

“Prayer Shapes Perspective”

Colossians 1:9-14

Turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians 1, and in just a minute we will read verses 9-14. We began a study of this little letter last week in a series we're calling 'Foundations.' We're addressing the importance of a biblical worldview in the life of a believer. Everybody has a worldview, but not everybody's worldview is biblical. This is true even among those who are professing Christians. I'm afraid that far too many Christians have embraced ideas which are rooted in the spirit of our times more than they are grounded in the truth of God's Word. When we adopt the values of the culture, and use the language of the culture, it is a dead giveaway that we're thinking more like the culture than like Christ. And so that is why Paul's letter to the Colossians is so relevant to our own time. As we've already seen, he is writing to a group of believers who were living in a difficult place. The city of Colossae wasn't a large city, but it was located along a major trade route that ran east to west. It meant that caravans and traders from all over the Roman Empire passed through their town, but in addition to all the products they sold, they also introduced their philosophical ideas. The result was a mixture of pagan philosophy, and religious legalism, and eastern mysticism that had adopted the language of Christianity. So that these ideas had crept into the church and was threatening to undermine the faith and witness of the Colossian congregation. A man named Epaphras, who more than likely had planted the church in the city, sought help from the apostle Paul who was under house arrest in Rome at the time. The help he receives is this letter which we're now taking up in our study.

In the first eight verses of the chapter, Paul expresses the depth of his gratitude for what God had done in the lives of these believers. Their lives were marked

by faith, love, and hope—a triad of virtues that set God’s people apart. Their faith was in Christ, resulting in their love for others, and this flowed from the hope they now had for eternity. Such was the change that the gospel brought about in the Colossians as they had learned its truth from Epaphras. And serves to illustrate a very important principle, and that is:

Chuck Swindoll — *“Nobody is born knowing the good news. People don’t discover it on their own. They need somebody to tell them. The gospel comes to us through a messenger.”*

Romans 10:14—“How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher?”

The gospel had transformed their lives, for which Paul was grateful. However, his desire is for them to grow. He isn’t content simply with ‘decisions’ for Christ, but makes it his aim to make disciples of Christ. He says in verse 28, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” That’s the goal.

Verses 9-14 represent one long prayer that Paul prays for the church. In fact, it goes all the way back to verse 3 as he begins by saying, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.” Though he had never been to Colossae, Paul was well aware of what the Lord had done in their lives. And he made it a priority to pray for them. Most of his epistles begin with reference to the specific ways in which he prayed for the believers. It is usually the case that you can tell a lot about a person’s spiritual maturity by the way they pray. I’ve heard it said that prayer is both a thermostat and thermometer. Think of it as serving two functions at once. Like a thermometer, it reflects the current

spiritual temperature of your heart. The frequency and focus of conversation with God reveals how dependent on Him you really are. If prayer is non-existent or shallow, it can signal a heart that's cooled toward God.

But prayer is also like a thermostat because it doesn't just report the temperature—it can change it. When you bring anxieties, sins, and desires before the Lord, He uses that communion to align your will with His, calm your fears, and stir new devotion. In other words, prayer not only registers where we stand spiritually, it also affects the climate of our soul and influences the atmosphere around you. So what is the current state of your prayer life? Think through these questions:

When do you pray?

How do you pray?

Where do you pray?

What do you pray?

We learn from Paul's prayer for the Colossians that prayer is something God uses to shape our perspective. So that a Christian's worldview is shaped by both instruction from the Word of God and intercession through prayer. Prayer is the means by which our will is aligned with God's will.

To be honest, I've needed this reminder in my life this week. I thought about how this is illustrated in Psalm 73 where the psalmist is perplexed by all that he sees going on in his world. The wicked seemed to prosper. He says in verse 9 they set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. He says, "But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped." I was bothered and confused by it all. I felt like I was coming unglued by all of it. Then he says this:

Psalm 73:16-17—“But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.”

