

## An Exegetical Look at Paul's Prayer for the Colossians Colossians 1:9–14

### *Introductory Content of Colossians*

According to the text itself, Paul, along with Timothy, is clearly the author of the book of Colossians as the introduction reads, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother...”<sup>1</sup> Just after this, the recipients are also cited, “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae...” (1:1–2)<sup>2</sup>. The recipients of the letter are regenerate Christians as described by Paul's address.

Paul begins the letter to the Colossians sharing his care for the Church. He shares this care through the truth of his prayers for them. Paul's overall purpose seems to commend the church in Colossae, while also correcting some serious doctrinal issues that have seemed to creep into the church – namely, questions about who Christ really is (1:15–20; 2:9), truth of the believer (1:21–29; 2:14), and the proper response of the believer (2:1–7, 20–23; 3:1–4:6). Clearly, there were some outsiders who had crept into the church (2:4) and taught “philosophy and empty deceit” (2:7) which is not according to Christ. Specifically, it seems to be about the limitations found within the Old Testament law, or at least in regard “to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath.” (2:16).

### *Interpretive Translation*

*Also, because of [causal] this [truths found in earlier passage], from the day we [Paul and Timothy] heard, we [Paul and Timothy] have not stopped praying and asking [words of petition to God] for you all [Colossians] in order that [purpose clause] you [Colossians] might be filled [subjunctive] with the knowledge of His [God – possessive/attributive] will in all wisdom and*

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<sup>1</sup> All Scriptural quotes will be from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> All Scriptural quotes will be from the book of Colossians unless otherwise noted.

*spiritual insight [means] so that [purpose] you [Colossians] will walk worthily of the Lord [manner], into all pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and increasing in the knowledge of God in all power being enabled [manner] according to His [God] glorious might into all perseverance and patience [means]. Giving thanks, with joy [manner], to the Father who qualifies us to [purpose] share the inheritance of the holy ones in light; who rescued us [cause] from the domain of darkness [location] and transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son [location] in whom we have the forgiveness, the redemption of sins [agency].*

*Phrasing*

Also because of this

**9** Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ [Why? – Cause]

We have not stopped praying and asking for you all

ἡμεῖς οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι,

from the day we heard

ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, [When? – Temporal]

in order that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will

ἵνα πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ [Why? – Purpose]

in all wisdom and spiritual insight

ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῆ, [How? – Means]

so that you will walk into all pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and  
[increasing in the knowledge of God

**10** περιπατήσαι εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν, ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες καὶ  
αὐξανόμενοι τῇ ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ, [Why? – Purpose]

Worthily of the Lord

ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου [How? – Manner]

in all power being enabled

**11** ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι [How? – Manner]

According to His glorious might into all  
[perseverance and patience

κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ εἰς πᾶσαν  
[ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν. [How? –  
Means]

with joy

**μετὰ** χαρᾶς [How? – Manner]

giving thanks to the father who qualifies us

**12** εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ικανώσαντι ἡμᾶς

to share the inheritance of the holy ones in light;

**εἰς** τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων **ἐν** τῷ φωτί· [Why? – Purpose]

who rescued us

**13** **ὅς** ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς [Why? – Cause]

from the domain of darkness and transferred us

**ἐκ** τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους **καὶ** μετέστησεν [Where? – Location]

into the kingdom of His loving Son,

**εἰς** τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ, [Where? – Location]

in who we have the redemption, the  
[forgiveness of sins.

**14** **ἐν** ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν  
[τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν· [Means – Agency]

### *Exegetical Outline*

*Central Idea:* Paul prays for the Colossians so that they might live a life worthy of God, who has set believers free through Jesus Christ and rescued from the domain of darkness.

