

Colossians 1:9-14

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[0 : 00] We're now going to look at the letter to the Colossians chapter 1 and particularly at the verses from 9 to 14.

Here we have one of Paul's recorded prayers in the New Testament. And this is a prayer that Paul offered on behalf of the church in Colossae, a church which at that point he had not known, he did not know, he had not met, he had not visited Colossae.

And the relationship of Paul to the church in Colossae is very similar to the relationship that we have with many churches in Africa and in Asia, many churches in China. We've heard of them, but we don't know them. We've never been there. We haven't seen them.

And yet we are encouraged, indeed commanded, to pray for them. And I think Paul's example here encourages us to do that. And here we see the apostle praying for these people who had come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ in Colossae through the ministry of Epaphras.

And tonight we live in an age in which the church has spread to many parts of the world. During the last hundred years the church has grown dramatically in numbers throughout the world.

[1 : 33] And it is our responsibility to pray for the church of God around the world. Because the church in China, the church in Zaire, the church wherever, is our church as well as their church.

Because it's Christ's church. And if it's Christ's church, it is our church. And therefore we have a responsibility towards them as they have a responsibility towards us to pray for one another.

And as we pray for the churches, we are to pray not only for these churches which, like the church in Colossae is a new church, but to pray for those churches which are older, churches which are in need of renewal and of revival.

We need to pray for the churches of Europe, for the churches of the Western world, which with the exception perhaps of the United States of America, are declining in numbers and declining quite rapidly.

And although a belief in a Christian God seems to continue with a remarkable proportion of the population in many countries in the West, nevertheless, the churches are in rapid decline.

[2 : 48] And this surely should stimulate us to pray for the churches in our land and in the lands of the West, that God would work by his Spirit to revive, to reform, to renew his church in our generation.

Now Paul had, in the beginning of this letter, just given thanks for the Colossians, given thanks for what God had done through them, just as we give thanks tonight for what God has done in China, what God has done in many African countries, what God has done in many Latin American countries.

We give thanks for what God has done. But Paul, although he gives thanks, is not complacent. He still prays for these new Christians.

The fact that they have come into the kingdom of God, the fact that they have been born again, does not relieve Paul of the responsibility of praying for them.

The prevailing model of spirituality in the Bible is the model of growth, of organic growth. And that's what Paul is concerned about here, that the church which had been born might grow, that the church which had come into being might develop, and that the church would cease to be embryonic, but that it would continue, would grow, and it would develop, and it would mature.

[4 : 12] And so he prays that their experience might be deepened. And this is the burden of his prayer, that the experience of the grace of God that they had received might be deepened, that it might develop, that it might go forward.

And he prays particularly that it might be deepened in four directions. First of all, he prays in verse 9, that they may have greater knowledge. Secondly, he prays in verse 10, that they might bear

greater fruit.

Thirdly, he prays in verse 11, that they may experience greater power. And finally, in verse 12, he prays that they may offer greater praise to God.

So let us look just for a few moments at each of these points this evening, because what Paul prayed for the Colossians, we ought to be praying for one another and for the church of God in the world in which we live tonight.

And so Paul's prayer is a model prayer. Paul's prayer here is a template which encourages us to know how we might structure our prayers as we pray for the church of God today.

[5 : 21] So first of all, Paul prays that the church might have greater knowledge. In verse 9, For this reason, since the day we heard of you, we have not stopped praying for you, asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

So Paul's great concern was that this church, this new church, might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

This is to be our priority as we pray for the church and as we pray for one another. We live in a world where our consumer lifestyle and the symbols of a material lifestyle have become highly desirable.

And in this lifestyle, we need to resist this pressure constantly to live our lives and find our fulfillment in consuming goods.

Rather, we must find our fulfillment in entering into a greater knowledge of the gospel, a greater knowledge of the word of God, a greater knowledge of the purposes of God.

[6 : 42] Paul says, Paul prays that they may be filled with the knowledge of God. He's not praying for a small knowledge of God. He's not praying for something which is small and scanty and microscopic.

