

Never Ceasing Prayer for Your Church

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[0 : 00] Let's begin with some prayer. And after you can turn in your Bibles to Colossians, or if you're already there, that's great.

But let's pray first. So Father, we thank you. We thank you that you have given us a church in Cambridge, Lord.

And I do pray that you would help this church to re-engage with East Cambridge, Lord, as they had originally been targeting, Lord.

But thank you that they can meet here, Lord, in this community center, Lord. And that your gospel can be shared here and through this community and as well the communities all around Cambridge and other towns, Lord, in the city.

Your gospel, Lord, is your message of love for your people. And so I pray that that message will be clear, that they would be able to bring that.

[1 : 03] And I pray that the word today will speak well to us so that we will know more of your wonderful news, the gospel, and your wonderful love for us.

Lord, I thank you. I thank you for this church. It's such a blessing to have this church here, Lord, and that you're continuing to grow it both numerically and spiritually.

We ask that you would make it a wonderful church that continues to just share your love with those in the community and share your love with each other, Lord.

I pray that they would build each other up in this church. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So let's turn in our Bibles to Colossians.

And I just want to say thanks for having me here. I mean, Jen's like, oh, this is such a privilege to have me. I feel like, oh, I'm the one that's privileged to be here.

[2 : 10] It's really, really good every time I get to see familiar faces and some new faces, which is fantastic. I love seeing how the church changes over time.

In some ways, it stays the same, too, which is wonderful. And I love seeing how many of you serve in such different ways. So I feel very privileged to be here.

That has nothing to do with my sermon, but I just wanted to say thank you. Thanks for having me. So let's stand in Colossians 1. Let's stand as well as I read. And I'm actually going to read from starting Colossians 1, verse 1, although I'm going to focus my sermon in verses 9 to 14, so pay special attention when I get there.

But I'm going to start in verse 1 just so you get the context of what Paul is talking about here. So Colossians 1, 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

[3 : 34] Of this you have heard before in the word of truth the gospel which has come to you as indeed in the whole world is bearing fruit and increasing as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth.

Just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant, he is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the

inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered 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.

Amen. You may be seated. Now, I have a question or a scenario for you, really, to imagine with me.

[5 : 10] And maybe this isn't like your life and you'll never own a boat. That's okay. And you won't immediately see how it's relevant to the scripture, but bear with me a little bit.

So, imagine this scenario. You're getting ready for a boating trip, right? You get together, you're fishing gear. Maybe you don't own a boat, you know, really, but just bear with me. So, you get all your together, together your fishing gear, your bait and tackle box.

You make up some sandwiches for lunch and snacks and drinks. You know, you put them in the cooler. Make sure you bring that. Life vests, you get some swimming gear, maybe some water skis, snorkels, inflatable tubes, all that good stuff.

You know, you're going to make a real great trip out of this. And you really map out the trip of where you're going to depart from the dock. And then you're going to travel for some good fishing areas and some maybe some good water skiing.

And then maybe a scenic area for lunch. And, you know, you bring an extra change of clothes, some towels, got to bring the sunblock, bug spray in case there's bugs. And you got to get, like, the GPS device and the fish tracker, all that, like, high-tech stuff that I have no clue about.

[6 : 19] But you bring all that stuff, too, because you know you got all this stuff. And you head out of the house, and you travel down to the dock, ready with all your stuff, but you forgot to bring the boat.

You forgot the main thing. Imagine how ridiculous that would be, right? All that other stuff is meaningless without the point of your trip, the boat.

And in a similar way, all the stuff of Christianity is meaningless without Christ and Him crucified.

Paul's concern for the church in Colossae, and really God's concern for all churches, is that we would remember the main thing and keep the main thing the main thing.

That we would know and live out the core of Christianity, Christ and Him crucified. And so, how I would summarize this passage is maybe not evident that I'm bringing it back to the main thing, but bear with me again.

