

Paul's Prayer for Struggling Christians (Colossians 1:1-12)

Not Just Another Introduction (1-8)

It can be tempting, when reading Paul's letters, to rush through the opening verses in order to get to the central points of the writing. I mean, they all seem to say the same thing, don't they? *Paul is an apostle. Maybe Timothy is with him. His readers are saints. Peace and grace be with you all.*

But this is more than just another introduction from Paul. It may sound familiar to us, but to the original audience, these words were exactly what they needed to hear. As was discussed in the introduction to this study, the Colossian church was being made to feel less confident and secure in their Christianity. However, Christ doesn't want His Christians feeling this way, and His apostle immediately does what he can to encourage them. Read through Colossians 1:1-8, and watch how favorably Paul describes the readers' spirituality.

- They are “*saints*,” or holy ones (1:2).
- They are “*faithful brethren*” (1:2).
- Their faith in Christ is both praiseworthy and known by others (1:3-4).
- They have a reputation for loving each other (1:4, 8).
- They should have an expectation of heaven (1:5).
- The gospel has made its impact on the Colossians, as it has with other Christians throughout the world (1:6).
- The gospel has been truly and thoroughly understood by the Colossians (1:6).

If I was feeling unsure in my standing with Christ, and then heard these words, I would surely be encouraged. No doubt the Colossians appreciated these words. The disheartening influences and opinions of those in the second chapter now mean less since an apostle has spoken so favorably of their character. I don't believe the original audience would have read through these initial verses as quickly as you and I may; they would have embraced these opening statements, finding assurance and optimism in every word.

The Gospel is On the Move (5-7)

In Paul's introduction, the Colossians' spirituality isn't getting all of the attention; his mention of the gospel is also noticeable. The gospel, which is the core message of the redemptive works of Christ, is described as “*the word of truth*” (1:5) and “*the grace of God in truth*” (1:6). It was brought to the Colossians by Epaphras, who is considered a bond-slave and faithful servant of Christ (1:7). Paul later identified Epaphras as one of the members of the Colossian church (4:12), who was with Paul in prison (4:18). Because of Epaphras' efforts, the gospel was “*bearing fruit and increasing*” in the Lycus River area (1:6). The gospel is also impacting “*all the world*,” which Paul almost certainly means the Roman Empire and beyond (1:6).

Paul's Prayer (1:9)

While the apostle is thankful for the faithfulness of the church (1:3), he continues to pray, asking that his readers would “*be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding*” (1:9). Let's break this prayer down.

1. “*Be filled*” – this Greek word occurs a few other times in this letter. Twice it is in reference to a preacher's ministry being completely carried out (1:25; 4:17). It is also used to describe the spiritual adequacy found in Christ (2:10). Paul knows these Christians need reassurance that their Christianity is working, and the best way for this to happen is for the Colossians to attain a full knowledge of Christ (2:2).

2. *“Knowledge/wisdom/understanding”* – *“knowledge”* might be better translated *“true knowledge,”* as in Colossians 2:2 and 3:10 (NASB). *“Wisdom”* is also repeated in this letter (1:28; 2:3, 23; 3:16; 4:5). The Greek word for *“understanding”* is a less common word which Paul uses, and is meant to indicate shrewdness or insight. While some may want an explanation of the differences between these three words, Paul would have us focus on the distinction between what is actually true, and those things which others may believe to be true, but aren’t (2:23). There is that which is from Christ, and that which isn’t; understanding this difference leads to one standing firm in their faith.
3. *“His will/spiritual wisdom”* – there are going to be teachings which originate with man, and the Colossians should understand that they are just that – worldly. Paul warns that such earthly instructions should not captivate them (2:8). The Christian has *“died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world”* (2:20). The knowledge that any Christian needs to be confident in their relationship with Christ is a heavenly, spiritual wisdom of God’s will – nothing more.

