

SESSION 2

Christ's sufficiency

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

Colossians 1:9–13

BUILDUP THEME

INTERNALIZE GODLINESS

God provides the wisdom in His Word for the believer's daily walk.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

Students will choose two ways to deepen their spiritual walks with the Lord.

MEMORY VERSE

"That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ What do you want to do? What do you want to be? Who do you feel you are on the inside? These questions dominate current thinking. The emphasis is on introspection as the means of determining one's personal truth and plotting one's path in life.
- ☐ Such modern thought patterns have ancient Gnostic characteristics. Gnosticism is an ancient system based on belief in secret knowledge that was supposed to help a person progress from the physical to the spiritual. The Colossian heresy could be called an early form of Gnosticism. Proponents of the Colossian heresy believed they had a knowledge superior to the Bible.
- ☐ Read Colossians 1:9–13. Paul prayed the Colossians would get in tune with God's will and then live accordingly. Instead of looking inward for answers, they needed to look to God and His Word.
- ☐ Pray Paul's prayer for your students this week as you study the passage for this session. As you teach, emphasize the need for your students to be intentional in seeking to know God and His will.

Session Summary

Paul prayed that the Colossian Christians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will. Such knowledge would be sufficient for the Colossian believers to live according to God's will. Paul also prayed the Colossians would walk worthy of the Lord. Walking worthy includes bearing spiritual fruit, increasing in one's knowledge of God, being strengthened by God's might for patience and longsuffering, and being thankful for one's heavenly inheritance and present deliverance from the power of darkness.

Session Starters

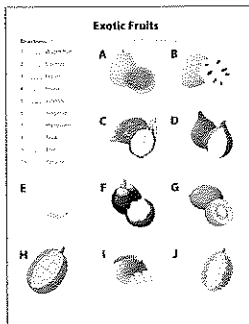
Option 1—Exotic Fruits

Gather

- Resource 63-R5.
- Exotic fruit sample (optional).

Steps

1. Give each student a copy of resource 63-R5. Give the students a few minutes to match the exotic fruit with its name.
2. Read the following answers: (1) C; (2) E; (3) J; (4) A; (5) H; (6) B; (7) F; (8) D; (9) G; (10) I.
3. Have students report how many matches they got right. Congratulate anyone who got 5 or more correct. Discuss a few of the fruits.



63-R5

Most likely you had never heard of some of these fruits. The durian grows in the Philippines and Malaysia. The fruit smells so bad that public transport of the fruit is banned. Yet, people will use them in desserts. The jackfruit can weigh up to 80 pounds. The texture is like pulled pork, but the flavor is sweet. Junglesop can weigh as much as 33 pounds. It grows natively in Central Africa and can have either a sweet or sour taste. The fruit is usually only eaten as a last resort when other foods are scarce.

4. Offer samples of exotic fruits if you brought some to class and transition to the Bible study.

Those promoting the Colossian heresy, an early form of Gnosticism, claimed superiority to the Bible and secret knowledge about how to live successfully. But there was no real fruit for people who followed their teachings. Paul countered by listing what it means to walk worthy of the Lord. There was nothing secret about it. In fact, bearing fruit is one of the marks. We will cover the other marks in this lesson. Paul's overall point is that God's Word is sufficient to provide for our daily spiritual growth.

Option 2—Recognizing Gnostic Thinking

Steps

1. Discuss the emphasis on knowledge and the individual in society today.

To most of us the idea of a person identifying as a gender other than the one that matches his or her body is ridiculous. And the notion

that a person could identify as genderless or as multiple genders is even more absurd. We couldn't have imagined such new ways of thinking would emerge in our lifetimes. But the belief that spawned such actions isn't new at all. Gnosticism is an ancient system based on belief in secret knowledge that was supposed to help a person progress from the physical to the spiritual. What a person *thought* was more important than physical reality. Belief in an individual person's reality is a Gnostic way of thinking. That is essentially what is happening in the gender identity movement. The person is elevated above the world and reality. A person's view of reality is elevated above factual reality.

2. Discuss the presence of Gnostic thought in society today.

ASK: How else do you see individual thought being elevated about reality? (Q1)

ASK: What does the elevation of individual thought often do to interpersonal relationships? (Q2) *The relationships suffer, for the person sees self as more important than anyone else. People, including parents, who point to reality are seen as the person's enemies.*

3. Transition to the Bible study.

In this session we will study Paul's teaching on the sufficiency of Christ and the believer's opportunity to know God and His will. We will learn that learning God's will leads to selflessness, patience, and longsuffering. Believers doing God's will find their identity in Christ.