That's what he's talking about in verses 9 to 14, is pray for God to give us knowledge of His will and make us thankful for deliverance. Pray for God to give us knowledge of His will and make us thankful for deliverance.

[7 : 48] It's a very simple message here. You've probably all heard it before, but we need reminders again and again. So, Paul's prayer for the church in Colossae is this prayer really for all churches.

And let me be clear here, by church we mean the people which make up the church. We're not the building, obviously. And not just the leaders that make up a church.

We're talking about all who are part of a local expression of God's people. That's Paul's prayer includes all churches and includes your church.

And we can face similar dangers that this church in Colossae faced. And we can even face false teaching at times. We can face similar struggles.

And so we should endeavor to have and to be what He prays for. Paul prays for us. Paul prays for this church.

[8 : 48] And so we should endeavor to have and be what He prays for. Paul's prayer should be our prayer for our church. It should be your prayer for your church.

It should be your prayer for other churches. and that's my continual prayer for you. You know, I have to admit that I don't pray as much as I'd like.

I don't know if I pray never ceasing like Paul does. I would love to. I want to increase my prayer but I do commit to you whether I'm officially a borrowed elder of yours or just a guy on the street.

I will continue to pray for you. You will be in my prayer. Really, you will be. And I pray that you will continue to grow and that you will never lose sight of the gospel.

And I pray that you will never lose sight of Christ's amazing and miraculous work that he continues to do through you at this church.

[9 : 59] And I will continue to pray for you as long as you are a church and I am alive. Really, I'm going to commit to that.

I want to continue to pray for you. You're near and dear to my heart and your work in reaching the lost in Cambridge is near to my heart as well.

I've worked in Cambridge for almost 13 years now. Actually, before that I worked in Cambridge too. So I worked in Cambridge for quite a while and the people of Cambridge are on my heart.

People in New England are on my heart. So I'll continue to pray for you. That's my commitment to you. Now, I want you to also pray as a result too.

So it's worthwhile looking into how Paul prays because I think that should model how we pray at times. You don't necessarily have to always pray this way, but these are good things to pray for and to pray for your specific church and to pray for other churches.

[11 : 03] And so there are really two parts here to Paul's prayer. And the first is this. It says, know God's will so that you may walk in a manner worthy of him. Know God's will so that you may walk in a manner worthy of him.

This is verses nine to 12. And in a commentary written by Grant Osborne, he describes the establishment of this church in Colossae. So just a little bit of background in this church.

It was founded during the third missionary journey in which Paul spent over two years in Ephesus, a city nearby. And he may have sent evangelists into the whole province in that area with the result that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.

That was Acts 19. Now, we don't know if Paul himself ever actually visited Colossae, and I think probably not, but we do know the founding pastor of the church was Epaphras, which is mentioned as I read.

He came from Colossae. He was converted under Paul in Ephesus and returned to his home area with the gospel. And nearly all the converts of Colossae were Gentiles, not Jews.

[12 : 24] And Epaphras, I think the really interesting part about this, this isn't the main point of the message, but Epaphras was really just a guy who heard the gospel and brought it back home with them.

I think that's something for us to consider for mission work sometimes done, you know, by men who don't necessarily feel called to be a pastor, and by women, whether you have seminary training or not, whether you've been trained, you can bring the gospel with you.

And maybe America is not your home country. Maybe you'll bring it back to where you came from.

Maybe U.S. is home, but you have a desire for China or elsewhere.

Maybe you can bring the gospel there. You don't have to be a pastor. You don't necessarily even have to be the stereotypical missionary, but just somebody who works in China.

Anyway, that's a topic for another day. The Christians in Colossae were dealing with some false teaching. Teaching was this kind of a proto-Gnostic philosophy.

[13 : 34] If you're familiar with Gnosticism, it basically said that the physical is evil and the spiritual is good, or that the physical is unimportant, and the only thing that matters is the spiritual.

