

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:1-2:3

Preached at: New Horizon URC-10-26-14 (prof. of faith by Joshua Persaud)

Sermon: 1. Colosse was a city in the Roman province of Asia, located some one hundred miles east of Ephesus.

2. Under the inspiration 默示 of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul wrote this epistle [letter] to the church at Colosse in order to undo the effects of dangerous and wrong teaching.

3. Epaphras was the man who brought the gospel to Colosse. It is possible that he informed Paul about this heresy 异端, which deprived Jesus Christ of His unique status as the Son of God and Savior.

4. Paul did not know the Colossian believers personally; he had never been to Colosse. However, from the day that he and Timothy had heard of the conversion of the Colossians to Christ, Paul and Timothy had prayed for them. Our text contains their intercessory prayer for these Christians. Boys and girls, to **intercede** means to pray for someone else.

5. **Colossians 1:9-12** says, **“For this reason we all, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father Who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.”**

6. The parts of this prayer should be goals which we aim at in living the Christian life, whether we are young or older believers in the Lord Jesus. Moreover, this prayer is one which we may pray for other Christians as well as for ourselves—for Christians in our own family, for our congregation, for our United Reformed Church in North America federation, and for fellow Christians worldwide. For this public profession of faith service, the sermon theme is: **“Intercessory Prayer for Fellow Christians”**

I. Prayer for Increase in the Knowledge of God

A. Part of the heresy which false teachers were spreading in Colosse was related to Gnosticism. This term refers to a variety of religious movements in the early centuries of the Christian church which stressed salvation not by grace through faith in Christ, but through a secret gnosis or knowledge. Thus, Paul and Timothy prayed for the Colossian believers to increase in the knowledge of God. The Greek word used here for knowledge means “accurate” or “advanced knowledge.” Accurate knowledge of God is very important.

1. The apostle Paul prayed for the Christians at Philippi as follows: **“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more with knowledge and all discernment** 我所祷告的，是要你们的爱，在充足的知识 and 各样的见识上，多而又多，” (Philippians 1:9). He used the identical Greek word for knowledge which is in our text.

2. Young people and boys and girls, our knowledge of our triune God should not be vague or of a small amount. Regrettably, some Christians’ knowledge of God remains small, hazy, fuzzy, and vague all their lives. Their knowledge of God is similar to trying to use binoculars 望远镜 which have scratched and filmy lenses, so that the object which the person is trying to see in the distance looks fuzzy and blurred.

3. All kinds of earthly, human knowledge are available in this highly technological, electronic computer age; whole libraries can be contained on C Ds. We have time only for gaining just so much knowledge during this brief earthly sojourn [temporary stay]. Therefore we are sinful saints must be selective concerning what knowledge will be our priority to gain and have. Gaining and growing in the knowledge of our triune God should be one of our top daily priorities 优先 as members of Christ’s church.

4. We read in Proverbs 2:1-5: “My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you; so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment [keen judgment, insight], and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.”

5. If we finite, mortal, sinful saints who believe in Christ are to increase in the knowledge of God, we have to work at it. We have to be sincere and wholehearted in growing in the knowledge of the only, true, eternal, living, triune God. We need the attitude of the psalmist in **Psalm 119:162**: **“I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure.”**

6. Joshua, may God give you this attitude, this spiritual hunger, this strong, continuing desire to know God and to keep on knowing Him better. If we do not have this attitude and strong spiritual hunger regarding the Bible, then we need to pray that God will give us this attitude and spiritual hunger regarding the Bible. The apostle Peter wrote, **“but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Peter 3:18a).**

B. How do we increase in the knowledge of God our Father, of Jesus, and of the Holy Spirit? There is only one way to do so, and that is by wholeheartedly hearing and reading the Bible; by studying Bible books; by memorizing Bible verses, passages, and books; and by meditating upon [prayerfully thinking about God’s Word and what it means] day after day, all with the intention of obeying the Bible and thereby obeying God. For when we grow in the knowledge of the Bible with a humble attitude of worship and love toward God, we grow in the knowledge of God. When we read or study or meditate, etc., upon the Bible, it is very wise that we pray that God will give us understanding of what we are about to hear, read,

study, memorize, or meditate upon. A good prayer to pray for this is **Psalm 119:125: "I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies."**

1. To grow in the knowledge of God also includes having personal devotions, family devotions, and sitting under the preaching of God's Word twice each Sunday. Christian education also has a positive part in growing in the knowledge of God. Likewise, instruction in the Biblical doctrines taught in the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort, and the Belgic Confession helps us to learn more about God.

