



Greek NT

9 Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι ἵνα πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ, 10 περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες καὶ αὐξανόμενοι τῇ ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ, 11 ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν μετὰ χαρᾶς, 12 εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί,

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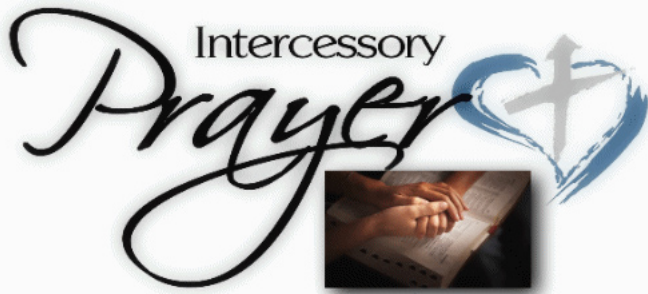
9 Por esta razón, también nosotros, desde el día que lo supimos, no hemos cesado de orar por vosotros y de rogar que seáis llenos del conocimiento de su voluntad en toda sabiduría y comprensión espiritual, 10 para que andéis como es digno del Señor, agradándole en todo, dando fruto en toda buena obra y creciendo en el conocimiento de Dios; 11 fortalecidos con todo poder según la potencia de su gloria, para obtener toda perseverancia y paciencia, con gozo 12 dando gracias al Padre que nos ha capacitado para compartir la herencia de los santos en luz.

NRSV

9 For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. 11 May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light.

NLT

9 So we have continued praying for you ever since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom. 10 Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and you will continually do good, kind things for others. All the while, you will learn to know God better and better. 11 We also pray that you will be strengthened with his glorious power so that you will have all the patience and endurance you need. May you be filled with joy, 12 always thanking the Father, who has enabled you to share the inheritance that belongs to God's holy people, who live in the light.

The Study of the Text:¹

1. What did the text mean to the first readers?

Col. 1:9-12 continues the prayer expression of the Apostle Paul in his letter. What is unclear is whether this is an extension of the Proem or whether it transitions into the body section of the letter.² Differing opinions

¹Serious study of the biblical text must look at the 'then' meaning, i.e., the historical meaning, and the 'now' meaning, i.e., the contemporary application, of the scripture text. In considering the historical meaning, both elements of literary design and historical aspects must be considered. In each study we will attempt a summary overview of these procedures in the interpretation of the scripture text.

²One of the challenges of this letter from the literary perspective is to detect a clear beginning of the body section of the letter. Unlike most of the 'standard' Pauline letters this letter contains few, if any, definitive boundary markers to signal the beginning of the body section of the letter. To be certain, this vagueness of transition from one major section to another is not uncommon in ancient

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by modern scholars with literary critical analysis skills can be found on this. Of course, other opinions by scholars without such skills will surface as well, but their views lack clear credibility because of their inadequate understanding of the literary aspects of ancient texts. The implications of the proper genre identification of this passage relate to authorship questions mainly, but have repercussions in some other areas as well. While it is not a critical issue, its impact is important enough to merit careful consideration of this literary aspect.

Quite interestingly is the intercessory prayer of this text. When Paul asked God to do things in the life of the different churches, what did he pray for? A comparative study of intercessory prayer in the Bible, and particularly in Paul's letters, is helpful background understanding for this passage.



Historical Context:

Thus several important background questions need answering as a part of the interpretive process here.

External History. In the history of the copying of this passage in the original Greek language, the United Bible Societies printed Greek text, *The Greek New Testament*, in the 4th rev. edition, identifies three places in verse twelve where variations of wording are important to Bible translators.



The first place where variation in wording is close to the beginning of the verse. The printed text reading in the UBS 4th ed. Greek text is εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι... (giving thanks to the Father who strengthened...). Many copyists felt the need for a clearer reference to God in the phrase and so added either τῷ θεῷ or τῷ θεῷ καὶ, which generated the reading either “to God, the Father who strengthened...” or “to the God and Father who strengthened...”.³ The adoption of the shorter reading τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι... by the UBS editors is based on internal analysis rather than the external weight of different manuscript readings which is rather evenly divided.⁴ The shorter reading provides a better foundation to account for the alternative letters outside the New Testament.

³“This verse presents a number of variant readings (see also the following comments on other places in this verse). The reading that best explains the origin of the others is τῷ πατρὶ, which is supported by a varied group of witnesses. Copyists no doubt found it strange that God is referred to simply as ‘the Father’ when Christ has not been named in the immediate context. So they added either τοῦ Χριστοῦ (of Christ) or [τῷ] θεῷ (God), either in apposition to τῷ πατρὶ (to God the Father [so FC]) or connected to τῷ πατρὶ with the conjunction καὶ (to the God and Father). The agreement of P⁴⁶ and manuscript B in prefixing ἅμα (together with) is remarkable, but unlikely to be correct. In some languages, it will be necessary to add a possessive pronoun to the words ‘the Father’ even though the reading in the text is followed.” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 411.]

⁴The process of analyzing the ‘weight’ of evidence favoring one pattern of reading over the alternatives is based on two fundamental factors labeled ‘external’ and ‘internal’ evidence. The ‘external’ evidence analyzes which manuscripts support each possible reading against the dating, geographical distribution, and text type for each manuscript or reading pattern. Generally a reading is given greater ‘external weight’ when it is found in the earliest manuscripts, is found in manuscripts scattered over the widest geographical region of the ancient Mediterranean world, and has the broadest support from the three basic text ‘families’ and especially from the Alexandrian and Western text families. The later Byzantine text family developed later and has paraphrasing tendencies that reduce its importance.

The internal evidence factors related to either identifiable patterns of copying tendencies by scribes (*Transcriptional Probabilities*) or stylistic tendencies by the author of the NT document the passage comes from (*Intrinsic Probabilities*). The former plays the more significant role in most instances and is guided by three principles. 1) The shorter reading is preferred. This because the copyists had a demonstrable tendency to add words for clarification of ideas, rather than to omit words. 2) The reading different from the parallel reading is preferred. When a passage has a parallel expression of idea elsewhere, like in the double and triple tradition material in the Synoptic Gospels, the scribes had a clear tendency to make every text read the same; that is, they found it hard to resist harmonizing the parallel passages. 3) The more difficult reading is preferred. The ‘corrections’ often introduced by the copyists were always intended to clarify and to simplify the meaning of the text. These sorts of things especially show up with ‘Hebraisms’ and similar writing patterns by the NT writers. By the third century AD almost no Jewish people were Christians and the Christians by that time had little understanding of the Jewish religious heritage and usually no knowledge of either Hebrew or Aramaic. Thus places where the NT writer was clearly thinking in Aramaic but writing in Greek with the result of producing a strange expression in Greek were prime targets for “cleaning up” by the copyists.

readings, than does any of the alternatives.

