

A GLORIOUS, DANGEROUS PRAYER

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

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If you have a bible, turn to COLOSSIANS – CHAPTER 1... Follow along as I read, **beginning in verse 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, 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. May you be 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. 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.

If I offered you a prayer you could pray that you knew would be answered - would you have interest?

Not some superstition – not as some magical incantation... not as some bottle you rub and a genie pops out...

But a prayer that had proven results: you pray this prayer and God answers...

Any interest in that? Such prayers do exist!

That's not what I mean. Prayer is not a vending machine you put in your quarters and out comes your selection....

But there are prayers he promises to answer...

The apostle John writes: *...if we ask anything according to God's will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us... we have the requests that we have asked of him.* (1 John 5)

Catch that? Pray according to God's will and He hears you – and will answer!

So, how can you be sure you're *praying according to his will*?

Answer: when God gives you the prayer!

That's what we have before you: a prayer from God, for praying back to God!

But it's a dangerous prayer.

It's dangerous for people like me, who grow complacent in their spiritual life...

It's dangerous for people like me, who get comfortable with the spiritual status quo

It's a dangerous - but *glorious* prayer – perfectly in accord with God's will for you and me!

So let's see three things about this prayer so that we can pray it back to God. Three key elements.
First...

1. THE REQUEST

So far in this letter, the apostle Paul has followed a standard letter format – greetings, then thanksgiving...

But now he informs these believers in Jesus of how he's been praying for them....

Verse 9: *And so, from the day we heard...* (since he and Timothy heard about their faith in Jesus)

*... we have not ceased to pray for you, asking **that** you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in (or consisting of) all spiritual wisdom and understanding,*

Did you see request?

The request is they would be **filled them with the knowledge of God's will.**

So what is that"?

We usually take "*knowing God's will*" as some direction we want...

Whom should I marry, what classes to take, what should my major be...

Where should I live, what house to buy, what car to buy, what career to pursue

All those things matter....

But what Paul is praying for matters even more!

He's praying for **the knowledge of God's moral will** – consisting of *spiritual wisdom and understanding*

Or: wisdom and understanding that the Holy Spirit brings...

That's what's in view: knowing God's moral, ethical will consisting of wisdom and understanding from the Spirit of God.

But that raises a question....

Why pray for them to know God's will if they already have God's word?

Hasn't the Holy Spirit *already* revealed that will of God in the word of God?

I realize the Colossians didn't have a complete New Testament, but they would have had access to our Old Testament.

And God's *moral* direction in both Old and New Testament is essentially the same.

The Colossians already had God's *revealed* will in His word... and we do as well.

SO, WHY pray for them to be “filled with the knowledge of God's will”?

It seems the Colossians were **confused about God's will, because they were confused about Jesus.**

Which is an interesting connection: get confused about Jesus, and we get confused about a lot of things!

The Colossians were losing sight of the fact that Jesus is over all – and Jesus is all we need!

So the apostle Paul says in chapter 2, See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition... and not according to Christ.

That's the issue – they were buying into teaching that diminishes Jesus.

So a repeated idea in this letter is “**fullness**”: *the **fullness** we have in Christ.*

And Paul here prays, *I want you to be **filled** with the knowledge of his will!*

There seems to be a connection between this request and their confusion about Jesus, and all that He is for us!

Now, we're not facing the false teaching that the Colossians were facing...

But we get **confused about doing God's will** – **under the supremacy of Jesus** - do we not?

As theologian Bilbo Baggins put it, in *The Lord of the Rings*:

“It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door... You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.”

Bilbo is right... you step out of your door, and you don't know what the day will bring!

Step out of your door, and life may confront you with all kinds of situations that are confusing – as you live under the supremacy of Jesus!

Some situations are flip and point in God's word: “Should I steal? No. Should I commit adultery? No.”

But, Bilbo is onto something: life is not always that straightforward.

Just think about the areas the apostle will address in this letter...

In chapter 3, he talks about **relationships** – how we are to bear with one another. And if we have a complaint, to forgive as the Lord has forgiven us...

Straightforward enough – but not always so straightforward, is it.

