



BIBLICAL INSIGHTS COMMENTARY

Volume 15 Pericope 3

Colossians 1:9-11a

Exegesis: English



INTRODUCTION

This pericope is the first of three units that transition the contents of the letter from the Proem (1:3-8) into the literary body of the letter (1:9-4:6). The Praescriptio (1:1-2) and the Conclusio (4:7-18) provide the literary “bookends” of the letter with a strong emphasis on prayer. The Salutatio in 1:2a invokes God’s favor and peace on the Colossian believers,¹ while the Benedictio in 4:18b repeats this with ἡ χάρις μεθ’ ὑμῶν, “Grace be with you.” This pattern is not only theologically important, but historically significant as well. That is, not only is prayer important for believers spiritually, but the early Christian worship patterns began and concluded with prayer. This mimicked the Jewish pattern of Friday evening synagogue meetings.

In our quest to understand the original meaning of this text of Colossians 1:9-11, we will follow the exegetical method set out for the Biblical Insights Commentary series.² This method provides us with a variety of ways to come to the text as we develop a historical understanding of its meaning. This exegesis of the third pericope of the letter in 1:9-11 builds on the foundations of the two preceding pericopes of 1:1-2 and 1:3-8.

This exegetical method works off the assumption of both historical and literary aspects existing for the passage and that an analysis of each set of aspects is

¹χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,
“Grace to you and peace from God our Father.”

²The basic depiction of this method is set forth in “[Guidelines for Exegeting a Text from the Greek New Testament](#),” in BIBLE STUDIES of [cranfordville.com](#). See also BIC volume 15 exegesis of [Colossians 1:1-2](#) at [cranfordville.com](#) for more details. Most of the conclusions to this beginning exegesis of the Letter to the Colossians are foundational to the understanding of the subsequent pericopes in this scripture text.

the best way to develop a trustworthy historical understanding of the text’s meaning.³

Now let’s begin the study. You should note the twofold distinction inside the historical and literary perspectives of the external and internal aspects. At certain points these two sets of aspects will become very interactive with one another. And that some of the aspects are more relevant to this passage than others.

The conclusions established in the exegesis of the first two pericopes in 1:1-2 and 1:3-8 can be summarized as follows:

1. This New Testament document was written in the form of an ancient Greek letter that was commonly found in the ancient world. It also follows closely in form the other letters of Paul in the New Testament.
2. The letter was dictated by the Apostle Paul to Timothy who served as the writing secretary, and who then carried the letter to its intended audiences.

³The method to be followed in outline presentation:

1.0 HISTORICAL

1.1 External Aspects

1.1.1 Compositional Aspects

1.1.2 Transcriptional Aspects

1.2 Internal Aspects

1.2.1 People

1.2.2 Places

1.2.3 Times

1.2.4 Events

2.0 LITERARY

2.1 External: Literary Forms

2.1.1 Identify the literary forms

2.1.2 Analyze the role of the literary forms

2.2 Internal: Literary Structure

2.2.1 Develop an understanding of the wording.

2.2.2 Assess the literary arrangement of the text.

Each point of analysis will be explored and will lead to a summary of the interpretive results in the conclusion of this study.

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3. The letter was most likely composed sometime during Paul's imprisonment at Caesarea in 57 to 60 AD.

4. The letter was prompted by the positive report of Epaphras to Paul. He was a native son of the Lycus River Valley where Colossae was located.

5. The apostle sought to affirm the apostolic foundations of the Colossians' religious experience that Epaphras had brought to them in his evangelizing of the Lycus River Valley some years previously.

6. This affirmation centered in Paul's deep gratitude for the Colossians and how they were developing their Christian faith. He sought to encourage and inform them in regard to this Apostolic Gospel message. This would protect them against false religious teachings that were present in Colossae.

With Colossians 1:9-11 in this third pericope, we are moving from the Proem in 1:3-8 into the literary body of the letter. This text represents the first of three transitional steps (vv. 9-11, 12-14, 15-20) that make this transition.⁴

1.0 HISTORICAL

The blending of both modern and ancient views of history in exegeting scripture texts is one of the most challenging aspects of interpretation. Plus, the unclear role of God in the creation of these ancient texts adds more complexity to the task. But given the embedded historical aspects of the scripture texts and the religious orientation of the exegesis of scriptures, one cannot escape such struggles over how to do historical analysis properly. To be sure, significant divergence of perspectives will surface at this point. We must give space to the ancient vertical divine-human approach to

⁴For an important discussion about establishing a proper context for the exegesis of this passage, see "Finding the Context," at cranfordville.com in volume 15 of the revised BIC commentary. Look under Pericope 3 homepage. This passage was used as the example of how to establish the context.

history, yet while maintaining the core of the modern horizontal human to human perspective. Otherwise, we have no credibility in our interpretive conclusions drawn from the text and presented to a modern audience. The approach to exegesis adopted here works hard at achieving the necessary balance between the ancient and modern views of history. And the history connected to every written text is an essential element that must be analyzed as a part of the process.

In order to detect the historical aspects of a text, every word needs to be examined to determine whether it asserts actions that have, are, or will take place inside a time frame. Are these actions perceived by the author as real or imaginary? What circumstances present at the time of the writing prompted the author to express his ideas? These and additional questions must guide the interpreter's analysis of the text.

1.1 External Aspects

The external aspects focus on both the situation of the writers at the time of composition, and on how faithfully this composition has been preserved in being copied over the centuries between the 'then' and 'now' dimensions of the text. First, the circumstances around the time of the composing of this text. The New Testament letter stands as a substitute voice for the physical presence of the apostolic author of the letter. Knowing all that can be uncovered about the compositional situation of the text becomes critical to correct understanding.

1.1.1 Compositional Aspects

From the studies on the first two pericopes of Colossians, several aspects of the situation of the letter's composition have been established. Beyond what was mentioned in the above Introduction, let me flesh out the scenario a bit more with both direct and implied aspects.

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Word came to the Lycus River Valley that the apostle Paul had been arrested by the Roman authorities in Jerusalem and was being held by them at Caesarea. Out of concern for him, the house church groups in the Lycus River valley decided to send Epaphras -- and perhaps others as well -- to Caesarea to encourage the apostle and to give assistance as needed. The trip from the Lycus River valley to Caesarea would take three weeks at most, depending whether it was made overland or by ship. Once Epaphras and those traveling with him arrived in Caesarea, they made contact with Christians in the city to learn how to contact Paul. He was being held by the Romans in the jail located in the governor's palace in the city. This opened the door for Epaphras to visit Paul at the jail.

