

**Col. 1:9-12, The Request**  
**May 28, 1995**  
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**Overview**

1. The three verbs in 1:3,4 summarize the entire prayer, which continues through 1:20.
  - a) "We give thanks" --> 1:12, "giving thanks to the Father."
  - b) "Praying always for you" --> 1:9, "we ... do not cease to pray for you"
  - c) "Having heard" introduces a summary of their condition that extends through 1:8, and motivates (1:9 *dio*) the following prayer and thanksgiving.
  
2. Following the report in 4-8, we move to prayer and thanksgiving.
  - a) Joined to the report by "for this cause." The report leads to what follows.
  - b) The participles in 9 and 12 are parallel, and both are subordinate to "we do not cease." "We do not cease praying and asking ... giving thanks ...." The "giving thanks" is by Paul, not the Colossians.
  - c) News of other believers should motivate us both to prayer and to thanksgiving.
  
3. Today, focus on the request, 9b-11. "To desire" is literally "to ask," and explains what sort of prayer is in view: a request. We have here the request itself, followed by the purpose for which Paul makes it.
  - a) Note the intensely practical emphasis. The false teachers in Colosse emphasized the need for "philosophy," special knowledge (2:8). Their ideas later developed into "gnosticism," literally "knowledge-ism," which emphasizes the need to possess special knowledge or illumination in order to escape the physical constraints of this world and reach true spiritual insight. Here, Paul emphasizes rather the need to behave according to God's will here in this world.
  
  - b) Structure: in AV, looks like two parallel requests: "that you might be filled, ... that you might walk worthy." In Gk, the first is a finite verb, but the second is an infinitive, "to walk worthy," and gives the purpose for the first. It in turn is followed by a series of participles ("being fruitful, increasing, strengthened, ...") that define what it means to walk worthy.

**A. 9b, The Request**

1. "to be filled with knowledge." So far the request would seem to be consistent with the emphasis of the false teachers on the importance of *gnosis*, "knowledge."

2. "of his will." Not of abstract mystical truths, nor of formal doctrines, but of his will. The objective of our faith is not accuracy of doctrine, but conformity of our wills with his.
3. "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." The emphasis on practice rather than doctrine is not to disparage the appropriate use of our minds. This knowledge is to be manifested in two capabilities:
  - a) "All wisdom": the general term; for Paul virtually defined by Job, Prov, and Eccl. Always in a good sense in the NT, unless modified by "of this world." We need not fear true wisdom. All of it will be compatible with knowing God's will.
  - b) "Spiritual understanding": this is a more specific term, indicating the critical faculty, the ability to discern what is right and what is wrong, what is true and what is false. Faced with false teachers, this is very necessary.
  - c) Both of these are to be focused on knowing "his will."

**B. 10a, The Purpose Stated**

"To walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing." The preceding verse emphasized our need to know his will as opposed to abstract doctrine. This verse refines it even further. Why do we need to know his will? Not so that we can argue about it academically, or so that we can beat up on one another, but so that we can follow it in our own conduct. This conduct is defined by reference to the Lord Jesus, in two dimensions.

1. "Walk worthily of the Lord," looking *back* to what he has done for us. Two other times Paul uses this language, and these clarify what he means here. Cf. Eph 4:1, "... walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called"; 1Th 2:12, "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." We have been selected for a high honor. God has singled us out from the mass of humanity, called us by his own name, and placed his Holy Spirit within us. Let us carry ourselves appropriately.
2. "Unto all pleasing," that is, pleasing God (1 Thes. 4:1, "how you ought to walk and to please God"), looking *forward* to the day when we shall report to him on how we have invested our talents, looking forward to his "Well done, good and faithful servant."

**C. 10b-11, The Purpose Defined**

A series of participles indicates what it means "to walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing."