In other words, when I worshiped, when I prayed, when I opened up my Bible, then I was able to discern. That same thing will be true in our lives. The world we live in is a very confusing place. Things happen that trouble us to the core of our being. Everybody seems to have an opinion, while nobody seems to have any answers. That's why we need to go into the 'sanctuary' of God!

Because it will be there on my knees with my Bible open that I'll be given the perspective I need. That's what Paul is praying for the believers in Colossae. Notice his words there in verse 9, "We have not ceased to pray for you." Back up in verse 3, he says, "We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you." Can you think of more encouraging words than those? I can't, especially coming from the Apostle Paul. To know that Paul was in your corner, praying for you, interceding regularly on your behalf, they must've been overjoyed to read these words. He always prayed for them, he had not ceased to pray for them. Whenever Paul thought of the Colossian Christians, he prayed for them.

It is a reminder to us that prayer is not the last resort after our efforts have failed, but is the primary way that we do God's work. James 5:16 says the effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. And so I want to show you some things about Paul's prayer here in these verses, and specifically the way in which he prays for believers. These petitions which Paul makes in his prayer for the Colossians aren't shallow concerns. The answer to his prayer will be a Christian whose worldview and lifestyle is transformed by the truth of Jesus Christ. First, he prays for them to:

1—POSSESSING wisdom and understanding (1:9)

“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,”

At the time he writes these words, Paul is several hundred miles away in Rome under house arrest. He can't travel, though he can have visitors. Though he is imprisoned and in a stationary position, he can pray. And his prayer life is taking him places all over the world. Here he is, praying for a small church in a city he's never been. What should his prayer consist of in terms of requests? We like to think in outward terms, so we would maybe pray for the finances of the church, or protection from harm, or increasing numbers of people in attendance. All of which are good things. But they are not the most important things.

Since the day he heard of their faith, Paul has been praying for the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. The word he uses for 'knowledge' is the word ἐπίγνωσιν (epignosis) and speaks of the revelation of God in His Word. The term that is used for knowledge in most places is the word γνῶσις (gnosis) and is a general term for the content or the facts. The ideas of the false teachers in Colossae claimed to offer knowledge, which is why they were called 'gnostics,' but it wasn't according to truth. It wasn't a true knowledge of God, His wisdom, or His will. Even though they liked to use the Christian vocabulary, they didn't use the Christian dictionary. Anything that stands opposed to God's revealed truth in the Scriptures is false knowledge.

In response, Paul prays that these believers would be filled with true knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. That's why he uses the term 'epignosis' which

means complete or full knowledge. It is not knowledge merely for the sake of information, but that which is necessary for transformation. It is a life transformed by the truth. He longs for them to be filled with the knowledge of God's will for how they should live in such a crooked world. It is the fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom, knowledge gained by trust.

Proverbs 3:5-6—“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths.”

Rather than following our own counsels, we trust God and submit to His authority. When you and I do that, He will ‘make straight’ our paths. Here’s what that phrase means in context. Our ‘paths’ is a picture of your life’s direction. The imagery is that of walking down a road for the choices we make and the course our life takes. It is the trajectory of our decisions, relationships, and future. And to ‘make straight’ speaks of removing obstacles and bringing clarity.

The word can mean to level, smooth, or guide. Now, that doesn’t necessarily mean the road will be easy or without problems, but that God will remove what would ultimately lead you off-course. He brings order out of confusion and keeps you moving toward His good purposes.

However, notice God’s direction is dependent upon trust and submission. The promise is conditional. As we trust Him fully and submit to Him in all our ways—inviting His will and wisdom into every area—He Himself directs, corrects, and clears the way. Instead of guaranteeing us a pain-free life, it assures us that when we depend on God rather than our own limited understanding, He will faithfully guide us where we need to go, aligning our steps with His wise purpose.

