

# Transformation

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 20 September 2020

Preacher: Rev. Aaron Roberts

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, good evening. Thank you, Sarah. So we are in our second week in this new series in Colossians, and let me start with a big picture. I love the big picture. Here it is.

Paul. Paul's in prison, and he's heard about this church in Colossae, which he's never visited. He's heard about this small church in Colossae, started by a guy called Epaphras, and Paul's just, he's just over the moon. He's super excited about this church. He's heard good things about it. So he writes them a letter, and he says, I am praying and praying and I'm praying and I'm praying for you guys. And in this little section of Colossians, he tells us what he is praying for them. We hear the content of his prayers for them.

And as you heard the scripture read, one thing you might have noticed is that he's not afraid to be very specific. He didn't pray generalizations. He didn't pray, Lord, just bless their socks off. No, we hear his prayer. We hear very specific desires for them. We hear, we hear about what sort of Christians he wants them to be. So let's get into the text and find out what kind of Christians he wants them to be. So do you see where the prayer starts though in verse 9? It's very interesting. He says this. He says, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all spiritual wisdom and understanding. It's significant that that Paul starts by praying for their knowledge. Because, this is a context thing here, heretics had come into the small church and they were saying, look, if you follow our new way with our special rights and our mysteries and our rules, you can become super Christians. The heretics were sort of selling this idea of, you know, sort of like bonus level insight, deeper insight into things of God if you did all these extra things. And right there we have the roots of the Gnostic heresies, which were just a huge drama for the church in the second century and still in some brands of Christianity today. I'll give you an example. Today, Christians and evangelicals who should know better, sometimes they pull things into Christianity. They try and mush them in there, trying to make Christianity plus, like bonus Christianity. And it's just a gong show. A couple of examples are like this QAnon nonsense. A really big one is nationalism. Trying to shove nationalism into Christianity can become a nightmare. So we have this, there's this really well known pastor in North America, you probably have heard his name. I read something he wrote the other day. His faith is so stewed in nationalism and he's really concerned about the election. He's saying a civil war is coming and

Christians need to form militias and arm themselves because the government's going to try and take your guns away. Stop it. Stop it. Back to the passage. So there's visiting sort of heretics, visiting teachers have come to Colossae and what they're doing is they are pulling in Gnostic Greek philosophy, saying there's this whole other special knowledge that God is withholding from you. You can unlock it, do X, Y, Z rights. Now why do I say all that? Because when Paul says, be filled with the knowledge of God, he is not talking about some extra knowledge reserved for elite Christians. He is asking, he is praying that they would live into what God has already revealed in Jesus Christ. Paul is saying, you don't grow in your faith through new techniques, through mysticism. You grow by putting your roots deeper and deeper into Jesus. When you soak your mind with the revelation of Christ and what that means for the universe. This is what Paul prays for these Christians first. He prays for knowledge of something he has already revealed. But it's not to remain head knowledge. Look at verse 10.

So as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Know about Jesus. So as to walk in a manner worthy as the Lord. So as. Here you see knowledge and conduct are woven together. This means folks, it is not good enough just to think rightly. It is not good enough just to think right doctrine. You must live it out.

[ 4 : 41 ] These things are woven together. We must live a life worthy of the Lord. Now what does that mean? Sounds very serious. It is very serious. What does it mean? It means we live in such a way that gives people a picture of who God is. And then Paul drills down some more in verse 10, you see. Verse 10, he says, the walk he's talking about is worthy one. We just talked about that. Worthy and fully pleasing to God and bearing fruit. So let's unpack those two things there. Fully pleasing.

So understanding God means studying what pleases him. So for those of you who have married your spouse, you probably know what your spouse likes. Like it could be like tidiness. They like things to be ordered, right? And you probably know what ticks them off. Maybe like a lack of planning.

So what do you do? You please them. You do what pleases them. You find out what they like and you do what pleases them because you love them. It's a very simple concept. But it's important to get your head around that because we misunderstand the moral expressions of Christianity sometimes.

And sometimes we think of them as things that we can use to control our life or control our kids if we just obey these rules. But no, the moral expression of Christianity exists. We do it because it pleases God. Because it's a way of saying we love you, God. That's an important distinction.

Now, what about this bearing fruit business? That's another mark of Paul's prayer. Paul prays that there would be tangible outworking of the knowledge of God and his people. Let me give you a very simplistic example. So the other day I'm driving to work and there's a guy beside me. So I'm stopped in traffic.

[ 6 : 29 ] There's a guy right beside me. And he's in a very, very nice car. And I'm driving my car, which is a very beaten up 99 Toyota Tressel, which I find embarrassing to drive, to be honest. So really nice car guy has accidentally got into a turning lane. So we're right beside each other. And he needs to get into my lane. So I just, I make eye contact with him and I indicate that he can pop in front of me when the light turns green. Now, why do I do that? See, I could have used that opportunity in quite a pity way. For about 30 seconds, I had power over this guy. I could have punished him out of jealousy for his car, but I did it. I let him in. I let him in cheerfully. I had no sense that I was being taken advantage of. Why could I do that? Because I know what grace is. I know what grace is. I've received grace and I want to pass that on. That action of letting him in, it's simply the fruit of knowledge. Paul prays for fruit. Fruit means a tree is healthy. It means the internals of the tree are working. To sort of continue this agrarian analogy here, the harvest of wisdom is good works, good actions. Now, the heretics who had come to this church in Colossae, they had knowledge to pass on, but it was poison. And the fruit of their knowledge was conceit. The harvest of their knowledge was a sense of superiority, thinking themselves as super Christians. Okay, summary so far. Paul says for us to dig deep, dig deep into what God has revealed in Christ. And the fruit of that will be a life that pleases God and filled with good deeds, good works, good actions. Now, look at verse 11. Verse 11.

Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might. This is important. We've just heard Paul's expectations for God's people. And the standard for Christian living, it seems very high, doesn't it? So here's what Paul prays next. Be strengthened with all power according to his glorious might. The standard is high. We can't do it, but God can do it through us.

God can do it through us. He gives us the power. Folks, do not underestimate the power of God in your life, particularly in the areas that you feel weakened. Do not underestimate the power of God in your life. God gives us what he demands from us. Are we living in this strength? How would you know?

Have a look at the rest of verse 11 and 12 there in your Bibles. Look at the fruit. It talks about endurance, patience, joy, giving thanks to the Father. This is the fruit. This is the fruit of a life empowered by the Spirit. Are you short on these things? Are these things lacking in your life?

Yes, they are lacking in my life. But you know what? It's okay because Paul's prayer gives us the path forward, doesn't it? We need a greater understanding of Christ through the Spirit. And we can do that and we can pray for God to work in our life, to see that fruit visible in our life through understanding who Christ is and what he has done. Paul finishes with an example of how all of this works. So let's drill right down on the example of thanksgiving as one of the fruits because that's the one he really expands on in verse 12. And he basically says in verse 12, thankfulness will arise in your life as you understand what God has done for you. So let me read verses 12 to 14 to you.

[ 10 : 27 ] Giving thanks to the Father. Why? 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. Isn't that brilliant?

Paul says thankfulness will grow in your life as you understand the gospel. And then in 12 to 14, he gives us a description of the gospel. He describes salvation to us and he doesn't mess around, does he?

He says our biggest problem is that we were actually in the dark. We're in the dark and God transferred us into the kingdom of light. So salvation is not, you got religion and now you're slightly more pleasant.

No, you were in the dark and you came into the light and you didn't make that transfer yourself. God took you and transferred you. So where I live in my house, there are people that live below us.

They are refugees from Syria. They are Christians and they have known a lot of death and pain and trauma in their life. And for the last two and a half years, three years, they've been waiting for a letter from the Canadian government, literally for years, right? Saying, hey, you guys can stay in Canada.

[ 11 : 56 ] They would check the mailbox a couple of times a day and we would have a conversation a couple of times a day. Was there any mail for us? Was there any mail for us? We have a little metal flap on our mailbox and we'd hear it banging a couple of times a day. Then waiting for that letter for two and a half years. It was agonizing. About a month ago, I came home and I walked through the front gate and Azar, my friend who lives downstairs, came around the side of the house, big smile on his face. And he's literally, he's dancing. He's doing this kind of this Middle Eastern dance. It's brilliant.

And he dances towards me. He wraps his huge arms around me and he says, I got the letter. I got the letter. They received the letter granting them the status of permanent residence in Canada and the joy on their faces, the joy. They honestly, they just look like different people now.

So this giant weight has been lifted off. Canada is their home and that cannot be taken away from them. Salvation is new status that can't be taken from you. You're in a much better place. You have moved realms. It's like a change of citizenship. You have a heavenly passport to the kingdom of God all through what Christ has done. We were in the darkness. We couldn't get ourselves out. God made a way he transferred us. There's a Canadian theologian I like called Don Carson. Here's how he explains it.

If God had perceived that our greatest need was economic, he would have sent an economist. If he had perceived that our greatest need was entertainment, he would have sent us a comedian or an artist.

If God had perceived our greatest need was political stability, he would have sent us a politician. If he had perceived our greatest need was health, he would have sent us a doctor. But he perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from him, our profound rebellion, our death, and he sent a savior. And the more we understand that, the more thankful we will be. The feeling I get from people at the moment and chatting to people in our congregation is that bubbling up, bubbling up to the surface of your life is some bitterness, some annoyance, some apathy. And it makes sense. It makes sense. This is a brutal time.

[ 14 : 28 ] The thing is though, if your eyes are only on what's immediately before you, you will stay in that place. But when your horizon is bigger than that, when it's the grand story of the universe, when your eyes on that, that's what enables Christians to be people whose life is marked by joy and thankfulness, even in the midst of seemingly impossible situations.

Let me finish here. One of the things our passage does today is it calls us to prayer.

And it furnishes our imagination with prayers that are bigger than perhaps what we have been praying. Bigger and more specific. It gives us a wider vision, a bigger vision of how we can pray for each other.

So let's pray these things. Let's pray these things for ourselves. Let's pray these things for each other. And Sarah's going to do that in a moment.

But first, we're going to sing our next song. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[ 15 : 48 ] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.