

Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (3) Paul's Prayer for Spiritual Growth (Col. 1:9-14)

Let us turn once again to the first chapter of Paul's epistle to the church at Colossae. I would not be surprised if the matters that we will address today are familiar to you; in fact, I hope that they are familiar to you. For although there are profound matters before us, there is nothing that is new or novel to most of us. We know and are convinced of these things. And I am glad that this is so. There was a time when most of us taught was new to many of us. But those days are past, and I am pleased that they are so. I hope the time will come when I will stand here not able to teach you anything with which you are unfamiliar, for you have heard it and believed it for many years. In fact, that should be my goal, that we come to the place in which you are all well taught in the whole counsel of God.

But even if every word spoken to today or every Lord's Day was only what you have already heard and understood, to repeat the matter is helpful and needful for us. Peter wrote of matters touching upon salvation, often repeating himself, knowing that his readers knew the substance of which he was writing. Here are his words:

¹⁰Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; ¹¹for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. ¹²*For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth.* ¹³Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, *to stir you up by reminding you*, ¹⁴knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. ¹⁵Moreover I will be careful to ensure *that you always have a reminder of these things* after my decease. (2 Pet. 1:10-15)

Peter had taught them these things in the past. He was presently teaching them these matters. And he would see to it after he had died that they would continue to be taught in these matters. And of course, his epistle being inspired of God and included in our canon of Scripture, brought Peter's desire to realization.

In our study of Paul's epistle to the church at Colossae, we arrive today to the second major paragraph that follows the initial greeting. Last week we considered the first full paragraph, in which Paul's declared that he prayed to God a word of thanksgiving whenever he had thought of these Christians at Colossae. They were Christians because God had performed a great work of grace, even sovereign grace, in bringing them salvation. In this second paragraph we read further that Paul prayed for this church. We could describe this paragraph as Paul praying for their spiritual growth. Let us read **Colossians 1:9 through 14**.

⁹And 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 in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so 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. ¹¹May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Last Lord's Day we described Paul's common style of writing. He constructed long, detailed, compound sentences. He would set forth a main subject and its verb, but then he would string a number

of subordinate and supporting phrases and clauses in order to complete his sentence. We pointed out that in the Greek text, the one paragraph of Colossians 1:3 through 8 is but one sentence in the Greek text of Paul's original epistle.

Paul did not change his style in the paragraph before us. All of verses 9 through 14 in the Greek text are one sentence. In fact, in the Greek text Paul's one sentence continues from verse 9 through the end of verse 20. There are 218 Greek words in this one sentence.¹ In the Greek text the paragraph includes all of verses 9 through 17.² But in this paragraph set forth in the English Standard Version (ESV) the translators did as they had done in the paragraph we studied last week. In order to make the subject easier for modern English readers, the one sentence in Greek of verses 9 through 17 is translated into 6 English sentences. And they also divided the one paragraph into two paragraphs for ease of reading and comprehension.³

In **verse 9** Paul once again declared to this church that he was continually praying whenever he thought of them. He had made a similar declaration in verse 3. But whereas in verse 3 his prayer was directed to God thanking Him for having brought them to salvation, here in verses 9ff Paul was asking God to assist these Christians to live as Christians should live. Paul was praying for their spiritual growth.

God would have His people grow in their maturity as Christians. Peter wrote to new Christians exhorting them to grow.

You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; ***but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*** (2 Pet. 3:17f)

Children have a natural desire to grow up. So it is that new, young Christians have the desire to grow, or it should be their desire. But where as a child will tend to grow physically without much attention or effort, the young Christian will only grow if God enables him or her to grow. This is why it is necessary to pray to God that Christians grow; they will not do so otherwise. Only God can give the increase.

The Lord Jesus has given church leaders to the end that His people would grow. Their spiritual growth is necessary in order to protect them from being vulnerable as children in the faith. We read in Ephesians 4:11ff these words:

¹¹And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴***that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,*** ¹⁵***but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--*** Christ-- ¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph. 4:11-16)

¹ This is according to William Hendriksen. However, I am not sure which Greek text he was using, for my Greek text has two sentences, verses 9 through 17 and verses 18 through 20. William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, New Testament Commentary (Baker, Academic, 1964), p. 54.

² Aland, Kurt, et. al., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (United Bible Studies, 1966, 1968, 1975), p. 693f.

³ The NIV has three sentences in a paragraph that includes verse 9 through 14. The next paragraph contains 5 sentences from verses 15 through 17. The KJV and the NKJV follows the Greek text.