- I. Because of the content discussed in previous verses, Paul has not stopped praying that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of the will of God so that they might live a life that is worthy of God. (Summary 1:9–11)
  - a. Paul has been praying for the Colossians since he heard. (v. 9)
  - b. Paul has been praying for the Colossians with the purpose that they might be filled with knowledge of God's will. (v. 9)
  - c. Paul wants the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will with the purpose that they will walk in a manner worthy of God, pleasing Him.
  - d. This walk will be fulfilled according to the might of God Himself, not the Colossians.
- II. Paul gives thanks to the Father because of the truth of the gospel message – namely that God has rescued us from the domain of darkness and given us an inheritance which is all accomplished through Jesus Christ.
  - a. Paul gives thanks to the Father who qualifies believers.
  - b. The qualifies us so that we can share in the inheritance.
  - c. We can share in this inheritance because God rescued us.
    - i. God rescued us from the domain of darkness.
    - ii. God transferred us to the kingdom of His Son.
  - d. It is through Jesus Christ that we have redemption and forgiveness of sins.

*Five Most Important Verbs*

Δυναμούμενοι – Present Passive Participles – Shows that an outside party is enabling the Colossians. It is not of their own might, but of God’s. (1:11)

πληρωθῆτε – Subjunctive Passive – Points to an outside force doing the action, but the subjunctive points to probability, not certainty. Paul is asking that the Colossians *might* be filled. (1:9)

προσευχόμενοι – Present Middle Participle – Main verb of the first half of the section. Sets the tone for rest of passage being about prayer and petition. (1:9)

αιτούμενοι – Present Middle Participle – Shares as main verb of the first half of the section. Adds to the theme of prayer and petition. (1:9)

εὐχαριστοῦντες – Present Active Participle – Main verb for second half of the section. Continues the theme of prayer, pointing to a specific topic of prayer from Paul about the Colossians. (1:12)

*Five Most Important Adverbial Markers*

Διὰ (1:9) – Cause – The manner in which this marker is placed tells the reader to look back to identify the cause in which Paul prays and asks on behalf of the Colossians.

ἵνα (1:9) – Purpose – Points to the purpose behind why Paul is praying and asking on behalf of the Colossians – namely, so they might be filled with the knowledge of God.

περιπατῆσαι (1:10) – Purpose – Points to the purpose behind why Paul wants the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God – namely, so they might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.

μετὰ (1:11) – Manner – Points to how Paul gives thanks in his prayers

ὅς (1:13) – Cause – Points to the cause behind the Colossians sharing in the inheritance of the holy saints.

*Five Most Important Uses of the Genitive, Dative, and Accusative*

τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ (1:9) – Objective Genitive – This points to the object of the knowledge Paul is praying the Colossians receive. Paul is praying that they would know the will of God specifically.

πάση σοφία καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ (1:9) – Dative of Means – Paul prays that the Colossians would receive knowledge of God’s will by means of wisdom and spiritual insight.

τοῦ θεοῦ (1:10) – Objective Genitive – Paul is praying that the Colossians will grow in the knowledge of God’s will so they might grow in the knowledge of God Himself.

τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ (1:11) – Attributive Genitive – It is God’s glorious might which which the Colossians are to be strengthened. It is not only God’s, but it is also a glorious might which comes from God.

τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν (1:14) – Verbal Genitive – The sins which are spoken of here is related to the forgiveness we receive as believers. Those sins have been forgiven because we have received forgiveness.

*Five Most Important Patterns*

*Alliteration* (1:10) – We are to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord 1. To please Him 2. Bear fruit in every good work and 3. Increase in the knowledge of God.

*Repetition* (1:9–10) – The semantic domain is knowledge. The words used are ἐπίγνωσιν [knowledge], σοφία [wisdom], and συνέσει [insight]. These are utilized four different times in the passage and give the foundation for the rest of the passage.

*Repetition* (1:9, 12) – The idea of prayer is utilized three times in the passage. While it doesn’t seem to be very frequent, all three main verbs in the passage relate to prayer or thanksgiving. The first is προσευχόμενοι, the second is αἰτούμενοι, and the third is εὐχαριστοῦντες.

