

## 属天眼光的祷告——歌罗西书 1:9-14

### Heavenly Minded Prayer -- Colossians 1:9-14

#### *Introduction, Context, Outline*

- Scripture reading: Luke 11:1-13, Jesus' teaching on prayer
- At the beginning of the letter, Paul thanked and prayed to God for the Colossians with a heavenly perspective. Last time we studied his heavenly minded thanksgiving (v. 3-8), today we will look at his heavenly minded prayer (v. 9-14).
- Outline
  - A. The Context of Paul's Prayer (v. 9a)
    1. Reason: Thriving Spiritual Lives of the Colossian Believers
    2. Manner: Unceasingly
    3. Elements: Thanksgiving, Petition, (& Praise)
  - B. The Content of Paul's Prayer (vv. 9b-14)
    1. The Key: Filled with the Knowledge of God's Will (v. 9b)
    2. The Result: A God-pleasing Life in All Respects (v. 10a)
      - Aspects of a God-pleasing Life (vv. 10b-14)
        - a. Bearing the Fruit of Good Works (v. 10b)
        - b. Increasing in the Knowledge of God (v. 10c)
        - c. Persevering with Patience and Joy (v. 11)
        - d. Thanking God for Spiritual Blessings (vv. 12-14)
          - 1) For the Inheritance of the Saints
          - 2) For the Deliverance from the Darkness
          - 3) For the Transference into the Kingdom

#### **The Context of Paul's Prayer**

##### *1. Reason for prayer*

- "For this reason", "since the day we heard of it" (v. 9a): The reason that moved Paul to pray was the report he heard from Epaphras (v. 4-5, 8).

Question: weird logic? The report was a very good one, that the Colossians were spiritually prosperous. Why should that motivate Paul to pray? Shouldn't we pray for those who have spiritual problems? "Lord, please help this couple resolve their conflict; please help that co-worker to be humble and submissive; please grant saving faith to my unbelieving friend..."

Answer: 1. Satan's scheme; 2. God's will. Satan loves to attack those who thrive spiritually, so they need more prayer support. And, God causes all things to work together so as to sanctify us and ultimately glorify us in heaven, and all these are God's will for *believers*. Therefore, the more someone manifests a saved life, the more we can be sure of God's will for him/her and that our prayers for him/her are indeed according to God's will, and so He will surely hear and answer those prayers.

Application examples: "Thank you, Lord, for giving this brother a thriving spiritual life, and please continue to help him grow! Thank you, Lord, for giving us faithful elders and co-workers, and would you please help them know you more and keep them away from Satan's temptations!..."

##### *2. Manner of prayer*

- "Have not ceased to pray" (v.9a): unceasingly, intermittently. It could be an exaggeration, but if we understand the nature of prayer in a broader sense, it can also be literally non-stop and unceasing.

To pray isn't just to utter the words. We need to see the nature of prayer in a broader sense that it is a state of living where one continually obeys God, trusts God, and seeks God at all times. Praying unceasingly is simply to live in a perpetual state of God-consciousness, as well as people-consciousness. *"Your love for God leads you to seek unbroken communion with Him; and your love for people drives you to unceasing prayer on their behalf."*

Example/application: "If we meet someone, we immediately consider where they stand with God. If we hear of something bad happening, we react by praying for God to act in the situation because we know He cares. If we hear of something good that has happened, we respond with immediate praise to God for it because we know He is glorified."

### 3. Elements of prayer

- "Thanksgiving" (v. 3), "Supplication" (v. 9a): Two of the four elements of ACTS. ACTS — Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication.

Note: The next paragraph (v. 15-20) is grammatically connected to this prayer. If we take the next paragraph also as part of the prayer, its content would be adoration. This way, three elements of ACTS are embodied in this whole prayer.

## The Content of Paul's Prayer

### 1. *The Key: Filled with the Knowledge of God's Will*

- "Be filled with the knowledge" (v. 9b): "be filled with" often expresses being completely controlled by a certain influence. E.g., filled with grief (John 16:6), filled with joy (Acts 13:52), filled with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18), filled with Satan (Acts 5:3), etc. Here Paul wants them to be filled with knowledge, that is, to be completely controlled by that knowledge. E.g., if you say you know the importance of Bible reading and prayer but you always find excuses not to do so, then you're not really "filled with the knowledge."
- "His will" (v. 9b): the object of the knowledge. Paul wants them to know God's will very well and be completely controlled by this knowledge. Knowing God's will is vital to Christian life.

Personal example: God's will for church pastors is to devote to prayer and to the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4) and shepherd the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2), so I know I have to prioritize these things and give my best to them, even though there are many good things worth doing. If I do many other good things but ignore God's will for me, can I still please God?

Theological expansion: the two types of God's will — sovereign will (what God intends *Himself* to do, see Isaiah 46:10, Ephesians 1:11), commanded will (what God intends *for us* to do, see Psalm 143:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18). The former is irresistible and is always accomplished; the latter requires our obedience where we make God's will our own! When Paul prays for believers to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, both aspects are included. If you don't know His sovereign will, your faith has no foundation, and the rushing waves of life will easily overturn your little boat; if you don't know His commanded will, there is no principle in your life, and you'd walk in darkness and trip and fall and don't even know what you tripped over.