2. Growing in the knowledge of God also includes attending Bible study groups with a learner's heart, wanting to learn, to participate actively, and to grow in the knowledge of our awesome, holy, loving, and great God. Do we pray that we and all Christians everywhere will increase in the knowledge of God?

3. **Joshua, I cannot stress enough that the five most important things you can do in your Christian life are: to be a consistent, eager, diligent student of God's Word; to be a faithful obeyer of God's Word; to be a faithful, believing, daily, wholehearted pray-er to your wondrous Father in heaven; fight against sin in your life and repentantly confess your sins to God as soon as you realize you have sinned; and try to live each day to the glory of God.**

C. Moreover, Paul and Timothy prayed that the believers at Colosse would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. This wisdom refers to godly wisdom—which wants to love and honor God, and to be used for the advancement of His church and kingdom. Godly wisdom is rooted in the Biblical fear (reverence敬畏 for) of God.

1. Only if we believe in the Lord Jesus for eternal life is it possible to have spiritual understanding. We learn God's will from the Bible, by seeking to know His will through prayer, and by being sensitive to and obeying the leading of the Holy Spirit. We daily can pray that the Holy Spirit will fill us, that we will be sensitive to His leading, and then obey His leading. (To obey the Spirit's leading is more than merely living according to feelings.) Also, there is always room for growth in our knowledge of God's will. Timothy and Paul desired that the church at Colosse would be **filled with** the knowledge of God's will. As saints in Christ we need to learn more and more to desire, to understand, to accept, to obey, and to submit to God's will for our lives and for the lives of our loved ones.

2. This is wisdom from God and spiritual understanding. It is possible to have wisdom and understanding about many different subjects or aspects of life. But spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding especially are what matter.

3. For they concern our relation to God, our life in the church, our laboring with eternity in mind, our living with for the glory of God and for the advancing of His church and kingdom. It is essential that we have correct understanding of what truly is important in life and what is worthwhile investing our life in.

4. Do we pray that God will give us as Christians wisdom and spiritual understanding? Do we pray this for Christians all over the world?

II. Prayer for Growth in Christlike Character

A. Text says: vss. 11, 12 (look back to the beginning). Paul and his helper Timothy prayed that the Christians at Colosse would be strengthened by God with all might according to His glorious power, so that they might have patience and longsuffering, with joy and thanksgiving.

1. This part of their prayer concerned the character of those Colossians who belonged to Christ. Webster's Dictionary defines the word "character" in part as follows: "7. The pattern of behavior or personality found in an individual or a group, moral constitution; " Character is what our outward behavior is like—based upon what our inner moral nature is like.

2. For example, when Ruth the Moabitess asked Boaz to perform the role of kinsman-redeemer to her, part of his answer to Ruth was: "All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble [showing high moral qualities] character" (Ruth 3:11b NIV).

3. Our triune God wants each of us as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ to keep on growing in Christlike character. This is not easy; this involves change in becoming more like Jesus. Change is painful. This involves being sanctified. Sanctification成圣 is a slow, gradual, sometimes very painful process worked in us justified-in-Christ believers by the Holy Spirit.

4. By means of using God's Word in our lives, and by means of trials (troubles, suffering, difficulties) the sovereign Holy Spirit files and chisels away at our character. He exposes and increasingly removes that which is sinful, that which mars within us the evidencing of the likeness of Christ. He also builds into our lives the positive virtues and traits of Christlikeness, preparing us for future eternal glory—even though we will never be sinless in this life.

B. Timothy and Paul prayed that the Colossian believers would grow in Christlike character in four main aspects: patience, longsuffering, joy, and thanksgiving. These Christian leaders wanted the saints at Colosse to have great patience.

1. **Patience /endurance** is the ability to keep on trusting in God and living for the Lord Jesus in the midst of difficulty. This is not a mere resigned patience, but active, courageous enduring. One Christian stated that endurance is the ability to hold up under fire. The Colossians needed to endure in Jesus, and not be deceived by heretics.

a. My wife and I have Wycliffe Bible Translators friends who translated the New Testament into the Madak language of New Ireland, which is part of Papua New Guinea. The translation process took well over twenty years to complete. There were various trials which occurred during the lengthy

process of finishing the difficult task. However, the Holy Spirit granted patience in the lives of that couple, and by God's grace they persevered 坚持不懈 and succeeded.

b. But by far the best example of patience is Jesus Himself. He endured the shame, humiliation, rejection, and intense suffering of death on the cross, bearing the weight of the wrath of God against our sins. And He endured all this without any murmuring or complaining.

c. **Hebrews 10:36: "For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise."** How much patience do we have and show in our dealing with trials in our lives? God wants all Christians to endure in their faith in Christ. Do we pray for ourselves and for all Christians that God will give us patience?