He's praying that they may be filled with the knowledge of God. The idea of fullness occurs again and again in this letter. Paul was concerned that the converts, the new converts in Colossae, might know the fullness of God's salvation, not just the beginning, not just the edges, not just put their toes into the water, but that they might be submerged in the salvation, that they may know it in all its fullness.

He makes clear that to enter into the fullness of the knowledge of God was not being initiated into some mysterious secret, as some people were misleading the church to think, but rather to enter into the knowledge of God's will.

Now, God gives us that knowledge in the scriptures. God has given us his word as the source of our knowledge, that we might know the will of God.

He has given us his word. It's a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. And Paul is praying, and we ought to pray, that the church of God today, including ourselves, might have a deep and basic knowledge of scripture.

[8 : 08] One of the challenges that we face today is that many people, even many genuine Christians, know so little of the word of God. Many people find it difficult to know where to put different biblical characters in the Bible storyline.

And we lack a knowledge of the big picture that God has given us in the scriptures. One of the challenges that we face is to help all Christians, all professing Christians, to have a knowledge of God's story.

Because that's what we have in the Bible. The Bible is not simply a book of ideas. It's primarily a narrative. It's a story out of which the ideas come. It's the story of God's redemptive acts.

It's a story of redemptive history, as some people call sacred history. Here we have the story of God's mighty deeds on behalf of a fallen world.

And it's crucial. It's crucial that those of us who profess to know the Lord Jesus Christ make it a priority that we might know this message, that we might know this story from beginning to end.

[9 : 13] And we ought to be ashamed if we find ourselves having to admit that there are huge gaps in our knowledge of this story. Of course, such knowledge has to be renewed constantly because our memories are fragile and we are fallen.

And we need to constantly renew our understanding and our knowledge of the Word of God. And Paul prays that they may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Now what does Paul mean by that phrase? It's interesting that there's a subtle difference between the words wisdom and the word understanding. The first word means first principles.

The second means the ability to apply these principles. And so what Paul is praying for here is a comprehensive knowledge of God's will. To know God's will in principle but also to know God's will in practice.

So it's not something purely theoretical although our minds have to be engaged with the scriptures that we are called upon to put into practice what our minds pick up.

[10:30] So that not only our minds are impacted but our character and our behavior is also impacted. So our knowledge of God's will has to be a knowledge which is with all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And there is this practical focus of Christian knowledge which is crucially important. And it's a great danger for us especially in our reformed tradition to have a purely theoretical knowledge of God and to have a purely cerebral approach to the gospel.

Now the mind is important. The mind is crucially important. But the gospel must get past the mind. It must reach the heart. It must reach the will.

It must work its way out in our lifestyle and in our character. And Jesus called his disciples he did not call them to sit in the school room.

He called them to work with him in the work of his mission. And the model of discipleship that Jesus took was not the model of a school room but the model of a craft shop where a craftsman would teach the skills to his apprentices.

[11:46] And that's what the model of discipleship that we have in the scriptures. God wants us to learn in practice. Not simply to learn out here. Not simply to learn theoretically. But to learn on the job.

To learn in practice. We are called upon not simply to be students but also to be apprentices. And so he says to them we have not stopped praying for you since the first day we heard about you. And he says that he always prayed to God that for them that God would show them everything he wanted them to do and that they would have all the wisdom and understanding that his spirit gives. And so this is the first thing that Paul prays for here on behalf of the Colossians. To pray for greater knowledge of God's will.

And truly as we pray for the church we pray for this congregation at this time we need to pray for a knowledge of God's will that we might be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

[12:54] And as we pray not only for this congregation but for all congregations and for the church of God around the world tonight that the church might have a knowledge of God's will that the church might know out of the scriptures led by the Holy Spirit how it ought to respond and to react to the society in which it lives and the challenges that it faces today.

But Paul not only prays that the church might have greater knowledge he also prays that the church might bear greater fruit. We see this in verse 10. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way bearing fruit in every good work growing in the knowledge of God.

