to learn. In fact, we see in a lot of cases that it's possible to gain a higher degree in theology and still lack actual knowledge of God. It's the knowledge of God's will, of God's grace, and God's truth that's important. And to be filled with this knowledge will mean being deeply affected by what we know.

[ 23 : 41 ] We've seen why knowledge is so important and why the lack of knowledge is so dangerous. We've even talked about how some people can be educated in theology and still lack that personal knowledge.

Given all of these things, though, let's spend a couple of minutes talking about how we get the true knowledge. John MacArthur says that three things are required to gain knowledge.

We'll summarize the three things and then we'll look at how the Bible shows us that each one is important. The first thing is that a person must desire knowledge. That's pretty basic, but it's hard to get something that you don't want.

Have you ever thought about that question? Unless maybe it's a cold or something like that. But as far as anything positive, it's hard to get something that you don't want. The second thing is that a person must depend on the Holy Spirit.

And the third thing is that a person must study God's Word. John 7, 17 and Hosea 6, 3 are two verses that speak about the importance of desiring knowledge of God.

[ 24 : 50 ] In John 7, 17 Jesus is speaking and Jesus says, If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.

And then back in Hosea, Hosea 6, 3 says, Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going out is as sure as the dawn.

He will come out to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth. Meanwhile, 1 Corinthians 2, verses 10 through 12 show us the importance of depending upon the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote there, These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thought except the Spirit of that person which is in him?

So also, no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the Spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God that we might understand the things freely given to us by God.

[ 26 : 00 ] Then in 2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17, we see the importance of studying Scripture. And of course, these verses are very familiar to us.

2 Timothy 3, 16 and 17 say, All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

So never underestimate the importance of studying the things of God. The experience of understanding and knowledge will recur throughout this letter as we go along.

And in 2, 2, Paul speaks of the struggle that the Colossians and others have to see the riches and full assurance of the understanding and knowledge of God's mystery. And we looked at this verse earlier, but in 2, 3, again, he'll say that that mystery is Christ in whom all treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden.

And then, like what we said before, in 3, 10, the believers are told that they are being renewed in knowledge. So we talked about the general will of God when we started this section.

[ 27 : 11 ] Our look at God's will, though, would be incomplete if we neglected to highlight some verses that call out God's will in situations of everyday lives of us as individuals. For example, it's God's desire that a person be saved.

We see that in 1 Timothy 2, 4 and 2 Peter 3, 9. Then once a person is saved, it is God's will that he'll be filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5, 17, and 18 say, Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit. Sanctification also is God's will. 1 Thessalonians 4, 3 says, For this is the will of God, your sanctification.

God also wills that the believer be submissive to the government. Peter writes, Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, for this is the will of God.

That comes from 1 Peter 2, 13, and then verse 15 as well. Suffering may also be God's will for the believer. Here's one example of that.

[ 28 : 23 ] Let those who suffer according to God entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. And that is 1 Peter 4, 19. Finally, giving thanks is God's will.

Paul writes, Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. And that is 1 Thessalonians 5, 18.

The general will of God for all His children is clearly given in the Bible. Then the specific will of God for any situation must always agree with what He's already revealed in His Word.

The better we know God's general will, the easier it will be to determine His specific guidance in our daily lives. Paul didn't encourage the Colossians to seek visions or to wait for voices.

He prayed that they would get deeper into God's Word and have greater wisdom and insight concerning God's will. He wanted them to have all wisdom. That doesn't mean that they would know everything, but they would have all wisdom necessary for making decisions and living a life that pleased God.

[ 29 : 35 ] Then Paul finishes verse 9 by telling the Colossians that he wants them to have the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. The Old Testament prophets knew that the Messiah would be marked by the Spirit of wisdom and understanding.

Listen to Isaiah 11, 2. Here Isaiah is talking about the Messiah. And Isaiah 11, 2 says, And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.

In the Old Testament, more generally, wisdom and understanding are God's purpose for human life. In other words, we are to live humbly and sensibly in the world as God intends for his followers to live.

