

(Rocky – Lesson 2 Handout – 09/01/2024) **PAUL’S PRAYER FOR THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH:**
A Prayer for Temporal Sanctification – (Colossians 1:9-14)

OPENING SCRIPTURE:

*And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ, having been filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God – *Philippians 1:9-11*.*

Principles taught in Scripture sometimes correspond with certain notions that seem to function well in the secular world. This should not be a surprise, even though biblical and secular world-views differ significantly.

Approximately 2,500-years ago, a **CHINESE military general, tactician, and philosopher** named **SUN TZU** wrote a book on military strategy titled, **THE ART OF WAR** ... **in which he proposed that KNOWLEDGE and WISDOM** are the bases for developing winning military strategies. In fact, in the CHINESE language, the symbol for KNOWLEDGE 知 – is similar to the symbol for WISDOM 智 – thus WISDOM and KNOWLEDGE were interwoven subliminally in CHINESE thought.

NOW APPLYING THIS TO MORE MODERN THINKING ... According to SYED RIZVI of THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, the famous phrase, ‘KNOWLEDGE IS POWER’ can be traced back to IMAM ALI (4th Caliph, Rashidun Caliphate) in THE 7TH CENTURY A.D. But the first written occurrence of the phrase appears in A TENTH-CENTURY A.D. book titled **PEAK OF ELOQUENCE**, by Nahjul Balagha. However, it is the English philosopher, SIR FRANCIS BACON, who brought the phrase into contemporary usage. ‘KNOWLEDGE IS POWER’ is an assertion that seems to hold a lot of truth – and it is not far afield from what SUN TZU taught over 2,500-years ago.

Continuing this line of thinking for a moment, recall the words of THE PROPHET HOSEA, who recorded God’s assessment of ISRAEL in THE EARLY-TO-MID-8TH-CENTURY B.C. ... GOD SAID: “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*” – *Hosea 4:6*.

KNOWLEDGE is foundational to science, medicine, engineering, aviation, and just about every endeavor in which human beings engage.

SUN TZU argued that **KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM ARE INTERRELATED** – I agree with him. And I will add to that thought the additional consideration that implicit to this idea is another similar – and perhaps more foundational connection: **KNOWLEDGE AND LANGUAGE ARE INTERRELATED**.

A big part of mastering any subject is becoming skilled in the vocabulary of whatever discipline you are pursuing, and this certainly is true for the theologian. Obviously, there is more involved in the Christian faith than terminology – but it concerns me that much of what is called, ‘*worship*’ today is almost completely devoid of content – and content is communicated through words.

Language is the foundation on which knowledge is built, and knowledge enables us to apply the principles of our faith WISELY to our daily lives; nevertheless ... *clichés* abound that seem to denigrate **DOCTRINE** (by which I mean the content that makes up the teachings of **JESUS** and **THE APOSTLES**), untying that CONTENT from PRAXIS, i.e., from the ‘*living out*’ of our faith.

Examples include platitudes such as: ‘DOCTRINE DIVIDES US; LOVE UNITES US,’ or ... ‘DEEDS NOT CREEDS’ – phrases one might see on a bumper sticker on a car.

But just as it is wrong to over-simplify theology, it is just as wrong to reverse these *clichés* in order to create a philosophical system that focuses solely on KNOWLEDGE to the exclusion of how we live ... (thus the *Book of James*).

In COLOSSAE, it was THE STOICS who were active during the time PAUL wrote his epistle – and we will discuss them more in CHAPTER TWO. But at this point it is important to agree that *separating KNOWLEDGE from how we live is a false dichotomy. KNOWLEDGE not put into practice is a dead-end; but so is contentless emotionalism.* Both extremes are wrong.

In today's passage PAUL masterfully *interlaces* the importance of 'knowing something' with 'putting that knowledge to use' in a practical expression of the Christian faith. So the context is not theoretical; it is the practical application of theological knowledge, something close to a concept we discussed in our previous series: viz., TEMPORAL SANCTIFICATION.

In the fourth lesson of the series, ADAM'S SIN, ATONEMENT, AND IMPUTED RIGHTEOUS I introduced two theological terms that were pertinent to that lesson, and one of those terms is applicable to our understanding of today's passage. The two terms are: (1) POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION and (2) TEMPORAL SANCTIFICATION.

- BY POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION we mean: 'A COMPLETED WORK.'
- BY TEMPORAL SANCTIFICATION we mean: 'A WORK IN PROGRESS.'

And POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION should be thought of as 'HEAVENLY' while TEMPORAL SANCTIFICATION is 'EARTHLY.'

These terms separate (1) what God *has done* from (2) what God *is doing* in the lives of believers.

Today's lesson falls into the practical side of this equation – The Christian life is a way of living that is *grounded* in DOCTRINE – specifically, in THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD revealed in SCRIPTURE – something the Bible calls 'THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE.'

[READ COLOSSIANS 1:9-14] – Notice how PAUL interlaces 'THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD' with the practical application of that KNOWLEDGE, which he calls, 'A WALK.'

IN VERSE 9 – PAUL prays that THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH will 'be filled with the KNOWLEDGE of God's Will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.' Then immediately IN VERSE 10 he uses the term 'WALK' as a reference to 'the manner of life the Colossians should lead.' Because THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH possesses a deep knowledge of God, this knowledge is expected to 'bear fruit in every good work.'

Then in that same verse – VERSE 10 – THE APOSTLE again emphasizes the centrality of 'increasing in the knowledge about God,' indicating these two ideas are inseparable. 'Knowing' and 'walking' are not presented as options; 'walking' is the expected result of 'knowing.'

Notice the sequence; notice which of the two comes first. 'Knowing' always precedes 'walking,' not because 'knowing' is intrinsically better or more important than 'walking,' but because in order to 'walk' in the sense in which PAUL is using the term, one first must 'know.' The two go together, but 'knowing' is the necessary precursor to 'walking.'

Now if we are 'to know,' what is the content of that knowledge? Well first, let's examine the word 'knowledge.' The most common Greek term translated, 'knowledge' in our English Bibles is the word γνῶσις (pronounced *gnosis*). It occurs in the Bible 20X as a noun and 222X as a verb. By itself, *gnosis* means 'general knowledge,' or 'a general understanding of things.' But the word used in VERSES 9 and 10 is not *gnosis*, it is ἐπίγνωσις (pronounced *epignosis*) – (in other words) it is *gnosis* plus the preposition ἐπί (pronounced *epi*) – a word that means 'upon.' If you consult the Greek Lexicons, you will find *epignosis* carries the heightened meaning of 'precise, correct knowledge.' And when combined with the word 'God,' as in the phrase, 'the knowledge of God,' it carries a very precise meaning: 'specific, accurate, precise knowledge about God.'

PAUL used *epignosis* to distinguish this particular knowledge from the less precise ‘*gnosis-kind-of-knowledge*’ that was being taught by THE STOICS – the false-teachers who, if given the opportunity, would have introduced *apostasy* into THE COLOSSIAN CHURCH.

The knowledge PAUL wants THE COLOSSIANS to have comes directly from the Scriptures, not from THE STOICS. This REAL KNOWLEDGE OF GOD is attained from a proper exegesis of the Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments (*at least to the degree that parts of the New Testament were written and being circulated at that time*).

This passage is a PRAYER, so it would not be improper to infer from it that PAUL often prayed in a similar way for all the churches he and his associates – (*in this case, EPAPHRAS*) – had founded. *And since the main subject of THE COLOSSIAN EPISTLE is THE SUPREMACY AND SUFFICIENCY OF JESUS, the precise knowledge PAUL has in mind would have been CHRISTOLOGICAL in nature, ensuring that a correct understanding of THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST was clearly understood and firmly fixed in the minds of THE COLOSSIANS.*

It is in the context of ‘*knowledge about Christ*’ and ‘*the Christian Walk*’ that we encounter the intersection of POSITIONAL and TEMPORAL SANCTIFICATION. After those two wonderful verses in EPHESIANS:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one can boast – Ephesians 2:8-9 ...

There comes the next verse – VERSE 10:

For we are His workmanship, created IN CHRIST JESUS for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them – Ephesians 2:10.

POSITIONALLY we are IN CHRIST and share in the many blessings that are ours as believers. But they are not ends unto themselves ... they are designed to produce in us A WALK – A WAY OF LIFE that honors God.

Now what PAUL is describing is not easy. Consider for a moment VERSES 11 and 12: It is evident this ‘*walk of faith*’ is not something FALLEN MAN can achieve by his own effort. Both ‘*the knowledge*’ PAUL references, and ‘*the walk*’ that knowledge produces, are ‘*divinely enabled.*’ As part of his INTERCESSORY PRAYER, PAUL, asks that THE COLOSSIANS be ‘*ENDOWED WITH THE POWER TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.*’ The source of this power is God Himself, for PAUL refers to it as ‘*according to HIS GLORIOUS MIGHT.*’

Now this ‘power,’ this ‘might,’ is unlimited: It is the same power that spoke the universe into existence. It is the same power, that divided the sea and delivered ISRAEL from the most powerful military force on the face of the earth; and ... it is the same power, that raised JESUS from the dead.