"Spiritual wisdom and understanding" (v. 9b): Describe how to be filled with God's will.

"Understanding" is the ability to use knowledge to perceive realities properly, and "wisdom" is the

ability to use knowledge to solve practical problems. Both are the ability to apply knowledge. It is not enough to have the head knowledge of God's will. We must learn to apply it with spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Examples: Knowledge—God wants me to be humble; understanding—what does humility look like in reality; wisdom—how to live out humility practically.

How to distinguish between "spiritual" and "worldly" wisdom? **James 3:13-17**. In short, worldly wisdom is prideful and self-loving, and spiritual wisdom is humble and loves others. **The key is not the kind of skills, but the spiritual character in using them!**

## 2. *The Result: A God-pleasing Life in All Respects*

- “So that you will.....”(v. 10): Indicating purpose. Knowing God’s will is very important, but it is only the means to the end, which is, to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects." For believers, there is no better blessing than this!

Application: Have you prayed for this best blessing for your brothers and sisters? Or are all your prayers focused mainly on things like good health or a successful career?

Aspects of a God-pleasing Life:

### a. *Bearing the Fruit of Good Works*

- “Bearing fruit in every good work” (v. 10b): Bearing fruit is a metaphor for the external outworking of the internal nature (see Matthew 12:33). The purpose of bearing fruit is not to glorify ourselves, but to glorify God (see Romans 7:4).

### b. *Increasing in the Knowledge of God*

- “Increasing in the knowledge of God” (v.10c): the purpose of knowing God’s will (v. 9) is to know God. The latter is relational knowledge. Our relational knowledge of God is dynamic and will grow. Our relationship with God will become more and more intimate.

Reflection: Will eternal life in heaven be boring? Eternal life is not a static condition. It is an ongoing sweet fellowship with God, in a fully sanctified body, mind, and soul, for an infinite period of time, as one lives on perfectly in God’s will at all times, so his intimate knowledge of God ever increases, becoming deeper and deeper with every passing moment! What a blessed hope! Doesn’t that stimulate us to strive to live in God's will today?!

### c. *Persevering with Patience and Joy*

- “Strengthened with all power” (v. 11): not the power to do any and every thing, but to attain “all perseverance and patience joyously”. When things go wrong, it is easy for us to get impatient, which is a natural response of the flesh. In order to persevere with patience, you need the power of the Spirit to restrain the lust of the flesh. This is the spiritual power.

Thinking: There are many aspects to spiritual character. The reason patience and perseverance are highlighted here is probably because the Colossian church was facing serious troubles within and without, so patience and perseverance were very important. Our circumstances today are much better, and it should be much easier to persevere and be patient, but do we still find ourselves often falling into temptations, losing patience with one another and with life circumstances, failing to be grateful towards God? Pray for God to fill us with the knowledge of His will, so we can be strengthened to be patient and persevere in all things.

d. *Thanking God for Spiritual Blessings*

- “Giving thanks to the Father” (v. 12a): V. 3-8 are Paul’s own thanksgiving. Here he prays for the readers to live a life of thanksgiving.

The importance of thanksgiving: See Luke 17:11-19. Of the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus, only one gave thanks, and only one was saved.

1) For the Inheritance of the Saints

- “Qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (v. 12b): All the blessings God has prepared for believers in heaven. The verb “to inherit” is often used in this sense: “to inherit eternal life”, “to inherit the earth”, and “to inherit the kingdom of God”. It cannot be earned with a price, but can only be inherited on the basis of a father-son relationship.

“Has qualified us” implies a qualification, and the qualification for inheritance is sonship. Sonship of God requires holiness, for God is holy, and that’s why the inheritance is “of the saints (holy ones)”. Thank God for making us saints through the salvation of Jesus Christ!

2) For the Deliverance from the Darkness

- “He rescued us from the domain of darkness” (v. 13a): “The domain of darkness” is the domain of Satan and sin. Unbelievers are completely controlled by the power of darkness. They sin constantly, and cannot do anything that pleases God.

Ephesians 2:2-4 “In which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience.....”

Believers are rescued from the “domain of darkness” – not just the punishment for sin, but also the power of sin. We are no longer slaves to sin but have become slaves of righteousness (see Romans 6:17-18).

3) For the Transference into the Kingdom

- “Transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (v. 13b): “the kingdom of His beloved Son” is the kingdom in which Christ reigns. Satan's reign has been done away with. Now, Jesus is the only Lord in our lives!
- “In whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” (v. 14): This is the core of the gospel, forgiveness and salvation can only be found in God’s beloved Son. “Redemption” emphasizes a transaction, where God paid a great price to buy us for Himself and we became a people for His own possession. Not only have we been rescued from sin and punishment, but we have become part of God’s loving family as blessed children.

Summary of thanking God for spiritual blessings: focus on the past—rescued from the domain of darkness; focus on the present—transferred into the kingdom of the beloved Son; focus on the future—qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints. How can we not give thanks for so rich a salvation!

Concluding application: Imitate Paul's example and pray for brothers and sisters with a heavenly perspective. Would you be committed to that?