2. **Longsuffering** is part of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22. Longsuffering 忍耐 is the ability to be forbearing [to control oneself when provoked; patient restraint], to deal gently with others when they treat us badly, when they are mean, nasty, and unkind to us. To be longsuffering is to be patient with people.

a. I Corinthians 13:4 says that agape love suffers long and is kind. Selfless, sacrificial, generous, Holy Spirit-given love is that which motivates longsuffering. God is very longsuffering toward us sinful human beings. **Romans 2:4** asks, "**Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?**"

b. How longsuffering are we with family members? With fellow members of our local congregation? With our employer or with fellow employees? Do we pray that God will give longsuffering to us and to Christians around the world?

3. The apostle and Timothy also prayed that the Colossian believers in Christ would have **joy** in the midst of their trials, joy in their patience and longsuffering. Joy is not happiness. Joy is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Happiness is based upon outward circumstances, whereas joy wells up from within our hearts, regardless of outward circumstances.

a. One of the greatest tests of whether our commitment to the Lord Jesus is real is if we are able to rejoice in the Lord when we experience deep trials in this life. A test which will show others that we are in Jesus the Lord, believe in Him and belong to Him, is if we rejoice in Jesus even in the midst of our trials and tears.

b. The apostle Paul was a prisoner in Rome, and yet he wrote concerning his joy. He wrote to the Philippian Christians: "**Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!**" (chapter 4:4). How sincerely and consistently do we rejoice in the Lord when we face severe trials? Do we pray for fellow Christians to rejoice in the Lord? Do we pray this for ourselves?

4. In addition, Paul and his helper Timothy prayed for the church at Colosse to **give thanks** to God the Father. To give thanks to God is to realize and express our humble gratitude to Him for the numerous blessings He gives us—both spiritual and material.

a. The Colossians were to give thanks to God because He had qualified them to share in the inheritance of the saints in light, that is, the realm of God's truth, love, and holiness. The Colossians had been Gentile unbelievers, but they had been qualified by God because of divine election and because of His grace to them in Christ. Jesus had died for their sins and had risen from the dead. He had redeemed them. They had repented of their sins and now they believed in the Lord Jesus for eternal life.

b. Not because of works or merit, but simply because of God's grace and love, these Gentiles had been conveyed [transferred] from slavery to the devil to the blessed status of being members of God's kingdom. They were now heirs of future glory as part of God's heavenly inheritance to them. They had been dead and lost in sin, but now were alive in Christ and saved from sin. The Bible says, "**But thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 15:57).**

c. What a great reason for giving thanks to God! Right? How often and how sincerely do we give thanks to God for His marvelous gift of eternal life in Christ? How often do we genuinely and specifically give thanks to God for the many spiritual blessings which are ours in Christ? As God's Word says, "**Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!**" (II Corinthians 9:15) How often do we pray for ourselves to be thankful to God and to give real thanks to God for the numerous spiritual and material blessings which He gives us? How often do we pray for other Christians to give real thanks to God by means of their lives, words, and music?

III. Prayer for Expression of Their Faith in Action to Others

Text says: vs. 10 (look back to the beginning). A. Our sovereign God desires that we walk [live] worthy of the Lord. To walk worthy of the Lord means to **live** in daily life what we **are** in Christ Jesus. To walk worthy of the Lord means to walk our talk. It means to live out day by day what we believe and in Whom we believe—with a minimum of hypocrisy 虚伪.

1. Scripture says, "**I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called" (Ephesians 4:1).** David wrote, "**Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully" (Psalm 24:3, 4).**

2. What a tremendous challenge it is to lead a life worthy of the heavenly calling which we have received from God! It is utterly impossible fully to lead a life worthy of the Lord, because we have a sinful nature against which we have to fight each day. Every day we sin against our holy God. But God wants us to keep pressing on toward the goal of fearing, loving, obeying, and serving Jesus as Lord—of living consistently for Jesus each day.

