

# Colossians 1:9-14

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<sup>9s</sup> *We have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you.*

Paul was a great intercessor and was always praying for the churches – both those he had visited and those he had only heard about. He was also not afraid to ask for things in his prayers because he knew what he was asking for was what God would want for the Colossians. And the things he asks for are related to fullness – fullness in knowledge and fullness in power.

## The Realm of Knowledge

<sup>9b</sup> *We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding.* <sup>10</sup> *Then the way you live will always honour and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better.*

### Gnosis vs Epignosis

Paul prays that they might have complete knowledge of God's will. Most likely one of the things the false teachers were offering was extra secret knowledge of God. The Greek word for knowledge is gnosis and it was out of this idea that there was extra secret knowledge of God that Gnosticism was to grow and become a threat to the church in the second century. The idea that you can somehow become a “better” Christian through some “special” knowledge fascinates some people – its gives a feeling of power. But Paul will have none of this. There is nothing special about complete knowledge of his will, no secret knowledge that you need, they can ask for full knowledge of God's will (epignosis) and that is what Paul prays for them. And we can ask for spiritual wisdom and understanding. But note what this is for – so that then you will be able to live lives that always honour and please the Lord.

### How can we have complete knowledge of God's will?

But the question is how? How can we have complete knowledge of God's will and spiritual wisdom and understanding? How do we know God's will. Well, His will is revealed in the Scriptures.

What we need is wisdom and understanding to translate that into everyday life – that is what we need to pray for. This is what David prayed for for Solomon (1 Chronicles 22:12) and what Solomon prayed for himself (2 Chronicles 1:10)

<sup>11</sup> *“Now, my son, may the LORD be with you and give you success as you follow his directions in building the Temple of the LORD your God.* <sup>12</sup> *And may the LORD give you wisdom and understanding, that you may obey the Law of the LORD your God as you rule over Israel.* (1 Chronicles 22:11-12)

<sup>10</sup> *Give me the wisdom and knowledge to lead them properly, for who could possibly govern this great people of yours?”* (2 Chronicles 1:10)

As Paul puts in Romans:

<sup>2</sup> *Don't copy the behaviour and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and*



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*pleasing and perfect.* (Romans 12:2)

### **What is spirituality?**

To get to verse 10 we have to go through verse 9 – if we want to honour and please the Lord then we need to ask for spiritual wisdom and understanding. Spirituality is very much based in the material – it's not about speaking in tongues or receiving visits from angels or hearing words from God. Those do happen but the reality is based in the stuff of life – marriage, work, family life etc. Look at Paul's letters for example – the first part is normally doctrine, who God is and what he has done, the second part is practical. And what does he cover? How to speak to angels? No. It's about controlling your tongue, how you live today in the midst of all the normal things of life. That is what pleases God. These are the things that Paul is referring to when he says your lives will produce every good kind of fruit. So often we think of this as converting people, helping the poor and it is true that is part of it but it's generally not what Paul is thinking of. Given this you can read James 2:17 will a different perspective - *So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless* – and not feel so guilty. If you are loving your husband and wife because you want to please Christ you are doing good deeds. If in your work you are trying to be honest and have integrity because you want to please Christ you are doing good deeds.

### **But life is complicated**

But I can hear you say. Paul and the other apostles, and even Jesus, don't cover many things in their sermons and letters and life is complicated. Does the Scriptures really give us sufficient information on which to base our lives? Well, that depends on what you are trying to answer but in principle yes. Everything boils down to two statements at the end of the day – *You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind* (or with your complete self) *and Love your neighbour as yourself* (Luke 10:27). The rest is merely filling the details. This is what the OT law does.

### **The OT Law?**

Hang on though – are you telling us we should obey the OT law? No. But the principles that the OT law reflect we should. They were rules giving to the people of Israel by God in a specific time and for a specific purpose and as such reflect the principles that God wants to see in our lives. So if we apply the principles given in the 10 commandments and the rest of the OT law to our own lives we will start to live as God requires us to live.

But I thought Christianity wasn't about following laws? No it's not. But if we want to please God then there are certain things he expects of us. We can make it all spiritual and saying it's living in the footsteps of Jesus but at the end of the day that has to become practical – how to love your partner, how to bring up the kids, how to get along with the really annoying co-worker, etc.

### **Three Examples**

Let's take marriage for example. At the end of the day who you are married to is largely irrelevant. The question really comes down to are you prepared to love and respect them and be faithful to them as Christ has commanded you to? Now that is a much harder question to answer and it has nothing to do with our spouse – it's all about us and Christ.