What a visit it must have been! When Epaphras introduced himself to Paul, there was an immediate bonding between these two Christian servants. Epaphras shared with Paul what had been taking place (Col. 1:4-6) in Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea -- the three principle towns in the Lycus River valley. This meeting was the beginning of several that would take place over the coming weeks, as Epaphras became a part of the group of Christians daily going to the jail to take care of his physical needs.⁵ At some point, it was decided that Paul would send a letter of encouragement to the Colossians. This letter would put an apostolic stamp of approval on the apostolic Gospel that Epaphras had brought to them and upon which their Christian ex-
⁵During the period of time during the era of the Roman Empire, the [handling of prisoners](#) by Roman authorities tended to give the prisoners some latitude about receiving visitors. Since no provision was made to supply food to the prisoners by the authorities, the survival of the prisoners depended upon outside friends and family to take care of these needs. During Paul's two plus year stay in Caesarea, he was given the flexibility to carry on activities while confined to his prison cell. His status as a citizen of Rome helped his situation.

perience was based. The present of false teachers in Colossae with a corrupted, alternative version of the gospel gave impetus to writing this letter validating the apostolic Gospel.

During this same period of time, other contacts from the Roman province of Asia arrived at Caesarea. Among them was Onesimus, the runaway slave who was converted to Christianity under Paul's ministry. After composing a brief letter to Philemon, Paul sent him back home to Philemon who lived in Colossae, with the letter. In it, mention is made of Epaphras sending his greetings to Philemon (v. 23) who is now described as Paul's (ὁ συναιχμάλωτός μου ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus. At some point the Roman officials in Caesarea became suspicious of Epaphras and took him into custody along with Paul.

Additionally, either directly through contacts arriving at Caesarea or else via reports reaching Paul, word came about the Christian community at Ephesus, the capital city of Asia located on the western coast about a hundred miles west of Colossae, located in the eastern region of the province. This prompted the apostle to create a third letter during this time at Caesarea. But this letter would be more general in content and would serve as a "cover letter" for the reading of Colossians and Philemon. These three letters were to be read at Christian communities in Asia.

Once all three letters had been created and approved by Paul, Timothy, Tychius, Onesimus, and others were dispatched by Paul to take these letters to the province of Asia and then to read them to assembled groups of believers in the Lycus River valley and all the way across Asia to Ephesus. Through these letters Paul aimed to encourage believers in their apostolic Gospel based faith commitment. In part, this would be achieved by adding insights into the contents of the Gospel mes-

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sage. Unfortunately, Epaphras wasn't able to accompany this group due to his Roman imprisonment at Caesarea along side of Paul. In Philm. 22, Paul expressed an expectancy of being released from Roman custody so that he could visit Philemon at Colossae. It is doubtful that this hope ever took place, at least while Paul was at Caesarea.

This more detailed picture of the circumstances surrounding the writing of Colossians comes out of the emerging history drawn from insights found in these three "Captivity Epistles," Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon, which were composed together while Paul was at Caesarea. The even larger picture of how letters were written in the first century Greco-Roman world gives a broader foundation for developing the above scenario.

The direct assertion underlying this scenario comes from Col. 1:9a, Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς, ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, "For this reason also we, since the day in which we heard, do not cease for you praying and asking..." Clearly in this statement, the writing of the letter to the Colossians did not come immediately upon Epaphras' arrival in Caesarea. But how much time elapsed between these two points is not defined.

1.1.2 Transcriptional Aspects

Looking at the history of the copying of this text over the subsequent centuries becomes possible via the insights of the modern discipline of Textual Criticism. [An overview](#) of this very technical procedure can be found in "Greek 202: Study in Textual Criticism" at cranfordville.com. We will focus on the insights of the Critical Apparatus in The Greek New Testament, fifth edition released by the United Bible Societies. The Critical Apparatus of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, 28th edition will be referenced but not treated in de-

tail.

In the critical apparatus of the UBS 5th edition Greek text,⁶ no variations of wording significant enough to impact the translation of the text are listed. The major issue that surfaces here connects to the punctuating of the text toward the end of verse eleven. The Textual Guide commentary summarizes the essence of the issue well:

"If a break is made before the words μετὰ χαρᾶς (with joy), as in the text, the words μετὰ χαρᾶς go with what follows and indicate the attitude one is to have when giving thanks, as in NRSV, "while joyfully giving thanks." If, however, the break is made after these words, μετὰ χαρᾶς go with what precedes and indicate the attitude one is to have while enduring and having patience, as in RSV, "for all endurance and patience with joy ...".⁷

The issue raises a couple of questions about grammar and punctuation in 1:9-14. Does the sentence, that clearly begins in verse nine, end toward the end of verse eleven with μακροθυμίαν, "endurance"? Or, with ἁμαρτιῶν, "of sins," at the end of verse fourteen? Or still possibly with οὐρανοῖς, "the heavens" at the ⁴*The Greek New Testament*, Fifth Revised Edition: Apparatus (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2014).

The Greek New Testament, Fifth Edition is designed for translators and students. Like NA28, this is the leading edition of the original text of the New Testament. It contains the same Greek text as NA28, differing only in some details of punctuation and paragraphing. The critical apparatus includes exergetically significant variants (fewer than NA28) but adds extensive manuscript evidence (more than NA28) for each variant, thereby offering in-depth instruction for students on how variants and the evidence for them work together.

⁵Roger 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.

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end of verse twenty? This issue surfaces in modern print Greek texts because punctuation marks, paragraph divisions etc. did not exist in Greek in the first century. Verse twenty-two is the first statement (vv. 21-23) to contain a main clause verb, ἀποκατήλλαξεν, “he reconciled” since the one, οὐ παύομεθα, “we do not cease,” in verse nine. In essence, should you place a period toward the end of verse eleven? Or at the end of verse 20? All of the verbal clauses from 9b through 20 are subordinate clauses.

A wide diversity of viewpoints can be seen in a comparison of available modern print editions of the Greek text and translations. The [critical apparatus](#) of the UBS 5th revised edition lists the following:

Colossians 1:11⁸

⁵ Colossians 1:11

NO C: = no comma after μακροθυμίαν, which links the prepositional phrase μετὰ χαρᾶς, “with joy,” to what precedes. It indicates that a break occurs between clauses or words in the editions or translations cited. Such differences in segmentation result in different words and clauses being grouped together with a change of meaning from that in the UBS text. Those Greek texts and translations which follow this are listed below:

NA^{mg} = marginal reading in the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece 2012.