Bible Study

As with Paul's opening address, his prayer beginning in verse 9 addressed the underlying threat of the Colossian heresy. Paul prayed for the Colossians regarding God's will and their walk. Both requests showed that the heretics in Colosse had nothing to offer the Colossian believers. And both requests reflect what we should pray both for ourselves and our fellow believers.

I. The Request to Know God's Will (Col. 1:9)

READ: Colossians 1:9.

Note that the faith, hope, and love already evident in the Colossians (1:3–8) prompted Paul and his companions to take their prayer for the Colossians to a new level. They saw true spiritual momentum and didn't want it to wain or be derailed. So Paul, Timothy, and Epaphras prayed for the Colossians fervently and consistently. They began their prayer with a request regarding God's will.

A. Fully (1:9)

Paul prayed the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will (1:9). By "God's will" Paul didn't simply mean whether the Colossians should change jobs, start a family, or move across town. He had in mind God's will for their spiritual lives. He wanted them to fully realize God's purpose for believers. Such realization comes from a close relationship with and a serious respect for God (Prov. 1:7). The Colossians had already shown signs of such a relationship with and respect for God. Their hearts and minds were fertile and ready to bear more fruit so long as their soil wasn't tainted by the Colossian heresy.

The promoters of the Colossian heresy believed they had a corner on a special, secret knowledge and perceived themselves as know-it-alls in the church. Wanting to counter this notion, Paul wrote that he was praying the Colossian believers would be filled with the *epiginosis* ("clear knowledge") of God's will. The word "filled" conveys the meaning of being "permeated with" or "controlled by." There was no room and no need for any extra, mysterious knowledge. The knowledge of God's will was all the Colossians needed. And Paul's letter to them, along with the rest of Scripture, would help them know and understand God better so they might live out His will for their lives. God's Word is integral for our learning of God's will too.

READ: Psalm 119:104, 105, 130. **ASK:** What does God's Word do for us? (Q3) *It reveals God to us and shows us how to walk in His way. It is our light for life.*

ASK: What are some religions that claim to have knowledge above or in addition to the Bible? (Q4) *Roman Catholicism; Mormonism; Jehovah's Witnesses.*

READ: 2 Peter 1:2, 3. **ASK:** What is Peter's answer to such claims? (Q5) *In His Word, God has given us all the things that pertain to life and godliness through our knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ.*

Paul prayed not only that the Colossians would know God's will fully but also that they would know it functionally.

B. Functionally (1:9)

Paul prayed that the Colossians would know God's will so thoroughly that they would be able to use that knowledge effectively. In other words, he wanted them to have a firsthand, functional knowledge of God's will. With the complete Bible and an array of study tools, we can obtain an intellectual knowledge of God's will quicker than the Colossians could. But to really know God's will is to live it.

"Wisdom" in verse 9 refers to knowledge of the truth, and "spiritual understanding" refers to the ability to apply the truth to situations that

The same Greek word for "filled" (1:9) appears in Ephesians 5:18, a verse that commands believers to be filled with the Holy Spirit. In both verses, "controlled" is an accurate synonym for "filled."

require decisions and action. The Holy Spirit works in believers' hearts to give them spiritual understanding. The Colossian believers needed wisdom to distinguish truth from error, and they needed spiritual understanding to check the advances of those who promoted error.

READ: Isaiah 8:20. **ASK:** What warning did Isaiah give the people of Judah about religious impostors? (Q6) *If they don't speak according to God's Word, they have no light. True believers have been transported from darkness to light.*

Every believer needs wisdom and spiritual understanding. Numerous false teachings compete against the Truth, and complex issues swirl around us every day. If we study God's Word, observing sound principles of interpretation, we will learn how to recognize and reject wrong beliefs and behavior. But beyond that, we will learn God's will for our daily lives, including our relationships.

READ: James 3:17. **ASK:** James described true wisdom. Would you say your life gives evidence of living by true wisdom? Which of his descriptions show you need to be applying true wisdom to your life? (Q7)

II. The Request to Walk Worthy (Col. 1:10–14)

READ: Colossians 1:10a. **ASK:** Why is physical walking a good picture of spiritual growth? (Q8) *Walking includes movement and progress. It moves the individual closer to a goal. Spiritual growth moves a person closer to Christlikeness.*

Our spiritual walk should be fully pleasing to the Lord. Paul stated in his letter to Corinth that he made it his life's aim to be well pleasing to the Lord, knowing he would one day stand before the Lord to be rewarded for his good works (2 Cor. 5:9, 10). So what is included in walking worthy of the Lord? Paul listed four participles to help the Colossians understand living in a manner that the Lord finds pleasing.