Let's take another example – Deuteronomy 22:8 – *When you build a new house, you must build a railing around the edge of it's flat roof. That way you will not be considered guilty of murder if someone falls from the roof.* So is that covered by love your neighbour as yourself? Yes. Is that covered by the 10 commandments? Actually no. There is nothing directly in the 10 commandments which would lead us to that particular command. Is the principle it implies useful? Yes – we still use



it today and that is the reason you have to have a fence around a swimming pool. We don't have flat roofs much any more but the principle behind it – that of protecting people from harm – is equally valid in the swimming pool case and is what God would want us to do.

There is another interesting one which ties in with Beulah's sermon last week. In Deuteronomy 20 we have:

<sup>19</sup> *“When you are attacking a town and the war drags on, you must not cut down the trees with your axes. You may eat the fruit, but do not cut down the trees. Are the trees your enemies, that you should attack them?”* <sup>20</sup> *You may only cut down trees that you know are not valuable for food. Use them to make the equipment you need to attack the enemy town until it falls. (Deuteronomy 20:19-20)*

## **The Realm of Power**

<sup>11</sup> *We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you filled with joy,* <sup>12</sup> *always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light.* <sup>13</sup> *For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son,* <sup>14</sup> *who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.*

Paul also prays that they will be strengthened with all his glorious power. Ahh, wonderful – spiritual power – now that is what I need. But look at the rest of what Paul writes – for what end is it – so that you will have all the endurance and patience you need. Now that was not what I was expecting.... But this is true to reality. We are talking about Christian living in the real world. The world of hurts, disappointments and even suffering. And even if we don't have anything major happen in our lives then we still need patience and endurance to continuing following Christ. In fact the fact that we do steadfast continue is a sure sign that the glory of God's power is resting upon us. And we can do this all with joy. As Paul says in Romans 5:3-4:

<sup>3</sup> *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance.* <sup>4</sup> *And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.*

Or James 1:2:

<sup>2</sup> *Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy.*

Patience here is not the passive acceptance of the inevitable but rather an active, unrelenting endeavour.

## **The Marvel of God's Work – Facing trials and suffering with joy**

This is the marvel of God's work – we can face trials and suffering with joy, thanking our Father, not naturally, but because we know that in them God is working to making us more like his son. And Paul sees thanksgiving the characteristic hallmark of the Spirit filled life:

<sup>7</sup> *Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. (Colossians 2:7)*

But why should we show joy. Because of the privileges we (and the Colossians) possess. They are already ours because of our inclusion in Christ. We don't need to pray for them or wonder if they are ours. They are. To truly as God is God. And what are those privileges?

## **The Inheritance**



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Well, one is that we share in the inheritance of the saints. If you are in Christ then you will gain your share of the inheritance. The false teachers with their “special” knowledge make some people feel like second class citizens but the reality is they have Christ, he is now their portion, and if they have Christ they have an inheritance which outstrips anything anybody else could possibly offer.

### **But am I good enough?**

Now some of us at this point may be wondering if we are really good enough to have such a great inheritance. Yes, Lord, we know you have this great inheritance but I'm not all that good really and I haven't done anything major for you – I haven't converted lots of people or been a missionary in the back of the beyond. I'm hoping to get to heaven, you know, sort of get through the gate by the skin of my teeth. But the reality it has nothing to do with you. You get all this because of what Christ has done. We are justified, made right, with God by grace alone. It doesn't depend on you. It depends on Christ. And everything is his. You have been accepted. In fact you have been accepted from before the world began before you had even been born!

### **He has rescued us!**

For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness, from eternal death. And he has bought us into the kingdom of his dear Son. Most likely one of the claims of the false teachers was that they offered special deliverance from evil, if you follow us then you will gain new power of the devil. But Paul sort of shoots that down by pointing out that it has already been done. You are no longer in the kingdom of darkness. Yes it may still tug at you and trip you up but that is not where you stand anymore. You have been bought into the kingdom of his dear Son. You may have once belonged to Satan, but no more. He purchased our freedom and forgave our sins. Notice the past tense. Not he will purchase our freedom and will forgive our sins. He has. The victory has been won at Calvary.

### **Forgiveness – not just a clean slate, but deliverance**

It is important to remember that when he says he has forgiven us our sins this is not just a case of the slate being wiped clean. That wouldn't help us very much because we would just start writing on it again. Rather it is far more than that. Christ not only pardons our sins but delivers us from them as well. Some days it may not feel like that but that is the reality. We have been transferred to the kingdom of his beloved Son. So then let us be filled with knowledge and power so that we can live a life of increasing goodness and gratitude to the end.

With the introduction to the letter over Paul now launches into a paragraph, almost a confession of faith, on Christ – the supreme Lord and sufficient Saviour. In verses 15-17 Paul covers Christ as supreme in creation, in v18 Christ as supreme in the church and over the new creation, in verse 19, Christ as sufficient in his person (God with us) and in verse 20 Christ as sufficient in his work (God for us).