God gives gifted men to enable His people to grow. But it is God that uses them to bring growth to His people. He alone can enable His people to grow from immature Christians into stable, informed, mature Christians. This why Paul prayed to God the Father on their behalf and he wanted the folks in this church know that he prayed for them to this end.

Now in **verse 9** we read of the arena in which spiritual growth takes place. Paul wrote, “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 in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...*”

Now they already had the basics. They had faith in the Lord Jesus and they had love for all the saints (vs. 3, 4). But they had much growing to do. They needed to come to know fully the will of God. Paul prayed that God would enable them to “*be filled with the knowledge of His will.*”

At this point we might bring to the forefront once again the heresy that was plaguing the people in this church. There was a false religion that was emerging in that region of the Roman Empire, which later would come to be known as Gnosticism. The word, Gnosticism, is derived from the Greek word, *gnosis*, which is the word meaning “knowledge.” Two characteristics of Gnosticism might be helpful for us to remember. First, the false religion was based on Greek dualistic philosophy. They viewed all of existence to be in the realm of co-eternal opposites. There was good and evil, flesh and spirit, light and darkness. Second, it was very syncretistic; that is, it was very adaptable to other religions, especially with Christianity.

Gnosticism adopted and adapted to Christian teaching. Gnostics claimed that they were true Christians and they joined the churches, even though there were some terrible heretical doctrines they espoused. They denied that Jesus Christ had two natures, divine and human. They also taught that salvation was through the merit of good works. And these good works were the product of coming to know secret knowledge of God. Through their “inside” knowledge of God that was made known to initiates into their cult, they thought that they could better understand and live within the world.

Now when Paul countered false teaching he would commonly use play on words to make his point. And so, where the Gnostics taught it was needful to attain a true knowledge (gnosis) of god, Paul declared here in verse 9 that he prayed that God would give these true Christians “full knowledge”, the Greek word being *epigenesis*, which was a heightened form of the word gnosis. The Gnostics claimed to have a “high knowledge” of god. But Paul upped them one, claiming that Christians should acquire an *epignosis*, a *full knowledge* of God’s will.

Now Paul prayed that this “full knowledge of God’s will” may be realized in two ways. Again, **verse 9** reads, “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 in *all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*” Christians need to grow through attaining full knowledge in God’s will in the arenas of spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding.

Now it may be that these two ideas are synonymous—spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding. He mentioned them both for emphasis. But if there is a difference in meaning of these two expressions, which I believe there is, then acquiring *spiritual wisdom* would be the ability to see and interpret the world from God’s perspective. *Spiritual understanding*, however, is to know how God would have you live according to the truth of His person and ways. And so, we might say that

Spiritual wisdom is knowing what God is like and what He is doing in His world.

Spiritual understanding is knowing what God would have you do.

And so, the way to grow spiritually is to increase in your knowledge of God, to walk with Him and hear from Him through His Word, and then to order your life according to that understanding. To the degree that you and I are able to do this and to do this increasingly, will be the degree that we mature spiritually.

Why was it that Paul desired that these Christians “may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”? **Verse 10** answers this question for us:

⁹And 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 in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰*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.*

Paul desired that they would grow so that their lives would be fully *pleasing* to the Lord. Paul desired these Christians to *learn* of Him more fully, so that they might *live* for Him more fully. **F. F. Bruce** said I well in his comments on this verse:

His prayer for them, then, is that they may attain to the full knowledge of God’s will through the insight that His Spirit imparts, and thus be able to please Him in everything and live in a way that befits His children... But the “knowledge” of which the apostle speaks is no merely intellectual exercise, no theosophical *gnosis* such as was affected by the teachers who were leading the Colossians astray. He wishes to impress his readers with the character and importance of true knowledge before drawing their attention to the dangers that “knowledge falsely so called” which was being pressed upon them. True knowledge is founded in practical religion; it is that knowledge which, according to the Old Testament, starts with a proper attitude towards God: “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge” (Prov. 1:7; cf. Psalm 111:10; Prov. 9:10). Right knowledge, according to Paul, leads to right behaviour; and here right knowledge is contrasted with wrong teaching.⁴

The aim and end of attaining wisdom and understanding in the will of God is to live rightly before the Lord. The end of full knowledge is good conduct. If increased knowledge does not result in improved conduct, then that knowledge will only aggravate one’s condemnation before God. We read this truth in **2 Peter 2:20** and **21**. Of false teachers Peter wrote,

For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹For it would have been better for them not *to have known the way of righteousness*, than *having known it, to turn from* the holy commandment delivered to them.

Even unsaved people may for a while experience some moral improvement in their lives from hearing and learning the truth, but if that knowledge is not fully acted upon, it only condemns them further before God.