*Relationships of Persons* – There are five persons/groups of persons recorded in this short passage all relating to one another. Paul relates with the Colossians and with the Father through prayer and petition (1:9). The Colossians relate to Paul as the recipients of his prayer and letter (1:9, 12). The Colossians relate with the Father as the object of Paul’s request (1:9, 12). Paul and the Colossians relate with the holy saints through a common inheritance (1:12). Paul and the Colossians relate to the Father as the object of salvation and transferred position (1:13). Paul and the Colossians relate to the Son as the object of his forgiveness and redemption, as well as being the king of the kingdom they are now citizens of (1:14).

*Explanation* (1:13–14) – Paul explains the reason that he and the Colossians should be giving thanks to God the father (1:12) in verses 13 and 14. He tells then the purpose behind giving thanks, the cause of the purpose, the location of the cause, and the Agency of the cause.

#### *Important Word Studies*

##### Παύομεθα

The lexical form of παύομεθα is παύω. BDAG offers two separate definitions. The first reading, “to cause something to stop or keep something from happening”<sup>3</sup> and the second, “to cease doing something.”<sup>4</sup> It seems it can either account for a force stopping another force or a force stopping itself. παύω is most commonly translated as “cease or ceased”.<sup>5</sup> It is used in a similar way throughout the Septuagint. The word occurs 15 times in the Greek New Testament and is translated as “cease” 8 of those occurrences. In the context, it seems clear that Paul is referring to

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<sup>3</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 790.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> In the NASB, the word is translated as “cease” or “ceased” half of the time while the other half of the occurrences are translated as “finished”, “stopped”, “kept on”, “incessantly”, or “keep”.



Timothy and himself persistently praying for the Colossians without ceasing. It would fall under the second definition. A formal translation would be “we have not stopped praying...”

### Μετέστησεν

The lexical form of μετέστησεν is μεθίστημι. BDAG also gives two different definitions for this term as well. The first reads, “transfer from one place to another, *remove*”<sup>6</sup> while the second reads, “to bring to a different point of view.”<sup>7</sup> So, the range of meaning is vital with this word. It could be talking about a physical move, or it could be talking about a perspective shift. Has the Colossians (or all believers for that matter) been actually place into the kingdom of God, or have they simply had their perspective of the world shift? Are they no longer seeing the world as a domain of darkness and now seeing it for it’s true potential? The word is used five times in the Greek New Testament and twenty-seven times in the Septuagint. Paul uses the word twice in the new testament while Luke uses it the other three times. Paul’s other use is found in 1 Corinthians 13 and the NASB translates it as to physically remove a mountain. Arguably, Luke’s three usages of the word are physical removals. The context of Colossians 1:9–14 also seems to point to more than a shift in point of view. The Kingdom of God is a real kingdom and it seems that believers have been removed from the domain of darkness and placed in God’s kingdom. This is not simply a perspective shift as nothing seems to denote that.

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<sup>6</sup> William Arndt et al., [\*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature\*](#) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 625.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## *Exegetical Problems*

### Being Filled with Knowledge

This problem is a theological issue that Colossians 1:9 speaks to quite nicely. The question is, how can one be filled with knowledge? Does the person themselves do the filling?<sup>8</sup> What is God's role in the filling? If someone else or something else does the filling, how does that take place? There are multiple places throughout Scripture where knowledge and understanding are of the utmost importance. In fact, within the passage at hand, knowledge of God's will enable the believer to walk in a manner that is pleasing to God – one that glorifies Him. Proverbs 1:7 states that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge and fools despise wisdom and understanding. John writes his first letter so the recipients might know that they are saved (1 John 5:13). God wants His people to know Him and know truths about themselves (Heb. 1:3; Col. 1:15). Jesus prays that God would sanctify believers with truth (John 17:17). John states in his gospel that the very meaning of life is to *know* God (John 17:3). Knowledge is important, so knowing who gives knowledge is also important.

Due to the passive voice on the verb πληρωθητε, someone other than the Colossians are doing the filling. The recipient of Paul's prayers is God. In fact, Paul is asking God for this filling. It would seem reasonable to use this as adequate evidence for the fact that God does the filling of this knowledge.