### **Conclusion:**

#### **Spirituality is rooted in life**

I think the really important thing to draw out of this is the fact that spirituality is not about “spiritual” things, or not in the sense that we normally think about spiritual things. Too often we tie spirituality to specific disciplines or specific work like converting people. But that is not as Paul sees it. Living for Christ in the midst of the day to day tasks is what Paul sees as spirituality whether at work, at home or where ever we are. We can pray for strength to endure and have patience, we can pray for wisdom and understanding, to understand his will. And we can do all this with joy because we know we have been enabled to share in the inheritance of the saints.

From chapter 3 onwards Paul starts to layout some the practical things that come out of the facts



about God, or the theology, he covers from here to end of chapter 2. But for now let's stand back and look at this from the broader perspective of where we are at in our lives.

### **When all is going well**

For some of us things will be going well and we feel close to God. That is really great and we need to make sure that we thank God for this blessing. However, one of the dangers that tends to trip us up when we are feeling like this is that we can become complacent and start to forget that God is behind it all. It is all too easy to see it as I have accomplished this or I have done this and aren't I great... We stop trusting in God and start trusting in other things, ourselves, our wealth, our health.

### **When things are going wrong but God is still with us**

For some of us life has become a drag, we have problems, marriage problems or money problems or health problems and some days it all feels like too much. We would really like God to step in and sort out the whole mess but often he doesn't and we feel like we have to struggle through it on our own. But even despite all the things going wrong we still feel that God is with us. We don't feel deserted by him, just overwhelmed in our own minds by the problems facing us. We pray and plead with God, but he doesn't give us the answer we want. Joy in these circumstances – yeah right! But God does care and the problems are there for a reason and he will answer in the way that is best for us. They may be of our own making or they maybe completely unrelated to anything we have done. That is not the point. Either way we need to grasp hold of the promises of Scripture and know that God is with us. He will never leave you nor forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5) And we need to go to Christ and plead for the wisdom and understanding to know what to do and for power to endure and have patience. And then to look for the good things in all the troubles and thank God for those. And as we start to thank God hopefully we start to see that we are not alone and our view starts to change and we start to see the troubles in a new light. Joy starts to return.

### **Feeling deserted by God**

For some of us things may be going well from the point of view that we don't have specific issues troubling us but we feel that God is far from us. Or we may be going through some serious difficulties and we feel that God is far from us. Under those circumstances we might feel that serving God is a waste of time, that church is boring and the preacher is boring. You try praying but there is no answer. From the outside everything looks OK to people but on the inside you are wondering – why am I bothering with all of this?

So what causes this? We won't go into detail but here are some of the possible causes:

The Holy Spirit:

1. The sovereignty of God. Sometimes God allows us to go through times of spiritual desertion. Think of Job. He had done nothing wrong (though all his friends were convinced he must have done something wrong).
2. To show us that God is actually the source of all our blessings, our comforts in life. Sometimes God takes away our joy so that we can see that all the things we have in life are not actually the source of that joy.
3. To mature us. Our faith is tested when going through periods of spiritual desertion and we come out stronger at the other end. It can help us to be more humble. It can increase our assurance because in times like these the fact that we are concerned and worried about his lack of presence make us realise that we do love God. And in prayer. Persevering in prayer despite the lack of answers.
4. To weaken and prevent sin.



5. To discipline us over sin
6. To keep us near to God. Like a young child who is determined to stay at the toys sometimes God withdraws himself from us. Then we look up and realise he is gone and we chase after him more.
7. To be able to help other people in the same condition.

From within ourselves:

1. Mental depression
2. False reasoning
3. Our emotions

Solutions:

1. Fly to God
2. Trust in God
3. Trust in Christ
4. Trust in his providence
5. Trust in his promises
6. Trust not in anything else

Under these conditions joy and even thankfulness is really hard. Job was not joyful. He was really angry and wanted answers.

### **Why am I here?**

For some of us we might be at a church because it is just something you do or because something is nagging us to be here though we don't really know why. Well let me assure you, there is a really good probability you are here because God wants you to be here. I grew up in a non-Christian home and so when I became a Christian going to church was not something you did. But every Sunday the Holy Spirit would nudge me and so most Sundays I would get on my bike and cycle to evening church. It wasn't a church in which I felt particularly welcomed though almost certainly that had far more to do with me than the people in the church but it was where God wanted me. The Holy Spirit works in our lives drawing us to Christ in sometimes very subtle ways.

So no matter where we are in our lives we need to be praying for wisdom to know God's will and to have understanding and wisdom to know how to translate that will into our daily lives and for power from on high to have patience and endurance to walk through life. And that would be my prayer for you as you step out into this week.