Walk in a Manner Worthy of the Lord (1:10-14)

Let’s be clear, we can never be worthy of what Jesus Christ did on the cross. Our salvation is completely underserved on our part. So when Paul says to *“walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”* (1:10), he isn’t speaking about earning forgiveness. He is, however, teaching about a lifestyle which is fitting and expected by those who claim Christ as their Lord. While full assurance in Christ starts with knowing the right things, it also involves doing the right things.

When Paul says *“walk,”* he is using a Greek word which more literally means to walk around. The NIV translates this *“to live a life”* rather than *“to walk.”* Paul is addressing a particular lifestyle that pleases Christ. To further emphasize this instruction, Paul says this walk pleases Christ *“in all respects”* (1:10). There is not one part of the Christian’s life that he gets to keep to himself; Christ means to affect every bit of it.

Before we take a look at what this lifestyle involves, let’s make sure we understand that Paul uses the terminology of walking in a manner worthy of the Lord in other writings, though with different meanings. For example, Paul instructs the Ephesians to *“walk in a manner worthy”* of their calling, yet he is referring to maintaining unity within the church (Eph. 4:1-3). When this phrase is used in 1 Thessalonians, it is likely alluding the church’s perseverance in a community hostile to Christianity.

So what is Paul talking about in Colossians? What does this lifestyle look like? While this is somewhat lost in translation, Paul provides some structure with four participles (words ending with *“-ing”*), showing us exactly what sort of lifestyle pleases Christ.

1. **A lifestyle which is bearing fruit in every good work** (1:10). There are all sorts of verses about Christians bearing fruit. But when we take a textual look of what Paul is speaking of in this letter, the fruit which Christ should see in our lives can be found in chapter three. Starting in verse 12, Paul instructs the Christian to be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, patient, loving, as well as being godly in the specified relationships (3:12-4:2). A life which is characterized by these traits pleases our Lord.
2. **A lifestyle which is increasing in the knowledge of God** (1:10). The word *“increasing”* is interesting. While we can truly know the Lord’s will, we will never be in a position where we have learned it all. There is always more to learn. And the more you learn, the more grounded you are in the faith.
3. **A lifestyle which is being strengthened with all power** (1:11). Strength is exactly what these Colossians need. Christianity is not for the weak, and these believers have been weakened as they’ve allowed the opinions of others to affect their confidence in the Lord. This strength is not a physical strength, but a spiritual fortitude that is not easily moved. Perhaps Paul is alluding to

the strengthening work of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16). Or maybe the strength is based on knowing the Lord's will more completely. The latter seems to fit contextually. Either way, this strength results in "*all steadfastness and patience*" (1:11).

4. **A lifestyle which is giving thanks to the Father** (1:12). Much has been said about assurance and confidence in Christ in this study. And rightly so, that is the major theme of Colossians. But another unavoidable concept has been peppered throughout this letter; the idea of thankfulness (1:3; 2:7; 3:15, 16, 17; 4:2). Such thankfulness is based on how God "*has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light*" (1:12). The word "*qualified*" means that God has made us adequate. We were sinners, residing in that "*domain of darkness*" (1:13), but by the redemptive work of Christ and His atoning blood, the Christian has been "*rescued*" from sin and "*transferred*" into Christ's kingdom (1:13). And if one is in Christ's kingdom, he has "*redemption, the forgiveness of sins*" (1:14). All of these spiritual blessings lead the believers to an overwhelming attitude of thanksgiving.

What You Can Do

- **Pray for the gospel** to make an impact, not just in your life, but in your community and throughout the world. The gospel was moving, bearing fruit and increasing, when Paul was writing to the Colossians. Pray that the gospel continues to do so, and get involved by sharing your faith with others.
- **Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord**, by improving in the four specific areas mentioned earlier. Can you be more humble, kind, and patient? Can you do more to increase your knowledge of God's will? How thankful are you for your salvation and placement in the kingdom? Remember, we need to live lives which are pleasing to Christ.
- **Mark in your Bible** the mentions of wisdom and thanksgiving found in Colossians (the specific verses were mentioned earlier). Circle the phrase "*walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,*" then underline the participles in the following verses (also mentioned earlier). In doing so you'll be able to more easily see what Paul is driving at in those verses.