3. To walk worthy of the Lord means single-hearted love to Jesus as we—in reliance 依靠 upon the Holy Spirit for ability-- daily try to obey Him as Lord in every area of our lives: in the areas of family life; marriage; rearing of children in the ways of the Lord; dating and courtship; employment; involvement in the life and Bible studies of the local church; friends; and stewardship of finances and property.

4. In reliance upon the Holy Spirit for ability, we are to try to obey the Lord in the areas of: the education of our children; volunteering our help for Christian organizations; having daily fellowship with our Lord; witnessing in word and deed for Christ; worship service attendance; what food we eat; what clothing we wear; what furnishings we have in our house or apartment; what music we listen to or sing or play; where we live and in what kind of house or apartment we live; future plans; recreation; what tv programs we watch, if any; what electronic equipment we have and spend our time playing with; etc.

5. Do we consistently pray that we will walk worthy of the Lord? Do we pray this for other Christians too?

B. These Christian leaders also prayed that the church members at Colosse would **fully please the Lord**. This clearly connects closely to walking worthy of the Lord. An amazing truth taught in the Bible is that we as sinful saints can please God. Just think of it—we as finite, inclined-to-sin creatures can please God, Who is totally sinless, glorious in holiness, perfectly just and right!

1. We can only please God if we are empowered to do so by the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 11:5 tells us that before Enoch was taken (without dying) by God to heaven, **“he had this testimony, that he pleased God.”** Furthermore, **Hebrews 11:6** says, **“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”** Thus, the Bible teaches that a necessary requirement for pleasing God is that we live and walk by faith in Jesus Christ and in our triune God. We are to have as our goal that we please the Lord in every way—every day.

2. Does this mean that we will no longer sin? No. But it means that we definitely are to live with a zeal to do what is right in God’s eyes, and that we are trusting in Him for the daily grace to attempt to please Him. We are to aim at pleasing the Lord both in what we do and in what we are—in our thoughts, words, and actions. Do we pray that other Christians all over the world, and we ourselves, will endeavor (try) daily fully to please the Lord? Oh how great God’s grace is, that we as descendants of Adam and Eve are able to please the Lord at all!

C. Moreover, Timothy and Paul prayed that these young Christians would be **fruitful in every good work**. Jesus told His disciples, **“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain” (John 15:16a, b)**. When we truly believe in the Lord Jesus and have eternal life, we will bear spiritual fruit in doing good works.

1. Good works arise from true faith in the Lord Jesus, conform to God’s law—which teaches love to God and neighbor, result in God being glorified, and are not based upon tradition or on what people think are good works, or traditions of people, or habitual human practices.

2. Doing of good works does not save us from our sins, but once we are saved they are an expression of our love and thankfulness to God for the covenant blessing of eternal life by grace through faith in Jesus. This is not just an occasional 偶尔 bearing of fruit for Christ. Instead it is an ongoing and consistent doing of good to our fellow human beings because the indwelling Holy Spirit is at work in our hearts causing us to be fruitful in all kinds of good works.

3. **Titus 2:14: “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”** Doing of good works involves acts of love and kindness which we do to others without any desire of being praised for them, but wanting God to receive the praise. Do we pray for fellow believers in Christ all around the world that they will be fruitful in every good work? Do we pray this for ourselves?

4. This intercessory prayer shows that we as Christians are not merely to maintain the status quo [remain at our present level or status], nor are we to go backward spiritually. Rather, this prayer desires and expects spiritual progress (that is, growth in Jesus Christ) to occur in each of our lives as believers in Christ. Let us realize that the elements of this prayer apply to our own lives as Christians as well as to Christians in general. We can pray this prayer for ourselves, for our wife or husband, for our children, for our parents, our grandchildren, our grandparents, for our congregation, for our sister or brother, for our cousins, for other relatives, for true Christians in different nations and on different continents and in different denominations or federations.

5. And if anyone here has not repented of his/ her sins and does not believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, why not repent of your sins and believe in Jesus this very day? Why? Because we are not guaranteed that we will still be alive yet this evening or even tomorrow. God’s Word says that God **“commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30b)**. Now is God’s day of grace. If you do not believe in the Lord Jesus, come to Him before the day of grace is forever past.

6. Joshua, we rejoice that you desire to make public profession of your faith in the Lord Jesus. May you by God’s grace abide in Jesus Christ all your days, and may your earthly sojourn be characterized as living vigorously for the glory of God and for the furthering of His church and kingdom.

Amen.