

“WALKING IN A MANNER WORTHY OF THE LORD”

I. Introduction

- A. Last week, in our study of the first part of the opening to Paul’s letter to the Colossians, we saw how the apostle expressed his affection for these saints by giving thanks to God for his gracious work in their lives.
1. In the remainder of the opening section, Paul continues to show his care for these believers by telling them about the petitions that he makes to God on their behalf.
 2. This is the typical progression that Paul follows at the beginning of his letters.
 3. He begins with thanksgiving, then he moves to petition.
 4. Before we look at the main elements of these petitions, I want to make three general comments about them.
- B. The first is that the thanksgiving and prayer at the beginning of Colossians is longer than the ones that are found in Paul’s other letters.
1. Biblical scholars suggest, and I think rightly, that Paul does this because of the situation that was unfolding in the church at Colossae.
 2. As we noted last week, false teachers had arisen among them who were saying that they needed something more than Jesus in order to have a complete and secure knowledge of God.
 3. Paul begins this letter with this lengthy thanksgiving and prayer in order to emphasize to the Colossians (and to us) that they do not need to embark in some new direction but simply need to keep going in the direction in which they have already begun.

4. In the words of one commentator, “adherence to the gospel of God’s Son provides for all the spiritual blessing and power that they will ever need.” [Moo, 74]
- C. My second general observation has to do with what Paul says about the frequency of his prayers for these believers.
1. He says that he has not ceased to pray for the saints in Colossae.
 2. We find similar statements elsewhere in Paul’s writings.
 3. Prayer was clearly a regular habit for Paul.
 4. It should be a regular habit for us as well.
 5. For many believers, the bulk of their prayers are made spontaneously, often in response to some pressing need or concern.
 6. That is all well and good, but the spontaneous element of our prayer life will be more robust if it is built upon the foundation of disciplined habits of prayer.
- D. The third thing to note about the petitions in this passage is the nature of the things that Paul prays about here.
1. He does not pray for the physical well-being of these believers, but for their spiritual needs.
 2. It can be easy for our prayer life to be dominated by the crises and concerns of life.
 3. While we are right to bring these matters to our heavenly Father, if this is the extent of our prayer life, we will never really benefit from how prayer can be a means of cultivating a heavenly-minded outlook on life.

II. Filled with Wisdom from God

- A. The first part of Paul's petition is that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.
1. When Paul speaks about God's will, he does not mean what many Christians today mean when they speak of knowing God's will.
 2. He is not talking about trying to discover God's specific leading for major life decisions, such as: Should I go to this college, or that one? Should I take this job, or that one? Should I wear the blue shirt, or the white one?
 3. Instead, he is praying that these believers will come to a deeper understanding of God's revealed will, and especially of God's saving purpose for them in Christ.
 4. If you want to know God's will for what you are to believe and how you are to live, the place to look is his Word.
 5. The Bible sets forth God's plan and God's ways.
 6. The more we study and internalize these things, the better equipped we will be for living a faithful and fruitful Christian life.
- B. When Paul specifies that this knowledge is "in all spiritual wisdom and understanding," he is saying something about the ultimate source of this knowledge.
1. The term "spiritual" could almost be capitalized here, because Paul is almost certainly using it to allude to the Holy Spirit.
 2. While the Bible sets forth the things of God, no one is capable of receiving the things of God apart from the gracious working of the Spirit of God.
 3. We refer to this aspect of the Spirit's activity in the lives of God's people as his work of illumination.

4. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives us insight into the revealed will of God and who helps us apply it to our lives.
- C. Another thing to consider as we think about this part of Paul's prayer is that we will never arrive at a fullness of understanding in this life.
1. We always need to keep growing in our knowledge of God's truth.
 2. One of the things that can motivate us in this pursuit is to ponder what it will be like in glory when our understanding is filled to maximum capacity.
 3. Consider these thoughts from Thomas Boston in his classic work *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*: "The glorified shall have a most clear and distinct understanding of divine truths, for in His light we shall see light (Psa 36:9). The light of glory will be a complete commentary on the Bible, and untie all the hard and knotty questions in divinity. There is no joy on earth comparable to that which arises from the discovery of truth, no discovery of truth comparable to the discovery of Scripture truth, made by the Spirit of the Lord to the soul. 'I rejoice at thy word,' says the psalmist, 'as one that findeth great spoil' (Psa 119:162). Yet, while here, it is but an imperfect discovery. How refreshing then it will be, to see the opening of all the treasure hid in that field." [456-457]
- D. Paul also makes it clear that our growth in the knowledge of God's will is not an end in itself.
1. The purpose of having knowledge of God's will is that we might lead a devout life.
 2. In Paul's words, it is so that we might "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord."
 3. Walking is often used in the Bible as an idiom for describing one's way of life.

4. Paul is not saying that we need to make ourselves worthy of the Lord by our walk.
5. That would contradict verse 12, where it says that God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints.
6. To walk in a manner worthy of the Lord is to strive to live up to what God has done for us.
7. It means following the standard that God sets for us in his law and being diligent students of all that he has revealed in his Word.