John makes it clear that God's word is the source of truth (Jn 17:17). Proverbs also makes it clear that knowledge comes from the mouth of God (Prov. 2:6). Paul tells Timothy that all Scripture is "God-breathed" (2 Tim. 3:16). Scripture is the means by which humanity find true knowledge.

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<sup>8</sup> i.e. through the reading of Scripture, prayer, etc.

Paul speaks in 1 Corinthians 2:12–16 about how natural man is unable to positively respond or understand accurately the Scriptures. In 1 Corinthians 2:14, Paul is explaining how natural man cannot understand accurately the things of Scripture because these things are spiritually appraised. He gives the answer to this chasm between natural man and understanding in 1 Corinthians 2:12 – namely, “the Spirit who is from God” which is given to believers. The natural man, according to 1 Corinthians 2:14, is unable to understand the things of God because they must be spiritually appraised. The difference between the believer and the natural man is further explained as either having or not having “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). Natural man can’t even respond positively, on his/her own, to general revelation (Rom. 1:19–21).

This filling of knowledge comes to the believer through God’s word and the believer is empowered to understand accurately this word through the work and indwelling of the Holy Spirit who has given the believer the mind of Christ.

This is why Paul is praying that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will with all wisdom and *spiritual* insight. It is a prayer to God because God does the filling. As the Church pursues the purpose of glorifying God, it is vital that we pray for each other – namely, that God would fill His people with the knowledge of His will and Himself.

*Meaning and Teaching of Colossians 1:9–14*

Paul is constantly praying for the Colossians, that they would understand the will of God resulting in a life that is pleasing to God. This knowledge should result in a spirit of thanksgiving, for God has transferred His children from the authority or domain of darkness into the Kingdom of His beloved Son – He has saved His children. Not only has God saved His children, but He has also given them an inheritance which they will share with the rest of the saints in light.

Because of this truth, God’s children should be in constant prayer for each other, asking that their brother’s and sister’s in Christ would be filled with the knowledge of His will. The children of God should be utilizing this knowledge to walk in a manner worthy of God, glorifying Him in all respects – in every aspect of life. Based on the truth of God’s glorious work through history, namely His salvation work throughout His Church, His children should continually give thanks to Him with joy. The reason for this is the blood that was shed that, for those who believe in Jesus, transferred them from the authority of darkness into the Kingdom of His Son. It is His Son’s work that accomplished this. What a glorious truth found in this passage.

### *Textual Critical Problems*

There are many textual problems found within Colossians 1:9–14. In fact, there are a total of eleven variants within these five verses. However, almost none of them have serious significance to the understanding of the passage. There are two that do seem to affect the passage enough that they are worth mentioning and dealing with here. Both external evidence and internal evidence will be submitted followed by a conclusion. External evidence will deal with genealogical solidarity, geographical distribution, and the date and character of the manuscripts. Internal evidence will transcriptional factors and intrinsic factors. Both external and internal evidence will be used to determine which reading gives best rise for the other readings. External evidence will be compiled for each individual reading and the internal evidence will be presented together at the end.

#### The First Variant

The first variant that will be handled is in Colossians 1:10. In this passage, the term τῆ ἐπιγνώσει is transmitted three different ways – namely as τῆ ἐπιγνώσει, ἐν τῇ ἐπιγνώσει, and εἰς τὴν ἐπιγνώσιν. Each will be dealt with respectively. The question is whether the preposition is supplied, or is the preposition lacking leaving context to determine the correct way to interpret the relationship between knowledge and Paul’s prayer.

*τῆ ἐπιγνώσει*

External Evidence:

	Byzantine	Alexandrian	Western	Other
Uncials		P46 – III  Ⲛ* – IV  A – V	D – VI  F – IX  G – IX	

		B – IV C – V P – IX		
Miniscules		33 – IX 81 – 1044 1739 – X		
Church Fathers		Clement of Alexandria – 200		

It seems the external evidence is very strong with this transmission of the text. The Alexandrian text type seems to refer strongly to this reading as well as the western. The byzantine text type it notably absent.