TR = Textus Receptus Oxford, 1889

WH = Westcott and Hort, The New Testament in the Original Greek, 1881

GNB^{mg} = marginal reading in the Good News Bible, 1992

NBS^{mg} = marginal reading in La Nouvelle Bible Segond, 2002

TOB^{mg} = marginal reading in the Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible (1998)

The marginal reading indicates that is comma is placed here rather than either a period or no punctuation mark. This ‘mg’ signals the listing of a secondary alternative to the preferred punctuation that is adopted by the publication.

C: Listing of those publications that place a comma after μακροθυμίαν in verse eleven. It indicates that a break oc-

NO C: NA^{mg} TR WH GNB^{mg} NBS^{mg} TOB^{mg}

C: NAmg TR WH GNB^{mg} REB^{mg} NBS^{mg} TOB^{mg}

The abbreviated system of listing in this edition is more confusing than enlightening. The critical apparatus of the NA 28th revised edition Greek text does not list anything at this point. The 28th revised edition of the Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece (2012) places a period after μακροθυμίαν in verse eleven, as does also The Greek New Testament, 5th revised edition from the UBS. But verses 9-11a and 11b-20 are divided into separate paragraphs in the NA28th revised edition. Yet, the UBS 5th edition Greek Text includes verse 9 through 20 in a single paragraph. The significantly differing sets of punctuational break points inserted into the serves to ‘muddy the waters’ in coming to a firm conclusion on how the text divides itself into sentences.

Here is my assessment of this issue. Since obvious main clause verbs serve as the foundation for sentence structure in ancient Greek, the sentence, that clearly begins in verse nine, extends to the end of verse twenty. That makes for a very long sentence, even in ancient Greek! But an analysis of thought flow in this sentence strongly suggests three identifiable units of expression as reflected in verses 9-11, 12-14, and 15-20. Quite clearly verses fifteen through twenty reflect Paul’s use of an ancient Christian hymn in its phraseology and he attaches it, via its relative clause nature, to the same antecedent of the relative clause introduced by ὃ “in Him,” in verse fourteen. This helps define the threefold thought structure in this long sentence. And at least a twofold structure of 9-14 and 15-20. The clear directional shift signaled by the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, curs between clauses or words in the editions or translations cited. Such differences in segmentation result in different words and clauses being grouped together with a change of meaning from that in the UBS text

NA^{mg} = Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, 2012

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“giving thanks,” argues for breaking verses nine through fourteen into two separate units (vv. 9-11, 12-14).

The really hard to decide issue here then becomes whether the prepositional phrase Μετὰ χαρᾶς, “with joy,” in verse eleven modifies the participle δυναμούμενοι, “being enabled,” before it. Or, the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, “giving thanks,” at the beginning of verse twelve and immediately following the prepositional phrase.⁹ The close proximity to εὐχαριστοῦντες favors this connection.

We conclude then that verses nine through twenty comprise a single sentence in the original Greek text. But that, in terms of thought structure, this sentence contains three distinguishable segments (vv. 9-11a, 11b-14, and 15-20). On this understanding we will carry out the exegesis of the passage. The first segment of the sentence begins the literary transitioning from the Proem into the body of the letter. This long sentence in verses nine through twenty stands as that transition.

1.2 Internal Aspects

Historical oriented references that may be present in the text need to be examined.

1.2.1 People

No named individual surfaces in this passage. But in the personal pronouns ἡμεῖς, “we,” and ὑμῶν, “you,” we note the interaction between the letter senders -- Paul and Timothy -- and the letter recipients, the Colossian believers. God is involved also as is noted by αὐτοῦ, “His,” κυρίου, “Lord,” and θεοῦ, “God.” Paul

⁹Some additional insight can be gleaned from additional instances of this prepositional phrase elsewhere in ancient Greek literature. In Phil. 1:4 μετὰ χαρᾶς occurs in front of the participle ποιούμενος, “doing” that it modifies. In Heb. 10:34, it stands in front of the verb προσεδέξασθε, “you accepted,” that it modifies. And in Heb. 13:17, it is before ποιῶσιν, “they may do.”

and Timothy pray for the Colossians consistently. The point of their prayers is for God to fill the Colossians with the knowledge of His will. This preserves the typical ancient historical perspective of human interaction with the divine and with other humans.

1.2.2 Places

No geographical designations are named here. But the setting for these words is clearly where Paul was when the letter was written. Earlier in our studies, we identified that place as Caesarea.

1.2.3 Times

One temporal moment is identified as ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, “from the day that we heard.” This reaches back to ἀκούσαντες, “having heard,” in verse four. Also, it links to ὁ καὶ δηλώσας ἡμῖν, “the one who also showed us,” in verse eight. The point of time alluded to is the moment when Epaphras gave his report to the apostle about what was taking place in the Lycus River valley. The best estimate is that this took place during Paul’s time in Caesarea, 57-60 AD. And probably not at the beginning of this stretch.

The second time reference surfaces in the present tense verb expression οὐ παυόμεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, “we do not cease praying and asking for you.” This clearly implies some time had passed between Epaphras’ arrival at Caesarea with his report to Paul and the writing of this letter. How much time? There is no way to know. But likely it wasn’t a long period of time. The verbal expression with a present tense verb and two present tense participles stresses ongoing action at least into present time. These help make this ongoing period of praying the primary focus of this text.

1.2.4 Events

The single moment of time reference in this passage

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is the Aorist verb ἠκούσαμεν, “we heard,” in verse nine. The simple Constative Aorist function of this verb marks off the starting point for the ongoing prayers for the Colossians.

In the adverbial purpose clause introduced by ἵνα, “so that,” has the Aorist passive voice verb πληρωθῆτε in the subjunctive mood form. This picks up a projected moment that stretches across the future and visualizes it as one happening. Parallel to it in time reference is the Aorist verbal purpose infinitive περιπατῆσαι, “in order to walk.” This creates the sense of being filled in order to walk. Each time a prayer for the Colossians was lifted up to God, its essence was for God’s filling so that the Colossians could walk.