III. Strengthened by God's Glorious Might

- A. This brings us to the second main element of Paul's petition, which is that we need to be strengthened by God's glorious might.
 1. We cannot walk in a manner worthy of the Lord by our own strength.
 2. We are dependent on God's power to do this.
 3. This is what Augustine meant when he prayed in his *Confessions*, "Grant what you command, and command what you will."
 4. In saying that, Augustine meant that we need God to grant us the ability to do the things that he commands.
 5. Our good works and our growth in knowledge are produced by God's gracious working in us.
 6. This will remain true for as long as we live.
 7. This is even indicated in our text by the verb that is translated as "May you be strengthened" in verse 11.
 8. In the Greek, this is a present tense participle, which would literally translate as "being strengthened."

9. The Greek present tense typically conveys the sense of a continuous activity.
 10. This indicates that the idea being presented here is that of “being strengthened continually.”
 11. It is something that takes place on an ongoing basis.
- B. Paul’s words in verse 11 assure us that we never need to worry that the supply of strength that we need for the life of faith will one day run out.
1. God strengthens his people “with all power, according to his glorious might.”
 2. We cannot even begin to comprehend the greatness of God’s glorious power.
 3. It is beyond human imagining.
 4. And the Bible tells us that God turns his power towards us and gives us all the strength that we need to keep walking in his ways.
 5. The Lord reminds his people of this in Isaiah 40 when he speaks these beautiful words: “Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, ‘My way is hidden from the LORD, and my right is disregarded by my God’? Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.” (Isa. 40:27–31)
- C. Paul also stresses the reason why the Lord supplies his people with his strength.

1. It is “for is all endurance and patience with joy.”
2. We need endurance and patience in this life.
3. We face many crosses, many temptations, many adversities, many trials as we live out our days in this world.
4. God supplies us with all that we need so that we can persevere in the faith and patiently wait upon him.
5. And this is not a stoic type of endurance.
6. It is not a matter of resigning ourselves to the hardness of life.
7. God’s strength empowers us to endure life’s trials with resolute joy.
8. The reason why we can have joy even in face of difficulty is because we know that our God is in control of everything.

IV. Thankful for Our Deliverance

- A. The last part of Paul’s petition is that the Colossians would give thanks to God for their deliverance.
 1. The Christian walk is to be characterized by thanksgiving because the new life that we have in Christ is a gift that God has freely given to us.
 2. The way to foster a genuinely thankful spirit is to take the time to reflect upon all that God has done for us in Christ.
 3. Paul says that God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.
 4. This confronted the false teaching in Colossae, because it made it clear that believers in Jesus Christ have no reason to worry that anything will be able to disqualify us from life with God.

5. This verse is also a good proof-text against the Roman Catholic notion of purgatory.
 6. How could God keep those whom he has already qualified for heaven out of heaven when they die?
 7. In Christ, God has qualified us for heaven.
 8. What a wonderful thought for us to cherish and meditate upon!
 9. While we could never do anything to qualify ourselves for the honor of sharing in the inheritance of the saints in light, God has qualified us by providing what we need in Christ.
- B. For a Jewish Christian like Paul, the term “inheritance” recalls the inheritance that God had promised to Abraham and reiterated to Israel many times in the Old Testament.
1. While Paul is not talking about a physical land inheritance here, he is talking about the ultimate goal of the promises that God gave to his covenant people of old.
 2. He is speaking of the inheritance that we will enjoy as members of the new creation, which will be consummated at Christ’s return.
 3. We should never lose our sense of wonder as we think about the glories that lie in store for us in the life to come.
 4. Listen to J. Gresham Machen’s description of our heavenly inheritance: “whoever possesses [salvation in Christ] has for himself... a treasure compared with which all the kingdoms of the earth — nay, all the wonders of the starry heavens — are as the dust of the street.” [cited in Troxel, “The World Is Not Enough,” in *Confident of Better Things*, 364]
 5. This is the inheritance that is being kept for us in heaven, even as we are being guarded by faith until it is revealed in the last time.

- C. Paul gives us a further reason to be thankful when he reminds us that God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.
1. Until a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ, he or she is under the dominion of Satan.
 2. When a person is saved, he or she is brought under the benevolent reign of King Jesus.
 3. Paul's use of the word "delivered" here may hearken back to the key instance of deliverance in the Old Testament: Israel's exodus from Egypt.
 4. That deliverance was not brought about by the strength or cunning of the Jews, or by the bold leadership of Moses.
 5. It was brought about by the mighty arm of God.
 6. The same is true of our deliverance in Christ.
- D. The last thing that Paul says in this text points us to the means by which God has brought about this deliverance.
1. He says, in Christ "we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."
 2. In the first century, the term "redemption" had connotations with being set free from slavery.
 3. Christ has redeemed us from our slavery to sin and Satan and judgment by paying the ransom price on the cross.
 4. Because of his shed blood, we can know that our sins truly are forgiven.
 5. That is something for which you should give thanks every day of your life.

V. Conclusion

- A. Paul's intercession for the Colossian Christians in this passage shows us what our ultimate needs really are.
- B. We need wisdom from God if we are going to live in harmony with God's ultimate purposes for the world.
- C. We need strength from God in order to walk in a manner worthy of him.
- D. And we need to cultivate gratitude for all that God has done for us in Christ.
- E. Paul prays these things because they are central to Christian identity.
- F. We might even say that this prayer is itself a portrait of what it means to be delivered from the dominion of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of Christ.