

II. Colossians
The Preeminence and Prominence of Jesus Christ
“Paul’s Prayer for the Saints”
Colossians 1:9–14
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We learned in the last study from our study in Colossians, the context, the greeting and the explanation of this wonderful report that Paul had received from Epaphras. We will start this study with Paul's intercessory prayer for the church at Colossae, which starts in Colossians 1:9. When you think about prayer, it's really pretty simple for it's just conversing with God, having communication with God and what a privilege that we can come to our Heavenly Father and have a conversation at any time we want – we can talk to God Almighty. God loves our prayers and I have to remind myself of that, that He wants to hear from us.

I love Psalms 116:2 which says [2] *Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.* I love that picture. For those of you who are parents you may remember when they were little and how they would pull on your coat or shirt and say something and you couldn't hear them due to a crowd or something. So what would you do? You incline your ear to them. Easily it looks like this; you lean down, cup your hand over your ear and ask them to repeat it. Why? It is because we want to hear what they have to say. That's what the psalmist is telling us here. He's saying that God inclines His ear to us. That's a very personable picture of God. I think it's important that we remember that God is both holy and almighty, but He's also personable and we are to come to Him for He's inclining His ear, just waiting to hear from us because he wants to hear from us. So as we look at this prayer, are we a praying people? God delights in our prayers and God works through our prayers but we have to pray and we're called to pray but it's not just that we have to, it's that we get to pray.

God calls us to intercede for others. I Timothy 2:1 says, [1] *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people.* In this study, we're going to look at this prayer that Paul prayed for this church. It's an intercessory prayer and interceding is to act or to interpose on behalf of someone else. Here in Colossians 1, Paul is interceding to God for these saints in Colossae. This is a common practice for Paul to constantly be praying and interceding for others and we see that all through his letters. As we look at Paul's prayer, ask yourself, do I value intercessory prayer as I should do? Do I understand it as I should? Do I do it as much as I should? Do I grasp the privilege of it that I can come and intercede for my brothers and sisters in Christ to God? If most of us were honest, most of us would say we have a lot of room to grow there. We have a lot of room to grow in prayer in general.

Most of us probably do intercede on behalf of others when there's a crisis or a really tough season, and we pray until that crisis is over, until that season's over. But as we look at Paul's prayer, it's a little bit different. He's not just praying in times of crisis. This is a lifestyle for Paul. He has a much broader view of intercessory prayer. Paul sees himself as a coworker or a co-laborer with God in the life of the saints. He sees intercessory prayer as a crucial ingredient of their growth in Christ. It's a part of his actual ministry to them. We think of his ministry as the letters and preaching but what we will see here is part of his ministry is prayer. That is the way that he ministers to other people. If you're a believer, we're also coworkers or co laborers with God. That's pretty bold to say, isn't it? It's bold to think that Paul the Apostle is a coworker with

God, but not me, not us. We're not apostles. What are we going to add to the movement of God? Why does God want me to pray? Does God really need me to pray? If God sovereign, knows all things and everything is under his sovereignty then what good does my prayer do? A

I ask that question a lot – who am I to intercede to God for someone else? I love a picture of this in a different way when you look at the book of John. John writes in John 5:31-33 that John the Baptist bore witness or is bearing witness to Christ and in John 1:6-8 he says that John the Baptist is to bear witness about the light. John Piper preaches a sermon on this and he says “That verse is one of the most ridiculous verses in the Bible – man is going to bear witness to Jesus the light. It would be as ridiculous if there was a lightning storm, I gave you a flashlight and said, ‘I want you to go outside and when it starts lightning, I want you to turn the flashlight on so that we can see it.’ God doesn't need us to bear witness to Him, but He chooses to use us.”

The same is true with prayer. God doesn't need us to act on behalf of others, but He invites us in. He allows us to be part of it. He allows us to be part of change in other people's lives. Somehow in God's sovereignty, He works through our prayers, even as imperfect as they are. I also love what Pastor Reeder says about this. If you want to hear an incredible sermon on this, I could have just stood up here, gone to a sermon on Colossians in 2004 from Pastor Reeder and just pushed play so you could hear it. I listened to the whole thing. He said in that sermon “Prayer doesn't change people, but God changes people through prayer.” That's the truth. Somehow, for some reason, God uses us in our prayers to change people. That's what Paul understood and did. That's why in every letter, including what we're about to look at, he starts with prayer. Let's look at Colossians 1.