The second place of word variation in verse twelve is the participle τῷ ἰκανώσαντι (*who strengthened...*). An alternative participle is found in some manuscripts: καλέσαντι (*who called...*).⁵ Here a combination of internal and external evidence factors merge in support of the printed text reading τῷ ἰκανώσαντι (*who strengthened...*).

The third place of word variation in verse twelve is at the point of the pronoun ὑμᾶς (*you*). Several manuscripts have ἡμᾶς (*us*) rather than ὑμᾶς (*you*).⁶ The context favors ὑμᾶς (*you*) so that the text reads “to the Father who has strengthened you...”.

The text apparatus of the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* (27th rev. ed.) lists six additional places of variation in wording beyond the above three.⁷ But as becomes obvious from close examination of these additional variations (cf. listing in above footnote), these changes are stylistic in nature and do not alter the meaning of the text.

Thus one can legitimately conclude that the present reading of the passage represents the



One should remember that virtually all the writers in the New Testament were using Greek as a second language, not as their ‘mother’ tongue. Thus the form of ancient Greek in the NT is frequently different from even the Koine Greek of the first century, much less than that of subsequent centuries where major changes even to native Koine Greek had taken place. Added to this was the impact of the almost dozen distinct dialects of Koine Greek with individualized pronunciation, spelling, and grammar patterns. That copyists felt the need of ‘correcting’ the NT texts should not be surprising.

Also to be noted is that in the ancient world what counted as ‘the bottom line’ was not words but ideas expressed by words. Thus words could be freely modified as an expression of reverence for the text. Unwillingness to change words in order to preserve the original ideas was regarded as lack of reverence for the divine inspiration of the text. The modern world has completely reversed that thinking.

For more details on how this process is done by modern scholars, see Lorin L. Cranford, *Greek 202: Text Critical Methodology: Week 2 study* at <http://cranfordville.com/g202TxtCritStdy.html#2.0>.

⁵“A variety of witnesses strongly support the participle ἰκανώσαντι. Several witnesses, chiefly Western, substitute the participle καλέσαντι (*who has called*). This variant reading may have arisen accidentally when a copyist confused ΤΩΙΚΑΝΩΣΑΝΤΙ (*who has enabled*) for ΤΩΚΑΛΕΣΑΝΤΙ (*who has called*), which would have been easy to do. Or the variant reading may have arisen deliberately when the familiar expression ‘who has called’ was substituted for an unusual expression (the verb ἰκανῶ occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Cor 3:6). The reading of manuscript B is an early combining of both readings (καλέσαντι καὶ ἰκανώσαντι).” [Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 411-12.]

⁶“A majority of the Committee preferred ὑμᾶς (⋈ B 1739 syr^{hmg} cop^{sa} goth arm eth), regarding ἡμᾶς (A C D G K P Ψ 33 614 Byz Lect it vg syr^{p,h} cop^{bo} al) as an assimilation to ver. 13.” [Bruce Manning Metzger and United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies’ Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 553.]

⁷Kolosses 1,9 (καὶ αἰτούμενοι omitted)

* B K vg^{ms}

Kolosses 1,10

* ὑμᾶς ⋈² D² Ψ 075 M (ὕμᾶς inserted after περιπατῆσαι)

| txt P^{46,61vid} ⋈* A B C D* F G 6. 33. 81. 326. 1175. 1241^s. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc; Cl

* ἐν τῇ ἐπιγν. ⋈² Ψ 075. 104. 1175. 1505 pc lat (preposition ἐν or εἰς added to τῇ ἐπιγνώσει)

| εἰς τὴν -σιν D² M

| txt P⁴⁶ ⋈* A B C D* F G I P 33. 81. 365. 1241s. 1739. 1881. 2464 pc vgmss; Cl

Kolosses 1,11

* [– et 1.] (either a semi-colon or a period at the end of verse eleven)

Kolosses 1,12

* καὶ P⁴⁶ 1175; Ambst (καὶ added before εὐχαριστοῦντες)

* αἶμα P⁴⁶ B (ἄμα added after εὐχαριστοῦντες)

*¹ θεῶ ⋈ (⋈^s F G) pc f g vg^{cl} sy^p sa^{ms} bo^{ms}; Or^{lat} Spec (either (τῷ) θεῷ or θεῶ καὶ inserted before τῷ πατρὶ)

| θεῶ καὶ C3 075. 6. 81c. 104. 326. 365. 614. 629. 1739^{mg} al ar vg^s sy^{h**}

| txt P^{46,61} A B C* D Ψ 33. 1739*. 1881 M b m vg^{st,ww} sa^{mss} bo; Or Ambst

* καλεσαντι D* F G 33. 1175 pc it sa; Ambst Spec (καλέσαντι replaces ἰκανώσαντι or καλέσαντι καὶ is added before ἰκανώσαντι)

| καλ. καὶ ἰκαν. B

| txt P^{46,61vid} ⋈ A C D² I Ψ 075. 1739. 1881 M vg sy bo; Or Aug

* ἡμᾶς A C D F G Ψ 075. 33 M lat sy bo

| txt ⋈ B 104. 365. 629. 1175. 1739. 1881 pc vg^{mss} sy^{hmg} sa; Ambst

[Eberhard Nestle, Erwin Nestle, Kurt Aland et al., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 27. Aufl., rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1993), 523-24.]

original wording of the text, which then becomes the foundation for interpreting the meaning of the scripture passage.

Internal History. The time and place markers in Col. 1:9-12 are very minimal, and thus pose few historical issues. Indirectly the passage raises the question of intercessory prayer in early Christianity. But this is more a literary genre concern than it is a historical concern. Thus it will be treated below under **Literary Form** in the genre discussion.

Literary Aspects:

The literary aspects of this scripture passage are important, and will play a significant role in the interpretation of the meaning of the text.

Literary Form: At the broad genre level, Col. 1:9-12 is part of an ancient letter that follows the basic form of letter writing in the Greco-Roman world of the first Christian century. The main implication of this is the occasional nature of ancient letters. This means the letter was prompted by news coming to Paul while he was imprisoned about the Christian community at Colossae. From Col. 1:8, we know that Epaphras was the source of this news.⁸ Circumstances of imprisonment prevent the apostle from traveling to Colossae to address the needs of the church directly. Thus, this letter was composed with Timothy’s assistance as the writing secretary and it speaks to the needs of the church in place of Paul’s personal presence. Given this nature of ancient letters, the interpretive process is more dependent on knowing as much about the historical circumstances of the targeted readers as possible.

At the small genre level, Col. 1:9-12 is clearly a prayer expression.⁹ Whether this is an extension of the *Proem* section of the letter, thus Col. 1:3-12, or whether it begins the transition into the body section of the letter is not clear. More on that in the next study.

