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# Giving Thanks to the Father

Paul's Prayer for the Colossians

**Scripture:** Colossians 1:9-14

**Sermon Series:** *Colossians*

**Topic:** Prayer, God's will, Power, Thanksgiving



## **Colossians 1:9-14 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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; <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

## Introduction

Today we continue working our way through Paul's letter to the Colossians. After the introductory greeting, in verses one and two, Paul noted their faith in Jesus, their love for all the saints, both of which flow from the hope of eternal life with God made possible through the gospel of Jesus, who is the Christ, that is, messiah. This gospel has changed their lives and it is also changing the world. The gospel of Jesus is true, while this world that is filled with lies. The gospel brings grace, when all we deserve is condemnation.

Paul then thanks God for Epaphras, who was the one who brought the gospel to them. Epaphras has accurately taught them the gospel. He is a faithful minister and Paul publicly affirms his ministry in this letter, most likely because there were false teachers in this new church who were challenging what Epaphras has taught them. Thus Paul wants the Colossians, and also us reading this today, to know that the historic content of the gospel is true. This concludes the first unit of thought in the letter (1:3-8).

Then, in verses 9-14, Paul writes out a prayer. He allows the Colossians to know how he prays for them. The first three verses (v.9-11) are petitions and last three verses (12-14) are praise. The first half contains two requests and the last half is three reasons for thanksgiving.

If you've ever wondered what Paul might pray for a group of Christians whom he has never met, then these verses will answer that question. And if you're finding it hard to be thankful in this season of life, then these verses will give you three reasons to be thankful to God.

## Prayer

Father, may this prayer of Paul's help each of us better understand your will for our lives. Please let your Spirit be at work, as we think about these words, giving us wisdom and understanding. Give us a passionate desire to live lives that are fully pleasing to you. Make our lives fruitful and allow us to love you more as we know you more. Strengthen us through these words. Strengthen each of us for the particular needs of the day and week. May your power be at work within us. Give us endurance and patience and joy.

Father, thank you for saving us. Thank you for delivering us from darkness and transferring us into your glorious kingdom of light. Father, do that again this morning. If there is someone hearing my voice who has not yet been transferred into the kingdom of your beloved Son, then you do that this morning. Grant faith in Jesus to those who do not yet have it, I pray, according to your great grace and mercy, through Jesus I pray. Amen.

## Filled With the Knowledge of His Will (v.9-10)

The first request is found in verses 9-10. Paul states for a second time that he is in constant prayer for the Colossians.<sup>1</sup> What does he pray?

### Colossians 1:9-10 (ESV)

<sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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;

Paul was a man of prayer, as all Christians should be. He uses language like this frequently throughout his letters. Prayer should be a priority in the lives of all of God's people.

Martin Luther wrote, "You cannot find a Christian who does not pray, just as you cannot find a living man without a pulse."<sup>2</sup> Prayer is the breath of the Christian life.

Paul had heard about the faith, hope, and love of the Colossians and was so burdened for them that he unceasingly prayed for them. Is it any surprise that it was he who wrote, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thes. 5:17).

## What Does Paul Pray?

What exactly does Paul pray for these Colossians? Paul tells them plainly. When he prays for them he is,

"...asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding..." (1:9)

Paul yearns for the Colossians to "**be filled with the knowledge of God's will**" for them. God wants his people to be **filled** with the knowledge of His will.

God's not trying to hide His will from us (i.e. his children). He wants us to be filled with it. Yet, we often struggle with this concept because there are two aspects of God's will. Theologians distinguish between God's revealed will and his concealed will. Another way of saying it is, His will of command and His will of decree, or His general will and His Specific will. There are some very clear, unquestionable dimensions of God's will and then there are some things that are not so clear and about those, we do ask questions.

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<sup>1</sup> He first says this in verse three.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, as quoted in Wilhelm Herrman, *The Communion of the Christian With God*, Second ed. (Williams & Norgate, New York: 1906) p. 332. Source: <https://books.google.com/books?id=r5BLAAAAIAAJ&pg=PA332&dq=%22living+man+without+a+pulse%22+Luther&hl=en&ei=ptarTOqOK8K88gb39JTVBw&sa=X&oi=#v=onepage&q&f=false> accessed 6 October 2018

## God's Revealed Will (Will of Command)

God's revealed will or his will of command refers to those aspects of God's will that he has clearly revealed in Scripture. For example, the Ten Commandments.<sup>3</sup> It is unquestioningly clear that it is God's will that we not worship an idol or love and worship anything more than we love and worship Him. It is God's will that we never carelessly misuse His holy name, that we rest one day out of seven, that we honor our parents, that we not commit murder, or adultery, or steal, or lie, or lust.