*εν τη επιγνωσει*

External Evidence:

	Byzantine	Alexandrian	Western	Other
Uncials		Ⲛ2 – IV Ψ – VIII–IX		
Minuscules	1505 – 1084	104 – 1087 1175 – XI		
Church Fathers				

The external evidence for this transmission is not spread exhaustively across all three text types and is also minimal in the text types it is found in. It gets a late spread into Byzantine and is notably absent from the western. While this reading does have  $\aleph 2$  it is notably the second edition which has been corrected while the first reading has the original. While some scholars would say these hold the same weight, it doesn't seem likely.

*εις την επιγνωσιν*

External Evidence:

	Byzantine	Alexandrian	Western	Other
Uncials	K – IX L – IX		D2 – VI	
Minuscules				630 – XIV Majority Text
Church Fathers				

Again, the external evidence seems to be minimal within this reading as well. While D is a very reliable manuscript, the first reading again holds the original reading for that manuscript while this reading holds to a revision. D2 is also the only manuscript that shows up before the ninth century providing a really late date for the reading.

#### *Summary of External Evidence*

It seems that the first reading of this variant is the reading which is most supported by the external evidence. It has the earliest readings, the best manuscripts in terms of character and is spread geographically earliest. The text types are in best agreement also.

### *Internal Evidence for All*

It seems obvious that the internal evidence also points to the first reading. It would make sense for the other readings, which provide an addition of text, would take place for clarities sake. Without the preposition being provided, it is up to the reader to determine the meaning intended by the author. It would make sense for a Scribe to “do a favor for future readers” by supplies what they thought the intended preposition was.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, it seems fair to conclude that the first reading of the textual variant, τῆ ἐπιγνώσει, is the correct reading of Colossians 1:10.

### Second Textual Variant

The second textual variant is found in Colossians 1:12. With this variant, there are three different readings – namely, θεω, θεω και, and the absence of either. The beginning of the verse without any additions reads εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ... Should it be translated as “giving thanks to the Father,” “giving thanks to God the Father,” or “giving thanks to God and to the Father?” The first two readings don’t make much of a difference as God the Father is implied even if θεω is not present. However, if the last reading is true, God has to be defined outside of the Father...or at least that can be a problem that would likely need to be faced in teaching. The same practice will be used as before to derive a conclusion.

### *External Evidence*

Θεω

	Byzantine	Alexandrian	Western	Other
Uncials		Ⲭ – IV	F – IX G – IX	



Minuscules				Vulgate
Church Fathers				Origen – 254

The external evidence holds some really strong witnesses, notably **Ⲙ** (IV). There is also some late distribution into the western text type.

θεω και

	Byzantine	Alexandrian	Western	Other
Uncials		C3 – V		
Minuscules		6 – VIII 81(c) – 1084 104 – 1087 326 – XII 1739 – X		614 – XIII 629 – XIV
Church Fathers				

While there seems to be a lot of Alexandrian texts which would agree with this reading, the geographical distribution is at a minimum. It doesn't leave the Alexandrian text type until the thirteenth century. Also, the earliest reading is the fifth century, and that is a third correction of the C manuscript.

No Addition

	Byzantine	Alexandrian	Western	Other
Uncials	K – IX	P46 – III	D – VI	

	L – IX	P61 – VIII A – V B – IV C – V Ψ – VIII – IX		
Minuscules	1505 – 1084	33 – IX 81 – 1044 1175 – XI 1739 – X		630 – XIV 1241 – XII Majority Text
Church Fathers			Ambrosiaster – 366	

Without much investigation, the external evidence heavily favors the lack of an addition at this point in the text – option number 3.

#### *Internal Evidence for All*

It seems apparent that the rise of all other readings would fall to the third option. Again, as there isn't any indicator, specifically, to who "the Father" is, the Scribe would inically place Θεω at this spot to clarify what was being mentioned. It's not just any father, but THE Father. However, it doesn't seem necessary as the context makes that clear.

#### *Conclusion*

It seems fair to say the original reading of Colossians 1:12 in this regard did not include any additions, but instead read as “εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ...”