The nature of the prayer language in vv. 9-12 is clearly intercessory prayer.¹⁰ That is, Paul asks God to bless the Colossians, rather than gives thanks to God for them as was the case of the thanksgiving prayer in



⁸NRSV: **He is the one who told us about the great love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.** (ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.)

⁹“But in contrast with the OT, which preserves more than 250 prose and psalmic prayers, the NT contains relatively few recorded prayers: the prayers of Jesus (Matt. 11:25–27 = Luke 10:21–22; Matt. 26:39 = Mark 14:36 = Luke 22:42; Matt. 27:46 = Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34, 46; John 11:41–42; 12:27–28; 17:1–26); the prayers of Peter and the assembly (Acts 1:24–25) and of Peter and John (4:24–30); the prayer of Stephen (7:59–60). Prayer is prominent in Paul, particularly in the introductory thanksgivings (Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4) and the benedictory blessings (Rom. 16:25–27; 2 Cor. 13:13) that conclude the letters, but otherwise the actual words of Paul’s prayers are not recorded.” [SAMUEL E. BALLENTINE, “PRAYER,” *EERDMANS DICTIONARY OF THE BIBLE*, DAVID NOEL FREEDMAN, ALLEN C. MEYERS, AND ASTRID B. BECK, EDs. (GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.) W.B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY, 2000), 1077.]

¹⁰Although prayer is, typically, an unself-conscious activity in which the person praying devotes himself to God, it is possible to distinguish various elements in prayer, as will be apparent from the discussion of the biblical data. *Praise* involves the recognition of who God is and what he does. It is ‘giving God the glory,’ not in the sense of adding to his glory, which would be impossible, but of willingly (and where appropriate, publicly) recognizing God as God. Typical expressions of such praise are to be found in the psalms (Ps 148,150). When the recognition of God’s goodness is in respect of what he has done for the one who prays, or for others, then the prayer is one of *thanksgiving*, for life itself, for the use and beauty of the physical universe, for Christ and his benefits (‘Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift,’ 2 Cor 9:15), and for specific answers to prayer. *Confession* of sin recognizes the holiness of God and his supreme moral authority, together with the personal responsibility of the one making the confession. Confession thus involves the vindicating or justifying of God, and an explicit and unreserved recognition of sin, both as it takes its rise in sinful motives and dispositions, and as it finds outward expression. Psalm 51, David’s confession of sin regarding Bathsheba, is the classic biblical instance of a prayer of confession. *Petition can be thought of as it concerns the one praying, and also as it concerns others, when it is intercession. Scripture never regards prayer for oneself as sinful or ethically improper, as can be seen from the pattern of prayer given in the Lord’s Prayer. Prayer for others is an obvious expression of love for one’s neighbor which is fundamental to biblical ethics.*” [Paul Helm, “Prayer,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), 1745.]

vv. 3-8.¹¹ The core verbal expression, “we do not cease praying and asking...” (οὐ παύομεθα...προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, ἵνα...), signals petition and intercession is signaled by “for you” (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν).

Some important distinctions both in English and in Koine Greek are helpful to remember. On a continuum of connotative meanings¹² is request (ἔρωτάω) -- ask (αἰτέω - αἰτέομαι) -- demand (ἐξαίτέομαι). Although the English words are clearly distinguishable, the Greek is not so clearly defined. Αἰτέω can be used not only of ‘ask’ but also of ‘request’ and ‘demand.’ What is clear is that the middle voice form αἰτέομαι is exclusively used of petitionary prayer inside the New Testament. And this is the form used by Paul here in our passage. Interestingly, Jesus always made a request (ἔρωτάω) to the Heavenly Father, never asked or demanded anything from Him. From the above chart one can tell clearly the wide range of potential meanings in English for the Greek word αἰτέω.



Also instructive is a comparison of the petitionary prayer aspects in the *Proema* of Paul’s letters, where they show up:

2 Thess. 1:11-12 (RSV): 11 To this end **we always pray for you, that**¹³ our God may make you worthy of his call, and may fulfill every good resolve and work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rom. 1:10-15 (RSV): 1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, 1:10 **asking that**¹⁴ somehow by God’s will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. 1:11 For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, 1:12 that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other’s faith, both yours and mine. 1:13 I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. 1:14 I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: 1:15 so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

Eph. 1:17-23 (RSV): 1:17 **I pray that**¹⁵ the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 1:18 so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 1:19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 1:20 God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 1:21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 1:22 And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 1:23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Phil. 1:9-11 (RSV): 1:9 And **this is my prayer, that**¹⁶ your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and

¹¹One should note that the *Proema* in the letters of the New Testament are not recorded prayers by Paul and others, as in the sparse listing of recorded prayers by Jesus and others in the early church (cf. footnote 9 above for details). Instead, they are descriptions asserting that praying is being done and the *Proema* typically provide some designation of the content of those prayers prayed by the apostles for their readers. In short, they are descriptions of prayers rather than prayers themselves.

¹²Described in non-technical terms, every word in all western languages possesses two kinds of meaning. 1) Its *cognitive meaning* defines what it designates or refers to (its denotative meaning). 2) Its *connative meaning* specifies the emotional tone of the word with the anticipated reaction to hearing the word by the listener. In other words, cognitive meaning refers to projected meaning between the ‘signifier’ and the ‘object’ specified, while connative meaning refers to projected meaning between the signifier and the ‘signified’ (the hearer or reader of the word). Just as is the case with the cognitive meaning of words, often the contextual use of the same word determines the intended reaction, either positive or negative. “For example, a US salesperson doing business in Japan might interpret silence following an offer as rejection, while to Japanese negotiators silence means the offer is being considered.” (cf. “Meaning (semiotics),” Wikipedia.org). This level of connative meaning, while more difficult to determine with ancient languages, is none the less very important to understand. Otherwise, we face the likelihood of misunderstanding the meaning of the text.

The classic illustration of this is Jesus’ word to his mother while dying on the cross in John 19:26. Ἰησοῦς οὖν ἰδὼν **τὴν μητέρα** καὶ τὸν μαθητὴν παρεστῶτα ὃν ἠγάπα λέγει τῇ μητρὶ· **Γύναι**, ἴδε ὁ υἱός σου.... How to translate Γύναι has puzzled translators for centuries. The crassly literal cognitive meaning is “Woman, here is your son!” But in a context such as this Γύναι is a term of endearment, not a harsh term of either rebuke or anger. Jesus here addressed His mother in very affectionate tones, but the above English translation suggests something very different. Consequently many translators use the English word “Mother” (e.g., BBE) for Γύναι. Cf. “Mujer” in the BdA; “Liebe Frau” in the Neue Genfer Übersetzung. The very crass “Woman” translation misses the point completely and wrongly portrays Jesus’ action toward His mother in His dying moments.