It is God's will that you put your faith in Jesus because that is the only means by which He has chosen to give anyone eternal life.

### **John 6:40 (ESV)**

"For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

It is God's will that we all live holy lives and keep ourselves sexually pure.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:3 (ESV)**

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

Abstaining from sexual immorality means remaining a virgin until you are married and then remaining sexually faithful to your spouse alone after marriage.

Furthermore, it is God's will that you never get drunk.

### **Ephesians 5:18 (ESV)**

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,

It is God's will that you love your neighbor<sup>4</sup>, pray for your enemies<sup>5</sup>, work hard when you're at work<sup>6</sup>, never tell a dirty joke<sup>7</sup>, that you never use a curse word<sup>8</sup>, that you never hold a grudge<sup>9</sup>, that you always forgive someone who asks for forgiveness<sup>10</sup>, that you never gossip<sup>11</sup>, that you

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<sup>3</sup> Ex. 20:1-17.

<sup>4</sup> Lev. 19:18.

<sup>5</sup> Mt. 5:44.

<sup>6</sup> Col. 3:23.

<sup>7</sup> Eph. 5:4.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. 4:29.

<sup>9</sup> Lev. 19:18.

<sup>10</sup> Mt. 18:21-35.

<sup>11</sup> Lev. 19:16; Rom. 1:29; 1 Tim 5:13.

never look at pornography<sup>12</sup>, that you never go to bed angry at a member of your family or your church<sup>13</sup>, that when you have a problem with a fellow Christian you go directly to that person in private to work it out, not to Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram<sup>14</sup>, and it is God's will that husbands always love and cherish their wives and never be harsh and abusive with them.<sup>15</sup>

I could go on and on and on. We are often tempted to think that God's will is unclear. It is not. His will is abundantly clear. He has revealed His will for our lives in hundreds of areas. His will for our lives in all of these areas and more, is perfectly clear. But we don't really care about these things so much, do we?

### His Concealed Will (Will of Decree or Specific Will)

We spend most of our time biting our nails over the concealed will of God, or what is also called His secret or specific will, or His will of decree. We want to know who we should marry, where we should go to school, where we should work, and if we should invest in this fund or that.

Actually God's word has much to say about all of these things, but Christians are called to a life of faith and trust not impersonal divination. No, you won't find a verse in the Bible that tells you to go do cancer research at Dana Farber, or one telling you to do your undergrad work at Gordon College. I didn't find a verse in the Bible that told me to marry Alisa Crowder. However, I did find a few verses that told me I was not to marry a girl who was not a Christian and there was one that said that I was only to marry a girl who was a believer<sup>16</sup>. I also read a few verses that told me if obeyed the passages that were clear, like the ones I just read above, then God would be faithful to lead me in the areas of life that were unclear.<sup>17</sup> God doesn't like being treated like a crystal ball—an impersonal shortcut to personally advantageous future information. He prefers a relationship of trust.

#### **Psalms 37:4-5**

"Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him, and He will act.."

If we are faithful in what we do know, then He will lead us faithfully in the areas we do not know. If we are not respectful of God's will which He has already given to us, then why would we expect Him to reveal more to us? He will not.

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<sup>12</sup> Mt. 5:27-30.

<sup>13</sup> Eph. 4:26.

<sup>14</sup> Mt. 18:15.

<sup>15</sup> Col. 3:19.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor. 7:39.

<sup>17</sup> Ps. 32:8.

## Spiritual Wisdom & Understanding

However, if we fill our minds with the knowledge of His will, living obediently according to what we know, then by the help of His Holy Spirit, He will enable us to rightly apply what we do know to the areas that are unclear. This what Paul means in writing, "...in all *spiritual wisdom and understanding*."

### Colossians 1:9

...you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all *spiritual wisdom and understanding*,

Our minds are not merely intended to be biological repositories of theological information. God's will is to be *exercised* in our lives, it's to be put into practice. The knowledge of God's will is to be applied to our lives through *wisdom and understanding* that comes to us through His Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who gives the child of God wisdom and understanding to apply the word of God. Wisdom is the right and timely application of knowledge. When the Holy Spirit grants us to understand the good principles of God's word, He also grants the wisdom that allows us to apply those principles in the daily particulars of our lives.

## The Purpose of Knowing God's Will is to Do God's Will

The purpose of knowing God's will is so that you may do God's will. This is what is pleasing to Him. Why should we know and do God's will? Verse 10 answers that question.

### Colossians 1:10 (ESV)

<sup>10</sup> 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;

If you are filled with the knowledge of God's will and by the work of the indwelling Spirit of God you both understand it and are enabled to rightly apply it, then the result will be that you will live your life in "*a manner that is worthy of the Lord*." The Lord is infinitely worthy of being fully trusted. When you fully trust the Lord then you will live obediently because you trust that His ways are better than your own ways or the ways of the world. Fully trusting Him in all that you do *is* living in a manner that is worthy of the Lord.