It is easy to see how right thinking as a Christian leads to right living as a Christian. “The more God’s children know Him, the more they will also love Him; and the more they love Him, the more they will also wish to obey Him in thought, word, and deed.”⁵

And so, is it your desire “to walk in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord”? Then you will need spiritual wisdom and understanding that only He can give. Therefore we, as did Paul, must pray continually to our God that He would grant us this grace.

Now, how does a Christian walk in a manner that is pleasing to the Lord? Our passage sets forth four ways in which we can live so as to please the Lord. We read again verses 9 through 12

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans’ 1957), pp. 185f.

⁵ Hendriksen, *Colossians*, p. 57.

⁹And 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 in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so 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. ¹¹May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Here are the ways that we may please the Lord: (1) First, we may live in a manner pleasing to the Lord by “bearing fruit in every good work.” (2) Second, we may live in a manner pleasing to the Lord by “increasing in the knowledge of God.” (3) Third, we may live in a manner pleasing to the Lord when we live in “endurance and patience with joy.” (4) And fourth, we may live in a manner pleasing to the Lord when we are “giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” Let us consider each of these in turn.

1. We may live in a manner pleasing to the Lord by “bearing fruit in every good work.”

This speaks of good conduct and holy conduct in the manner that we live and seek to do good. Honesty, purity, and fidelity should be seen in all the works that we do. The stress here is not so much on what is done, but rather how everything is to be done. It is the manner that we serve God and others that is all important.

Now, when the Scripture speaks of “every good work”, it must be understood that a good work before God as defined and described in Holy Scripture. Our 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith has an article on what constitutes good works. Here is a synopsis of that article of faith:

- 1) Good works are only such as God hath commanded in his Holy Word, and not such as without the warrant thereof are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intentions. (Micah 6:8; Heb. 13:21; Matt. 15:9; Isa. 29:13)
- 2) These good works, done in obedience to God's commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith; and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus thereunto, that having their fruit unto holiness they may have the end eternal life. (James 2:18; 22; Psalms 116:12, 13; 1 John 2:3, 5; 2 Peter 1:5-11; Matt. 5:16; 1 Tim. 6:1; 1 Pet. 2:15; Phil. 1:11; Eph. 2:10; Rom. 6:22)
- 3) Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ; and that they may be enabled thereunto, besides the graces they have already received, there is necessary an actual influence of the same Holy Spirit, to work in them to will and to do of his good pleasure; yet they are not hereupon to grow negligent, as if they were not bound to perform any duty, unless upon a special motion of the Spirit, but they ought to be diligent in stirring up the grace of God that is in them. (John 15:4, 5; 2 Cor. 3:5; Phil. 2:12, 13; Heb. 6:11, 12; Isaiah 64:7)
- 4) They who in their obedience attain to the greatest height which is possible in this life, are so far from being able to supererogate, and to do more than God requires, as that they fall short of much which in duty they are bound to do. (Job 9:2, 3; Gal. 5:17; Luke 17:10)
- 5) We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come, and the infinite distance that is between us and God, whom by them we can neither profit nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins; but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants; and

because as they are good they proceed from his Spirit, and as they are wrought by us they are defiled and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure the severity of God's punishment. (Rom. 3:20; Eph. 2:8, 9; Rom. 4:6; Gal. 5:22, 23; Isaiah 64:6; Psa. 143:2)

6) Yet notwithstanding the persons of believers being accepted through Christ, their good works also are accepted in him; not as though they were in this life wholly unblamable and unprovable in God's sight, but that he, looking upon them in his Son, is pleased to accept and reward that which is sincere, although accompanied with many weaknesses and imperfections. (Eph. 1:6; 1 Pet. 2:5; Matt. 25:21, 23; Heb. 6:10).

7) Works done by unregenerate men, although for the matter of them they may be things which God commands, and of good use both to themselves and others; yet because they proceed not from a heart purified by faith, nor are done in a right manner according to the word, nor to a right end, the glory of God, they are therefore sinful, and cannot please God, nor make a man meet to receive grace from God, and yet their neglect of them is more sinful and displeasing to God. (2 Kings 10:30; 21:27, 29; Gen. 4:5; Heb. 11:4, 6; 1 Cor. 13:1; Matt. 6:2, 5; Amos 5:21-23; Rom. 9:16; Titus 3:5; Job 21:14, 15; Matt. 25:41-43)

Now God is not just concerned about us doing good works, but He is concerned with the manner that we do them. Again Paul wrote that we please God when we are “**bearing fruit**” in every good work.” It is important what you do. It is all important how and why you are doing it. We should be bearing fruit in all that we do. In other words, we should be displaying and imparting the grace of God to others through what we do. This is pleasing to God.