How many participles are there in this series? At first glance, four (being fruitful, increasing, strengthened, giving thanks). But we have already seen that "giving thanks" closes out the chiasm of this introductory section. Suggestion: Paul means to merge their thanksgiving into his. "We pray for you, that you would live in a worthy manner, and part of the walk we desire for you is a

thanksgiving that appreciates the same characteristics about our LJC that we do when we give thanks to God."

So in this section we treat the four participles as though they all defined the walk Paul desires of the Colossians, but then later expound the fourth in detail as continuation of Paul's prayer.

These four participles fall into two groups of two each. In each group, the first is introduced by the words "in all" ("in all good work being fruitful," "in all might being strengthened"). The first pair emphasizes the believer on the offensive; the second pair shows our resources in defense. The first shows how we do good things for God; the second, how we are to respond when bad things are done to us.

1. 10b, Offensive: our good works for God.

- a) "In every good work bearing fruit." We ought to excel in every area of practical righteousness. Care for the poor; responsibility toward the environment; respect for people of all races and classes. Believer, you are not walking worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing if there is conduct in your life that the world can legitimately fault.
- b) "Increasing unto the knowledge of God." Continues the metaphor of a plant, whose prosperity is seen not only in what it yields, but also what it becomes itself. We are not banana plants, whose value is only in the fruit and whose stems are pulpy and worthless, but like cherry trees, yielding both sweet fruit and beautiful lumber. By a life of bearing the fruit of good works (and not through abstract academic speculations such as were being recommended to the Colossians), we grow up into the knowledge of God. John 7:17, "If any man will *do his will*, he shall know of the doctrine, . . . ." The way to know God better is through more careful obedience. The most refined theology is forged in the furnace of daily life.

2. 11-12, Defensive: our response to difficulty.

The world's hatred for our Lord is so great that they will despise in us good works that done by an unbeliever would bring praise, "persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matt. 5:10). Walking worthy means not only bearing fruit, but keeping going when there is no encouragement from those around us.

- a) 1:11, "In all strength being strengthened." We are told of the source, the objective, and the result of this power.
  - 1) Consider first the objective: "unto all patience and longsuffering." Not what we think of when we first think of power. We are more likely to want the ability to work miracles or bring multitudes to salvation. But Paul's first concern is that they demonstrate divine power in facing adversity.

2) Now the source: "acc. to the power of his glory." Not just "glorious power," but the power that comes from his glory, the revelation of himself. The world tells us to look within ourselves for strength; or to link ourselves with some powerful person and depend on them. As believers, we need to draw strength from the glory of the Lord. Our daily times in his Word are not only, or even primarily, to instruct our minds. They are a time to "behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple," to engage his glory and thus draw strength for daily life. Examples:

a> Moses, drawing strength from his personal fellowship with the Lord, getting his batteries recharged, Exod. 34:33-35.

b> Psa. 91, dwelling in the secret place of the Most High so as to enjoy the protection of the shadow of the Almighty.

c> Paul's appreciation of the person of Christ reaches its highest levels in Phil. 2, Col. 1, and Eph. 1, all written in prison! In persecution, he focused his attention on the Lord and rose to new heights of appreciation of him.

3) Finally, the result of God's power: "with joy." It doesn't take any power to suffer. Bad things happen. The sign of power is that we can exhibit patience and longsuffering with joy.

b) 1:12, "Giving thanks to the Father ...." Thanksgiving is one of the most powerful antidotes to discouragement available, and the NT repeatedly recommends it to us in times of difficulty (Phil. 4:4-6; 1 Thes. 5:16-18). The mind cannot complain and give thanks at the same time.

What if we can't think of anything for which to give thanks? This prayer will be an example for us. It focuses not on us, but on our God and his Christ. The character and perfections of the LJC are constant, and we can always give thanks for them.

3. Summary of walking worthy:

a) Grow unto the full knowledge of God by fruitfulness in every good work.

b) Manifest the power that you draw from God's revelation of himself in joyful patience and longsuffering in the face of adversity, always giving thanks to God.