

## THE PRIORITY OF PAUL'S PRAYER

**INTRODUCTION:** Please take your Bibles and turn to Colossians 1. Just to refresh your memory, the book of Colossians *is a letter* that Paul wrote to the church of Colosse that was hand-delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus in roughly 62 AD. Although Paul *had not personally met* most of the Colossian believers, Paul did know *Epaphras*—the man who had brought the gospel to Colosse—quite well. Epaphras was concerned with some false teaching that was creeping into the church—so much so that he traveled over 1000 miles to visit Paul who was imprisoned in Rome! Paul—and ultimately God—was concerned, too, and that is why God led Paul to write this letter—and had it recorded for us in His Word!

To lay the context, please follow along as I read Colossians 1:3-8. Three weeks ago, we noted from these verses that Paul *praised God* for *their faith* in Christ Jesus...and *their love* for all the saints...and for *their hope* (expectation) that was laid up for them in heaven.

But why is Paul *thanking God*—and *not the Colossians* themselves? Because *God is the giver* of all these things—and they were merely *the receivers!*

--Why is it proper to thank God *for their faith*—meaning their salvation—in Christ?

Because God is the one who did the seeking...and convicting... and drawing...and the opening of their eyes and hearts *before they put* their trust in Christ for forgiveness.

--Why is it proper to thank God for their *love for all* the saints?

Because the fruit of the Spirit is the fruit *of the Spirit*—and God is the One who *developed that love in them* for their brothers and sisters in Christ! Phil 2:13 “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”

--And why is it proper to thank God *for their “hope”*—their expectation—of heaven?

Because *the only reason* they could expect a home in heaven—a place where God wipes the tears from our eyes and there is no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain—is because God provided the way for them to get there!

But we also learned from Paul's praise what *his priorities* were!

--Paul did not give thanks because they had a *big building*.

--He did not give thanks because they provided him with *elaborate or extravagant gifts*.

--And he did not give thanks because they followed *him on X*, subscribed to his *YouTube channel*, or “liked” his sermons on Facebook!

Paul thanked God for what had taken place in their lives *spiritually* because that is what he *treasured and valued!* His *priority* was their *eternal destiny*—and whether or not they would hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant” when they met their Savior!

But...Paul's *praise* wasn't the only thing that showed his priorities—so did *his prayer* for them! We see that in verses 9-14. Please follow along as I read these six verses.

### 1. Paul's prompting to pray

Notice again what it says in the first part of vs 9: “**For this cause we also**, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you...” What was it that *Paul heard* that prompted him to pray—consistently/regularly—for these Colossian believers? What *motivated* him and gave him a *sense of urgency?*

--In vs 4, he is thankful for their faith and love

--In vs 5, he is thankful for their hope laid up in heaven

--In vs 6, Paul said that the gospel is “bringing forth fruit” in them

--And in vs 8, Paul again mentions their “love in the Spirit.”

So what's the problem that prompted Paul to pray? There *wasn't one*—and that's the point!

--Should we pray urgently when we ourselves—or someone who is close to us—is going through **some kind of crisis**? Yes; we should! But...we should also **pray for people** when they are doing well! **Why?** Because that's what God through Paul is teaching us here!

--This might seem a bit random—at first—but you'll see the connection in a minute or two. I joined the National Guard in 1979 as a "normal, part-time" National Guardsman. After being a **part**-timer for 6 years, I became a **full**-time National Guardsman. I'll never forget what my Commander said as I was getting started.

"You will spend 90% of your time on 10% of the people. That means 90% of the people will only get 10% of your time!" **His point?** 'You will have to work hard at not neglecting those who are doing well!'

What about us? Do we only pray for those who are "**struggling**" with something? Shouldn't we also be praying for those who we believe are **doing well**, too?

Next, let's consider... **2. Paul's petition**

**What** did Paul pray for? What exactly was it that Paul **asked God** to do for the believers at Colosse? He spells it out in the middle of vs 9 "...that ye might be **filled with the knowledge of His will** in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;"

#### A. Filled with the knowledge of God's will

Let's think through this a little bit.

--"**Filled with**" Not merely **aware** of—or **sprinkled** with—but **full of**.

--"**Knowledge**" comes from the Greek word "eh-pee'-gno-sis." It is **not the word** used to indicate the mere gathering of facts. Instead, it is the first-hand, personal, **relationship** kind of knowledge. It is not just knowing **about** something—it is being personally familiar with it. Example: Some people **know about** the military; but others of us have **personally experienced** the military!

--**What** did Paul want the Colossians to be **fully familiar with** in an experiential way? **The will of God!**

Let that sink in. Paul's heart-beat—and ultimately God's heart-beat—is that they would be filled with knowing—by experiencing first-hand—**the will of God!**

--**How** can we know what the will of God is? We often times make **finding God's will** really complicated and difficult, but I believe it boils down to two steps.

**1) Go to the source—God's Word!** Not exactly a "news flash"—and certainly not rocket-science, either! If you want to know **what God wants** you to do, look in the Bible where **God tells you** what He wants you to do!

