

PREFACE

Last week we opened this passage, beginning at v9, in which the apostle Paul expands on his repeated prayers—his desire—for the church at Colossae. Paul is continuing to set the table for what will come later in this letter: more direct and specific references to the problems in Colossae.

It is clear that what Paul is expressing here in Chapter One is important to him, for he repeats it later at the beginning of Chapter Two.

Read Colossians 2:1-3.

And then he immediately tells them why this is so important to him.

Read v4.

What is also clear is that this should be important to us. Read v4 as if Paul himself were standing before you, poking his finger in your chest: *“I say this so that no one will delude you with persuasive argument!”* or as J. B. Phillips paraphrases it,

I write like this to prevent you from being led astray by someone or other’s attractive arguments.

Every day we are bombarded by “attractive” benign-sounding arguments that would covertly or overtly pull us away from the eternal truth of holy God. We must take to heart, and take into our daily life, the words of that same God, recorded by the pen of the apostle, intended to buttress *our* defense against such things.

Whenever there is this sort of repetition and emphasis in God’s word (as we have in both chapters), the light bulb in our brain should switch on; we are to pay special attention to what He is saying to us. So let’s return to our passage in Chapter One, and read through it again.

Read Colossians 1:9-14.

[\[Look at the outline I handed out last week\]](#)

Paul has been steadily praying for the Colossians. What specifically has he been praying for? That God would fill them with the knowledge of His will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Why? To what end? So that they would walk, would live, in a manner worthy of—in accord with—the Lord, thereby pleasing Him in all respects. And just what does such a life look like? That is what we are going to look at in this session.

v10b

In v6, above, Paul wrote that the *gospel* was “constantly bearing fruit and increasing.” And now he writes, in v10b, that he has been praying that their lives would do the same: bear fruit in every good work and increase in the knowledge of God.

In a manner of speaking the relationship of these two statements is similar to what Jeff was saying last week—the importance of our being a *channel* of the knowledge we gain. Here Paul says (v6) that the gospel is already being fruitful in their lives, so they are to let that flow through them to others, so that *they* would now bear fruit in others as the gospel has been bearing fruit in them. (Moo)

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

I originally wanted to consider these separately, but upon further study realize that they are inexorably bound together.

This passage naturally follows the previous, for even just the word translated “walk” (v10a) implies progress (Hill/Archer), which is continued in the idea of “bearing fruit” and “increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Many people are accustomed to thinking that whenever the Bible refers to “bearing fruit” it is code for winning souls—sort of like the *Amway* salesperson who has his or her quota of converts to win, to expand the sales force. And the tie-in with the previous mention of the spread of the gospel might encourage that thought. Certainly sharing with others the Good News that saved us is *part* of “bearing fruit,” but we must not make the mistake of limiting it to that.

The word picture being painted here [vs9-12] by Paul is one of **movement forward**—growth, maturing, developing, improving. My personal philosophy has always been that regarding my chosen craft I should be better at it today than I was yesterday. Something is terribly wrong if my skills today are the same as they were ten years ago. I should be constantly growing, improving, developing my skills, improving my product. And it is the same for our life in Christ.

This is what Paul desires for the Colossians: that their faith (and the resulting actions) would not remain static, but constantly moving forward. And we see this in the totality of the phrase: bearing fruit *in every good work*.

Sidebar: Note the totality of scope of these exhortations:

v9: in **all** spiritual wisdom and understanding

v10: to please Him in **all** respects

v10: bearing fruit in **every** good work

v11: strengthened with **all** power

v11: for the attaining of **all** steadfastness and patience

every = *pas* = **all, any, every, the whole** :- all (manner of, means), always (-s), any (one), × daily, + ever, every (one, way), as many as, + no (-thing), × thoroughly, whatsoever, whole, whosoever.

good = *agathos* = a primary word; “good” (in any sense, often as noun) :- benefit, good (-s, things), well. Compare <G2570> (kalos).

The concept of “good” in the OT “is indissolubly [i.e., cannot be dissolved] linked with personal faith in God. An idea of the good, freed from the concept of God as personal...is inconceivable.” In the NT, “natural man is irretrievably in bondage to the powers of sin and death, and has no right to claim the attribute ‘good’ for himself. But through the redemption which has taken place in Christ goodness overflows the believer” (E. Beyreuther in *Brown*).

Whatever “goodness” we have comes from God. We see this throughout the Bible, but let’s read it in the benediction with which the writer of Hebrews closes his letter.