Living in this way is *fully pleasing* to the Lord. What does the life that is fully pleasing to the Lord look like? It is "*bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God*." How can one live life like that? Only by faith. Only by continual trust in the Lord. By keeping the roots of your soul connected by faith to Jesus.

### Jeremiah 17:7-8 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> "Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,  
whose trust is the LORD.

<sup>8</sup> He is like a tree planted by water,

that sends out its roots by the stream,  
and does not fear when heat comes,  
for its leaves remain green,  
and is not anxious in the year of drought,  
for it does not cease to bear fruit."

Bearing fruit means your life is being useful to man and glorifying to God. Fruit produces life and health and strength to those who eat it. In the same way, when you trust in the Lord you are able to rest in Him by allowing His Spirit to work in your life whether you are in a season of feasting or in a season of famine. A life of trust in the Lord can't help but bear fruit.

## Strengthened With All Power (v.11)

The second petition for which Paul prays is that the Colossians would know and experience the strength of God's power. Paul asks God that they would be,

### **Colossians 1:11 (ESV)**

being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;

Paul yearns for the Colossians to be "*strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might.*" Not only does Paul want the Colossians to be "full of the knowledge of God's will," but he also wants them to full of God's power. By expressing his desire that they be filled "according to God's glorious might," he is essentially praying that they would have all the power they need. God's glorious power and might is unlimited. Therefore, by virtue of their being connected to Christ through faith, they are connected to an unlimited power source. This reminds me of what Peter wrote in his second epistle.

### **2 Peter 1:3 (ESV)**

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

God has made available to His children all the power that we need in order to live a godly life, in order to live in a way that fully pleasing to him. This comes through the knowledge of the truth of what Jesus has accomplished for us. We will not live as though we have access to the strength that comes from the power of His glorious might unless we know that through the indwelling Spirit of God we can be strengthened with all power. We will not pray and ask God for this kind of power in our lives unless we first know that God has made such power available to us. The simple truth is that God, in pouring out His Spirit within us, has made available to us, all the power we need to do what God has individually called us to do.



## For All Endurance and Patience With Joy (v.11)

Notice that there is a purpose for you being strengthened with that kind of power. It is so that you may be strengthened, "*for all endurance and patience with joy.*"

### Colossians 1:11 (ESV)

being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, *for all endurance and patience with joy*;

This is a very interesting prayer. It reveals the fact that God does not always strengthen His children to remove them from difficulty and suffering, but rather He grants them the strength to *joyfully endure through* all seasons of difficulty and suffering.

### All Endurance

God is able to provide you with the strength you need for *all endurance*. Whatever it is that you must endure, God has the power to strengthen you so that you will be able to endure it. This means that there will be all kinds of seasons through which you will go and for which you will require endurance. According to the power of His glorious might, God will supply you *all* the *endurance* you need.

Whether you are enduring a lengthy season of unemployment, or a season of relational strife, or religious persecution, or failing health, or vocational discernment, God, according to his glorious might, has unlimited power to strengthen you with all the endurance you need.

### Patience With Joy

Not only will God supply you strength to endure, but He will also supply you the strength to endure *patiently with joy*. God is able to strengthen you to, avoid worrying while you wait, but rather to *wait with joy*. When you must endure some difficult and challenging season, God is powerful enough to give you such strength that you can walk through that difficult season *with joy*, rather than with anxiety. The people of God need not fear that God will run out of resources to supply their every need. He has the emotional resources to equip you to joyfully endure life's seasons of waiting. God possess all power, therefore he possesses in abundance all the power you will ever need. He can not merely help you have patience, but he will grant patience with joy. It's one thing to be patient, but it is another to be patient with joy. God has the power to grant both.

## Giving Thanks to the Father (v.12-14)

Finally, after stating the two petitions, Paul now turns to praise. He gives thanks to the Father mentioning three reasons for doing so. First, he gives thanks to the Father has **qualified** the Colossian Christians to share in the heavenly inheritance. Second, he gives thanks to the Father for He has **delivered** believers out of the domain of darkness. Third, he gives thanks to the Father for He has **transferred** Christians into the kingdom of His beloved Son, who secured their redemption through the forgiveness of their sins.



### Colossians 1:12-14 (ESV)

<sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. <sup>13</sup> He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

### He Qualified You to Share in the Inheritance

The first reason for giving thanks to the Father is because "*He qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*" The "saints in light" are the children of God who have already died and been welcomed into the glorious light of heaven. These are the saints, the holy ones, who have been called by God and received by Him into eternity. These saints were qualified to inherit the blessings of heaven, not because of anything they did, but because of what the Father did. **He** qualified them to share in the inheritance. They did not qualify themselves. Their own deeds did nothing to secure their inheritance in heaven.

