

A Life of Interaction with God

(Colossians 1:9-12a)



REVIEW

Colossians 1:1-8: Paul, while in prison, writes to a young church in Colossae after learning they had heard and received the good news. The message of hope they responded to was this. Now, through Jesus, a relationship with the living God was available to them. The environment in which this message was received is beautifully captured in Ephesians 2:12 where Paul says: ... *remember when you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*

This message of being brought near to God, of learning how to bring their lives into the life of God lit people on fire and set them off like a rocket. A new energy, power, and strength filled them with confidence in Jesus and love for all God's people. This is what hope does, they are now alive to God. With Him, the world becomes a totally different place because Jesus is now shepherding them into a life of interaction with God. It is an indestructible life, one that begins now and not even death itself can extinguish it.

MAIN POINT

Paul's prayer for the Colossians, centers on seeing these young Christians enter into a type of life that is fully pleasing to God. A new life has been imparted and with it a new sense of God's presence and love, of his guiding and strengthening. What is now needed is for this new sense to be directed and nurtured. He longs for them to know, in the circumstances of their lives, both God's will and His ways.

What is needed is spiritual wisdom and understanding, this is not mere book learning, a kind of abstract and impractical knowing. It is a deep sense of who they are, of the new life they have received from God, and of what will nurture or harm it. It is by cultivating this awareness of the true God who loves them and is shaping their lives that led them to place their confidence in Jesus and commit themselves to be his disciple. In seeing his life, they become convinced that he knows the best way to live. For us, the disciple of Jesus is someone who is learning to be with Him, so that they can become like Him.

This is the path toward becoming a thoroughly good person, one dominated by love from whose lives good works naturally blossom like fruit from a fruit tree. Jesus is the way into the safety and rest of a life that knows God, that is learning to interact with Him as one becomes like little children, by going "beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees", beyond "performance" into the depths of the heart.

Paul knew, the uphill battle of growing in the knowledge of God and possessing the type of life from which routine obedience flowed from one's inner depths.

(9) For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, (10) so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. (11) May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully (12) giving thanks to the Father,...
(Colossians 1:9-12a)

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COLOSSIANS OUTLINE

- 1 | Opening Greeting (1:1-2)
 - 2 | Introduction of Paul and His Theme (1:3-2:5)
 - A | Thanksgiving (1:3-8)
 - B | Prayer & meditation (1:9-23)**
 - i | Paul's prayer: the knowledge of God (1:9-12a)**
 - ii | Reason for thanksgiving (1:12b-23)
 - C | Paul's Ministry and his reasons for writing (1:24-29)
 - 3 | The Appeal for Christian Maturity (2:6-4:6)
 - 4 | Final Greetings (4:7-18)
- (Bold indicates current lesson)*

The only possibility of this taking place was by being strengthened with the power that comes from God himself. This power, already evident in their lives, is to be gratefully received in the work of bringing their lives in conformity with the new world that has opened before them.

They carry on this work gratefully because the climax of this prayer is that the young Christians learn the art of thanksgiving. A sign of healthy Christian life on the way to maturity is gratitude to God for the extraordinary things he's done in Jesus, and the remarkable things he is continuing to do in the world and in their lives. Spontaneous gratitude of this kind reveals that they are coming to know and love the true God. A life that is lived in the presence of God is a life full of thanksgiving.

Q What Jesus makes available to us, through a relationship with Him, is the wisdom and understanding needed to do God's will and understand His ways. Consider someone you admire, a person whose insight you value and lifestyle you sought to model your life upon. How can applying those approaches to this human relationship provide you with valuable insight into how you might enter into a learning relationship with Jesus?

1 | OPENING GREETING & 2.A. THANKSGIVING (1:1-8)

See study "Entering a Life of Hope: Colossians 1:1-8"

2.B. Prayer and meditation (1:9-23)

These verses form a single unit in which Paul is reporting his prayers on behalf of this emerging community.

To catch this, we need to see that verses 13–23 are built around the final main element in this prayer, which is thanksgiving. "Paul prays that the young church will grow in knowledge (1:9), in holiness (1:10) and in spiritual power (1:11), adding a few phrases to fill out the petition in each instance; then, finally, he prays that they will continually give thanks to God (1:12), this time filling out the meaning not with a few phrases but with several sentences." (2)

This thanksgiving to God and their knowledge of him are to be shaped around the person and work of Jesus Christ.

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i. Paul's prayer: the knowledge of God (1:9-12a)

It is important for us to see Paul connecting this section with his opening thanksgiving. In witnessing what God has already done in the lives of the recipients of this letter, this allows him to pray with confidence for what God will continue to do. It is an unwearied prayer: "we have not stopped praying for you" "since the day we heard about you."

"He will not offer teaching, advice and encouragement except in the context of prayer. His work is not his own idea. It is part of God's plan. Conversely, prayer brings the assurance that his ministry is being used within God's overall plan (1:24–29), and consequently that characteristic confidence which, outside this context, could sound like arrogance." (2)

(1:9b) "asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will"

Here is Paul, in prison, but also aware of a little church that is just beginning, one full of energy and enthusiasm but also unaware of the problems they may soon face. In placing their confidence in Jesus a new life, a divine life has been implanted into them. It is a life where they sense his presence and love, his shepherding and strengthening. For them, what is most needed at this time is to understand what's happening to them, and how to cooperate with the divine life that gently works in them.