In verse 6 Paul had referred to the gospel that was bearing fruit there and elsewhere. and the gospel is something dynamic.

The gospel is not something dead it is not something sterile the gospel is living and dynamic and it bears fruit. And Paul was concerned that the gospel's converts should bear fruit he's concerned that we should bear fruit as we ought also to be.

So Paul envisages in this chapter two types of church growth. First there's the numerical growth.

The gospel of God's grace is spreading throughout the then known world and Paul rejoices at this.

[14:31] But he is concerned that this growth might not simply be statistical and numerical but that it might also be spiritual.

He prays for spiritual growth as well as for statistical growth. And how we need to pray that today.

The church has grown today and we give God thanks for that.

But as someone said the church may extend many thousands of miles around the world but that extension is only one or two inches deep.

How we need to pray for the depth of the church as we pray for the breadth and for the growth of the church today. And so Paul is concerned that the fruits of the spirit might be seen in the lives and in the characters of the converts.

This is vital and that is a vital factor today. So often when we read of the growth of the church in many parts of the world we read about new people coming to faith in Christ and that's great and we say hallelujah and we praise the Lord I hope.

[15 : 46] But we also need to hear about the growth of these believers as they develop and as they mature in their faith. And this second type of church growth is more important than the first because we are called all of us not simply to be converts but to be disciples.

The great danger is that the church tends to do its statistics and missionaries tend to do their statistics at the level of conversion whereas I believe God if he has statistics if he needs to do statistics will do it at the level of discipleship.

We are commanded to make disciples and making disciples is not done in a day although men and women may pass out of death into life in a moment in an instant by the grace of God.

They do not become disciples so quickly and our mandate that we must fulfil and obey is to be disciples and to make disciples.

This fruit bearing is practical Paul says it's it's it ought to be we ought to bear fruit in every good work. He's concerned that we live lives that are worthy of the Lord and fully pleasing to him.

[17 : 09] And he says that the key to this growth is the growth this growth in fruit bearing is that we grow in the knowledge of God. That we grow in the knowledge of God.

Growing in the knowledge of God is the last phrase of verse 10. God is calling us into a personal relationship and he's calling us to know him personally not just to know about him.

Now there's a lot that we learn in the Bible about God and all that we learn in the Bible about God is of crucial importance. But if we read the Bible and we listen to the gospel and we simply know about God at the end we have not got the message.

The message is that we might know God. God wants us to know him. God is seeking to have a personal relationship with us. He wants us to call him father. He wants us to enter into a personal relationship of trust and of dependence with him.

That is why he's given us his word and that's why we read his word I hope day by day and week by week in order that this spirit of trust and of friendship with God might be developed.

[18 : 29] That we might learn that we might grow in the knowledge of God. And perhaps one of the great challenges that the churches face today is to demonstrate what it means to know God.

We live in an age in which many people are interested in spirituality of one kind or another. And true spirituality, the biblical spirituality, is that spirituality of knowing God, of having a personal relationship with God, knowing him as our father, and learning to trust him and to say Abba, father, to trust him day by day, and to know what it is to share our lives with him, to live for his glory, and to do his will, and to seek his kingdom above everything else.

And it is, I believe, as we will be able by the grace of God to live out a true spirituality spirituality, that the church of God will be revived in the western world, where a lot of people are looking for a spiritual solution, a spiritual answer to lives, although they're looking, many of them, in the wrong direction, in the new age, and in paganism, and elsewhere.

But it is, as we have in the church of God a living spirituality, of a community that lives in relationship with, a personal relationship, and communal relationship with God, that we will attract such people, and they will be convinced, as Paul said, that God is among us.

And so our prayer ought to be, Paul says, that we might bear greater fruit, and that this fruit might be expressed as an ever-deepening knowledge of God, so that we might be enabled to say that at the end of one year we know God better than we knew him in the previous year.

[20 : 22] It's so easy for us to become content with an academic, with a cerebral knowledge of God, knowledge about God. What God is inviting us into is a personal relationship, a personal interaction, a personal engagement with him.