Colossians 1:9-14 says [9] *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, [10] 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; [11] being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; [12] giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. [13] He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

What a prayer! In this study, I want to look at the who, the how, the why and the what. So who's praying and who's being prayed for? How is Paul praying? Why is he praying in this way? Then I want to close by looking at the actual prayer. So who's praying? That's pretty simple. It's Paul, but I think maybe more than just Paul. Right? In Colossians 1:9 he uses the word “we” twice so who might Paul be talking about? I think he's probably talking about Timothy; Paul's has brought Timothy along and he's addressing the church from himself and Timothy.

In Colossians 4 Paul talks about someone that's in prison with him who's also praying for the Colossians, and in that same chapter he talks about Epaphras who brought this wonderful report of the Colossians to him. Colossians 4:12 says [12] *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ Jesus, greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God.* So the we is probably the group of people Paul has collected to intercede for this church, and they're praying united together. There's a lot of strength when we come together and pray together about the same thing, focused on the same thing.

Who is being prayed for? That's easy, right? It's the Saints at Colossae. The interesting thing is, is these saints are not just believers, but they're growing believers. Paul gets a good report. They're bearing fruit. They understand the Gospel. They love the saints and so in some

ways, you think, why do they need prayer? They seem like they're doing great and so that's who's being prayed for.

How is Paul praying for them? We can learn a lot from Paul's practice of prayer here. Colossians 1:9 says that he has not ceased to pray for them. He's praying immediately, from the first day he heard about their faith and he's praying incessantly, without ceasing. It doesn't mean he prayed every second of the day. It just means he prayed for them regularly, all the time. Paul immediately goes to prayer and that's why it says 'and so from the day we heard...' The day that Paul gets this great report, what does he do? He prays. He didn't waste any time. The prayer starts with thanksgiving which is seen in Colossians 1:3 when he says 'We always thank God, the Father of our Lord...' and then he talks about this good report. Then he goes in the petition in Colossians 1:9. I do think Paul is in a constant state of prayer. He's always abiding in Christ, and so he's always in communion with God. That's a great example for us, is that we never detach ourselves from our relationship with God and God is always present so Paul, in a sense, is always praying. That's important, that he's praying for them regularly.

Why does he pray immediately and why does he pray every single day? It is because he's received a good report. What's the urgency? Why does he hear this great report and go, 'I've got to pray every day?' Paul starts out Colossians 1:9, [9] *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you...* There was this Colossian heresy and we're not real sure what that is and what all was involved there, but there is some concern that there are some teachings out there that they may be exposed to in this church. I don't think that's the sole reason Paul prays immediately and without ceasing. I think that's probably part of it, but I think there's a much broader and deeper reason why he prays immediately and incessantly.

It would have been one thing if Paul, in the first eight verses, if he would have said, 'I heard this report and a bunch of you in your congregation are sick, you have cancer and disease and I'm going to start praying today. I'm going to pray every day until God heals you.' It would be another thing, if Paul said 'there's a lot of suffering going on over there, I'm going to pray today and I'm going to pray without ceasing' or there's a bad governor or leader and he's persecuting you, which probably was going on but that's not the report we get and because of that, you're going to go over some intense trials. Upon hearing of those trials, Paul says 'I'm going to pray for you every day, starting right now.' But Paul didn't get a bad report. He received a good report. They've become Christians. They're growing in their faith. They're bearing fruit. They love one another. It's based on that report that Paul says, "I'm going to pray for you every single day."

Why does he pray immediately? I think there's several reasons. I think one is he wants to give thanks immediately. That's what he does. He's always giving thanks first. I don't know if this is a man thing, it probably is, but not the stereotype but whenever I get a gift I know to write a thank you letter and I usually want to, but it usually takes me a long time because I hate writing. I don't hate writing thank you letters. I just hate writing. I can't tell you how many times my wife has said, "Have you have you written that thank you letter?" And I've said, 'No.' She will say something like, "It's been six months, now, it's just rude, now, you almost can't write a letter." But I do it anyways.

There's something to being immediately thankful that just shows how thankful you are and I think that's what Paul's doing as he is immediately thanking God for his work in their life. I also think he prays immediately because he believes that prayer is his number one weapon. It's the best thing he can do. It's the most powerful thing he can do. Notice he didn't immediately go, "Hey, give me some paper. I have to write a letter and challenge them' or he didn't beg to get out

of prison so he could go preach to them. He goes to his knees and he prays. Now, he couldn't do anything else because he was in prison but I don't think it's because that was all he could do. I think it was because he knew that was the best he could do. Pastor Reeder would always tell the story of people that would come up to him and say, "The least I can do is pray for you" and he would say, 'No, it's not the least you can do. It's the best you can do.' Right? But do we honestly believe that? Paul did. We usually try to do everything in our power first, and then we pray but Paul flips that. He prays first. Paul believed in the power of prayer.

