

# Northolt Park Baptist Church

## Praying for the Church: Colossians 1:9-14

How do we pray for people in the church? We might pray for their personal concerns, their job interview, the results of their blood tests, their forthcoming exams, their children... And all those things are valid things to ask God for, because he is interested in every aspect of our lives. But Paul's prayers are different from the way we tend to pray, and it's helpful and challenging to eavesdrop on a veteran pray-er, like Paul. In particular, we look here at Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9-14.

In the early part of the chapter, Paul has spoken about their faith in Jesus, and their love for fellow Christians, the hope stored up for them in heaven (1:3-5), and that they had heard the word of truth and they were bearing fruit and growing (1:6-7)! By all accounts they were doing well in their Christian walk. I might have eased off in my prayers for them, but not Paul. He writes at the start of verse 9: 'For this reason...' In other words, it's *because* of the faith and the love and the hope, and the bearing of fruit that Paul hasn't stopped praying for them since the day he first heard about them! But, *why* did he continuously pray for them, and *what* did he want for them? What was on Paul's agenda for the church? What did he pray for?

### 1. Filled with knowledge (1:9)

*He prays that they might have knowledge* (1:9). He prayed for knowledge for the Philippians too (Philippians 1:9). In fact, here like there, it is more than mere head knowledge Paul has in mind; he's praying for wisdom, discernment, understanding. The focus of this knowledge is God's *will* (1:9b). When Paul writes about God's will, he doesn't have in mind what we sometimes have in mind. We tend to think about God's will in terms of whether we should get a new car, or move house, or change jobs, or get married. We seek the Lord's will for our lives when it comes to certain choices like these that need to be made.

But when Paul talks about God's will, he has a much bigger idea in mind. It's about what God has already revealed of himself and his grand plan of salvation in Scripture, which moves all the way from the creation in Genesis 1 to the new creation in Revelation 22. His will is not something secret which we have to work out for ourselves; his will is what he *has already* told us about how we are to live our lives in the light of what he has done and will do. And it's *that* will that's so crucial. God's will isn't hidden from us; it's been *revealed* to us in his word. And it is our responsibility to know it and to do it. Paul wants us to begin with the agenda of God's revealed will rather than force our agenda on to him. But again, this knowledge of God's will is not about being clever or intellectual; it comes 'through all spiritual wisdom and understanding' (1:9b).

This is what Paul prays for the Colossians. He prays that they will be filled with the knowledge of God's will – a knowledge which consists in spiritual wisdom and understanding – because it's only as they do this that they will be able to think as Christians, and bring their hearts and minds into conformity with God's will. Let's pray the prayer for ourselves as a church: that God would fill us with knowledge of his will through all spiritual understanding and wisdom. But Paul has more to say...

### 2. Walking worthy of the Lord (1:10)

*He prays that they might be holy* (1:10). He wants them to be filled with the knowledge of God's will precisely so they will live a life worthy of the Lord. He wants them to 'please God in every way' – which is fairly comprehensive. There's no notion here of pleasing God in *some* ways but not in others, of pleasing him in *some* areas of our lives but not others, of pleasing him when certain kinds of people are around, but not others. It's pleasing God in *every way*. This conduct which is worthy of the Lord is

then spelled out in more detail in the phrases that follow. If we do this, says Paul, it will lead to us bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in our knowledge of God (1:10b). That's what Paul wants for the church: that we may be filled with the knowledge of God's will, not as an end in itself, but so that we may be mature as Christians and as a church.

### 3. Strengthened with power (1:11)

*He prays that they might experience power (1:11).* Why does Paul want us to be strengthened with God's power and glorious might? To do great works? To perform miracles? To be successful evangelists? To be amazing preachers? No: he wants us to be strengthened with God's power and might so that we will have great *endurance* and *patience*. It's mundane, but realistic. What the Colossians need more than anything else, and maybe what some of us need more than anything else, is the ability to carry on. Not to 'grin and bear it'; it's not about resignation. It's rather the stamina of the long-distance runner who carries on and on, moving towards the finishing tape at the end of the race. If that was important in Paul's time, it's perhaps even more important today, in a society where people assume they have the right to get things *instantly*, immediately, and on demand. Paul wants us to be characterised by patience and endurance.

### 4. Giving thanks to God (1:12-14)

But this endurance is to be accompanied by *joy* and *thankfulness* (1:11b-12a). This joy is directed towards God, because it's a reminder that we endure only through *his* power. The real cause of joy is not that we're so good at persevering, but that God is so good at saving and keeping us (1:12b-13). No wonder Paul wants us to be giving thanks to the Father!

Paul writes of us being rescued from one kingdom and brought into another one. Centuries before, when God brought his people out of Egypt, he rescued them one 'dominion', and transferred them into another. The language Paul uses reminds us of that work of God: what God has done in Jesus is like a new exodus. Redemption is about being

released from captivity. But instead of being released out of political bondage, we're released from the bondage of sin, and forgiven. Like the Colossians, we too have been released from the kingdom of darkness, of hostility, of alienation from God and from others, and we have been brought into Christ's kingdom, to serve the one true God and live in fellowship with his people.

Let's remind ourselves of the things Paul prays for, and as we do so, let's pray for ourselves: that God would fill us with knowledge of his will through spiritual wisdom and understanding; that we would live a life worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit, and growing in knowledge; that we would be strengthened with power, so that we might endure and be patient; that we would give thanks to God who has rescued us from darkness, and brought us into light, releasing us from captivity, and forgiving our sin.

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- Paul prays that we will be full of the knowledge of God's will through spiritual wisdom and understanding. Let's pray for ourselves, and for each other, that this would be the case...

- Paul prays that we would live a life worthy of the Lord, pleasing him in every way by bearing fruit in good deeds, and growing in our knowledge of God. Let's acknowledge we don't always live up to this calling, and let's be determined that as a church we will seek to walk worthy of God...

- Paul prays that we would be strengthened with power from God, in order to have patience and endurance. Let's ask God for this patience and endurance...

- Paul prays that we would give thanks to God who has brought us from darkness to light, from death to light. Let's give thanks to God for the salvation we share...