Following the Aorist infinitive περιπατῆσαι is a series of present tense participles -- καρποφοροῦντες, “bearing fruit,” ἀυξανόμενοι, “growing,” δυναμούμενοι, “being enabled.”¹⁰ These punctuate that future stretch of time (Aorist infinitive) with repeated instances of bearing fruit, growing, and being enabled. Remember that this is a scenario that Paul and Timothy pray will continue to happen among the Colossians. In verse seven, we were told that bearing fruit and growing were already taking place among these believers. This pattern had its beginning in their conversion (v. 7). Thus this assertion of continuing prayer has the sense that this positive Christian experience will continue and deepen as time passes. To promote this process comes this letter from Paul with its elaboration of the apostolic Gospel.

¹⁰Very likely, in a strict grammatical sense, one more present tense participle follows in the same pattern, in verse twelve: εὐχαριστοῦντες, “giving thanks.” To be sure, it echoes the verb εὐχαριστοῦμεν, “we give thanks.” The effect is to reintroduce the theme of thanksgiving from the Proem main clause verb in verse three. But this time the focus is more pronounced on the work of Christ. Verses eleven b through verse twenty center on the person and work of Christ. The strategy is to make claims about Christ in verses 11b-14, which then are strengthened by citation from a first century Christian hymn in verses 15-20.

Thus praying and taking action work hand in hand with each other.

2.0 LITERARY

Now we examine the scripture text from its literary aspects angle. With the External perspective, we will compare the literary pattern of the text with similar pattern found in the ancient Greek and Latin literary materials available to us today. And with the Internal perspective, we will examine the individual words in the passage and how they are arranged together grammatically.

2.1 External: Literary Forms

By having already established that the entire document is in the form of an ancient letter, we would then expect to find the typical four sub forms of ancient letters: Praescriptio, Proem, Letter Body, and Conclusio. And indeed we find them in Colossians: Praescriptio, 1:1-2; Proem, 1:3-8; Letter Body, 1:9-4:6, and Conclusio, 4:7-18.

The challenge of 1:9-11a is that this text is but the first part of a long Greek sentence found in verses 9-20. Thus, we are dealing with a unitary structure, but it possesses three distinguishable segments: vv. 9-11a, 11b-14, 15-20. We will look at each segment over the next three studies.

2.1.1 Identify the literary forms.

The central idea of this long sentence in verses 9-20 is established by the main clause ἡμεῖς...οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, “we...do not cease for you praying and asking.” The affirmation made by Paul and Timothy to the Colossians is their continual prayer support. The overt stating of the verb subject via the personal pronoun ἡμέρας, “we,” emphasizes their affirmation to the Colossians.

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The adverbial purpose clause introduced by the subordinate conjunction ἵνα, “in order that,” in verse 9b defines the goal of the prayers of intercession being raised up in behalf of the Colossians. Its content is defined in detail in verses 9b-14. But the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, “giving thanks,” in verse twelve is the last of four participial phrases specifying the meaning of περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου, “to walk worthy of the Lord,” goes a unique direction so that it stands apart concept wise from the other participle expressions. Connected to this participle is the content found in 11b - 14.

Now the question arises as to how this intercessory prayer expression compares to other such prayers both elsewhere in the New Testament, and beyond.¹¹ First we examine the Proems in Paul’s letters for insights.¹² Then we will consider some of the terms related to intercession found in the New Testament.¹³

¹¹ The topic of prayer in Christianity, or, just even prayer in the Bible, is a hugely massive study with numerous ways of being done. The bibliography on publications treating the subject of prayer would fill a large room with books and journal articles. And then, there is the internet. Perhaps more junk material exists on this topic online than almost any topic imaginable.

¹² All of Paul’s letters contain a Proem. But intercession is either a part of the Proem (Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, 2 Thessalonians, Philemon) or immediately follows it (Colossians) in six of the letters.

¹³ Far and away the best secondary article on prayer is the study of εὐχομαι, and εὐχή in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. The article was written by several authors, each responsible for one of the sections of the outline:

- A. The Usage of εὐχομαι, εὐχή
- B. Prayer in the Greek World.
- C. Prayer in the OT.
 1. OT Usage.
 2. The Main Features of OT Prayer.
 3. Review of Prayer in the OT.

In the Proem of Romans 1:8-25, Paul shifts from thanksgiving to intercession in verses nine and ten. He begins with a oath of the truthfulness of his intercession to God οὐκ ἄδιαλείπτως μνησθῆναι ὑμῶν ποιούμενος πάντοτε ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου δεόμενος εἴ πως ἤδη ποτὲ εὐοδωθήσομαι ἐν τῷ θελήματι τοῦ θεοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, “how unceasingly I always make mention of you in my prayers asking if by some means I may at last succeed in coming to you.” But the focus is on a request to God to make it possible for him to visit Rome. The participle δεόμενος, “asking,” sets up the petition he states in verse ten b. Verses 11-15 amplify the circumstances around this request.

In the lengthy Proem of Ephesians in 1:6-23, the intercessory prayer is found in verses fifteen through twenty-three. Verse sixteen sets up the intercession with οὐ παύομαι εὐχαριστῶν ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν μνησθῆναι ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, “I do not cease giving thanks as I make mention of you in my prayers.” Also note verse fifteen with Διὰ τοῦτο κἀγὼ ἀκούσας, “For this reason after having heard...” Verses seventeen through nineteen state the content of his intercession via a long conjunctive ἵνα clause. Its core is “that God may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in knowledge of Him.”

In the Proem of Philippians 1:3-11, the intercessory prayer is found in verses 8 through eleven. Verse eight sets it up with the vow affirming his longing for the Philippians. The sentence in verses nine through eleven state his prayer. It is introduced by Καὶ τοῦτο προσεύχομαι, “And this I am praying.” Two ἵνα clauses state his request for increased love and spiritual maturity among the Philippians.

- D. Prayer in the Synagogue.
- E. Prayer in the NT.
 1. Review, Presupposition and Content.
 2. The Words Used.

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In the Proem of 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12, the intercession surfaces in the last two verses. The first part of verse eleven sets it up with προσευχόμεθα πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν, “we are always praying for you.” The relative clause Εἰς ὃ καὶ, “for this also,” and its antecedent follows with the ἵνα clause containing the content of the request. The essence of the request is that God might fill the Thessalonians with every good resolve and deed of faith by His power. The ὅπως clause in verse twelve states the intended result of this filling.

In the Proem of Philemon verses 4-7, the intercession is stated by the ὅπως clause in verse six. Its content is simply that Philemon’s sharing of the Christian faith may be energized. This ὅπως clause is attached to μείαν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου, “making mention of you in my prayers,” in verse four.¹⁴

Some observations about patterns.¹⁵

1. The intercession is often attached to the phrase, “making mention of you in my prayers” (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:16; Philm 4).