I also think he prays immediately because he knows that these believers from the second they have come to Christ have entered the battle. Paul writes in Ephesians 6:12, [12] *For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.* When we become a Christian, that's when we enter the battle. That's when we start to struggle. We struggle but we struggle well. Paul knows that from the day they became Christians, they have gained salvation, but they've also gained an enemy and that enemy wants to distract, distort, destroy and disrupt them. Even though they're growing in their faith. Paul has an urgency for prayer. They need prayer maybe now than ever before.

Why does he pray incessantly, without ceasing? He could have just prayed the first day, lifted up his prayer and moved on or he could have prayed a couple of days in a row. That's tends to be how most of us probably do it. We pray once or we pray a couple of times, and then we just kind of give it to the Lord. Paul prays every day. Why? I think he realizes that every Christian needs prayer every day, whatever season you're in. If you're growing, you need prayer every day. This was not a seasonal prayer. It was an everyday need that they had, but he also knew that they had an enemy who was not going to cease so he was going to never cease to pray for them. Briarwood Presbyterian Church, we must not delay and must not cease to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, starting within our own body, but also brothers and sisters outside of Briarwood. We need our brothers and sisters praying for us even when we're doing well and that may be when we need it the most.

What does Paul pray now? We spent a lot of time on Colossians 1:9 answering the who, the how and the why and now we have the prayer. I could do a whole other sermon on this but I don't have time for that to give more attention to this prayer. It's an incredible prayer that Paul prays. He prays first for knowledge, and then recognizes that from knowledge comes a spiritual walk. So as he prays for knowledge it then spirals down to cause and effect. If they have knowledge, they're going to have the ability to walk in a way that's pleasing for the Lord and then he gives for descriptions of that walk. We're just going to do a flyover of this prayer that deserves a lot more time. Let's start by looking at the last part of Colossians 1:9.

Colossians 1:9 says [9] *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.* This is the foundation of Paul's prayer. If you look at most of his prayers in the Epistles, this is where he starts. This is what his baseline is. He emphasizes that the saints would have a deep knowledge of God and the word that he uses is the regular Greek word for knowledge, but he adds a prefix to it – *epignōsin*. It means an intimate knowledge or deep knowledge or a precise knowledge. Paul wants them to be filled to the brim with this intimate knowledge of God and His will.

Then Paul want them to have spiritual wisdom and understanding along with this knowledge. These three words are seen together a lot in the Bible – knowledge, wisdom and understanding. Wisdom and understanding enable us to take the knowledge of God and grasp its

implications in our life and figure out how do we apply the knowledge that we've learned. That's wisdom and understanding. Spurgeon says this; “wisdom is better than knowledge for wisdom is knowledge rightly used. Knowledge may be the horse, but wisdom is the driver.” We all know where we get this wisdom, knowledge and understanding from – God's Word. This is the consistent foundational prayer that Paul prays for the saints.

As I was studying this, I thought if Paul were alive today, what would he pray for Briarwood – a church that's in a culture that's crumbling all around us and celebrating the things that we would say were wicked, a church that has lost their beloved pastor and going through grief, a church where some are worried about the unknown? I certainly think he would pray for comfort in certain things, but I think he would pray this prayer in Colossians 1 for us. Why do I say that? It is because this is the prayer he prays for all of the churches. This is the consistent thing he asks for, is a deep knowledge of God because if we get that, if we know God intimately, then we can go in the light, in whatever the culture brings and be a light. If we know and have a deep and intimate knowledge of God, then we grieve, but we grieve with hope and anticipation. If we're to the brim full of this intimate knowledge of God, then we don't have to worry about whatever comes our way, whether it's in our church or in our culture, because we can trust the Lord is with us.

Tim Keller, in his book titled Prayer, says this; “It's remarkable that in all of his writings, Paul's prayers for his friends contain no appeals for changes in their circumstances. It's certain that they lived in the midst of many dangers and hardships. They faced persecution, death from disease, oppression by powerful forces and separation from loved ones. Yet in these prayers, you see not one petition for a better emperor, for protection from marauding armies or even bread for the next meal and those aren't bad things to pray for.”

Paul does not pray for the goods we usually would have near the top of our list. He's not giving us a universal model for prayer, rather, in his prayers, he reveals what he asks most frequently for his friends – what he believed was the most important thing God could give them and what is that? It is to know God better. That's what Paul prayed for – for the Saints who were growing in their relationship, that they would know God better and better and better each day. What does that lead to? It leads to a spiritual walk that's pleasing to the Lord, that's worthy of His name.