Read Hebrews 13:20-21.

work = *ergon* = from a primary (but obsolete) *ergo* (to *work*); **toil (as an effort or occupation)**; by implication **an act** : - **deed**, doing, labour, work.

We are not just *able* to perform good works through Christ Jesus; we have been *created* for them.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

Our “good works” include...

increasing in the knowledge of God;

This is a multifaceted thought. If we first just interpret the text as it is on the page, we see that,

- Following the translations other than the NIV, it describes *progress in knowing God*
- The NIV translates this *growing in the knowledge of God*—which is not terribly different. Philosophical and applicational increase is often synonymous with growth—that is, maturing.
- So at a rudimentary (if not quite accurate) level, we can interpret this to mean *learning more about God*.

However, the Greek preposition translated “in” in all our common translations can also be translated “by”: “growing *by* the knowledge of God.”

- With this, we would interpret Paul’s statement to mean that our increase, our growing, takes place *by means of* our knowledge of God—which, of course, can be very true. But is that what Paul is saying?

Probably the best interpretation is to go back to the preferred translation (“in”) but understanding this in a way similar to when we say—and God’s word says—that we are “in Christ.”

- That is, knowledge of God is the *sphere* or realm in which spiritual growth takes place. Field corn grows best in the sphere, the climate, of heat and humidity. Children grow and mature best in the sphere of a loving and complete family. And Christians advance, progress, in spiritual maturity best when enveloped in the knowledge of God. If we live in the sphere of this world, our growth will be in the things of this world; if we live, if we abide in the sphere of the knowledge of God, our growth will be in that.

I like how F.F. Bruce puts this all together.

If pagans appreciated the importance of rendering worship which was worthy of the deities whose votaries they were, much more should Christians render the spiritual service of obedient lives to the living and true God and to His Son Jesus Christ. **Thus the fair fruit of good works would spring in greater abundance from the divine seed which had been sown in their hearts**, and at the same time they would make ever increasing progress in the knowledge of God. For obedience to the knowledge of God which has already been received is a necessary and certain condition for the reception of further knowledge.

v11

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

In v11 Paul answers the question, “How is all this wonderful stuff to be accomplished? How do we achieve it?” Just as in vs9-10, the qualities and behavior Paul prays will be instilled in and demonstrated by the Colossians all come from above:

- v9: *God* fills us with knowledge, and our wisdom and understanding are *Spirit-fed*;
- v10: our walk of faith is to be pleasing to the *Lord*, and our growth and the fruit we bear are to take place within the realm of the knowledge *God* has poured into us.

In a similar vein, Paul has been praying that they would be strengthened—but a holy strength defined by the glory of God.

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

God remains the standard and source.

There are some interesting things going on in the words of this verse.

“Strengthened” is the verb form of the noun “power” (or “might” in the KJVs)

dynamis = from <G1410> (dunamai); **force** (literal or figurative); specially **miraculous power** (usually by implication a *miracle* itself) :- **ability**, abundance, meaning, might (-ily, -y, -y deed), (worker of) miracle (-s), power, strength, violence, might (wonderful) work.

“Might” (or “power” in the KJVs) is a different word.

kratos = perhaps a primary word; **vigor** [“great”] (literal or figurative) :- **dominion**, might [-ily], power, strength.

The “all” in “strengthened with all power” is not used to denote a number—he picked up *all* the marbles—but denotes a “marker of the highest degree; complete, unlimited” power. Douglas J. Moo paraphrases this, “strengthened by God with the greatest strength imaginable.”

As if that were not sufficient to describe this power, Paul goes on to say that it is “according to His glorious might.” I prefer the word order of the original Greek: “the might of His glory.” God’s glory is not just some bright light that tells us He is something special. God’s glory is not just resplendent, but strong, powerful, mighty. To what end? How do we put this power to use? Moving mountains? Evangelizing the population of the whole world?

...for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience;

Sidebar: The KJVs and ESV associate the “joy” with this phrase, while the NASB and NIV associate it with the following verse. Both can be true and neither is utterly wrong. The NASB includes the alternate rendering in a margin note.

If there is any special distinction to the way Paul uses these two words—and, as above, the KJVs flip them—it could be as N. T. Wright states:

Endurance or steadfastness [the first word: *hypomone*] is what faith, hope and love bring to an apparently impossible situation, patience [the second word: *makrothymia*] what they show to an apparently impossible person.

Isn’t that a fascinating and non-intuitive use of the immense, unlimited power of God’s glory?