Here in Colossians, Paul says that he wants his readers to have the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And his words can be translated a few different ways.

Perhaps the best way to render his original wording is that the knowledge for which he prays consists of all spiritual wisdom and understanding. So it's what it consists of.

[ 30 : 50 ] So in other words, to know God's will is not a matter of understanding what is pleasing to him, but it includes experiential wisdom, knowing how to apply what God desires to the realities, crises, and decisions of everyday life.

Notice Paul's emphasis on the word spiritual, which applies to both the wisdom and the understanding that we need. Part of the problem in Colossae was the temptation to listen to the worldly and fleshly wisdom of the false teachers who were disrupting the life of the community. And of course, Paul's trying to bring home the fact here that worldly and fleshly wisdom, as the world considers it, is not really wisdom at all. So we're only one verse into Paul's prayer for the Colossians, and it's a challenge already.

Much of this conclusion comes from Sam Storms, and he says, never forget what we said at the beginning, that Paul had never met these people. As best we can tell, Epaphras brought the gospel to Colossae.

Paul wouldn't have known a single name or recognized a single face in that church, yet he prays for them passionately and persistently. We started the lesson with a few questions, so as we wrap up the lessons, let's close it out symmetrically with a few more challenges to ponder.

[ 32 : 13 ] And these questions also come from Sam Storms. He says, Why do we pray for others? Is it only because we think they are praying for us? Is it only if we have prior assurance that they will continue to love us and provide for our needs?

Is it only because we think that by doing so, God will surely bless us in the way that he has blessed them? Then he says, For whom do we pray? Is it only for those we know and can recall by name and with whom we have shared much in life?

He says, Yes, you can pray fervently and successfully for that distant congregation in Sri Lanka about which you only read in the newspaper. Yes, you can intercede passionately for their good and God's glory on behalf of the persecuted church in Iran.

Finally, how often does this occur in the midst of your daily routines? You may not have prolonged seasons free from the distractions of life that you can find a minute here or perhaps ten there to bring to heaven those whom God has placed on your hearts.

And he says, Remember, God only places them on your heart because they are first on his. So let that last sentence sink in. When you get the urge to pray for somebody or the feeling that you need to pray for somebody, remember that God only places that person in your heart because that person is first on God's heart.

[ 33 : 40 ] So God places people on our hearts for whom we need to pray. But he does more than that. He gives us the ability to pray for them as well. We read it earlier but listen to Isaiah 11-2 one more time.

There we read of a similar experience in almost identical language of what was to be true of the Messiah. That verse said, And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

So that's very good news because the same spirit who anointed the Lord Jesus Christ and empowered him with wisdom and understanding and knowledge has anointed us.

The knowledge of God's will and the spiritual wisdom and understanding to apply it in every circumstance is available to us as well. 2 Corinthians 1 21 and 22 say, And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us and who has also put his seal on us and given us his spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

And then going to 1 John we see a couple other verses. 1 John 2 20 says, But you have been anointed by the Holy One and you have all knowledge. And then 1 John 2 27 says, But the anointing that you have received from him abides in you and you have no need that anyone should teach you.

[ 35 : 08 ] But as his anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie, just as it is taught you, abide in him. So that's the key.

Listen to that last part again. Just as it is taught you, abide in him. So we not only need to get the knowledge, we have to be able to apply it as well. With that, let's go ahead and close in prayer. Dear Lord, we thank you for the reminder that we see tonight from Paul about how important it is to pray for other people, regardless of whether we have met those people or not.

Let us continue to remember to lift up people who have genuine need, but also at the same time never forget to also pray for people for whom things are going well, because as we talked about tonight, they may need to be reminded of your presence even more, because it's often easier to drift away from you in the good times.

Help us also to remember to pray for each other and especially our staff as we go through the rest of the week and the coming months as well. Let us continue to lift each other up and continue to grow deeper in your knowledge.

[ 36 : 22 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Thank you.