¹⁴The General Letters and Hebrews contain no Proems, except for First Peter and Third John. The typical ancient Greek and Latin letter format is only followed very loosely with two ‘letters’ (Hebrews and James) actually being Jewish Christian sermons with either a letter Conclusio or Praescriptio attached.

¹⁵1 Timothy 2:1-2 lists various kinds of prayers in Paul’s vocabulary:

1 Παρακαλῶ οὖν πρῶτον πάντων ποιῆσθαι **δεήσεις προσευχὰς ἐντεύξεις εὐχαριστίας** ὑπὲρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, 2 ὑπὲρ βασιλέων καὶ πάντων τῶν ἐν ὑπεροχῇ ὄντων, ἵνα ἡρεμον καὶ ἡσύχιον βίον διάγωμεν ἐν πάσῃ εὐσεβείᾳ καὶ σεμνότητι.

1 First of all, then, I urge that **supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings** be made for everyone, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.

2. The content of the intercession is usually introduced by either ἵνα (Eph. 1:17; Phil 1:9; 2 Thess. 1:11) or ὅπως (Philim. 6).

3. The orientation of the content is varied. In Romans the request to God is for Paul to come to Rome. In Ephesians, it is that God may grant the Ephesians wisdom. In Philippians, it is that God may grant the Philippians increased love and spiritual maturity. In Philemon, it is that God may grant Philemon an energized sharing of his faith. What becomes clear for this analysis is that each intercession is customized to the individually targeted readership, and what Paul sees as their need.

How does that compare to Colossians? There is similarity of some terms used, but grammatically a significance difference is present. In the other letters the intercessory materials are either embedded inside the thanksgiving sentence or else a subsequence sentence closely tied to the thanksgiving material. But in Colossians there are two long sentences, 1:3-8 (Proem) and 1:9-20 (Intercession) that are not closely linked together grammatically. In this construction scheme, the role of the intercessory sentence is modified to serve as a transition into the letter body. Thus some repetition of terminology with what preceded helps tie it to the previous material, and some of the new terms set the stage for the contents of the letter body.

The repetitive terms include ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, “for you praying,” in verse nine, which compares to περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι, “praying for you,” in verse three. ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, “from the day that we heard,” in verse nine compares to ἀκούσαντες, “after having heard,” in verse four. καρποφοροῦντες καὶ αὐξανόμενοι, “bearing fruit and growing,” in verse ten compares to ἐστὶν καρποφορούμενον καὶ αὐξανόμενον, “it is bearing fruit and growing,” in verse six. This repetitive terminology helps tie verses nine through eleven back to the Proem in verses three

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through eight. Yet slightly different thrusts to the usage in verses nine through eleven signal some distinction. For example, in verse six it is the Gospel that is bearing fruit and growing, while in verse ten it is the Colossians who are bearing fruit and growing.

The two terms used exclusively for prayer to God in the New Testament are προσεύχομαι, (verb, “I pray”) and προσευχή (noun, “prayer”).¹⁶ Add the adverbial prepositional phrase ὑπέρ τινος, (or, περί τινος) and the praying becomes intercession, “I am praying for someone.” The content of the praying is mostly set up by the subordinate conjunctions ἵνα, ἵνα μή, ὅπως either with a subjunctive mood verb or with an infinitive. Alternative constructions also exist inside the New Testament, but usually with nuances of different meaning.¹⁷ For example, δέομαι means I ask (noun δέησις= request), and can refer to asking God in prayer. But normally both the verb and the noun suggest urgent requests

¹⁶For a very helpful survey of the topic of prayer in the New Testament, see topics 33.171, 178, 179 in the Louw-Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*.

¹⁷The range of terms that can refer to the act of praying to God or a prayer includes αἰτέω, αἴτημα, ἀπαιτέω, ἐξαίτέω, παραιτέομαι, δέομαι, ἐπικαλέω, ἐρωτάω, εὐλογέω, εὐχαριστέω (εὐχομαι). But these terms have core meanings that do not necessarily refer to praying. For example, αἰτέω means, “I ask.” But often it implies an intensity which can produce the sense of “I demand.” The context of its usage determines whether prayer is the thrust of meaning or not.

[Gustav Stählin, “Αἰτέω, Αἴτημα, Ἀπαιτέω, Ἐξαίτέω, Παραιτέομαι,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 191.]

[Heinrich Greeven, “Εὐχομαι, Εὐχή, Προσεύχομαι, Προσευχή,” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 775.]

being made in a variety of settings (cf. Jas. 5:16).

In Colossians 1:9-11a both προσεύχομαι, “praying,” and αἰτέω, “asking,” are used to express intercession: οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, ἵνα..., “we do not cease for you praying and asking that...”. This main clause establishes the theme of the sentence in verses nine through twenty as intercessory prayer. The other place where prayer resurfaces is 4:2-4.¹⁸ Here Paul admonishes the Colossians to make prayer, especially thanksgiving, a major focus in their life. And he adds intercessory prayer for him to his encouragement to pray: προσευχόμενοι ἅμα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, “praying at the same time also for us.” Here the ἵνα clause in verses three and four specify the content of this requested prayer. This unit in chapter four is anticipated by the earlier emphasis on prayer in 1:9-20, and especially 1:9-11a.

The letter ends in 4:18 with the abbreviated Benedictio, ἡ χάρις μεθ’ ὑμῶν, “Grace be with you,” that echoes χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, “Grace be with you and peace from God our Father,” in the Salutatio of 1:2b. The two prayer expressions serve as thematic bookends to the letter. This same pattern prevails in all but one of Paul’s letters: 1 Cor. 1:3, 16:23; 2 Cor. 1:2, 13:13; Gal. 1:3, 6:18; Eph. 1:2, 6:24; Phil. 1:2, 4:23; Col. 1:2, 4:18; 1 Thess. 1:1, 5:28; 2 Thess. 1:2, 3:18; 1 Tim. 1:2, 5:21; 2 Tim. 1:3, 4:22; Tit. 1:4, 3:15;

¹⁸2 Τῇ προσευχῇ προσκατερεῖτε, γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, 3 προσευχόμενοι ἅμα καὶ περὶ ἡμῶν, ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου λαλῆσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι’ ὃ καὶ δέδεμαι, 4 ἵνα φανερώσω αὐτὸ ὡς δεῖ με λαλῆσαι.