¹³GNT: εἰς ὃ καὶ προσευχόμεθα πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, ἵνα...

¹⁴GNT: πάντοτε ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, δεόμενος εἰς πῶς...

¹⁵GNT: μνεῖαν ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, ἵνα...

¹⁶GNT: καὶ τοῦτο προσεύχομαι ἵνα...

full insight 1:10 to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, 1:11 having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

An assessment of these examples shows the variety of ways that Paul can introduce intercessory prayers in the *Proem* section of his letters. What becomes abundantly clear, when these texts are studied in their larger contextual setting, is that each petition to God for his readers was customized to the specific needs of the intended readers of the letter. Paul didn't have a rote formula that was reproduced each time the exact same way. Rather, he asked God to bless the individual churches with things he knew they needed from God. The most eloquent and also the most generalized in theme is the intercession in Ephesians. This is connected to the circular letter¹⁷ nature of this document.

Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that God would “make you worthy of his call, and may fulfill every good resolve and work of faith by his power” (ὕμᾶς ἀξιῶσῃ τῆς κλήσεως ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν καὶ πληρώσῃ πᾶσαν εὐδοκίαν ἀγαθωσύνης καὶ ἔργον πίστεως ἐν δυνάμει). For the Romans, whom he had not seen previously, the “somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you” (εἴ πως ἤδη ποτὲ εὐδοωθήσομαι ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς). To the Ephesians and other churches where this letter was read including Colossae that God “may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him” (ὁ θεὸς τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ πατὴρ τῆς δόξης, δώῃ ὑμῖν πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ ἀποκαλύψεως ἐν ἐπιγνώσει αὐτοῦ). To the Philippians that “your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight” (ἡ ἀγάπη ὑμῶν ἔτι μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύῃ ἐν ἐπιγνώσει καὶ πάσῃ αἰσθήσει).

All of the prayer requests to God in behalf of his readers had an expressed purpose or goal behind them.

To the Thessalonians: “so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (ὅπως ἐνδοξασθῇ τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἐν αὐτῷ, κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).

To the Romans: “that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine” (ἵνα τι μεταδῶ χάρισμα ὑμῖν πνευματικὸν εἰς τὸ στηριχθῆναι ὑμᾶς, τοῦτο δὲ ἐστὶν συμπαρακληθῆναι ἐν ὑμῖν διὰ τῆς ἐν ἀλλήλοις πίστεως ὑμῶν τε καὶ ἐμοῦ).

To the Ephesians: “so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power” (πεφωτισμένους τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς τῆς καρδίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς τίς ἐστὶν ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ, τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις, καὶ τί τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τοῦ κράτους τῆς ἰσχύος αὐτοῦ).

To the Philippians: “to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God” (εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα, ἵνα ἦτε εἰλικρινεῖς καὶ ἀπρόσκοποι εἰς ἡμέραν Χριστοῦ, 11 πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης τὸν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἔπαινον θεοῦ.).

The objective for God's blessings was for spiritual growth in this life and for preparation to stand before Almighty God in final judgment at the

Outline of Colossians

Praescriptio

Introduction: 1:1-2

Superscriptio: 1:1

Adscriptio: 1:2a

Salutatio: 1:2b

Proem

Thankfulness: 1:3-8

Body

Intercession: 1:9-12

Christus Hymnus: 1:13-20

Reconciliation: 1:21-23

Paul's Ministry 1: 1:24-29

Paul's Ministry 2: 2:1-5

Christian Living 1: 2:6-15

Christian Living 2: 2:16-19

Christian Legalism: 2:20-23

Seeking the Heavenly Things: 3:1-4

Christian Behavior: 3:5-11

Getting Dressed: 3:12-17

Haustafeln: 3:18-4:1

Husband/Wife: 3:18-19

Father/Children: 3:20-21

Master/Slaves: 3:22-4:1

Admonitions and Requests: 4:2-6

Conclusio

Tychicus: 4:7-9

Greetings: 4:10-17

Closing: 4:18

Letter Validation: 4:18a

Prayer Request: 4:18b

Benedictio: 4:19c

¹⁷A circular letter in the ancient world was meant to be read to multiple groups of readers. Instead of targeting one set of issues in a specific group, such letters addressed more general themes that were applicable on a wider basis. That Ephesians was intended as a circular letter is clearly signaled by the omission of “in Ephesus” ([ἐν Ἐφέσῳ]) in the *Adscriptio* of 1:1. Instead, a blank space shows up in many of the early manuscript copies of this document. The intention of this was that the one orally reading the letter would insert the appropriate geographical reference when reading the letter to the different churches.

end of the age. These prayers were to be read before the congregation in their public worship. As such they highlight basic, fundamental needs of both individual believers and of the church collectively. They serve us as teaching models for intercessory prayer, especially in a public worship setting.

Note that his prayer requests focus on spiritual blessings from God; he never asks God to give people money or homes or things. And the spiritual blessings that Paul requests for his readers emphasize greater understanding of God's will and ways for them to live correctly in their daily life. Out of this background comes then better understanding of the specific requests made in behalf of the Colossian believers.