Paul's prayer for the Colossians to be filled with knowledge and spiritual understanding suggests that Christianity isn't a 'quick-fix' but a life of discipleship. You do know what a quick fix is, don't you? A temporary solution to something while you try to figure out something more permanent. I remember our family was going to the beach one year. My uncle was going with us, and he worked on cars all his life. The radiator hose in our van sprang a leak, and his 'quick fix' was a packet of pepper. He poured a packet of black pepper into the radiator and it plugged the leak until he could get another hose. That's a quick fix.

The gospel is immediate, but it isn't a temporary solution while we look for something better. It isn't the ABC's of the Christian life while maturity moves on to something novel. No, the gospel is the A-Z of Christianity. We're to grow in knowledge, spiritual wisdom, and understanding of God as we study His Word and seek Him through prayer. And the result will be a Christian mind that is increasingly trained to think biblically. Friends, the times call for such wisdom!

1 Kings 3:9—“Give Your servant an understanding mind, that I may discern between good and evil.”

Solomon asked for wisdom above all else, and we need to seek the same. Notice a second way in which Paul prays for the Colossians and it involves:

2—PLEASING God in our manner of living (1:10a)

“...so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him:”

When we are filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, it will be reflected in the way we live practically. The emphasis is on 'walking' which refers to our lifestyle. In Scripture, a believer's walk is a metaphor for the whole pattern of a person's daily life with God—how we live,

think, act, and relate to others. It's more than occasional burst of spiritual activity here and there. It's the ongoing, moment-by-moment direction of a life shaped by faith and obedience.

Ephesians 4:1 — “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”

To walk worthy of the Lord doesn't mean that we earn His acceptance through the way we live. Left to ourselves, none of us could live up to His standard of perfect holiness. We've all fallen short of His glory. But having come to faith in Jesus, we've been justified and declared righteous. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. We are now in Christ, and that is our new position. And so when Paul tells the believers to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, he is saying that we are to live in light of that position. He says the same thing in a slightly different way in:

Philippians 1:27 — “Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ.”

Philippians 2:12-13 — “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”

The phrase 'manner of life' carries the idea of behaving as a proper citizen. It is the same word that Paul will use later in Philippians 3 when he says that our 'citizenship' is in heaven. And so he is simply saying that it is the solemn duty of every Christian to live as a citizen of heaven and not of this present world system. Now, that's not to say that you and I are to withdraw and live like hermits. Far from it! We are to be salt and light, to influence the world around us for Jesus. The goal is to live in such a way that is 'fully pleasing' to Him. That is

the opposite of how most people approach life. They live to please themselves, or they live to please the crowd. Jesus' followers live for the glory of God. As those who have been changed from the inside out, we have a new aim in life. And this is key to making an eternal impact. I read an interesting story from the life of Billy Graham:

Richard Philipps — *“When Billy Graham faced a difficult decision, he always put in a phone call to his old friend V. Raymond Edman for advice. Not only did Graham value the prayers of his friend, but he especially appreciated Edman’s constant advice: ‘Billy, you have only one Person to please, and that’s the Lord.’”*

In the big things and little things of life, in our jobs and in our homes and in our relationships, we must make it our aim to live in a manner that is fully pleasing to Him. Then notice a third way in which Paul prays, and it involves:

3—PRODUCING fruit in every good work (1:10b)

“Bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;”

When a Christian is filled with the knowledge of God’s will in wisdom and spiritual understanding, he or she will walk in a way that is in keeping with their faith. And there will also be fruit in that person’s life. God’s design for humanity made in His image is that they be fruitful. It is part of the creation mandate that God gave to Adam in the beginning.

There are several ways that the word ‘fruit’ is used through the New Testament...

One way is in terms of our character. The word ‘fruit’ is used in Galatians 5:22-23 to describe our character as believers. You know them as the ‘fruit’ of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Where the seed of God’s truth has produced divine

life in a person, it will be verified by these accompanying virtues. The outward fruit is proof of inward life. A person who possesses a biblical worldview will be set apart by such virtues. Satan attempts to mimic these through worldly counterfeits. Perhaps it is a cultural value that looks appealing, but substitutes human effort or selfish aims for genuine spiritual fruit.