2. Second, we may live in a manner pleasing to the Lord by “increasing in the knowledge of God.”

Now, again, the Gnostics emphasized and prided themselves that they had “knowledge.” But theirs was primarily and solely *intellectual* knowledge. “Knowledge of God” as set forth in the Bible is largely *relational* knowledge. Christians not only strive to know more about God; they strive to know God personally and fully. Yes, we desire to know more *about* God. But we desire more. We desire to *know* God Himself. Our knowledge about God helps us know Him more fully.

We are to be as Paul, who wrote:

Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of *the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord*, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰*that I may know Him* and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:8-11)

We should desire and strive to know God more fully, to walk with Him, to commune with Him, and in this way fulfil the purpose for which God made man, that he might have fellowship with His Creator and Redeemer. Increasing in the knowledge of God is pleasing to God.

How else may we please God?

3. Third, we may live in a manner pleasing to the Lord when we live in “endurance and patience with joy.”

The Christian life is difficult, filled with hardship, disappointment, persecution, and weariness. Paul taught the new disciples of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch that “through much tribulation we enter the

Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22. And when one comes to salvation in Jesus Christ, and he continues in faith even in the presence of trials and troubles, this is pleasing to God!

We read in 1 Peter 2:20, “For what glory is it, if, when you are buffeted for your faults, you shall take it patiently? But if, when you do well, and suffer for it, you take it patiently, *this is acceptable with God.*”

On the other hand, the one who professes to know Him but then forsakes his faith in Christ when trials come, we know that God has no pleasure in that one. The Scripture declares, “Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, *“My soul has no pleasure in him”* (Heb. 10:39). To “draw back” is to abandon and reject Jesus Christ fully and finally, even though He was formerly confessed to be true.

Now trials will come, even severe trials. We will endure severe temptation as well. Trials without and temptations within, how shall we stand? How do we know that we will be able to stand in the evil day? How may we face and deal with these matters in “endurance and patience with joy”, as our text tells us is pleasing to the Lord? The answer is that we are in need of being strengthened by the Lord to persevere through these matters. And this is what we read in our text of **Colossians 1:11**. Paul wrote to the Colossians, *“May you be strengthened with all power,* according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy.” We are in need of God’s grace to help us in our time of need.

And thankfully this power is available to you and me for we may be strengthened with all of God’s power. Paul wrote in verse 11, “May you be strengthened with all power, *according to His glorious might,* for all endurance and patience with joy.” If we are to stand, He must hold us up. And so, Paul prayed continuously that God would strengthen them unto this end. And when one does persevere in faith, this is pleasing to God.

We might also say a word about Paul’s little expression, “with joy.” Again, verse 11 reads, “May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience *with joy.*” Christianity had some features that were similar or common with other movements of the day. Among the Greeks the philosophy of *Stoicism* was popular. This was a philosophy of life that characterized many. It had originated with the Greek philosopher, Xeno, who lived in Athens in the 3rd century BC. They taught that emotions were dangerous to the well-being of people when they were based upon errors of assessing events in the world. What was important to the Stoic was to be and remain virtuous and unbothered by that which transpires around him. And so, the Stoic would calmly face and endure difficulty, claiming to be at peace. But he was never one characterized with joy in his misery. Here, again, is how **F. F. Bruce** put it:

Such an endowment with divine power will enable them to stand firm in the face of trial and opposition and everything else that will test their faith in Christ. Patient endurance belongs to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It was, of course, a quality highly esteemed by the Stoics, but Paul adds another quality which was not so characteristic of Stoicism—joyfulness. Had not Paul himself learned to combine joyfulness with patience and long-suffering on more than on one occasion? A Stoic in the stocks would have borne the discomfort calmly and uncomplainingly, but would he at the same time have sung praises to God, as Paul and his friend Silas did in the prison in Philippi? Early Christianity and Stoicism show resemblance with respect to several ethical features, but the power which Christians received from God gave them something over and above what Stoicism could impart. The Stoic virtue of self-sufficiency falls short of that habit of mind to which Paul referred when he had said that he had learned to be content in all the circumstances of life, for Paul’s contentment was attended by a joyful exuberance which overflowed to others.⁶

How else may we please God?

⁶ Bruce, pp. 187f.

4. We may live in a manner pleasing to the Lord when we are “giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

Back in verse 3 we read that the Apostle Paul was thanking God for their salvation. Here he expressed his desire that they thank God for their salvation. This is only fitting since He was the One “who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

If you are a Christian, you are due to God’s work of grace on your behalf. He overcame your ignorance, your indifference, even insolence, your unbelief and your resistance to His rule. You were unqualified to enter His presence to be received by Him. But He set out to qualify you to share in what He has promised to all of His people. You will inherit all things for He has enabled you to be in the place and position to receive His blessing.