2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time pray for us as well that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may declare the mystery of Christ, for which I am in prison, 4 so that I may reveal it clearly, as I should. (NRSV)

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Philim. 3, 25.¹⁹

What this analysis reveals is a tendency of Paul to introduce the topic of intercessory prayer with an established set of grammar patterns in his letters. Προσεύχομαι with either *περὶ ὑμῶν* or *ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν* is a common way to introduce intercessory prayer. Both forms are used in Colossians. Also Paul in Colossians makes use of *αἰτέω* with the present intensive middle participle *αἰτούμενοι* in verse nine to introduce the content of the request through the *ἵνα* clause attached to it.²⁰ Although there are diverse ways to set up intercessory prayer, at least in Paul's letters in the New Testament the options he used are well established patterns.

2.1.2 Analyze the role of the literary forms.

In Paul's writings, these well established patterns have not reached a level of rigidity that establishes a specific genre for intercessory prayers. But the patterns are clearly moving in that direction. Enough so that each of these patterns does serve definable functions.

What is the role of this long sentence in Colossians 1:9-20? With its three noted segments in verses 9-11a, 11b-14, and 15-20, the clear function of transition from the literary Proem, in verses three through eight, into the literary body of the letter is observable. The repetition of some words and phrases found in 1:1-8, even

¹⁹Romans has the typical Pauline *Salutatio* in 1:7, but ends with a doxology of praise in 16:25-27.

²⁰Interestingly, Philippians 4:6 contains four of the Greek words that can relate to prayer:

μηδὲν μεριμνᾶτε, ἀλλ' ἐν παντὶ τῇ **προσευχῇ** καὶ τῇ **δεήσει** μετὰ **εὐχαριστίας τὰ αἰτήματα** ὑμῶν γνωρίζεσθω πρὸς τὸν θεόν

Do not worry about anything, but in everything by **prayer** and **supplication** with **thanksgiving** let your **requests** be made known to God.

with somewhat shifted meaning, helps link this long sentence back to what preceded it. But most of this repetition is found in the first segment of the sentence in verses 9-11a. To be sure the participle phrase with *εὐχαριστοῦντες*, "giving thanks," does reach back to the core theme of verses 3-8 built on *Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ*, "we give thanks to God," in verse three. But in verses twelve through fourteen, the fleshing out of the idea of thanksgiving centers on *τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς*, "to the Father who strengthened you." This is then elaborated by two lengthy relative clauses in verses thirteen and fourteen explaining how the Father strengthens. This section stands very foundational to much of what will then surface in the letter body (1:21-4:6).

Then in a rather celebratory manner, Paul attaches another relative clause in verses fifteen through twenty from a first century Christian poem praising the work of Christ. He is now set to begin amplifying the salvation center of the Apostolic Gospel which the Colossians had received from the ministry of Epaphras some years before the writing of this letter. Various aspects of who Christ is and what He did on earth, alluded to somewhat in the latter part of this long sentence in verses nine through twenty will provide glimpses into their expansion in the letter body.

Paul's message becomes clear. It is exclusively through the Apostolic Gospel that we gain a correct picture of Christ. Alternative views may contain a tidbit of truth here and there, but they are overwhelmed by corrupt man-made angles. Thus they are false and dangerous. One does not find salvation in them. The apostle will do a masterful job in presenting the Apostolic Gospel with subtle critique of the alternative views in the letter body. This is what the Colossians began their Christian journey with and what he hopes they will stay with throughout their journey.

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2.2 Internal: Literary Structure

Now we turn our attention on the wording of verses nine through eleven. First, we examine each word of this text, and then we will take a look at the structural arrangement of these words. First, parsing of the words, and then a block diagram of them. Both of these are available as separate documents in the online BIC commentary in the homepage of pericope BIC1503 at cranfordville.com.

2.2.1 Develop an understanding of the wording.

An individual analysis of each word in both form and function (morphology and syntax) is labeled parsing. Below is a parsing of verses nine through eleven a:²¹

Verse 9:

Διὰ: Preposition used with accusative case pronoun - Because of

τούτο: Demonstrative Pronoun - Accusative of Cause - Neuter - Singular - οὗτος, αὕτη, τούτο - this

καί: Coordinate conjunction in adjunctive use - also

ἡμεῖς: Personal Pronoun - Subject Nominative case -

²¹This parsing of Colossians 1:9-11a follows the guidelines set forth in Appendix 2: Guides to Parsing, which is found in [volume 35](#) of the **Biblical Insights Commentary**, "Tools for Using Greek" at cranfordville.com. The action of parsing is to simply identify the specific aspects of each Greek word in the text. That is, in its spelling (morphology) and function (syntax).

Different categories of analysis exist for verbs, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, participle clauses, and relative clauses. Relatively fixed spellings exist for conjunctions, prepositions, and adverbs, although they possess different functions.

Plural Number - σύ - you²²

ἀφ': Preposition used with Ablative of Time noun - ἀπό - from

ἥς: Relative Pronoun - Ablative of Time - Feminine - Singular - ὅς, ἥ, ὅ - the very

ἡμέρας: First Declension noun - Ablative of Time - Feminine - Singular - ἡμέρα, -ας, ἡ - day

ἠκούσαμεν: First Aorist (Constative) - Active - Indicative - First Person - Plural - ἀκούω - we heard

οὐ παυόμεθα: Present (Descriptive) - Middle (Intensive) - Indicative - First - Plural - παύω - we are not ceasing

ὑπὲρ: Preposition used with Genitive of Advantage pronoun - in behalf of, for (the benefit of)

ὑμῶν: Person Pronoun - Genitive of Advantage - Plural - σύ - you

προσευχόμενοι: Present (Descriptive) - Deponent - Participle (Adverbial Modal) - Nominative - Masculine - Plural - προσεύχομαι - praying

καί: Coordinate conjunction linking the two participles - and

αἰτούμενοι: Present (Descriptive) - Middle (Intensive) - Participle (Adverbial Modal) - Nominative - Masculine - Plural - αἰτέω - asking

ἵνα: Subordinate conjunction expressing purpose - in order that, so that

²²σύ: 2 pers. pron. σοῦ (σου), σοί (σοι), σέ (σε); pl. ὑμεῖς, ὑμῶν, ὑμῖν, ὑμᾶς you (*A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament*)