We know that that knowledge from the word informs our actions. It inspires our actions. Knowledge of God is the catalyst for a holy life. Knowledge informs the mind and it properly motivates the heart and then it directs our actions and our lives. So, if we don't know God's will, we can't live in a way that pleases God and we know that we don't live to earn God's love. We love because of God's love for us. I love what D. L. Moody says. Moody is the spiritual, great, great grandfather of Billy Graham, through a long line of conversions. Moody says this; ‘Every Bible should be bound in shoe leather.’ I love that because the Bible gives us knowledge about God and then it equips us to put our shoes on and go walking in a way that is worthy of the Lord.

In closing, I want to give these four characteristics of this walk. What does this walk look like? We find these characteristics in Colossians 1:10-12 which says *[10] so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work (that's number 1) and increasing in the knowledge of God (that's number 2); [11] being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy (that's number 3); [12] giving thanks to the Father (that's number 4), who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*

Paul prays that they would have knowledge, that knowledge would equip them and motivate them to live a life that's pleasing to Him. That life is one that bears fruit. A Christian who is informed by the knowledge of God, lives a life of for Christ and bears fruit – the fruit of God. That walk is one that increases in knowledge. We've never arrived as Christians. I love Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:19, which says, *[19] to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.* Think about that. Somebody's prayer for you is that you would know something that you can't know. That's what Paul is praying. Paul is saying, as much as you study God's love, you will never know the depths of it.

I've been following the Ocean Gate submarine with five on board that went down to get pictures of the Titanic and they put a graphic to show how deep 13,000 feet was. In this graphic they tipped the Empire State Building upside down and they put it in the water to show how deep the Empire State Building would look like if in water. The Empire State Building is 1,250 feet high and the ocean floor is at 15,000 feet. So 1,250 feet in depth didn't look like much compared to 13,000 feet in depth. When you're a little kid and you look at the ocean the kid might ask 'how much water is in the ocean?' You might say a lot and then as you're older, you might say, 'I don't know, a million gallons' where you get a little bit more precise the older you get and all of us know we can't fathom how much water is in the ocean. We cannot know the depths of God and Paul's prayer is that as Christians we would just continue to know Him deeper and deeper every day.

Then that walk would be strengthened according to His glorious might so that we can endure and be patient and have joy in every circumstance and then it would be a thankful walk. Paul starts with thankfulness, and then he prays they would have a walk that's one that is thankful to the Lord. What does he tell them to be thankful for? The Gospel. The Father has qualified them to share in the inheritance of saints. Let's read this last part of our text for this study.

Paul says in Colossians 1:13-14, *[13] He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, [14] in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* A worthy walk is one that is thankful, and we're thankful that we've been qualified because of Christ to share in the inheritance of the saints. We've been delivered from the domain of darkness. We are no longer slaves to sin. We've been transferred to the Kingdom of His beloved Son. We are no longer children of wrath, but we are children of God – adopted, loved and accepted. We are redeemed. We've been bought with a price. We are His and He is ours. We have much to be thankful for.

Here are two quick life takeaways. First is pray. One Pastor said "you can't pray without ceasing if you don't start praying." Perhaps you're thinking 'that's a lot of deep depth in a prayer.' Start somewhere. Just start praying five or 10 minutes every day and you don't have to use big words. Just have a conversation with God.

The second take away is realize that you are co laborer with Christ, that we've been given a privilege to pray for others – pray for non-Christians, but also pray for the Saints. Maybe that's not a practice that you've regularly done. You have probably interceded for your kids and or other believers that are going through a tough time, but have you ever taken a group of people that seem to be growing in their faith and just pray that they would know God at a deeper level? That's what Paul's doing. So maybe just take five or ten people, men or women in our church, and just pray for them every day – pray this prayer that they would grow in the knowledge of God, they would walk in a way that is worthy of His name and then you can go through those four descriptions of that walk.

We have the blessing of coming to the Lord's Supper where we remember Christ and what He has done for us. We remember that His body was given for us, that His blood was shed for the remission of our sins and we're talking about intercessory prayer. Christ is the Intercessor. Christ interceded for us when we were sinners. Christ died for us and made a way for us to be forgiven of our sins so that we can know the Father, so that we can pray through Him and by His Spirit. As we come to the Table, we come with thanksgiving for what He has done for us. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank You that even now, as we are lifting our prayer up to You, that You are bending Your ear to us because You care, because You want to hear what we have to say. I know that there's those reading this who might be thinking, "I just need to grow in prayer. This is a lot. I just need to have just have some prayer in my life." I pray that You would give them the ability just to start praying to You on a regular basis. Then Lord help us to realize that we are coworkers with You. Lord, in Your sovereignty somehow use our prayers to make change. Help us to believe that, help that to be our go to, and help us to be faithful like Paul is to intercede for each other. We love You. We pray these things in Christ's Name, Amen.