And so they proposed, some of them proposed, that Jesus was not really physically God. And they promoted the way to salvation was a direct knowledge of God, or direct knowledge to God.

And we don't really know how developed the ideas of Gnosticism were at the time of this writing, but we do know that some of the struggles that the church in Colossae had, they faced because of this particular heresy.

And it focused on knowledge and delving deep into philosophies that were really speculative at best. And they also promoted, you know, certain rules about eating and drinking and various rules about religious festivals.

And all this meant that these teachers were drawing focus away from the truth. Salvation through Christ alone.

[14 : 43] Paul writes this letter to reiterate what he first taught them, or really first taught Epaphras, who then taught them. Faith in Christ is the way to salvation.

It doesn't depend on our works. It doesn't depend on our knowledge or our wisdom or our intelligence. It doesn't depend on what we eat or don't eat or what we drink or don't drink, or whether we observe certain rules about religious festivals.

This is the truth, that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life physically and spiritually. He died physically on the cross for our sins. And he has risen from the grave physically.

He is seated on the right hand of the Father in heaven where he intercedes for us. So that if you have faith in him and you repent, he has saved you.

He has forgiven you. He's called you brother or sister. And the Father has called you son or daughter. What Paul is reminding them of is that Jesus Christ is your core.

[15:58] He's reminding us of the same thing. Jesus Christ is our center. He's how we're saved, but also how we continue in the faith. He's how we're saved, and how we continue in the faith.

There's not some higher truth that we'll eventually get to after you kind of get the basics of Christianity out of the way. Christ is the core, and he's our life. And we should never move beyond this.

It's particularly interesting that Paul is praying for the Colossians to know, to grow in knowledge. The false teachers were saying something kind of similar.

That we need to grow in knowledge to be closer to God or attain salvation, or to grow in knowledge for the sake of knowledge. But Paul's very specific in what kind of knowledge.

What kind of knowledge does Paul want us to have? It says in verse 9, 9, knowledge of God's will.

[17:05] That's interesting. Verse 9 to 10, And so from the day that we heard, we had not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.

As I studied the passage, that really, it grabbed me. The kind of knowledge that we're to grow in is not a knowledge for the sake of knowledge.

It's not a knowledge that puffs us up. Hey, I'm gonna, I'm gonna get all the knowledge of the world. I'm gonna get my doctorate and be really super smart. Not that that's bad.

But it's a knowledge of God's will so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. This is not a knowledge for its own sake, a knowledge that will make us really smart.

It's a knowledge so that we will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Not a knowledge of God's will so that you'll know like what college you should go to or who you should marry.

[18:18] Not a knowledge of what career you should go into. Not a knowledge of when or how many kids you should have. Not a knowledge of, you know, what stocks or investments you should get into.

It's a knowledge of God's will so that you will grow in holiness and sanctification. A knowledge that leads you to act more like Jesus Christ. And this matters a lot because if you try to serve God and worship Him without knowledge of His will, you'll be worshipping a God of your own imagination. And many people try to do that. It's really not that much different than worshipping a God made of wood or stone or gold. We must know God's will to know who He is.

There are really four aspects of being filled with the knowledge of God's will that Paul prays for this church and really is praying for us too. And I pray for you.

I have them A, B, C, D here. A is bearing fruit in every good work. Verse 10. B is increasing in the knowledge of God. Again, verse 10. C is being strengthened with all power.

[19:37] And D, giving thanks for our share in the inheritance. And so we'll go through these really briefly but I just want to lay out His prayers are really specific in a number of these areas.

So A, bearing fruit in every good work. Verse 10. There are many false teachings that this church is facing as I mentioned. And there are many worldly philosophies that really assault our eyes and our ears.

But Paul is not praying that our knowledge of God's will is to combat these false teachings. Not directly anyway. He's not praying so that we can engage and debate well although certainly that can happen.