A. Bearing fruit (1:10)

As we already learned, James mentioned bearing fruit as an indicator of the application of God's wisdom (James 3:17). And Paul commented on the fruit of the gospel earlier in his letter (Col. 1:6). Paul picked up on the fruit theme again, listing it first among the indicators that the Colossians were walking worthy of the Lord.

READ: Colossians 1:10b.

The believer who applies God's wisdom will be fruitful in every good work. Such good works are the result of God's grace and not the reason for God's grace. In other words, we don't do good works to earn God's grace and favor. We do good works because God has saved us and already given us His enabling grace.

Our good works should become second nature as we learn God's will through faithful understanding and application of His Word. God will be pleased with our good works because they further His work on earth and testify to His enabling grace in our lives.

ASK: If your fruitful good works were each represented by real fruit, how many pieces of fruit would you have? (Q9)

ASK: What are some fruitful good works you would like to see in your life? What can you do to see them come to fruition? (Q10)

B. Increasing in knowledge (1:10)

No matter how many years we study the Bible, we will never exhaust the treasures of God's Word. The more we learn about the Lord, the more we see there is still much to learn. We should keep on increasing in the knowledge of God (Col. 1:10). Such increase is Paul's second mark of those walking worthy of and pleasing to the Lord.

Job knew God well. He feared and respected God, but he had so much more to learn. During a time of tremendous emotional and physical pain, he admitted his knowledge of God had been severely limited.

READ: Job 42:5, 6.

The Colossian heresy was in part based on Gnosticism. Gnostics taught that a series of emanations separated humanity from God. They insisted that to know God, a person must struggle up the ladder of emanations to reach Him. Paul taught that believers already know God personally and get to know Him better as they walk with Him over the course of a lifetime. There is no ladder with rungs to climb. And people aren't in a process of becoming God. Man will never become God.

ASK: Name two or three significant truths you have learned about God since becoming a believer. (Q11)

C. Being strengthened (1:11)

Those walking worthy of and pleasing to the Lord will also be known for their spiritual strength and joy no matter their circumstances.

1. Extensively (1:11)

READ: Colossians 1:11.

Trying to succeed spiritually in one's own power is like trying to run a house on a single AAA battery. Don't expect to find any more spiritual light in that life than you would find in that house. Paul prayed that the Colossians would know God's power extensively and practically.

God is all-powerful. When Abraham's wife Sarah laughed upon hearing that she would become pregnant, the Lord asked Abraham, "Why did

Sarah laugh and ask whether she would bear a child in her old age? Is anything too hard for Me?" (Gen. 18:13, 14). Like Sarah, a believer may need to be reminded that nothing is impossible with God. He can turn even a seemingly impossible situation into an accomplished act.

ASK: Could a believer ever rightfully say that successfully living for God is not possible? Explain. (Q12) *No. Since we are strengthened with God's might, we can do anything God asks us to do.*

Nothing is too hard for God. He created all things, and He is in control of all things. There is nothing in our lives He can't handle. What a relief to know that God's power carries us along as we strive to grow spiritually!

2. Practically (1:11)

Surrounded by paganism, scrutinized by their neighbors, and stalked by false teachers, first-century believers in Colosse found themselves in stressful circumstances. A thorough knowledge of God and His power, however, would enable them to surmount every trial joyfully and respond to every antagonist with patience (Col. 1:11).

Paul used two words to describe the practical strength God gives believers. The first has to do with bearing up under affliction or persecution. The word points to the "thing" that the believer is facing. The other word means to exercise patience toward the "people" who are causing the affliction or persecution. God gives believers strength to resist lashing out and attacking uncharitable and antagonistic people. By God's strength the believer responds to unkindness with kindness, to meanness with meekness, and to hatred with love. God's glorious power can make us gracious people!