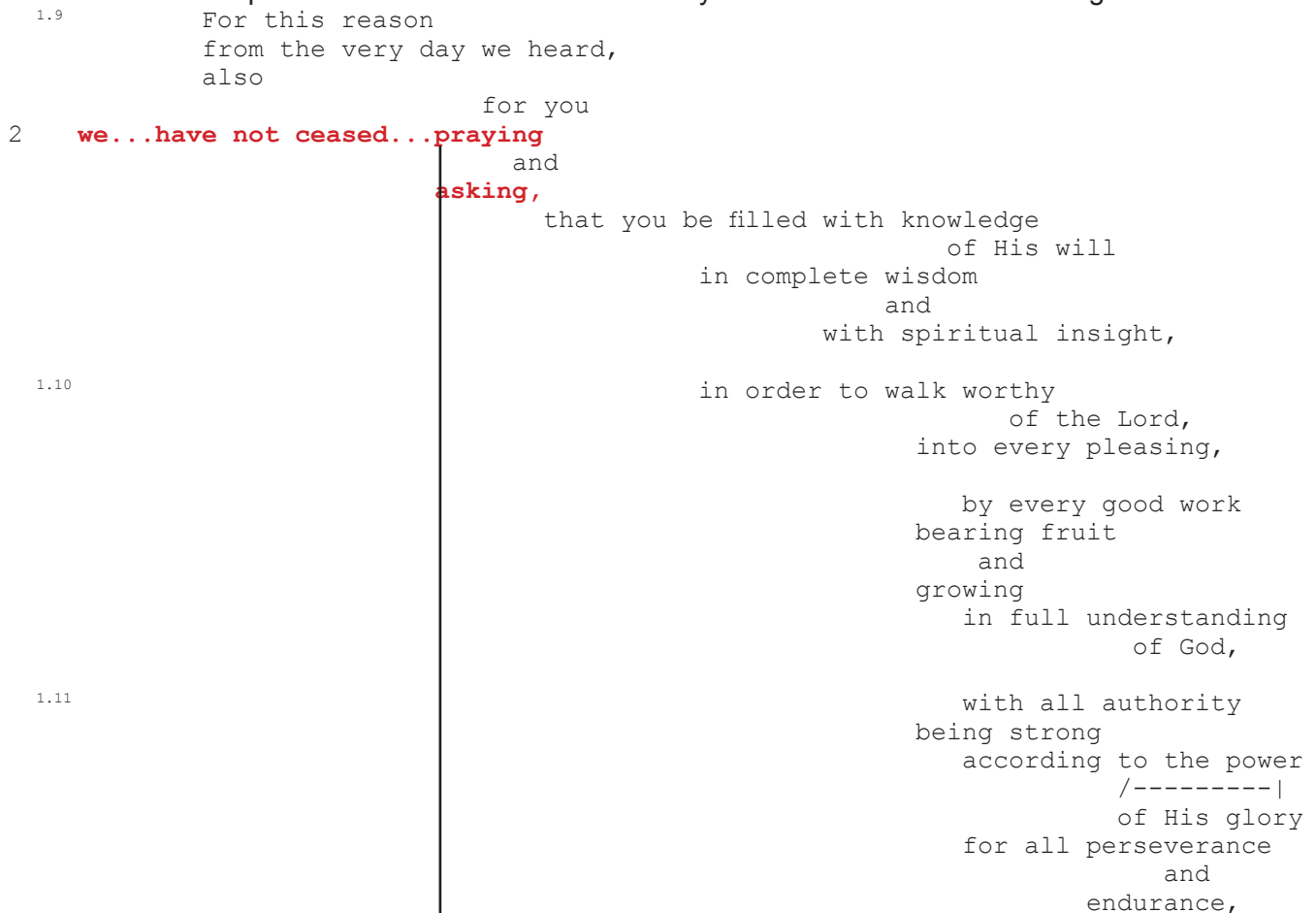
Literary Setting: The precise literary setting is difficult to determine with certainty. The language of 1:9-12 points toward a continuation of the *Proem* that begins in 1:3. But the sentence grammar, in which vv. 9-20 is a single sentence in the Greek text, clearly points to the beginning of the body of the letter. Verses 13-20 possesses its own distinct genre as a fragment of an ancient Christian hymn or confession of faith statement, and is tied onto 9-12 through linkage to the reference to the Heavenly Father in verse 12.

The best alternative is to see vv. 9-12 as a bridge between the *Proem* and the body of the letter with connections to both elements of the letter. The formal prayer language for public reading provides affirmation of the readers in the manner intended by the *Proem*. And the content provides a conceptual launchpad for the topics of discussion in the body proper of the letter. This is charted out in the above outline of Colossians.



Literary Structure:

The complexity of the grammar of the long Greek sentence makes the role of the Block Diagram of the text all the more important in order to understand clearly how the ideas in the text fit together.



with joy
giving thanks to the Father

who has made you fit
for a portion
of the inheritance
of the saints
in light;

The foundational declaration of Paul is his unceasing prayer for the Colossians, as is highlighted in the core statement in bold red. The expansion of this is extensive, and actually continues through verse 20, which we will look at in the next study.

In the sentence pre-field, several elements help set up the declaration. “For this reason” (Διὰ τοῦτο), “from the very day we heard” (ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν), and “also” (καί). The first and the last of these help tie the core declaration onto verses 3-8, and in particular verse 8 which states that Epaphras had made clear to Paul how much love for him that the Colossian believers possessed through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. “Also” (καί) adds to this linkage by defining the natural consequence of hearing this good news from Epaphras.

Three participles define the unceasing actions of Paul in light of this good news from Epaphras: praying, asking, and giving thanks. The expansions of these participles forms the bulk of the content in the text. His praying was for the Colossians. The heart of his praying was intercessory in asking that God fill the Colossians with both knowledge and spiritual insight. Thirdly, he did not cease giving thanks to God. The language of giving thanks (εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ) in verse 12 echoes the beginning of the *Proem* in verse 3: Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ. But in verse eight the emphasis is upon God’s work of salvation that prepares the saints for Heaven. The separation of this third participle from the core verb in verse 9 led ancient copyists of the text to adopt a variety of variations, largely to link the idea of giving thanks to the walking worthy of the Colossians, rather than to Paul’s unceasing prayer. But the best reading of the Greek text clearly points to giving thanks in defining Paul’s action of expressing thanksgiving, rather than by those of the Colossians.

Exegesis of the Text:

Greek sentences such as this one present Bible translators with a nightmare. Particularly is this true if the Bible publisher has mandated a Formal Equivalent method of Bible translation.¹⁸ Paul’s sentence covers verses 9-20. To put this into a single English sentence is to make the English sentence incapable of being understood. To break it up into multiple English sentences is to risk distorting the ideas contained in the original Greek sentence. Especially is this true in clearly defining relationships of the ideas to one another in the original sentence. Consequently when the English language reader compares different translations, he or she will encounter a variety of expressions of ideas. The transitions used in each of these studies reflects a variation of Bible translation method. Both the German Die Gute Nachricht and the English New Living Translation follow the Dynamical Equivalent method strongly with major emphasis upon clarity and understandability for the reader. On the other hand, the New Revised Standard Version follows a dominantly Formal Equivalent method¹⁹ with elements of Dynamical Equivalent methods also used.



¹⁸Two basic methods of Bible translation prevail in today’s world. **1. Formal Equivalent** methods are guided by the requirement of maintaining the form, or structure, of the Source Language text, to the degree possible within the grammar requirements of the Receptor Language. Thus the lengthy Greek sentences of Paul are turned into uncommonly long and complex English sentences by this translation method. **2. Dynamic Equivalent** methods seek to preserve accurately the ideas of the Source Language text, rather than the ‘words’ of the Source Language text. Equal concern is placed upon the Receptor Language translation communicating in clear and natural patterns the ideas of the original text. For a detailed discussion of this for laymen see my “History of the Bible: Session 16: Topic 5.0: Modern English Translations: 1800 to Present” at cranfordville.com.

¹⁹A more stringent expression of Formal Equivalent translation method is reflected in the New American Standard Bible of 1:9-12:

For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with

Motivation to unceasing prayer, v. 9a: “For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you,” Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι.