And the only reason that you are here today and not someone else in your place, is because, if you are in Christ, He set His heart upon You in eternity. He had decreed that He would bestow His everlasting blessing upon you and not on someone else other than you. He is solely responsible for your salvation; therefore you should give thanks continually to Him for His kindness and mercy that He has lavishly bestowed upon you. Not one of us fully realizes the extent of His kindness and blessing to us. Some of us may know more than others, but none of us knows very extensively how great His love is toward us. But we read in the Scriptures that on into eternity our God will continue to be revealing the nature and extent of His kindness toward us. Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:4ff** these words:

⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷*that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* (Eph. 2:4-7)

And so, to the degree that you realize your indebtedness to God’s sovereign grace, and you therefore render unto Him due thanksgiving for what He has so freely given you, this is pleasing to God.

We might say a word about the expression of **verse 12**, in which it is said of God, “who has qualified you *to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*” Our salvation is frequently set forth in the Holy Scriptures as something we are due to *inherit*. We have spoken of this before.

For His holy people—the people of His choice—God in earlier days provided an earthly inheritance, a land which they might enter and possess. But the inheritance which Paul speaks here belongs to a higher plane and more enduring order than any terrestrial Canaan.⁷

In Scripture our Christian inheritance is often associated with God’s promise to His people. It is an inheritance because salvation is set forth frequently as a *promise* that His people would one day receive and experience. Paul set forth these ideas in Galatians.

¹⁵Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. ¹⁶ Now to Abraham and his Seed were *the promises* made. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as of many, but as of one, “And to your Seed,” who is Christ. ¹⁷And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make *the promise* of no effect. ¹⁸For if the *inheritance* is of the law, it is no longer of *promise*; but God gave it to Abraham *by promise*.

⁷ Ibid, p. 188.

¹⁹What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom *the promise* was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator. ²⁰Now a mediator does not mediate for one only, but God is one.

²¹Is the law then against *the promises* of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. ²²But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that *the promise* by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (Gal. 3:15-22)

We also read of this in **Hebrews 9:15**:

And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive *the promise* of the eternal *inheritance*. (Heb. 9:15)

We have these ideas also expressed in Hebrews 6. There we read this exhortation to believers:

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, ¹²that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience *inherit* the *promises*. ¹³For when God made a *promise* to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself, ¹⁴saying, “Surely blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply you.” ¹⁵And so, after he had patiently endured, *he obtained the promise*. ¹⁶For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. ¹⁷Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to *the heirs of promise* the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, ¹⁸that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, *we* might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. ¹⁹This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, ²⁰where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. (Heb. 6:11-20)

Here salvation is set forth as a promise of God that we will most certainly inherit after a life of persevering faith. We will inherit all that God has promised to Abraham, since we are his children, children of promise, who will inherit God’s promises to him.

Why does Paul speak of the inheritance of “*the saints in light*”? This may be another allusion to the heresy that the church at Colossae was struggling against. Gnosticism claimed that they were “spiritual” and of “the light”, whereas all others were “fleshly” and of “the darkness.” Paul declared that Christians are the ones who are truly of and in the light of God’s truth and blessing. The next verse of Colossians 1 shows the contrast. “He has delivered us from *the domain of darkness* and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (1:13). Before we were in Christ, we were in the realm of darkness. This describes the kingdom of satan, which is characterized by ignorance, error, misery, enslavement, and hopelessness. It was a “domain”, in other words a kingdom, but it was the kingdom of darkness. But our God has snatched us out of that kingdom and has translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son.

Now we also read in these verses of the present reality and citizenship that Christians have in the kingdom of God. **Verses 13 and 14** read, “*He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*”

There are some Christians who do not believe that the Kingdom of God, here, the Kingdom of Christ, currently exists. They say that it will not be instituted until the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. But we read here that God has already caused Christians to be transferred into this kingdom. Jesus Christ is our King. We are citizens of His kingdom. It is within this kingdom that we enjoy our present redemption, even the forgiveness of sins.

We now arrive to the end of our paragraph. Next week, Lord willing, we will give attention to the wonderful description and depiction of our blessed Lord Jesus that is set before us in the following verses. Since the apostle had been praying for the spiritual growth of these Christians, and since that growth was contingent upon their increasing knowledge of God and His Son, it is fitting and suitable to his desire to set forth the glory of the Lord Jesus before His readers. In this way we may come to know more *about* our Savior so that we may better know our Savior.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph. 3:20f)