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πληρωθήτε: 1 Aorist (Constative) - Passive (NAE) - Subjunctive (Potential) - Second Person - Plural - πληρώω - you may be filled

τήν ἐπίγνωσιν: Third Declension noun - Accusative of Reference - Feminine - Singular - ἐπιγνώσκω - with full knowledge

τοῦ θελήματος: Third Declension noun - Genitive of Reference - Neuter - Singular - θέλημα , -τος, τὸ - will, intent

αὐτοῦ: Personal Pronoun - Genitive of Possession - Masculine - Singular - αὐτός, αὐτή, αὐτό - His

ἐν: Preposition used with Locative of Sphere noun - in, in regard to

πάση: Attributive Adjective - Locative - Feminine - Singular - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - every

σοφία: First Declension noun - Locative of Sphere - Feminine - Singular - σοφία, -ας, ἡ - wisdom, insight

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction linking two nouns - and

συνέσει - Third Declension noun - Locative of Sphere - Feminine - Singular - σύνεσις , -εως, ἡ - insight, understanding

πνευματικῆ: Attributive Adjective - Locative - Feminine - Singular - πνευματικός , -ή, -όν - spiritual

Verse 10

περιπατήσαι: 1 Aorist (Constative) - Active - Infinitive (Verbal: Purpose) - περιπατέω - to walk (Fig. for living out life)

ἀξίως: Adverb of manner- worthily

τοῦ κυρίου: Second Declension Noun - Genitive of Reference - Masculine - Singular - κύριος , -ου, ὁ - of the Lord

εἰς: Preposition used with Accusative of Reference noun - in regard to

πᾶσαν: Attributive Adjective - Accusative - Feminine - Singular - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - every

ἀρεσκείαν: First Declension noun - Accusative of Reference - Feminine - Singular - ἀρέσκεια, ἡ - pleasing

ἐν: Preposition used with Dative of Reference - in respect to

παντί: Attributive Adjective - Dative - Neuter - Singular - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - every

ἔργω: Second Declension noun - Dative of Reference - Neuter - Singular - ἔργον, τὸ - deed

ἀγαθῶ: Predicate Adjective - Dative - Neuter - Singular - ἀγαθός, -ή, -όν - good

καρποφοροῦντες: Present tense (Descriptive) - Active - Participle (Adverbial: Modal) - Nominative - Masculine - Plural - καρποφορέω - bearing fruit

καὶ: coordinate conjunction linking the two participles - and

αὐξανόμενοι: Present tense (Descriptive) - Middle (Permissive) - Participle (Adverbial: Modal) - Nominative - Masculine - Plural - αὐξάνω - growing

τῇ ἐπιγνώσει: First Declension noun - Locative of Sphere - Feminine - Singular - ἐπιγνώσκω - in the

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knowledge

τοῦ θεοῦ: Second Declension noun - Possessive Genitive - Masculine - Singular - θεός, ὁ - of God, God's

Verse 11

ἐν: Preposition used with Instrumental of Manner noun - with

πάση: Attributive Adjective - Instrumental - Feminine - Singular - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - with full, complete

δυνάμει: First Declension noun - Instrumental of Manner - Feminine - Singular - δύνᾳμις, -εως, ἡ, - with power

δυναμούμενοι: Present tense (Descriptive) - Deponent - Participle (Adverbial: Manner) - Nominative - Masculine - Plural - δύνᾳμαι - working

κατὰ: Preposition used with Accusative of Manner noun - according to, to the extent of

τὸ κράτος: Second Declension noun - Accusative of Manner - Neuter - Singular - κράτος, τὸ - with the strength

τῆς δόξης: First Declension noun - Genitive of Reference - Feminine - Singular - δόξα, ἡ - of glory, Presence

αὐτοῦ: Personal Pronoun - Genitive of Possession - Masculine - Singular - αὐτός, αὐτή, αὐτό - His

εἰς: Preposition used with Accusative of Measure noun - to, into (denotes movement into)

πᾶσαν: Attributive Adjective - Accusative - Feminine Singular - πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν - with full, complete

ὑπομονήν: First Declension noun - Accusative of Measure - Feminine Singular - ὑπομονή, -ῆς, ἡ - endurance, perseverance

καὶ: Coordinate conjunction linking the two nouns - and

μακροθυμίαν: First Declension noun - Accusative of Measure - Feminine - Singular - μακροθυμία, -ας, ἡ - patience

What does this analysis show us? Some issues do emerge from this analysis.

1. What does Διὰ τοῦτο, "because of this," refer to? Normally, the antecedent of the Greek demonstrative pronoun will refer back to something referenced previously. The neuter gender demonstrative pronoun τοῦτο means that the antecedent is most likely a previously mentioned idea, rather than just a previously listed neuter noun. Since this is the near demonstrative pronoun rather than the remote demonstrative ἐκεῖνο, "that," one would look for the nearest idea prior to τοῦτο. Verse eight thus surfaces as a likely antecedent. It is Epaphras having made known the love of the Colossians for the apostle Paul that prompts him into unceasing prayer for them. If not verse eight, then the next candidate is the thanksgiving expressed in the single sentence of verses three through eight.

2. The first possible antecedent means that the adjunctive use of καὶ, "also," alludes to Paul's praying for the Colossians as his response to learning of their devotion to him from Epaphras.

3. The relative clause ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν, "from which day we heard," is positioned before the main clause verb οὐ παύομεθα, "we do not stop." This is a position of heightened emphasis that marks very specifically the beginning point of his unceasing prayers.

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This alludes to Epaphras' report to Paul upon his arrival in Caesarea in verses seven and eight.

4. The normally active voice *παύω* is here used in the intensive function of the middle voice, *οὐ παυόμεθα*, to stress the not stopping sense of the construction. Of course, this negative construction is but a way to say emphatically that he consistently prays for the Colossians.

5. The participle based expression *ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, ἵνα...*, "for you praying and asking that..." sets up a rhetorically balanced pair of participles that focus especially on intercessory prayers as a central part of his praying for the Colossians. This parallel structure is for greater emphasis upon this kind of praying.

6. The *ἵνα* clause both states the objective of his intercession and the content of it. The use of the subjunctive mood verb *πληρωθῆτε*, "you may be filled," enables both intent and content to be expressed. The passive voice verb implies that God is the One who will do the filling. The Aorist tense creates the idea that each intercession from Paul will produce divine action of filling.