Reason. Paul defines his reason for such praying for the Colossians. The more emphatic expression of reason used here, Διὰ τοῦτο, points back through the demonstrative pronoun ‘this’ to the final statement in verses seven and eight: “This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit” (καθὼς ἐμάθετε ἀπὸ Ἐπαφρᾶ τοῦ ἀγαπητοῦ συνδούλου ἡμῶν, ὃς ἐστὶν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι). Epaphras’ arrival to where Paul was imprisoned brought news to Paul that these believers at Colossae, in spite of not knowing Paul personally, had come to possess a deep love for him. And this was genuine love because it was generated by the Holy Spirit. Realization of this through Epaphras’ report motivated Paul to pray regularly for the Colossian believers.

Interestingly, one is reminded here that in order to pray for people’s need sincerely we must know what those needs are. Prayer is not magical. Intercessory prayer must be based on awareness of genuine spiritual needs. Without being made aware of the needs, no legitimate intercessory prayer can be lifted up to God. Over the years of ministry I have sometimes seen church members fuss at the preacher for not praying for them, especially if they had to go to the hospital because of some health problem. But they never bothered to let him know their needs. In their minds, he was supposed to ‘magically know’ what they needed without them telling him! Paul’s experience here flatly contradicts such thinking, and sets the example for us to follow.

Consistency. Paul learned of the needs of the Colossians at Epaphras’ arrival in Caesarea, as is signaled by the expression “since the day we heard about you,” ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν. This corresponds to his reference in verse eight to Epaphras’ arrival: “and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit” ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν τὴν ὑμῶν ἀγάπην ἐν πνεύματι.²⁰ Exactly when was that? Paul doesn’t say. Just the insertion of a time marker into this statement would have clarified the issues of when and where about the writing of the letter enormously. But this wasn’t Paul’s concern. Rather, he stressed emphatically that from the moment of hearing about their needs he began lifting them up to God. Literally the text reads, “we, from the day we heard, have not ceased...” He wanted the Colossians to realize how seriously he took the responsibility of intercessory prayer for them.

The seriousness of his commitment is further stressed by the core verb expression, ἡμεῖς...οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, which literally translated means “we...are not ceasing for you to pray.” His intercessory praying for them began the day of Epaphras’ arrival, and has continued through the time of the writing of this letter. How long was that? We do not know. No time markers are present signaling the amount of time from Epaphras’ arrival to the writing of the letter. It could have been weeks or months. But there’s is no way to knowing for sure.

Paul’s point, however, is not to focus on how much time he had spent praying for them. Rather, it was to stress the seriousness of his praying for them and that he had faithfully done so since first learning of their needs. Consistency, not quantity, is the point.

And that is the lesson to be learned here from Paul’s example. Faithfulness to pray for others is what matters. This in no way means having to spend x number of hours every day. Any emphasis upon how much time is spent praying moves close to Jesus’ condemnation of the Gentile pattern of praying to their idols in Matt. 6:7-8 (NRSV):

When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

These translators often violate their own stated adherence to the Formal Equivalent method by breaking off the English sentence off at the end of verse twelve, rather than by continuing it to the end of verse twenty, as is the case with the NASB here. More importantly, however, is the virtual incomprehensibility of this long, clumsy English sentence. The typical English reader will be pushed into not understanding the content of the passage in its wholistic expression. Instead, words and phrases that resonate with the reader’s personal life experience will jump out and become the basis for the minimal understanding of the text. The danger of eisegesis of the text, ‘false reading of outside meaning into the text,’ is virtually irresistible! Most Christian heresy is derived this way.

²⁰Additionally this statement also reaches back to verse 4: ἀκούσαντες τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ἣν ἔχετε εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἁγίους, having heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints. This anticipates the reference to Epaphras’ arrival to where Paul was in prison.

Προσευχόμενοι δὲ μὴ βατταλογήσητε ὡσπερ οἱ ἔθνηκοί, δοκοῦσιν γὰρ ὅτι ἐν τῇ πολυλογία αὐτῶν εἰσακουσθήσονται· μὴ οὖν ὁμοιωθῆτε αὐτοῖς, οἶδεν γὰρ ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὧν χρεῖαν ἔχετε πρὸ τοῦ ὑμᾶς αἰτῆσαι αὐτόν.

We need to pray for one another in intercession. That intercession must be based on awareness of specific needs. Communication of those needs is necessary for intercession. It must be done faithfully and consistently. And as is noted below, it must be focused on spiritual needs, not personal wants. Intercession for others is a marvelous privilege that God has granted to every believer, not just spiritual leaders. I suspect that if we spent more time praying for others, especially fellow believers, we would be much less inclined to fuss with them over differences of opinion. Intercessory prayer draws us together in mutual support of one another, and gives us the perspective of lifting to God the needs -- and deficiencies -- present in the life of those we pray for. It then becomes God's responsibility to solve those needs, not ours. From God we may very well receive instructions on how He wants us to help solve our brother's problems, but those instructions will grow out of God's desire to strengthen and edify our brother. Our self-motivated efforts to 'solve' our brother's problems will invariably turn into criticism and condemnation of our brother -- something Jesus condemned in Matt. 7:1-5.

Intercessory prayer for the Colossians, vv. 9b-12: "we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light." (9b οὐ παυόμεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι ἵνα πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ, 10 περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες καὶ αὐξανόμενοι τῇ ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ, 11 ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυνατούμενοι κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν μετὰ χαρᾶς, 12 εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί.)

In his intercession for the Colossians Paul focused on two things: 1) That God would fill them with spiritual understanding, and 2) thanksgiving for God's redemption work among the Colossians. Inserted in these are expressions of purpose and intention.

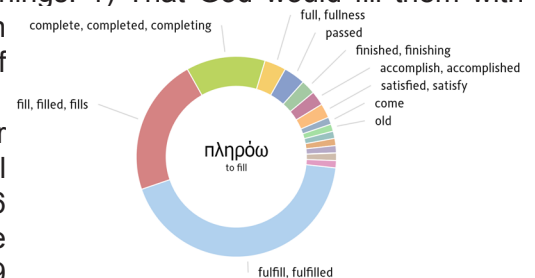
God's filling, vv. 9b-11. The heart of Paul's request to God for the Colossians was that they might be filled (πληρωθῆτε). The original Greek expression πληρώω has a wide range of meanings in the 86 uses in the New Testament, but the contextual based meaning here is clearly to be made full or complete,²¹ which is the meaning in 19

²¹πληρώω impf. 3 sg. ἐπλήρου; fut. πληρώσω; 1 aor. ἐπλήρωσα; pf. πεπλήρωκα; plpf. 3 sg. πεπληρώκει (on the omission of the augm. B-D-F §66, 1; Mlt-H. 190). Pass.: impf. ἐπληρούμην; 1 fut. πληρωθήσομαι; 1 aor. ἐπληρώθην; pf. πεπλήρωμαι; plpf. 3 sg. πεπλήρωτο (s. B-D-F §66, 1; Mlt-H. 190) (Aeschyl., Hdt.+).