More specifically it was the work of Christ Jesus who secured their *redemption*. The purchase price for the salvation of everyone who will be saved was paid by the blood of Jesus. Jesus paid with His blood in order to secure forgiveness of sins of all those who would believe in Him. If Jesus had not done what He did, then no one would be saved. It was the shedding of His righteous blood that paid the debt of our sins and secured our freedom from the just demands of God's righteous wrath against our sin. It is not our own righteousness that qualifies us to enter heaven. It is nothing more than the perfect righteousness of Christ and our faith in His holiness that qualifies us for heaven.

Since it was the will of the Father<sup>18</sup> to provide heaven to us by this means, then it is He who is deserving of our thanks. It was will of the Father that graciously gave them this great inheritance. Paul is reminding the Colossians (and us) that they (and we) are not the ones ultimately responsible for their (or our) salvation. The great blessing falls solely upon the work of the Father. If God had not decided to save us, then no one would be saved. He it was who has qualified them to receive the gift of salvation. He it is who qualifies us to share in the heavenly inheritance. This is why thanksgiving rightly goes up to the Father, for He has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in heaven.

### He Delivered Us From the Domain of Darkness

Secondly, He has "*delivered us from the domain of darkness.*" Notice that Paul now moves from to first person plural pronoun, including himself and thus all Christians in this wonderful work that the Father has done and for which He is to be thanked.

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<sup>18</sup> Jn. 6:38-40.

To be delivered from the domain of darkness means that someone must enter into that domain and then manifest a power that is greater than the power of the realm. This is what the Father has done through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Son. God the Father has freed us from the domain of darkness. He did this by placing all His power in Jesus, His Son, through the anointing and filling of His Spirit. God the Father poured out His Spirit upon His Son "without measure."<sup>19</sup> Thus, it was the Spirit of the Father at work in the human Son destroying all spiritual powers, obeying all of God's righteous commands, and conquering Satan by overcoming death. Thus, through Jesus, God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness. When we are united with Christ by faith, then enters our life the power that delivers us from darkness. Thanks be to the Father for such a complete deliverance.

## He Transferred Us Into the Kingdom of His Beloved Son

Thirdly, not only has the Father delivered us from the domain of darkness, but He has also ***transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son***. When the Father delivered us from the domain of darkness, He didn't leave us wandering in a spiritual wilderness of the world. He didn't deliver us from prison only to leave us destitute on the streets. No. After delivering us out of darkness, He then transferred us into the kingdom of His Son whom He loves. He delivered us from the poverty of the spiritual slums and then He transferred us into the rich and glorious kingdom of His beloved Son. He delivered us from our captors and then transferred us into a new home. He not only paid our debts, but He then went on and provided us with a palace in which to live. The Father does not merely rescue you from a bad situation but then through the gracious riches provided to us through Christ, he transfers you into a good situation.

The kingdom into which we are transferred is one that is described as "***the kingdom of His beloved Son***." Christians are not transferred into the dictatorial kingdom of a maniacal monarch who, like king Herod, killed his own sons to eliminate all rivals to his throne. Christians are transferred into a kingdom of love. Believers are welcomed into a warm environment of familial affection. We have been transferred into this kingdom of love. This is our true place of residence.

Faith in Jesus so deeply and truly unites believers to Christ that everything that happened to Him has also happened to us. Since Jesus has overpowered the domain of darkness, then we too have been delivered from that dark domain. Since Jesus, beloved by His Father, now sits enthroned in His kingdom, then we too have been transferred into that kingdom. Thanks be to the Father for transferring us into such a kingdom filled with love.

## Conclusion

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<sup>19</sup> Jn. 3:34.

If Paul prays that the people of God would be filled with the knowledge of His will, then certainly God wants us to know that He is not trying to hide His will from us. However, He does not tell us everything He is doing in the world. There are many areas of life in which we must simply trust Him. If we trust Him in what He has revealed, then He will certainly direct our steps in the areas that He has concealed. He will lead us as we trust Him and His indwelling Spirit will give us wisdom and understanding in those areas.

God will also strengthen us according to His unlimited, glorious might. He has supplied with all the strength we need in order to live a life that is fully pleasing to Him. As we rely on His strength and power we will bear fruit in every good work and we will increase in our knowledge of God as He gives us spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Finally, there are plenty of reasons to be thankful to God. He has qualified us to enjoy the inheritance of heaven, He has delivered us from the kingdom of darkness, and He has transferred us into the kingdom of the Son whom He loves.