We are called upon to be the bride of Christ. Now, a couple who are getting married, the word bride, of course, in a strict sense in the New Testament we might say a fiancé, a couple who are getting married, they are constantly together and they know one another and they try to get to know one another better.

And that's the relationship which God has called us into with himself through Christ, to be part of his bride and to be part of his fiancé and to anticipate, to prepare for the great marriage of the bride and of the Lamb which will take place in the new order.

But the third thing that Paul prays for here is that the church might experience greater power. See this in verse 11, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might, so that you may have great endurance and patience and joyfully giving thanks to the Father. Power. Power is a prominent, the power of God is a prominent theme in this letter of Paul to the Colossians.

[21 : 52] We see it not only in this verse but also in verse 29 of this chapter. To this end he says I labor struggling with all his, to this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, that's God's energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Paul here is conscious of God's energy, God's power working in him. There's also another reference in the second chapter in verse 12.

So what Paul is saying in that verse, verse 12 of chapter 2, is that the power that raised Jesus from the dead is a power to which we have access through the gospel.

Now just a week or two ago there was a power crisis in some parts of Western Europe where the power system failed. and I suggest that that may be a parable of the church of God today.

We have a power crisis. We have all the forms, the outward forms, but we lack the spiritual power. And Paul is telling us here that that power will seldom come unless we pray for it.

[23 : 15] And we know from the history of the church that revival movements have been born again and again out of prayer. And Paul is reminding us here of the importance of praying that God would endu his church with power.

And as the church is strengthened by this power, it will receive three great Christian graces. He tells us that we will be granted the grace, first of all, of endurance.

That you may have great endurance. endurance. The idea behind the Greek word that Paul uses here is an active idea. It's not something passive.

It is the spirit which no circumstance in life can ever defeat and which no event can ever vanquish. It's an endurance which endures to victory.

It's an endurance which is optimistic. It's not simply hanging on by your fingernails. It's much more than that. Although it may sometimes involve that. It is much more than that.

[24 : 24] So it is from the power of God that we receive the grace of Christian endurance. But Paul also uses the word patience. And he distinguishes endurance from patience.

Patience is a different word altogether. While the former word, the word which is translated here, endurance, refers to situations, patience. This word is often used with regard to persons.

So that's just the first word, the word endurance, expresses a fortitude that no situation can defeat. So the second word, this word patience, refers, describes a patience which no person can wear out. And it's so easy for us to say we lose patience with someone. And so often we use the term patience with people rather than with situations. But Paul is saying that we can receive, by the grace of his power, a patience which will not wear out.

And so as we think of situations that may be defeating us and confronting us, or think of persons who are frustrating us, God is offering in the gospel power for us to overcome these frustrations and to cope with these people who appear to us to be difficult.

[25 : 47] God has promised endurance and patience. But he's also promised joy. Joy comes from the power of God. He speaks here of joyfully giving thanks to the Father.

Now this joy, or joy in the Bible, is always something deeper. It's something deep. It's not something superficial. It's not something on the surface of our emotions.

It's something which goes deeper than that. As one American captain of a submarine said, he said, joy is like being in a submarine in a howling gale fifty fathoms down.

He said, the submarine doesn't move. It's stable. But on the surface, everything is volatile. That's joy.

On the surface, our happiness, for example, can go up and down. But joy is something deep, something basic. And Paul says that God's power can give us that joy.

[26 : 54] But finally, Paul prays that the church might offer greater praise. He speaks about giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

And so, Paul is encouraging us to praise God. And we come to church not simply to learn. We come to church not simply to listen to the sermon. Important as that is, but we come to church also to praise God, to worship God, to honour God.

And that is something that we often forget about. So often we've converted the church into a school room. And we forget that the church is to be a house of praise.

And that we're to exalt the Lord and extol the Lord and to worship him and to praise him and to magnify his name and to enthrone him on our praises. That's our response to his word.

Or at least that ought to be our response to his word. And this praise is essentially the praise of thanksgiving, constantly giving thanks to God for his great salvation.