The foundation of Paul's prayer is that these young brothers and sisters in Christ come to know for themselves what God's will is. When the Bible speaks of knowledge, it carries with it the understanding of an interactive relationship. It is never mere head knowledge - as that term is understood today. Generally speaking, we know something when we are able to deal with that subject matter on an appropriate basis of thought and experience. As such, this knowledge of God's will is the ability to interact with God from a deep inner sense of who they now are, of the new life which they have received from God, and of what will either nurture it or harm it. This 'knowledge' then forms the basis of both the holiness of verse 10 and thanksgiving of verse 12.

(1:9c) "...in all spiritual wisdom and understanding"

This knowledge of God's will is open to all God's people. The two adjectives ('all' and 'spiritual') govern both the nouns ('wisdom' and 'understanding'). The regular secular meaning of 'wisdom' is mental excellence in general, while 'understanding' is the ability to think through a subject with clarity and coherence. This wisdom and understanding is enlarged to include not just interaction with the visible landscape by mere intellectual skill, but the invisible realm of God.

For Paul, the terms 'knowledge', 'wisdom' and 'understanding' are best understood within their Old Testament and Jewish roots in which these are aspects of a type of character God is seeking to develop in his people. Wisdom is the truly humble person, exemplified by Jesus, who takes the humble yet confident place marked for man in the order of creation. A place under God and over the world. To have understanding and 'grow up' in every way will include the ability to think coherently and practically about God and his purposes for his people.

This 'wisdom and understanding' is spiritual because it places the individual into interaction with God who is not seen, but who is acting to bring about his purposes in his world.

Verses 9 and 10 form a miniature picture of Christian life and growth. By increasing in knowledge of God's will, this will result in the Colossians living as God wants them to and so increase in the knowledge of God! Understanding will fuel a holy life, and holiness will continue to deepen understanding.

He (Paul) will not offer teaching, advice and encouragement except in the context of prayer. His work is not his own idea. It is part of God's plan.

For them, what is most needed at this time is to understand what's happening to them, and how to cooperate with the divine life that gently works in them.

This wisdom and understanding is enlarged to include not just interaction with the visible landscape by mere intellectual skill, but the invisible realm of God.

...(it) is spiritual because it places the individual into interaction with God who is not seen, but who is acting to bring about his purposes in his world.



The following phrase, fully pleasing to him, is not expressing an impossible ideal...

Here is Paul's typical understanding of grace, God is at work, therefore his people are at work.

It is God who will develop Christian character in his people and fruitful lives by making them strong...

WORK CITED

- 1 | All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the **New Revised Standard Version**, Copyright 1985.
- 2 | N.T. Wright, **Colossians and Philemon: Tyndale New Testament Commentary, Volume 12**, InterVarsity Press, 2008, pg. 49-51
- 3 | Dallas Willard, **Knowing Christ Today**, HarperCollins e-books, 2009, Pg. 52

(1:10a) "so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord,"

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus provides a pattern for life and sets the standard for his people. Those who belong to the Lord must live in an appropriate manner. The following phrase, fully pleasing to him, is not expressing an impossible ideal because those who belong to Christ can and do please God. He can look at his new, yet maturing creation and declare it to be very good because it is God and His type of life that is beginning to inhabit the individual and community.

(1:10b) "as you bear fruit in every good work"

In Paul's thanksgiving, he mentions the gospel is bearing fruit and growing, in like manner, God's people are themselves bearing fruit in every good work. Here is Paul's typical understanding of grace, God is at work, therefore his people are at work. "He is asking that the Colossians may understand themselves more and more to be God's new, true humanity, and that they may increasingly live in a manner appropriate to this vocation." (2)

Paul has joined together 'in every good work' to 'bearing fruit' and 'in the knowledge of God' and 'growing' he has expanded to highlight the connection between the active and reflective aspect of Christian living. Knowing God is itself an activity, as is obeying is a form of devotion.

(1:11a) "May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power,"

The remainder of Paul's prayer reveals the power which will enable the young church to grow in this way and the thankful attitude which will characterize them as they do so.

It is God who will develop Christian character in his people and fruitful lives by making them strong with all the strength that comes from His glorious power. God is regularly seen in the Old Testament as the powerful God – the sovereign creator who rescued Israel from Egypt. That same power is now available to continue the work of bringing God's people into conformity with the new world which opens up before them.

(1:11b) "...may you be prepared to endure everything with patience"

These qualities, singled out by Paul, are the weapons one needs to live in the world undaunted by its crises and panics. A patient and enduring spirit, the quiet corollary of faith, hope and love, is the product of the settled conviction that the Father of Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of the world, and that he is able to bring about his purposes in his own time and manner.

"There is a slight distinction to be drawn between 'endurance' and 'patience'. The former is what faith, hope and love bring to an apparently impossible situation, the latter what they show to an apparently impossible person." (2)

(1:11-12a) "...while joyfully giving thanks to the Father,"

The climax of Paul's prayer is that the young Christians will develop the practice of thanksgiving. God's strength equips his people to live in the world with patience and to praise him for his grace. A sign of the divine life at work and growing towards maturity is gratitude to God for the extraordinary things he's done in Jesus, and the remarkable things he is continuing to do in the world and in their lives. When there is an inner impulse or inclination of gratitude, this signifies that they are coming to know and love the true God, as opposed to one they concocted in their own imagination.