ASK: What situations might we perceive to be beyond the range of God's power? (Q13)

READ: Hebrews 12:2, 3. **ASK:** How well did Christ demonstrate the power of the Father in His life? (Q14) *Perfectly. He died on the cross to be the finisher of our faith; He endured the cross, despised the shame of that kind of death, and put up with sinners' hostility.*

Knowing God and experiencing His power in our lives does more for us than simply help us endure trials and unjust treatment; it helps us endure with joyfulness (Col. 1:11). It is easy to be happy when life presents favorable happenstances, but joyfulness derives from the Holy Spirit rather than from happenstances. It is a supernatural quality developed in us by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). Trials may rob us of our health and possessions, but they cannot rob us of our joy. We can surrender our joy, but nothing can steal it from us.

D. Giving thanks (1:12—14)

Paul included giving thanks as the final mark of walking worthy of and pleasing to the Lord.

1. For an inheritance (1:12)

Walking among rose bushes, some people curse the thorns, but others cherish the fragrance. Similarly, walking through life, some believers malign their circumstances, but others magnify God's goodness. The different responses reflect different focuses. A focus on circumstances produces grumbling, whereas a focus on God's goodness produces gratitude. Paul was praying that the Colossians would give thanks to the Father.

READ: Colossians 1:12.

ASK: How does praising God affect your outlook on life? (Q15)

By His grace, God has qualified each of us to share a rich inheritance with other believers as saints in light. We have inherited spiritual possessions and a title deed to a home in Heaven. No doubt many of the Colossian believers were slaves, but God had given them an inheritance—freedom in Christ, spiritual status, and the prospect of a home in Heaven.

The apostle Peter described the believer's inheritance as incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, and reserved in heaven (1 Pet. 1:4). This inheritance is exceedingly more valuable and secure than any inheritance a believer might receive on earth. We should regularly thank God for this inheritance.

2. For deliverance (1:13)

READ: Colossians 1:13

Life in Egypt must have been dreary and gloomy for the Hebrew slaves. But the spiritual darkness of Egypt was surely worse. Appropriately, when God judged Egypt with ten plagues, the ninth plague (Exod. 10:21–23) plunged the land into such a deep darkness that the darkness matched that of Egypt's spiritual condition. Later God delivered the Hebrews from that dark kingdom and led them to the Promised Land. Paul assured the Colossian believers that God had also delivered them from the power of darkness (Col. 1:13).

Like the Colossians, we, too, have been delivered from the power of darkness. When God saved us, He snatched us from the clutches of Satan and from eternal darkness. We were once in darkness, but now we are "light in the Lord" (Eph. 5:8).

God called Israel out of Egypt, gave the people an inheritance in Canaan, and called them to be a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6). Similarly, He has delivered us from the power of darkness, given us an

inheritance, and called us to be a royal priesthood, holy nation, and a peculiar people (1 Pet. 2:9). As God's people, we anticipate reigning with Christ when He establishes His Kingdom on the earth (Col. 1:27; 3:4; 2 Tim. 2:12). Keeping our hearts focused on Christ's Kingdom will motivate us to thank God even when our adversaries in the dark kingdom assault us feverishly.

ASK: What might you do to keep God's goodness at the forefront of your mind? (Q16)

3. For redemption (1:14)

READ: Colossians 1:14.

Redemption is the act that involves paying a price to acquire something. The New Testament concept of redemption stems from words meaning to buy someone in the slave market, to rescue the person from the slave market, and to set him or her free. Specifically the word "redemption" in Colossians 1:14 means "to set free from." We are redeemed through the blood of Christ.

READ: Romans 6:22; 8:1–4.

Redemption set us free from sin (and by implication, wickedness and eternal death), from the law of sin and death, and from the flesh. As believers we are now God's servants and no longer obligated to sin.

Because Christ's blood provided perfect redemption for us, we are no longer condemned sinners. We are now pardoned sinners and forgiven members of God's family. For that we should be thanking God every day!

Session Application

Gather

- Fresh fruit.
- Dry or spoiled fruit.

Steps

1. Emphasize the importance of God's Word in daily spiritual growth.

Daily spiritual growth and its accompanying joy aren't a secret. God plainly tells us that we can grow spiritually and experience joy through the truth in His Word. Our job is to get into His Word.

ASK: Based on the amount and quality of time you have recently devoted to God's Word, how important is it in your life? (Q17)

Display some fruit that is fresh and appetizing. Then display some fruit that is either rotten or dry. Have the learners think about which fruit best represents the spiritual fruit in their lives.

ASK: What would you say to me if I tried to sell you my overripe and dry fruit?

ASK: If you could transform the spiritual fruit in your life into a real piece of fruit, would you want to eat it? (Q18)

2. Have each learner determine two ways to deepen his or her walk with God. (Q19)