1. to make full, fill (full)...

b. of persons *fill* w. powers, qualities, etc. τινὰ someone ὁ ἄγγελος τοῦ προφητικοῦ πνεύματος πληροὶ τὸν ἄνθρωπον Hm 11:9a. τινὰ τινος *someone with someth.* (OdeSol 11:2; B-D-F §172; Rob. 510) πληρώσεις με εὐφροσύνης Ac 2:28 (Ps 15:11). Cp. Ro 15:13 (cp. POxy 3313, 3 χαρ[ᾶ] ἡμ[ῶ]ν ἐπλήρωσα). τινὰ τινι *someone with someth.* (B-D-F §195, 2) ὁ διάβολος πληροὶ αὐτὸν τῷ αὐτοῦ πνεύματι Hm 11:3.—Mostly pass., in pres., impf., fut., aor. *become filled* or *full* (Scholiast on Pla. 856e of μάντις; ἄνωθεν λαμβάνειν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ πληροῦσθαι τοῦ θεοῦ); in the perf. *have been filled, be full*: w. gen. of thing (Diod S 20, 21, 3 τῶν βασιλείων πεπληρωμένων φόνων=when the palace was full of murderous deeds; Diog. L. 5, 42 τὸ πάσης ἀρετῆς πεπληρωσθαι) Lk 2:40 v.l.; Ac 13:52 (Jos., Ant. 15, 421 ἐπληρώθη χαρᾶς; cp. Just., A I, 49, 5); Ro 15:14; 2 Ti 1:4; Dg 10:3; IRo ins; Ox 840, 40f.—W. dat. of thing (Aeschyl., Sept. 464 et al.; Parthenius 10, 4 ἄχει ἐπληρώθη; 2 Macc 7:21; 3 Macc 4:16; 5:30; Just., D. 7, 1 πνεύματι. Cp. BGU 1108, 12 [I B.C.]) Lk 2:40; Ro 1:29; 2 Cor 7:4; Hm 5, 2, 7; 11:9b v.l. (for πλησθεῖ).—W. acc. of thing (pap use the act. and pass. w. acc. of thing in the sense 'settle in full by [paying or delivering] someth.': PLond II, 243, 11 p. 300 [346 A.D.]; 251, 30; POxy 1133, 8; 1134, 6; PFlor 27, 3 al.; B-D-F §159, 1; Rob. 510) πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης Phil 1:11. Cp. Col 1:9.—W. ἐν and dat. of thing ἐν πνεύματι with the Spirit Eph 5:18. ἐν πίστει καὶ ἀγάπῃ ISm ins. Cp. Col 4:12 v.l., in case ἐν κτλ. here belongs to πεπληρωμένοι (s. πληροφορέω 1b); but mng. 3 also merits attention. ἐστὲ ἐν αὐτῷ πεπληρωμένοι Col 2:10 is prob. different, meaning not 'with him', but in him or through him.—Abs. Eph 3:19 (εἰς denotes the goal; s. πλήρωμα 3b). πεπλήρωμαι I am well supplied Phil 4:18 (cp. Diod S 14, 62, 5 πληροῦν τινα=supply someone fully)....

[William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 827-828.]



of the 86 NT uses.²² The use of the passive voice verb here, ‘will be made full,’ highlights that God will do the filling, not anyone else.

What are the Colossians to be filled with? The answer is clear in the Greek construction: **τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν** τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ **καὶ συνέσει** πνευματικῇ, *the understanding of His will in complete wisdom and spiritual insight*. A distinctively Greek grammar pattern set forth the substance of filling as “full understanding... and spiritual insight.” These are two separate ‘substances.’ Instead in the standard Greek pattern of *article noun and noun*, they are two aspects of one reality. By placing the qualifiers ‘of God’s will in full wisdom’ in the middle of the construction, both nouns are linked to these two qualifiers. The two noun objects of the verb ‘be made full’ specify Paul’s primary concern that the Colossians come to a complete grasping of the spiritual realities of the Gospel as it expressed the will of God. The knowledge of God will should be profound, not superficial. Critically important, this knowledge is ‘spiritual insight’ in the sense that it comes from the working of God’s Spirit in our lives, just as Jesus promised in John 14:15-17 (NRSV):

15 If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. 17 This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

15 Ἐὰν ἀγαπᾶτέ με, τὰς ἐντολὰς τὰς ἐμὰς τηρήσετε· 16 κἀγὼ ἐρωτήσω τὸν πατέρα καὶ ἄλλον παράκλητον δώσει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἦ μεθ’ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, 17 τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὃ ὁ κόσμος οὐ δύναται λαβεῖν, ὅτι οὐ θεωρεῖ αὐτὸ οὐδὲ γινώσκει· ὑμεῖς γινώσκετε αὐτό, ὅτι παρ’ ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἔσται.

Was this ‘filling with knowledge’ to just make us smart Christians? Absolutely not! God’s granting us deep comprehension of His will has the intention of enabling us “to walk worthily of the Lord,” περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου. ‘Walking’ is a metaphor for living life, especially in the behavior aspect. The manner of our living out our life is to be what is appropriate of the Lord’s expectation and requirements. This is emphasized even more with the phrase εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν (“into all pleasing”). Although very clear in Greek as an idiom, the English meaning points to walking into everything pleasing to God. The inner connectedness of what is pleasing to God and the will of God is very tight. ‘God’s will’ is what He mandates that we do; ‘all pleasing’ is us doing what brings Him pleasure and delight.

What is the outcome of living this way? Three consequences are named: bearing fruit; growing; becoming strong. These three ‘modal participles’ in Greek define specific spiritual blessings that come to the believer doing God’s will. Each of them has modifications that make the core image richer.

Bearing fruit is qualified by ‘in every good work’ ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες. Spiritual fruitfulness through doing God’s will takes place in every deed of obedience expressed. God will bless our efforts of obedience so that they produce spiritual harvest. Note what James promised Jewish Christians in his writing: “But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act — they will be blessed in their doing,” ὃ δὲ παρακύψας εἰς νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας καὶ παραμείνας, οὐκ ἀκροατῆς ἐπιλησμονῆς γενόμενος ἀλλὰ ποιητῆς ἔργου, οὗτος μακάριος ἐν τῇ ποιήσει αὐτοῦ ἔσται (Jas. 1:25).