--How do you know what your **coach** wants you to do? Look at the **playbook!**

--How do you know what your **employer** wants you to do?

--Look in the **handbook**...and the job description...and the orientation instructions you received when you started the job!

--How do you know what your **teacher** expects you to do?

--Look at the **syllabus**—the instructions that you are given at the beginning of the course—to see what the expectations are!

--It should not be surprising, then, that in order to **know the will of God**, we need to go to the source!

**2) Step 2—Do what God says!** Again, this is by no means "new" news—it is common sense!

If you want to be **filled with experiencing** first-hand the will of God, you **need to do the will** of God!

God does not **reveal what He wants** us to do—in order for us to "**evaluate**" what He says to do—so we can then make an "**informed**" decision as to whether or not we should do it!

God **declares His will** so that we **do His will!**

**Joshua 1:8** "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, **that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein**: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

**Psalms 143:10** "Teach me to **do thy will**; for thou art my God: thy spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." That little word "**do**" is important, isn't it? David doesn't say "Teach me to **know** thy will; he says, "Teach me to **do** thy will." And "lead me" (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the verse) obviously indicates **a desire to follow!**

John 14:15 "If ye love me..." What's the next word? "**keep** my commandments."

## B. In all wisdom and spiritual understanding

What does Paul mean by “in all wisdom and spiritual understanding?” I can’t spend a lot of time on this, but I don’t want to just skip it, either. And I don’t want to be overly technical, but it is a bit of a challenge to understand what Paul is getting at.

First—people who have a lot more expertise in the Greek language than I do—point out that that the word “spiritual” is in the **emphatic** position—meaning it applies to both “wisdom” and “understanding.” (Steven Cole, Biblehub.org, Lesson 3: What Spiritual Growth Looks Like (Colossians 1:9-12)).

In other words, it should read “in all spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

Does that mean Paul is saying that we should **only concern ourselves** with knowing the will of God when it comes to “**spiritual**” things—like where you go to church; **but not** “non-spiritual” things like what **kind of car** you should buy and how you should **spend your free time**? No; Paul is not saying to seek to know God’s will **in some** areas—but **not in** other areas.

It is important to realize that the little word “in” can also mean “by” or “through”—and that meaning makes the most sense in this context. Paul’s emphasis is not in **what areas** you pursue the will of God—he is emphasizing **how** you go about doing it. We are filled with the knowledge of God’s will by having **wisdom** from God—not wisdom from the world; and **understanding** from God—not our own understanding.

So what’s the difference between “wisdom” and “understanding”? I like how **Steven Cole** put it: “‘Wisdom’ refers to knowing how God’s Word commands us to live, whereas ‘understanding’ refers to insight, perception, or the ability to discern between things.” (Cole, Biblehub.org).

--Do we need God-led **wisdom** to know **how to live** in this present evil world? Yes; we do!

--Do we need God-led **discernment** and insight into differentiating between the false and the true? Yes; we do! And the Colossians needed it, too! And that is **why God had Paul write** this letter to them—and to us!

## Next, let’s consider... **3. The purpose for Paul’s petition**

What was the **purpose** behind Paul’s prayer? **Why** did he ask God for the Colossians to be filled with knowing—by experiencing first-hand—**the will of God**!

We have the answer in the beginning of vs 10: “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing...” In vs 9, **Paul implied** that **knowing** the will of God would lead them **to do** the will of God.

In vs 10, it is almost as if he wants to **make sure** they don’t miss his point. And **what** is the point!

Don’t just **know** the will of God for the sake of **knowing** the will of God! Be filled with knowing first-hand the will of God in **order to do** the will of God so you can live a life that **is pleasing to** God!

So basic...so common-sensical...so easy to understand and logical—and yet, so rarely practiced! There used to be (and maybe there still is) a “movement”—for lack of a better word—focused on “What Would Jesus Do.” There were “WWJD” bracelets that people would wear to remind themselves to **try to do things** the way Jesus would have done them. Is that a **bad** thing? Obviously not!

**What** did Jesus do? He did what **pleased the Father—always!** **John 8:29** “And He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for **I do always** those things that **please** Him.”

Is that true of us? Is our aim...is our desire...is our goal...is our heart-beat to please God **always**—in **every** area of our lives? Maybe **instead** of WWJD bracelets, we should have DTPG—“Does this please God”—bracelets!

--How different **our lives** would be if we kept that question in the **forefront of our thinking** and decision-making! Here’s another thought: What if we got in the habit of **asking each another** “does that please God?”

Some of you might be thinking, ‘Wait just a minute, Pastor! You’ve gone from preachin’ to meddlin’!’

## Lastly, let’s look at... **4. The particulars of a God-pleasing life**

Are you seeing the progression here? Paul asks God to fill them with knowing—by experiencing first-hand—**the will of God** for the **purpose of doing** that which pleases God. And then, to make sure they understand **what pleasing God looks like**, he gives them 4 characteristics of a God-pleasing life.

### A. Being fruitful in every good work

We see those exact words in the middle of vs 10 “...being fruitful in every good work...”