Not straightforward for me when I'm the one having to do the bearing with or the forgiving!

So I need this prayer... To see Jesus – his supremacy and his sufficiency, that I might do those things, and obey God's will!

In chapter 3, Paul also talks about **our ministry to each other** – the word of Christ dwelling richly in us, teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom...

Doing that well will not always be straightforward!

We can use His word like a sledgehammer – no problem. We don't need a lot of help for that...

But to use His word like arthroscopic surgery – making the smallest incision, to bring great healing...

That takes *wisdom and understanding* from the Spirit!

In chapter 3, Paul talks about **marriage** – wives honoring a husband's loving and kind leadership, AND husbands loving their wives and not being harsh.

Are you going to need *spiritual wisdom and understanding* for that?

Sung and I do... if you've got those things perfectly nailed down, come pray for us afterward.

Marriage is a great blessing - but as Paul Tripp puts it, "you're one flawed person married to another flawed person" – that's not going to be straightforward all the time!

You're going to need to know God's will - as you live out your marriage - under the supremacy and sufficiency of King Jesus!

Paul talks about **parenting** in chapter 3.... I love parenting...

I love parenting, and it's the hardest thing I've ever done!

When my kids were younger, I had a pretty formulaic view of parenting: *Do this – just like this – and you always get this...*

If you have these inputs you always get these outputs...

I'm older and hopefully wiser, and my kids are older – I have two teenagers now - and parenting is not so straightforward any more.

I regularly need the Spirit's help to *know* and *obey* God's good will in that area of my life!

The apostle talks about **vocation** in this letter – and working heartily unto the Lord in all you do...

He talks about **relating to outsiders** – people who don't know Jesus – *with wisdom...* another connection to this prayer.

You'll need the Spirit of God to *do* the will of God for those areas.

You'll want wisdom and understanding from the Spirit – will you not?

We could run similar scenarios for our use of time, our pursuit of recreation, our use of media – and countless other things...

My point is simply – we need this REQUEST!

AND... we need it regularly.

Notice, the apostle says he has *not ceased* praying for the Colossians like this.

He makes this request *continually* for them! It's near the top of his regular prayer priorities!

We should ask: is it near the top of our regular prayer priorities?

How often do you pray along the lines of what Jesus taught us to pray:

“Father, your will be done – your revealed, moral will be done – on earth, in my life, as it is in heaven“?

When I first preached this message, I realized I was not praying this way often enough... and I needed to.

So I put this prayer into my regular prayer list.... I'd encourage you to do the same.

But WHY? Why pray continually to *know and do God's will* like this?

2. THE REASON

Verse 10 tells us: so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him

That is a profound reason to pray this prayer!!

To walk or live in a way that is “*worthy*” of the Lord, *fully pleasing* to Him!

This can be confusing for us, as people who are saved by free grace. It can be confusing because we know we are justified by faith alone.

That the verdict of the last day, brought into the present, as the Father declares you: “*righteous, with the righteousness of my Son!*”

If you are a believer in Jesus, that declaration has been made over your life – once and for all – by grace alone, through faith alone!

So you always relate to God – and HE always relates to you – on one basis: the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ!

But that verdict does not mean we’re always walking worthy of the Lord, *fully pleasing* to him...

D.A. Carson in his outstanding book, “*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*”, points out that if we lived in a shame-based culture we would understand **verse 10** a lot better.

Our culture says, “Do whatever you want, as long as you’re not hurting anyone...”

But in an honor or shame-based culture, you represent other people – you represent your family in particular...

And the worst thing you can do is fail to bring honor to those you represent...

My wife Sung was born in Korea, came to the states when she was 10, so grew up in a very Korean home.

Like many Asian cultures, it is more of an honor and shame-based culture.

I was introduced to that reality the night before our wedding.

Sung’s uncle from Korea flew in for our wedding. He is the patriarch of that side of the family, so it’s important he be there (*honor culture*).

Had the wedding rehearsal, drove over to the rehearsal dinner – I pull up at the restaurant and find my lovely fiancée outside - in tears, sobbing.