- Love substituted with tolerance
- Joy substituted with pleasure
- Peace substituted with escape
- Patience substituted with convenience
- Kindness substituted with niceness
- Goodness substituted with success
- Faithfulness substituted with loyalty to self
- Gentleness substituted with weakness
- Self-control substituted with self-expression

A second way 'fruit' is mentioned in Scripture is in terms of our conduct. The conduct or behavior of our lives is a kind of fruit based on what the Bible says in verses like:

Romans 6:22—“But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness.”

We're not perfect, but the longer that we are saved, the more we ought to be growing in Christlike character and conduct. Genuine faith will be accompanied

by works. If not, then it is dead. We're to let our light shine before others, so that when they see our good works, they glorify our Father which is in heaven.

A third way in which 'fruit' is mentioned in the Bible is in terms of our conversation. The words that we speak are also described as being fruit. The Bible says in:

Hebrews 13:15, "Through Him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips that acknowledge His name."

And fourth, 'fruit' is also used to describe our contribution. Giving is described as being fruit. Paul told the Philippians, "Even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account" (Phil. 4:16-17). Giving to support the work of the ministry is fruitfulness in our lives. Were it not for the faithful tithing of so many of you, we could not do what we do through the ministry of Hopewell. Having a biblical worldview ought to make a tither out of you!

A fifth and final way 'fruit' is used in Scripture refers to our converts. Which is to say the people that we win to the Lord are described as being the fruit of our ministry. Paul wrote in Romans 1:13, "I long to have some fruit among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles." Each of us should have the desire and ought to make it a goal to have some 'fruit' being produced in our lives. Then I want you to see the fourth thing about Paul's prayer, and it involves:

4—PERSEVERING under life's pressures (1:11)

"Being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;"

Paul wants the Colossians to be strengthened with divine power as they face the various issues of life. The Christian life is supernatural. It isn't lived out of our own strength or ability, but it is Christ living in and through the believer. If we are to walk in a manner of life that is pleasing to God, it should stand to reason then that Paul asks God to provide the power that such a life requires. His words here echo what he writes in the first chapter of Ephesians. He says he wants believers to know:

Ephesians 1:19-20—“...the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in heavenly places.”

In other words, we're strengthened with the same power of His resurrection. Which means you and I have resurrection power working in us! That's why Paul says here that he is praying these Colossians would be:

“Strengthened with all power”—it is a present tense verb that means continually being strengthened.

“According to His glorious might”—since it was by God's might that He created all things by His mere word, His power is sufficient to any challenge we may face.

“For all endurance and patience with joy”—the word that is used for 'endurance' means to bear up under even the most difficult of circumstances. The word 'patience' is a compound word made up of two words. The first one is 'makro' which means 'slow' and the second is 'thumos' which means 'temper.' So the combined word means to be slow to temper. It is the idea of having a long fuse. Some people have short tempers, which means they easily lose patience and quickly become angry or volatile. There are very few things in life more

uncomfortable than being the recipient of someone's temper release. But those who are 'macrothumia' people are long tempered. The one who has patience is not quick to explode. They don't cave in under pressure. They don't quit when faced with difficulty. Neither do they expect instant results. If endurance refers to the way we respond to circumstances, patience refers to the way we respond to people. Both are needed. Life's problems call for endurance and patience in our lives.

James 1:2-4—“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience [endurance]. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

James uses the Old Testament prophets as an example of what this looks like as it is on display in a person. He says:

James 5:10—“As an example of suffering and patience brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast.”

We live under constant pressure, and patience is what we need to get through it. Patience is faith under pressure. These believers needed courage to stand up to the false ideas that were being spread in Colossae, much in the same way that you and I need the courage to stand for the truth in our time. Truth is always under attack in a world of unbelief that is being held in the grip of Satan. That means truth bearers will always be persecuted. Folks, this isn't an anomaly but is to be expected. Jesus said so!