Growing is qualified by ‘in full understanding of God,’ καὶ αὐξανόμενοι τῇ ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θεοῦ. As God fills us with understanding we come to understand Him more fully. But this is conditioned on our walking in a way worthy of the Lord, since growth depends on walking, in Paul’s analogy. Christian behavior is essential to grasping who our God is. Knowledge of God is mental but its presence depends on our behaving ourselves properly. The Greek term ἐπίγνωσις stresses deep knowledge gained experientially. Mere intellectual comprehension doesn’t produce this kind of knowledge.²³

²²Cf. Mt. 23:32; Lk. 2:40; 3:5; Jn. 12:3; 16:6; Acts. 2:2; 5:3, 28; 13:52; Rom. 1:29; 15:13; 15:14; 2 Cor. 7:4; Eph. 1:23; 3:129; 4:10; 5:18; Col. 1:9; 2 Tim. 1:4.

²³“ἐπίγνωσις, εὐσ, ἡ (σ. γνώσις and prec. entry; Philo Mech. 59, 2; Polyb. 3, 7, 6; 3, 31, 4; Diod S 3, 38, 2; Epict. 2, 20, 21; Plut., Mor. 1145a; Herodian 7, 6, 7; pap [Mayser 438; UPZ 118, 16: 136 B.C.?; BGU 1873, 20f; PTeht 28, 11: c. 114 B.C.]; LXX, EpArist, Philo, Just., Tat.; καιρῶν ἐ. Did., Gen. 195, 28) *knowledge, recognition* in our lit. limited to transcendent and moral matters (Hierocles 22 p. 467). W. gen. of the thing known (Diod S 3, 56, 5 τῶν ἄστρων ἐ.) δόξης ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ 1 Cl 59:2 (here ἀγνωσία as contrast to ἐπίγν.). (τῆς) ἀληθείας a knowledge of the truth (Epict. 2, 20, 21; Philo, Omn. Pr. L. 74; τοῦ ἀληθοῦς Just., D. 3, 4.—MDibelius, Ἐπίγνωσις ἀληθείας: GHeinrici Festschr. 1914, 178–89) **1 Ti 2:4; 2 Ti 2:25; 3:7; Tit 1:1; Hb 10:26** (for the expr. εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἔρχεσθαι in **1 Ti 2:4; 2 Ti 3:7** cp. 2 Macc 9:11). ἀμαρτίας consciousness of sin **Ro 3:20**. τοῦ μυστηρίου τ. θεοῦ **Col 2:2**. τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ **1:9**. παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ **Phlm 6** (cp. Herm. Wr. 3, 3b ἀγαθῶν ἐ.; EpArist 139; ἐ. τοῦ καλοῦ Did., Gen. 72, 17). W. gen. of the pers. known ἐ. τοῦ θεοῦ knowledge of God (Pr 2:5; Hos 4:1; Just., A II, 10, 6; Tat. 13, 1) **Col 1:10; 2 Pt 1:2; cp. Eph**

Being empowered is qualified extensively: ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν, “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience.” The first two modifiers, ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει (with complete power) and κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ (according to the strength of His divine presence), stress the extent of the divine empowerment of believers. This Heavenly strengthening of believers is first of all deep and profound, rather than shallow and limited. Secondly, this empowerment comes out of God divine Glory as the source of strength. God’s *Doxa* is the Shekheniah presence in the midst of His people from the days of ancient Israelites who experienced this in the pillar of fire that hovered over the tabernacle in the wilderness. In that Presence of God comes the resources of God to His people. Not to be overlooked is John’s declaration about Jesus in John 1:14 (NRSV):

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, καὶ ἐθεασάμεθα τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ, δόξαν ὡς μονογενοῦς παρὰ πατρός, πλήρης χάριτος καὶ ἀληθείας·

Jesus as the divine Logos is in the New Covenant that empowering Presence of Almighty God in the midst of His people. Earlier Paul had used this imagery to admonish the Corinthians (1 Cor. 6:19-20, NRSV):

19 Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

19 ἢ οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματός ἐστιν, οὗ ἔχετε ἀπὸ θεοῦ; καὶ οὐκ ἐστὲ ἐαυτῶν, 20 ἠγοράσθητε γὰρ τιμῆς· δοξάσατε δὴ τὸν θεὸν ἐν τῷ σώματι ὑμῶν.

Here in Colossians with different words he makes the same essential point to the Colossian believers.

But what is the purpose of this empowerment? For Paul it was clear: “may you be prepared to endure everything with patience,” εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν μετὰ χαρᾶς. The combining of ὑπομονὴν and μακροθυμίαν into a single prepositional phrase expression is difficult to translate clearly into English. Patience and endurance are the core ideas. Combining them heightens the emphasis upon faithfulness to God under pressure. God’s empowering of His people is explicitly to enable them to be faithful to Him in the midst of pressure and hostility. And again, one must note that this empowering is conditioned on our walking properly before the Lord. God will empower us -- thoroughly by His Presence in our midst -- when we behave ourselves as believers.

This is some kind of ‘filling’ by God! And it is for the highest of objectives: to enable us to consistently live out our lives faithfully to Him. Out of this comes a life that pleases God and a believer who profoundly deepens his understanding of God. What a petition from Paul for the Colossians! Here is a worthy goal for our intercessory praying. Whatever we ask God to do in the lives of others should ultimately point them toward a more profound experience and awareness of God in their lives.



Thanksgiving to God, v. 12. This last phrase in verse 12 has been subject to differing views about its grammatical connection in this long sentence. This vagueness goes back into the era of copying the manuscripts of Colossians.²⁴ The grammatical uncertainty is whether this Greek participle, εὐχαριστοῦντες, qualifies ‘to walk’ as a fourth modal modifier, or whether it goes back to ‘we do not cease...’ as the third participle object of the verb ‘to cease.’ The first translation option can be seen in the NRSV and NLT translations above which indicate that it is the Colossians who are to give thanks as a part of their worthy walk. This has the least amount of grammatical

1:17; 2 Pt 1:3; Dg 10:1. Also ἡ περί σου ἐ. MPol 14:1; ἐ. τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ Eph 4:13; cp. 2 Pt 1:8; 2:20. Knowledge of God and Christ 2 Pt 1:2; but legal terminology may be reflected here (=cognitio, cp. PTeht 28, 11 πρὸς τὸ μὴ ἕκαστα ὑπ’ ἐπίγνωσιν ἀχθῆναι [114 B.C.]; SIG 826d, 16f). Abs. (cp. Hos 4:6) θεὸν ἔχειν ἐν ἐ. to recognize God Ro 1:28; (w. αἰσθησις) Phil 1:9; ἀνακαινούμενος εἰς ἐ. renewed in knowledge Col 3:10. κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν in accordance w. (real) knowledge Ro 10:2.—DELG s.v. γινώσκω. M-M. TW.” [William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 369.]

²⁴In the Greek text a variety of readings appear that can generate the following two core translations:

1. giving thanks to the Father who made you fit for...
2. giving thanks to the Father who made us fit for...

4) Are you fruitful and growing in your relationship with God? What areas do you need to focus on for increased growth?

5) How important in your church is public intercessory prayer as a part of gathered worship?