Between sobs, she tells me that as they were leaving the rehearsal her uncle from Korea said to her, “*You have dishonored our family*”.

It's a good thing I wasn't there when he said this! "*You have dishonored our family*".

We're still not sure why he said that...

Sung thinks maybe it's because she wasn't dressed up enough in his eyes, or because she wasn't wearing her hair up...

Apparently women in Korea would have been made-up, dressed up, and had their hair up.

For her uncle, Sung brought shame to the entire family – all the way to Korea!

As he went through the receiving line the next day, I shook his hand - looked him in the eyes, and said "Sung represents your family very well."

I think he got the message!

But here's the thing... her uncle would get verse 10!

Verse 10 would make total sense to her uncle: *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord...*

Why? Because the Christian life IS lived for the honor of Someone else!

We represent Him now! We have the privilege of living *for His honor and praise!*

That's why this prayer is so dangerous. It doesn't just reorient our prayer life – **it reorients all of life!!**

It makes *walking worthy - and fully pleasing* - our Polaris to navigate by...

Polaris is that bright star in the northern sky.

If you're on a ship 100 years ago... no GPS - you look up and it guides you... you navigate by that bright star.

Verse 10 becomes our star – our reference point - to navigate by! Secure in his grace, I am living for his honor and glory!

Last week, I was sinfully angry with one of my sons.

I had told him to get into bed, and I went to bed because I was exhausted.

Then I hear him running around, having fun with his other brother – being childish. Lo and behold, a child being childish... who could imagine that!

But, in impatience and anger, I got up, grabbed his arm – and took him back to his room....

I asked his forgiveness, and he forgave me...

My actions in that moment, were not *worthy* of the Lord... they were not honoring HIM, though I stand righteous before him.

Do you see how we need this star to navigate life: “walking worthy”... “fully pleasing”?

Friends, what’s your reference point for navigating life?

To what degree is *Walking Worthy of Him* directing what I do... In the workplace, or on the campus?

To what degree is *pleasing Him – not others – HIM...*

To what degree is pleasing HIM my goal in how I relate to my kids, or how you relate to your parents?

Am I seeking to *please Him* as I relate to my spouse?

So often in marriage, the goal of my heart is how to *please myself...*

It’s good to ask: Would my spouse say that I’m seeking to please Him in our marriage?

Is this how you’re navigating life with friends? Or with members of the opposite sex?

What’s your Polaris? What orients you?

Is it – walking worthy, pleasing the Lord?

Remember, the Christian life is lived repenting and believing good news... Let your heart be full of faith in the finished work of Jesus!

And realize that in giving us this prayer, **God wants to meet us – and help us!**

It’s like the prayer of the church father Augustine – who said: “Lord, command what you will and grant what you command!”

I like that: “Lord, command what you will – to be pleasing to you these ways...”

“And, by the way, I need help! Help!! So grant to me – do in me - what you command!”

Give me the ability to do what you command - to navigate by that star more and more – *for my joy, and your glory!*

But what does it look like as God answers this prayer? *Third...*

3. THE RESULTS

The English Standard Version (ESV) doesn't capture these effects quite as well as the New International Version (NIV). Here's the NIV:

Notice the four verbs ending in "ing":

*(VERSE 10) ...so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: **bearing fruit** in every good work, **growing in the knowledge of God**, 11 **being strengthened** with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and **giving joyful thanks** to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Think of those four phrases as **four results** of this prayer.

They're **four aspects** of living worthy of Jesus...

First, bearing fruit in every good work (verse 10)

A tree that is alive, bears fruit of some kind...

It has sap flowing in it, which makes branches put out leaves and bear fruit.

The grace of God is like that sap in our lives... God's grace makes you fruitful.

Verse 10 is saying: this prayer results in more fruitfulness in those works!

More fruit in our relationships, more fruit in service, more fruit in countless ways... sign me up for that!

And God is answering that prayer – you are a wonderfully fruitful church!

Second result, growing in the knowledge of God (verse 10 again)

It's a wonderful feedback loop of grace here!

We pray to know God's will...