When the enemies of truth run out of argument, their only recourse is to kill the one who speaks it. There is a long, long line of faithful martyrs in history. That

word comes from the Greek word μάρτυς (martyr) which means witness, and it refers to those who were killed for their faithful witness to the Lord. A martyr is anyone who remains a faithful witness to God even when it costs life itself. From Abel to Stephen to the unnamed faithful in Hebrews 11, their testimony points to the ultimate Martyr—Jesus Christ—who gave His life for the salvation of the world (Rev. 1:5). We preach the gospel of a crucified and resurrected Savior who is Lord.

When we speak of God's strength for the sake of witness, it is a strength that leads us to lay down our lives for what we know to be true. Evil takes life for its cause, but truth lays down its life. Such courage is contagious. Such courage flows from the fruit of the Spirit. When one person lives out his convictions publicly, it stirs a collective resolve. A single act of courage can create a ripple effect that spreads.

Tertullian — *"The blood of the martyr is the seed of the church."*

It is important to remember such truth, especially in light of the events of this past week and the assassination of Charlie Kirk. It is sobering reminder that we live in hostile territory as God's people. Paul prays that the Colossians be strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit for the sake of endurance and patience. And then one final thing I'll mention is that his prayer for them involves:

5—PRAISING God for His redemptive work (1:12-14)

"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."

One last thing that I will point out in Paul's prayer for these Colossians involves their gratitude. He prays for that their lives will be characterized by increasing thankfulness in their hearts for what God has done to save them in Jesus Christ. Notice specifically what that involved:

- He has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (v. 12). This speaks of our possession.
- He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son (v. 13). This speaks of our position.
- He has redeemed us and forgiven us of our sins in Christ (v. 14). This speaks of our pardon.

The gospel is the answer to dispelling the darkness of this world and setting men and women free from the power of sin. The gospel addresses at a fundamental and practical level what is wrong. The world tries to solve its problems by appealing to finances, race, education. The problem of lawless behavior isn't an issue of what side of the tracks a person lives on. It isn't political or environmental. It is spiritual. And until men and women in our society awaken to the reality that man is not simply physical and mental, but is spiritual, then we will be like a dog chasing its own tail. Our society no longer has a category for spiritual evil. We're trying to lump everything into a pile of mental health or politics and a host of other things. The problem is the depravity of man. When your problem is spiritual, then there is no amount of money, education, or medications that you can throw at it to cure it. The cure must always fit the disease. Lostness is the problem, and the gospel is the cure! As Christians, you and I live to praise God for what He has done for us in Christ. And what He's done for us, He can do for anybody who confesses their sin and trusts in Christ.

This is how prayer brings some much needed perspective into our lives. Friends, it is important for possessing a truly biblical worldview. It is the means by which God shapes our minds and hearts to see the world as He does. When Paul prays for these Colossian believers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, he is calling them—and us—to a life where every thought, choice, and action reflects the reality of Christ's kingdom. Friend, you cannot live with a truly biblical worldview in your own strength. You need the wisdom, the endurance, and the redemption that only the Lord Jesus provides. Paul ends this passage reminding us that we have been rescued from the domain of darkness and brought into the kingdom of the Son He loves. That's not just information—it's an invitation to life.

Years ago, missionary Hudson Taylor was sailing to China when a fierce storm threatened the ship. The captain, a man of little faith, asked Taylor to pray because the wind had completely died and they were drifting toward dangerous reefs. Taylor agreed—but only if the crew would first set the sails. The captain thought it foolish with no breeze in sight, but he obeyed. While Taylor prayed below deck, the captain rushed back to report: "God has sent the wind. The sails are full!" The danger passed, and the voyage continued.

That story really captures the heart of these verses. Prayer changes how we see reality. It changes our perspective. Hudson Taylor believed God was present and powerful even when the circumstances said otherwise. And my friend, that's the worldview Paul longs for us to embrace. How might your perspective need to be changed today? Pray!