[28 : 08] Because he is qualified as to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. He's privileged his people of participating in what he has in store for the people of God.

The word inheritance here is a word which alludes back to the Old Testament to the land of Canaan, where each tribe received its lot or its inheritance.

Perhaps the Colossians would have understood it in that sense, but also in the sense in which it was commonly used in the Greek culture to which they were accustomed, when it was used of small holdings which were assigned to veteran soldiers who were settled on the land after their army service was over.

So Paul is reminding us here of the great hope that he has given to us because this inheritance is an inheritance which is in the light, which he has stored up for us, he tells us in verse 5, in heaven. the hope that is stored up for you in heaven. That is the inheritance that is being spoken of here.

This is an inheritance in the light, a light which is contrasted with the dominion of darkness in verse 13, or the realm in which darkness holds sway.

[29 : 37] God rescues his people from the darkness, from the dark power of sin and of Satan. But has also transferred us into the kingdom he tells us of his beloved son.

The word that Paul uses here to transfer almost in the ancient world was a technical term for mass deportations of peoples. It is a word which became popular as historians ruminated about the colonial policy of the Assyrians, who were regarded as the most barbaric nation of antiquity, whose practice it was when they captured a people to uproot them from their homeland and to spread them throughout its empire.

People have tried to do that today in the Balkans. But here of course the method is honourable and the object is good. We are transferred, we are uprooted, not in order to become captives, but in order to be set free.

And so Paul here uses this word which speaks about a dramatic uprooting and he says that we should give God thanks for the fact that he has lifted us out of the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of light.

And to this concept of this inheritance which God has given us to look forward to in heaven, to look forward to in the new order. He adds two other ideas.

[31 : 14] First of all the idea of redemption. He speaks in whom we have redemption. Now redemption in its most common usage in the Bible refers to secure the release of a slave or a captive in return for a payment.

And that's what Jesus has done for us. He's given his life as a ransom. And the word redemption means to set free. And this is underlining the fact that God has uprooted us, God has delivered us, God has set us in order that we might be set free.

But he also speaks here of the forgiveness of sins in whom we have redemption, not only redemption but the forgiveness of sins. And the word forgiveness here means the loosing, to loose, to be set free, to be untangled from our sins.

sins. It was used in the Old Testament of the cancelling of debts every seventh year. It was used in the year of Jubilee every fiftieth year when debts were cancelled.

And that's exactly what happens when we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. We find ourselves in debt to him. We find ourselves in debt to God. We have broken the law of God and are therefore under obligation.

[32 : 33] salvation. But Christ has fulfilled that law for us. And he's died and borne the consequences in himself upon the cross so that when we believe in him and trust him as our Lord and Saviour we are set free.

We're loosed. The chains are cut. The ropes are broken. We are set free for the glorious liberty of the children of God.

And what Paul is saying here is that we may never cease to give thanks for all of these things. For this great inheritance that he has given to us and for this redemption and for this forgiveness of

sins.

And as we pray for the churches of the world and as we pray for the churches of Scotland tonight let us pray that all of us may have a renewed understanding of the value and the importance of praise and of thanksgiving to God for the great inheritance that he has given to us in Christ.

And so here we have Paul's prayer for the churches. A prayer that they may and that we might know a greater knowledge of God's will. That we might bear greater fruit through having a deeper knowledge of God.

[33 : 49] That we might experience greater power as we persevere and overcome impossible situations and difficult people and that we may be enabled to praise God with a new song with an ever-growing appreciation of the work of Jesus Christ for us.

And so God calls upon us to listen to what he says to us but he also calls upon us to respond in prayer not simply as individuals but also as a congregation.

A prayer which is a prayer of praise as well as a prayer of intercession. And Paul has given us this example of a prayer here as a model to help us to learn to pray.

What a wonderful privilege it is to speak to God. What a wonderful privilege it is for us tonight to hear God speak to us. May God grant that we may respond as Paul responded by giving the Lord God our all and surrendering all that we have and all that we are to him.

Let's pray together. Amen.