WE NEED TO REALIZE SOMETHING IMPORTANT; WE ARE IN A WAR.

It is a war that began before the creation of mankind, and though it is spiritual in nature, frequently it shows itself in the actions of evil despots and in the policies of human governments when those governments pass legislation that honors what God has declared to be evil, and when what God has said is good and right becomes the target of god-hating men and women in positions of power. It is a war that rages today in THE MIDDLE EAST, in GAZA, in LEBANON, in SYRIA, in YEMEN, and very likely soon in IRAN — and behind closed doors it rages in WASHINGTON D.C. Recently it raged on the streets of CHICAGO, and in the seats of governments around the world – certainly any place where ANTI-SEMITISM has become the order of the day.

We were warned about this war in early-Genesis. There were hints of it in the creation account, but it was announced to us explicitly in GENESIS 3:15, when God said, *'I will put enmity between THE SEED OF THE SERPENT and THE SEED OF THE WOMAN.'*

This set the course for (1) **A DIVIDED HUMAN RACE**, and (2) **AN ULTIMATE SHOWDOWN** that took place on A CROSS on the outskirts of JERUSALEM. And even though the outcome of this war is not in question, and even though the victory already is won, the fight continues with no cease fire in sight until THE 2ND ADVENT OF JESUS CHRIST ... when He will come in POWER and in GLORY TO FRUSTRATE THE AMBITIONS of those among the human race, whom God referred to as THE SEED OF THE SERPENT.

And it is against this powerful enemy PAUL prays for God's Spirit to enable THE COLOSSIANS to live a life worthy of THE LORD. And this same power is available to you and to me right now. If we are going to survive as witnesses of THE TRUTH OF GOD'S WORD – when we consider what we are up against – then we need this very power that far exceeds any efforts we can muster from within ourselves.

PAUL prayed for '*steadfastness*' in the face of difficulties; he prayed for '*patience*,' when things seem to be going in the wrong direction, and he prayed for '*joy*.' The lesson for us from VERSE 11 is this: *'It is possible to endure HARDSHIPS while at the same time, experiencing JOY.'* (see Acts Chapters 5 and 16).

The word '*qualified*' in VERSE 12 is the Greek term (*ἱκανόω* – pronounced *hikanoō*). It means, '*to make sufficient, to render fit, to equip a person with adequate power to perform his or her assigned duties.*'

Remember, we came into this world '*unqualified*' as a result of THE SIN OF ADAM. But believers, no longer are 'IN ADAM' but we are 'IN CHRIST,' and therefore, we now are qualified based on GOD'S COMPLETE SATISFACTION with THE ATONEMENT accomplished by JESUS CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

Apart from the Cross, the only thing for which a man is *qualified* is to be a recipient of THE WRATH OF GOD ... but instead of WRATH, we are given AN INHERITANCE.

SO WHO RECEIVES AN INHERITANCE? SONS AND DAUGHTERS RECEIVE AN INHERITANCE. And notice, it is GOD THE FATHER who grants this INHERITANCE, so this must mean we are His sons and daughters. *We were BORN IN ADAM but we have been ADOPTED INTO CHRIST so we share in HIS SONSHIP in THE FAMILY OF GOD THE FATHER.* And as qualified recipients of our Father's generosity, we share in His Sovereign Grace as children of God.

The inheritance we receive is described as "*the inheritance of the saints in LIGHT*" having been rescued from "*the domain of DARKNESS.*" *Darkness is the opposite of LIGHT; it is the opposite of TRUTH; it is SATAN'S DECEPTIVE LIE.*

In verses 13 and 14 we are told how the '*rescue*' is accomplished. It is through redemption and forgiveness, a process that transfers us from THE DOMAIN OF DARKNESS into THE KINGDOM OF HIS BELOVED SON – JESUS CHRIST. All who trust in **CHRIST** are **SAVED**, fully and eternally. **SALVATION** is **not earned**, **FORGIVENESS** is **not merited** by any form of '**works-righteousness.**' And **REDEMPTION** is **not secured** through baptism or circumcision or by any religious activity. **SALVATION** is freely given on the basis of God's grace-alone, by faith-alone, in Christ-alone – and it is upon this foundation we are to build our lives.