

PREFACE/OUTLINE

Our passage this morning is one that benefits from a simple outlining.

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you

may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will

walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects,

- bearing fruit in every good work and
- increasing in the knowledge of God;
- strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for
 - the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;
- joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

For He rescued 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.
(Colossians 1:9-14)

[haven't changed a word; see p5 of PDF for a better version of this outline]

Read Colossians 1:9-14.

KNOWLEDGE

The first element of Paul's repeated prayer for the church in Colossae—again, our text is not “a prayer,” but Paul's telling the church how and what he has *been* praying on their behalf—was that they would be filled with knowledge—but a rather focused knowledge.

Read v9.

knowledge = *epignosis* (ep-ig'-no-sis) = from <G1921> (epiginosko); *recognition*, i.e. (by implication) full *discernment, acknowledgment* :- (ac-) knowledge (-ing, -ment).

[“epignosis” “gnosis” “Gnosticism”]

It is important that we understand what Paul means by this. Recall that in an earlier lesson we discussed that one of the rhetorical battles in which Paul was going to have to engage was against the philosophy called “Gnosticism.” One aspect of this was a “salvation through knowledge”—that flesh was inherently evil (and worthless) and that all that mattered was knowledge. That, of course, is a grossly simplified description; countless volumes have been written about Gnosticism and its relation to the gospel. But for our purposes it should suffice for now.

But how does Paul use this? What does he mean by the term *epignosis*?

Illustration: Let's say the water pump in my car needs replacing. Being stingy with my brass, I decide to do the work myself. One problem: I've never done it before. So I go to the library and read all I can find about changing a water pump in a Jeep. I watch one or two YouTube how-to videos, and I stop by my mechanic's garage to pump him for as much free advice I can get away with. So after all of this, I am reasonably confident the day I open my toolbox and get to work on replacing the water pump. I have filled my head with the “knowledge” of how to replace a water pump in a 1997 Jeep Cherokee.

By this *gnosis* I accomplished “salvation”—a fully functional motor vehicle.

To understand what Paul means here is **not** to simply spiritualize the illustration above. He is not praying that the Colossians will spend more time reading their Bibles, reading more Christian self-help books, watching videos about how to be a better Christian, or studying more commentaries by the leading scholars. And this is not something new to the NT.

E. D. Schmitz (in Brown): Knowledge of God is always linked with God’s acts of self-revelation... While the Greeks were concerned with detached knowledge and a speculative interest in the metaphysical nature of things, the OT regards knowledge as something which continually arises from personal encounter.

We do not obtain knowledge of God by going to the library and reading about Him; we obtain knowledge of God by *living with Him*. By receiving *from Him*. Look at how Paul states it:

that you may be filled with the knowledge of...

Douglas J. Moo refers to this as the “divine passive.”

What Paul prays for is that the Colossians “might be filled with the knowledge of His will.” The verb *plerothete* [be filled] is a “divine passive,” with God as the implied agent.

We see this reflected in the NIV:

...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will...

So while it is true that in many respects the believer is an active participant, the fundamental point of this is that ***we receive our knowledge of God from Him—***

- in communion with Him;
- in not just reading His word but *meditating* on His word, understanding what He is saying;
- in worship of Him;
- in acknowledging His lordship over our lives, so that we know God as an active, vital participant in our life

We see this in the cultic imagery of Romans 12.

Read Romans 12:1-2.

We give ourselves wholly and unreservedly to God, and thereby have our minds renewed and filled (implied, by Him) with “that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” Proverbs 1:7 puts it more succinctly:

**The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;
Fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:7)**

v9

At the moment of this writing, Paul is probably of two minds. He is encouraged by the generally positive report he has received from Epaphras, but he understands as well that there exists in Colossae serious threats to their faith. So we can see this paragraph as both an affirmation of their progress in the faith and a reminder of how they will need to gird themselves for the battle ahead.

Paul knows that the essential foundation for their victory over the encompassing threats to their faith *must* be that they **be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. (emphasis added)**

It is critical that they approach this battle not girded with the wisdom [*sofia*] of flesh, but girded with wisdom from above. It must be *spiritual* wisdom.

spiritual = *pneumatikos* = from <G4151> (pneuma); **non-carnal, i.e. (humanly) ethereal** (as opposed to gross), or (dæmoniacally) a *spirit* (concretely), or (divinely) **supernatural, regenerate, religious** :- spiritual.