And in knowing God's will, we grow in knowledge of God himself

As we grow in the knowledge of God, we will know more of his will...

It just keeps going – this glorious feedback loop of grace!

And God is bringing this result too – we are growing in our knowledge of God together!

Third result, being strengthened with God's power

Verse 11: ...*being strengthened* with all power according to his glorious might...

This is a remarkable.... This verse is describing a constant supply of the greatest power imaginable...

Douglas Moo paraphrases it, "*being strengthened by God with the greatest strength imaginable*"

The "greatest strength imaginable" - *according to his glorious might*.

Next, you'd expect some reference to miracles being performed. Maybe some obvious powerful spiritual gift....

Power to heal. Maybe power to raise the dead!

But we read: *so that you may have great endurance and patience*

Endurance, perseverance – through trial and difficulty... with patience. According to God, that's power!

When you see a Christian here going through a **financial trial** with patience, and without complaint... that's power!

When you see someone here enduring a **parenting trial** – while patiently trusting God...

Realize, parenting trials are doubly hard, because your child is sinning against you – and simultaneously breaking your heart...

When someone is enduring a trial - with a child they love – but they are persevering with patience.... that's power!

Or, when you see a believer enduring a **health trial**...

Recently guy had a stroke in our church..... (story of being with Lindsay)

That's not normal! That's not natural - that's power!

I'm all for enjoying the power of the Holy Spirit... let us have all we can get.

But include this in your definition of power: *endurance with patience*... perseverance with trust... that's power biblically defined!

Fourth result, giving joyful thanks to the Father

Verse 12 - *and giving joyful thanks to the Father*

The ESV attaches joy to the endurance, but most see the joy connected with giving thanks...

It's "giving joyful thanks" to the Father ... so appropriate on Thanksgiving weekend... Christians have so much reason to give thanks!

And if you're here, and not a Christian – not a believer in Jesus – thanks for coming!

Let me walk through these and hear this as an invitation from God to you, that you might have some amazing reasons to give him joyful thanks!

... who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

We often live with what Paul Tripp and Tim Lane call “**a gospel gap**” – **a gap related to the good news of Jesus, that's all that means**

That's the gap between realizing what God has done for us in the **past** – and realizing what God will do for us in the **future**...

But how we *fail* to realize that this same good news makes a difference in the **present** for us too.

The gap is being aware of what grace *covered from our past*...

And being aware of what grace *promises* to do for our **future**...

But living unaware of how grace means to affect us right now...

And this prayer closes that gap!

It makes us aware of God's **past** work...

rescuing from the domain of darkness, bringing them into the saving reign of Jesus, and forgiving their sins.

And makes us aware of **future** implications – *qualifying us to share in the inheritance of the saints!*

But, God's work for our past - and our future – transforms our present: **causing us to give God joyful thanks right now!**

If you are a believer in Jesus, you have been **qualified**, when you were utterly disqualified!

You have been **rescued** – plucked out of the pitch-black darkness of our sin ... and transferred the glorious kingdom of Jesus!

For you were **redeemed** – purchased out of the slave market – **forgiven** of all your sins...

You stand righteous with the righteousness of Jesus!

All, that you may be filled with **joyful thanks to Him** right now...

God wants to close that “gap” in our lives, as we pray this prayer!

If you are not a believer in Jesus... You might be a guest here today – or you might be growing up in this church.

See what Jesus’ life, death and resurrection have provided for you!

He can qualify you... and rescue you – and deliver you – and forgive you – right now!

And that produces purpose in your life!

25 years ago, I met a Christian, who asked me what I was living for... and I didn’t have a good answer. But I longed for purpose!

Maybe you feel that way right now...

God can give you the purpose you were made for – living not for yourself, but living for Him...

As he qualifies you – rescues you – and forgives you...

Turn to Jesus and believe. Trust in his life, death and resurrection for you!

Friends, all of us, do you see what a dangerous, glorious prayer this is?

Let me encourage you to pray it for yourself – and your family... and your friends – and your church!

That we might live worthy of Him - fully pleasing to him... as we give much joyful thanks to Him!

Celebrate the Lord’s Supper for that reason right now...