That's not His focus. Our focus is not to match these philosophies with our own philosophies. What God wants for us is that we would know His will so that we will bear good fruit.

Our study of Scripture even deep theological study should be practical. It should affect us. It should lead us to change in our behavior or our thoughts such that we do good works.

[20:50] You know, I know too many people and we all can be tempted to this but too many people have delved deep into studying theology and studying Scripture and increasing their knowledge of God.

You know, studying the Hebrew and the Greek and all that only to throw it all away either by committing some disqualifying sin or just walking away from the faith entirely and really none of us are too holy or sanctified to keep from this happening.

This is why we must be vigilant in our study and meditation of Scripture that should not just increase our knowledge. When you hear a sermon it's not so that we can just increase your knowledge of the

Word.

I hope my sermon is not just serving your head knowledge but affecting your heart and affecting how you conduct yourself. And so when we study Scripture we want to make sure that it's producing real fruit in our lives and increasing our love for God.

You know, one of the things I sometimes get concerned about is people will read through the Bible in a year or half a year or however many like a really accelerated pace which is fine.

[22 : 11] I think it's great for you to do. I think you should learn about the Scripture and it's great to read it in a short time span. But if you're doing that just so that you can know the Bible better rather than knowing God better right check check what your heart is in that in that endeavor.

I do want you to know Scripture. I want you to memorize Scripture. I want you to be familiar with it. You should be familiar with it. God wants you to be familiar with it.

But more so He wants you to be familiar with it because it's how we get familiar with God. It's how we become more familiar with God as we know what He said in His Word.

If you want to get to know somebody you listen to their words. Right? You can't just kind of observe them from afar and kind of like oh looks like he likes basketball but he played like one time you know but we have to listen.

When we want to get to know somebody listen to them talk. You hear about what they like and what they dislike. what they do for work what they do at home what they believe.

[23 : 29] It's important for us to know what God believes. Alright let's keep moving. B. Increasing the knowledge of God.

It's just what I'm talking about. The knowledge of God's will increases in our knowledge of God Himself. Knowing what God says is good is actually good and knowing what is evil is actually evil knowing that studying that if we accept that as true we grow in our understanding of God Himself we will grow to be closer to God Himself we will be more and more like Jesus but if we see in scripture that God calls something evil and we resist I'm not sure if that's evil or he calls something good and you're like I don't like that if we shy away from it if we don't see it as evil ourselves or we don't see it as good ourselves and we kind of put a barrier to our own understanding of God and now I'm not saying that you necessarily need to always understand everything you know why God says something is evil and why

God says something is good you don't have to always understand everything the why behind everything but we do have to trust God that what he says is good is good and what he says is evil is actually evil I think a lot of times when we are tempted to sin and we give in to that sin it's because we don't really recognize it as evil we think oh there's that good thing over there that God says I'm not supposed to have but it looks really good I'm going to go do that and then we repent because we feel bad afterwards there is forgiveness there's grace God God also wants you to grow in holiness so that when you are tempted you will resist and thus you will know him better you will grow in holiness

C being strengthened with all power this is an interesting one to me verse 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy you know what we are weak we have to admit that before God and you know facing the difficulties of life can wear us down and I think that knowing God's will being convinced of it it will help us as we face opposition and persecution it will help us as we face temptation to sin and temptation to compromise our values to hide when we should be shining our light before others to see so we get worn down we get tired but know that continuing in God's will is what will produce in us the most joy do you believe that do you believe that following

God will produce the most joy in your life because sometimes that thing that seems really tempting it seems like the world really enjoys that thing it seems like that will produce joy and I'm missing out on it I'm not getting that joy no following God's will it's not always going to lead to happiness and joy joy feelings but real lasting joy that's what it will produce and it will lead you to live the best life that you can live and a life worthy of our calling in Christ knowing God's will will produce that in you and lastly giving thanks for our share in the inheritance verse 12 giving thanks to the father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light now remember this whole clause begins in verse 9 asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding how does knowing