--We know from Ephesians 2:8-9...and Galatians 2:16...and Romans 3:20...and Romans 3:28...and Titus 3:5 that **good works don't save us**. But...God **still wants us to do** good works!

--We see that here in vs 10—and **Ephesians 2:10** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus **unto good works**, which God hath before ordained **that we should walk** in them.”

--Many of us know Jesus' words in Mt 5:16 “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

--**Titus 3:8** “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain **good works...**”

So the life that pleases God will be one that is **characterized by good works**.

In Acts 10:38, we read that Jesus “went about doing good.” Are we known for **doing good**?

### B. Increasing in the knowledge of God

We see those words at the end of vs 10. “Knowledge” here comes from **the same Greek word** that we looked at in vs 9. It is getting to **know God** on a personal level—not just knowing **about** Him. So even though **they already knew God** by virtue of being saved by Him, Paul wanted them to **increase** in knowing Him. I love how **D.A. Carson** put it: “Paul is never satisfied with the mere status quo: Christians are **organisms that grow**, not machines that simply perform a designated function for which they were designed” (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, pg 107, emphasis mine). **How** do you increase in personally knowing God?

**Listen** to Him through His Word...**talk** to Him in prayer...and **do what** He asks you to do. What happens when we do that? God reveals Himself to us more and more—and Jesus says as much in **John 14:21** “He that **hath my commandments, and keepeth them**, he it is that **loveth me**: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I **will love him, and will manifest myself to him**.”

It shouldn't be difficult to understand that God is going to **reveal Himself more** to those who love Him and obey Him than He will to those who **say** they love Him—**but don't do** what He says!

### C. Strengthened with His power to joyfully display patience and longsuffering

We see this characteristic in vs 11; notice what it says: “Strengthened with all might (power), according to His (God's) glorious power” to do **what?** ‘To get out of every bad and difficult situation?’ No; it doesn't say that, does it? What does it say? It says that a life that is pleasing to God **will be strengthened by God** to do the impossible—joyfully demonstrate “patience” and “longsuffering.”

**“Patience”** carries the idea of endurance...and faithfulness and steadfastness in the **midst of sufferings and trials**. **“Longsuffering”** means to bear long with people; to be slow to retaliate when wronged or insulted. To again quote Carson: “...these virtues enable the believer to survive with joy when persecuted, to triumph in self-composure and contentment when insulted, to trust God's all-wise and all-gracious providence when one is suffering like Job” (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, pg 109).

Lastly, in vs 12, we have the fourth characteristic... D. Giving thanks unto the Father

**Why** should we give thanks to the Father? **What** is the reason Paul says we should be thankful? Because the Father is the One who “hath made us meet”—meaning qualified us—“to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:” Simply put, we should thank God the Father **for the salvation** He has provided in Christ and all that that encompasses! I'm going to expand more on what that means next week, but for now I just want to focus on “giving thanks unto the Father.”

Are you known for being a **thankful** person? You should be—if you are a believer—and not just for your salvation! Why? Because it is **God's will** for you to be thankful!

**I Thess 5:18** “In every thing give thanks: for **this is the will of God** in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

Not only that, God commands us **not to be a grumbler** or a complainer!

**Phil 2:14** “Do all things without murmurings and disputings.”

--“Do all things” is in the imperative—meaning it is a **command**.

“Murmurings”—are you ready for this—comes from the Greek word “gong-goo-MOS!” What a great word!

What does it mean? It means to ***complain or grumble!***  
Imagine growing up in a Greek-speaking home “back in the day!”  
--‘Alright you kids, quit your gong-goos-mos-ing!’

On a more serious note, we live in a world of grumblers and complainers, don’t we? You want to be different? ***Don’t be a grumbler and complainer!*** Notice **Phil 2:15**—the verse right after the one that says “Do all things without grumbling”—“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, **among whom ye shine as lights in the world;**”

Do you want to shine as a light in a dark world? Be a thankful person—not a grumbler!

***What*** did Paul pray for? That God would fill the Colossians with the ***knowledge of His will.***

***Why*** did Paul pray this? Because he wanted them to ***live a life that was pleasing to God.***

***What*** does a life that is pleasing to God ***look like?*** It has these four characteristics:

- 1) The fruit of ***good works*** will be seen in our life
- 2) We will be ***increasing in our closeness***—our familiarity—with God
- 3) We will be strengthened with His power to ***joyfully display endurance and longsuffering***, regardless of what God sends our way
- 4) We will be joyful people, giving thanks to the Father.

Are these things in your life? God wants them to be!

So what would God have us do in light of what we’ve heard this morning?

1. First and foremost, are you really a child of God? You cannot be truly serious about ***knowing*** the will of God—and ***doing*** the will of God—***if you reject what God says*** about your need for forgiveness!
2. Are you seeking to know the will of God—and striving to do it? You can’t ignore the source—or continue to disobey what God says—and expect to find the will of God?
3. Does your life please God? I believe we all could be better about asking ourselves this question: “Will this please God? Is this what God wants me to do?”