Not from a mindless, ecstatic, trance-like perspective, but one based on reason and understanding.

understanding = *synesis* (soon'-es-is) = from <G4920> (suniemí); **a mental putting together, i.e. intelligence or (concretely) the intellect** :- knowledge, understanding. [*think, synergy*]

Faith is not devoid of reason. Our hope is based on Spirit-informed truth. Equipped by the Holy Spirit with a supernatural perspective, the gospel of Christ is sensible, logical.

v10

This is not simply an intellectual exercise: Our conduct *flows out of* this knowledge. Verse 10 begins,
so that you will...

And then what follows is a bullet-list of Spirit-empowered behaviors or attributes, all designed to equip the Colossians—and us—for battle against (as Paul describes them in 2:8) “the elementary principles of the world.”

walk in a manner worthy of the Lord,

First, this knowledge will affect our daily life—our deportment, our behavior.

walk, live^{niv} = *peripateo* = from <G4012> (peri) and <G3961> (pateo); **to tread all around, i.e. walk at large** (especially as proof of ability); figurative **to live, deport oneself, follow** (as a companion or votary) :- go, **be occupied with**, walk (about).

Implicit in this statement is the hard fact that *without* this knowledge, we will *not* “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.” What does your “walk” look like to others? What are you occupied with?

Sidebar: I confess that I initially got hung up on the word translated “worthy,” for one could read that to mean *conduct yourself in a way that will make you worthy of the privilege of having Christ Jesus as your Lord*. That is, *live a life that earns a relationship with Christ, or a life that deserves Christ*. Since that can't be what Paul means, I dug deeper.

worthy = *axios* (ax-ee'-ose) = adverb from <G514> (axios); **appropriately** :- as becometh, after a godly sort, worthily (-thy).

“Worthy” is used here in the sense of something fitting, in accord with, appropriate. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:27 Paul warns against celebrating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner (anaxios). He is not requiring moral quality in the participants, but looking for a manner of life which accords with the gospel. (E. Tiedtke in Brown) Or it could be thought of (as Curtis Vaughan puts it) “live a life that is commensurate with what the Lord has done for us and is to us.”

Another way to express this is that we are...

to please Him in all respects.

The KJV is the most literal translation, most faithful to the original Greek: “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing”—but also the least understandable. The “Him” is implied by the context; that is, Paul is not suggesting we live a life pleasing to everyone or anyone, but a life pleasing *to our Lord*.

Vaughan explains that “in classical Greek this word [‘to please’] had a bad connotation, denoting, as H.C.G. Moule observes,”

a cringing and subservient habit, ready to do anything to please a patron; not only to meet but to anticipate his most trivial wishes. But when transferred to the believer’s relations to his Lord, the word at once rises by its associations. To do anything to meet, to anticipate His wishes is not only the most absolutely right thing we could do. It is His eternal due; it is at the same time the surest path to our own highest development and gain.

That is, pleasing God and living in obedience to Him always—*always*—pays dividends. Unlike the cringing slave who obeys just to survive another day, or the obsequious servant who just hopes that his pay won’t be docked, believers are showered by the Lord’s blessings when our life pleases Him. In fact, it has been my experience that the Lord is so gracious as to pour blessings even into a life *not* always in obedience to Him.

Unlike the servant or slave, our obedience rises out of our love for, our devotion to Him—and our gratitude for what He has *already* done for us.

DEFINING A LIFE

What follows this call to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects” is a number of behaviors that constitute such a life. We will dig into these next week, but for now let’s just note them.

bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

These could be read together, as one item, but I have separated them for a more thorough study. A life pleasing to God will every day be growing and maturing deeper into *His* life. It will be a productive, fruitful life.

strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;

A life pleasing to God will receive its power from above—not from this temporal plane. And it will be that supernatural power which will supply the necessary stamina, the forbearance, the peace.

joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Far from being a laborious burden, such a life is filled with joy, with thanksgiving, with praise to God for this free gift through Christ Jesus.

Let’s close with a brief verse in Proverbs that more succinctly describes a life pleasing to God.

Read Proverbs 4:18.

Colossians 1:9-14

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walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects,

pleasing to Him

- bearing fruit in every good work and
- increasing in the knowledge of God;
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 - the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;
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Colossians 1:9-14 NASB