[27 : 59] God's will promote giving thanks for our share in the inheritance if we know God's will we know what is good and what is evil right we know that we have failed to live up to the standard

knowing God's will means that we also know that we have sinned we know we were enemies of God because of sin the world I think a lot of the issue in modern Christianity modern western civilization probably throughout the whole world is the fact that a lot of us don't recognize that we have sin or we don't know what sin is or we don't recognize how serious sin is but

God is a holy God he cannot abide sin at all he can't be near sin he can't be near sinners sinners getting close to God means they will just instantly die he is so holy so radiant not only will it produce fear in us but we literally will die if we are in his presence that is the seriousness of sin even the smallest of sins even that little white lie that you told even that exaggeration that you had somebody believing something better about you than was really true whatever that sin is and maybe you have some major sins you are aware of we can come before him repent and receive forgiveness and so when we get that forgiveness we get to share in the inheritance of the saints in light all that Jesus has won through his obedience he lived a perfect life and he has won all the blessings that God has and we get to share in that just think about that a moment there's no limit to the blessings and all the good stuff that God has there's no limit he can always give us more of himself because he is an infinite God and he is good and full of blessings and we don't have to wait until heaven to partake of these blessings God blesses us now in Christ with every spiritual blessing so knowing this knowing that we do not deserve this because we've not lived up to his standard we have defied God's will so we should be ever thankful that we can stand before him because we have a mediator in Christ Jesus so we can be in his presence we can receive all the blessings that he has we get to share in this inheritance that should make us ever thankful so my question is how can we increase in all of these things just like

Paul prayed for the Colossians how can we increase in these things we must pray for each other in this church and in other gospel preaching churches we must pray for ourselves to grow in the knowledge of God's will so that let's pray that we grow in this knowledge so that we bear good fruit so that we increase in the knowledge of God so that we are strengthened with all power and we give thanks for our share in the inheritance so not only must we pray to be thankful for inheritance but also remember our deliverance they're very closely related but they're slightly different and so bear with me a little bit more as I take you through the second part of these verses we're to take hold of the forgiveness that we have in Christ remember and take hold of our deliverance and forgiveness that's my second point remember and take hold of our deliverance and forgiveness verses 13 and 14 and

Paul is ending his prayer how he began it so let me let me read in verse 3 to 5 when he began this prayer we always thank God the father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we prayed for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven of this you have heard before in the word of the truth the gospel and now in verse 13 and 14 saying very similar things he has delivered 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 we must remember where we were before Christ and I just talked a little bit about that but he highlights that we were in the domain of darkness we were part of the kingdom of death that's that's where we're citizens of the dark domain we're slaves to sin we're slaves to the devil really but we have been transferred where have we gone we become

[33 : 38] Christ's kingdom citizens of Christ's kingdom citizens of heaven and with it we have all the rights granted to us by being citizens of heaven all the rights that Christ has won for us in his kingdom we share in those Paul is highlighting this truth yet again because it is the core of Christianity we so quickly forget we so quickly get sidetracked we place other things as higher priority than remembering and cherishing this truth Jesus came to earth as a baby he lived a perfect life he died on the cross for our sin and rose from the grave on the third day and if we repent of our sins have faith in him we have forgiveness and redemption in him now maybe this is unfamiliar to you and this is the first time you hearing there's an opportunity for you even here right now you can recognize oh yes

I have sinned I've done wrong and to repent to believe in Christ as your savior if you're in that situation come come talk to me or Sean or really anybody in this church can help you walk through that did you know that you need a savior to get to heaven you won't get there by doing doing all the good works and donating all your money and time to charities those are good things they won't get you to heaven you need Christ you need a savior but to the rest of you you are familiar with this right you've heard this many times you probably hear this every week I hope you hear this every

week you probably hear this multiple times a week you probably read this in scripture many times it's so many times you stop paying attention

I've done that I've heard oh yeah I know the gospel I get to that point of the sermon yeah I know I've I mean I've studied this but what's more important than this truth is there anything more important all the things that I've said to you up until now pale in comparison to the gospel there is nothing more important than this truth this is why we constantly talk about the gospel this is why we constantly sing about it and pray about it and preach about it we preach about the cross of Christ and what Christ has done for us and this isn't just where we start on the Christian journey it's the entire journey we never move beyond the gospel we never get beyond the cross we never get beyond Christ into some deeper theology it's all about him from him for him because of him and through him he's the entire thing

Christianity Christ it's part of it it's the core it's our center now you're going through Exodus right we're going through Exodus as well at my church remember how the Hebrews were delivered out of Egypt remember how they were slaves to the Egyptians and that even with the mighty works of God through Moses that the Pharaoh would not let the people go and finally God took some really drastic measures to deliver the people out of the land of darkness to deliver them out of slavery and yet what did the people do time and time again they forgot they forgot God's power when they were up against the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army what did they do they said God save us no they said we're all gonna die they forgot

God's might they had just seen it but they forgot they were fearful they thought they were gonna die but God delivered them God made a way part of the Red Sea they crossed on dry ground with a wall of water on each side and behind them Pharaoh's army tried to come after them but God squashed the wall then they went through the desert a little bit and they got thirsty and the water was bitter so what do they do they say God can you help us make the water better no they didn't do that they said we're gonna die the water is horrible so they complained again they forgot God's power but God is forgiving and he provided and gave them sweet water when they were hungry they again complained but

[38 : 57] God provided manna food from the sky basically then they were thirsty again here's another you're faced with thirst God delivers you you're again faced with thirst what do you do you complain that you're gonna die and they rebelled but God provided water from a rock a miracle after miracle and you haven't gotten there yet I don't think but coming soon they they went to Mount Sinai and they were waiting for Moses to return they forgot about God and they created these statues golden calves and they worshipped them time and time again people forgot but time and time again God forgave them and once again delivered them they needed to be reminded over and over and that's so why so many of the

Psalms cover the events of God delivering the Jews out of Egypt so many parts of scripture recall those events because they would so often forget they would sing the songs so that they remember and tell the next generation what God has done for them and we are just like them when we're tempted to see in scripture all these Hebrews they were just so dumb complaining we do the same thing I do the same thing and we so easily forget just like they do we so easily take it for granted what Christ has done for us we forget where we would be without our redemption in Christ so the application is fairly simple here take hold of your deliverance and redemption in Christ don't skip over that part when you're reading or listening to scripture don't tune out when your pastors are preaching the gospel again for the 40th time that Sunday don't skim over the parts of the gospel when you're reading a good

Christian book pay attention pay special attention when you're reading and it comes to the connection to the gospel to the connection to Christ when you're singing make that part the most meaningful part of your singing pay attention when you're shown the connection to Christ in scripture cherish and enjoy the forgiveness that you have in Christ each day how do we do these things we pray Paul is praying for your church I want you to pray for your church Paul is praying for you I want you to pray for you as well so pray for these things pray that God would give us knowledge of his will make us thankful for deliverance pray for your church pray for other churches ask God to do this in your life and let us never cease to pray for the church in this way let's pray right now father we thank you that you've given us this scripture today

Lord and help us to ever keep the gospel keep Christ in him crucified ever in our eyes as the most important the core the center of our beliefs and our walk with you that really is the center of our lives

Lord we so easily forget so easily take it for granted so I pray Lord instill in the hearts of each person here a love for the gospel a love for Christ and his amazing work that he accomplished on the cross and his work that he continues to do through each and every Christian you have saved Holy

Spirit pour out your spirit upon us this morning that we would appreciate to treasure our deliverance and redemption that we have in Christ make it more real to us we pray this in Jesus name amen eat that we are way to to us to and