7. A divine filling with what? *τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ*, "the knowledge of His will." The accusative of reference noun *ἐπίγνωσιν*, from *ἐπίγνωσις*, stresses a deep grasping of something mentally. Here *τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ*, "of His will," specifies His desires as what is grasped with each filling.

8. The context for this filling is *ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ*, "in full wisdom and spiritual understanding." That is, how does God increase our understanding with each filling? He does so by deepening our wisdom and understanding. It is through these

means that we understand increasingly the specifics of His desires for us.

9. Why do we need this filling? Not to make us smart. Instead, it is *περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου*, "in order to walk worthy of the Lord." Each filling is to expand our comprehension of His will with the objective of shaping how we live day to day. The image of 'walking' in this Aorist infinitive is to live out our life day to day.

But it is a certain kind of walking that we are to do. *ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου*, "worthy of the Lord," sets up the spiritual and moral orientation of our living. This does not imply a kind of life that deserves God's blessing. Rather, it means a lifestyle that reflects the moral and spiritual character of God, especially as our Heavenly Father. Note that the image of divine Father will be developed in verses twelve through fourteen. The extent of this walking is defined by the prepositional phrase *εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν*, "in every way pleasing." This word *ἀρεσκεία* is only found here in the entire Greek New Testament. The sense of it is "the trait delightfully yielding to the will of another person for their happiness." That is, our worthy walk is prompted by delightfully seeking to make God happy with us."

10. How does this happen? Another pair of participles with modifiers defines this in an adverbial modal use here, which specifies the manner of this walk as bearing fruit and growing, *καρποφοροῦντες καὶ αὐξανόμενοι*. The fruit bearing takes place in *ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ*, "in every good deed," and the growing surfaces in *τῇ ἐπίγνωσει τοῦ θεοῦ*, "in the knowledge of God."

This pair of participles of bearing fruit and growing is but the first set of participial modifiers of the infinitive to walk. Following them is the modal participle *δυναμούμενοι*, "being enabled," and then *εὐχαριστοῦντες*, "giving thanks." Together these de-

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fine our Christian walk from four angles: bearing fruit, growing, being enabled, and giving thanks. These develop the idea of walking worthy of the Lord.

11. The δυναμούμενοι, “being enabled,” is heavily modified by three prepositional phrases: ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει, “with full power,”; κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ, “according to the might of His glory,”; and εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν, “for complete endurance and long-suffering.” These vividly describe the filling of God for walking in terms of divine Presence giving us the ability to walk well. It is an enabling fully adequate for our needs. It’s parameters are defined as the power of His glorious presence. Its objective is to enable us to remain consistent and firm in our walk.

In this portrait of the Christian life, here described as what Paul was praying to continue happening among the Colossians, we gain a deep understanding in what

it means to be a Christian from the message of the Apostolic Gospel. This lengthy ἵνα clause, which grammatically extends through verse twenty, creates not only a beautiful summary of being Christian, but it will lay the foundation for further expansion in the letter body. Clearly, this is indeed the genuine Spirit filled Christian life. But it was not the picture being offered by the false teachers at work in Colossae. Thus the apostle, out of his appreciation for the Colossian believers, is motivated to develop this portrait in great detail in order to counter the false picture and to persuade the Colossians to stay committed to the Apostolic Gospel as their source of understanding their Christian experience.

2.2.2 Assess the literary arrangement of the text.

After this close look at the individual words, we now need to see how these words are put together in order to create the larger picture of thought. The device

for doing this is the Block Diagram of the passage. The diagram is based on the original Greek text. Thus two diagrams will be presented. First, one of the Greek, and then one of the translation language text. This second one is presented for the sake of clarifying the structure of the Greek text and may override some grammar rules of the translation language. Since the Greek sentence here extends from verse nine through verse twenty, the block diagram will be presented in three parts over this and the next two studies. Also, note that this block diagram is available in a separate document located in the [BIC1503 homepage](http://BIC1503.homepage) in the BIC commentary series at cranfordville.com.

1:9

2

Διὰ τοῦτο
καὶ
ἀφ’ ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν,
ἡμεῖς...οὐ παύομεθα
| ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν
προσευχόμενοι
| καὶ
αἰτούμενοι,
ἵνα πληρωθῆτε
τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν

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1:10 | τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ
|
| ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ καὶ συνέσει πνευματικῇ,
|
| περιπατῆσαι
| ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου
| εἰς πᾶσαν ἀρεσκείαν,
|
| ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ
| καρποφοροῦντες
| καὶ
| αὐξανόμενοι
| τῇ ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ,
1:11 |
| ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει
| δυναμούμενοι
| κατὰ τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ
| εἰς πᾶσαν ὑπομονὴν καὶ μακροθυμίαν.

English Text Diagram:

1:9
2 **we...do not cease**
Because of this
also
from the very day we heard,
| for you
praying
| and
asking,
so that you may be filled
with the knowledge
| of His will
in complete wisdom and spiritual understanding,
1:10 |
in order to walk
worthy of the Lord
in every pleasing,
|

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1:11

| in every good deed
bearing fruit
| and
growing
| in the knowledge of God,
|
| with complete power
being enabled
according to the might of His glory
for complete enduring
and
long-suffering.

Some observations about the diagram:

1. In this second long sentence in the letter from verse nine through verse twenty, three distinct subsections surface. They represent a threefold transition from the Proem in 1:3-8 (the first sentence) into the letter body. The first subunit in verses nine through eleven has strong connections to the Praescriptio (vv. 1-2) and the Proem (vv. 3-8). Several repetitive words and phrase tie 9-20 to what preceded it in this beginning subunit. The second subunit in verses twelve through fourteen builds off the idea of thanksgiving and centers on expanding the idea of God as Father. Then Paul attaches segments of an early Christian hymn in verses fifteen through twenty in order to emphasize Christ as the means of the divine salvation. These three segments will set the stage for the detailed discussion of the Apostolic Gospel in the letter body (1:21-4:6).

2. The second sentence in verses nine through twenty has as its core idea ἡμεῖς...οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, ἵνα..., "we...do not cease for you praying and asking, so that.... Clearly the theme of this sentence is intercessory prayer, whereas the core theme of the first sentence in verses three is thanksgiving. Both sentences deal with prayer in the Christian experience.

The lengthy sentence in verses nine through twenty is part of the justification for not including it in the letter Proem. To be sure, it has its roots in the first two beginning units of the letter.²³ But it moves well beyond these with new emphases and ideas. It is better to regard this second sentence as transitional in intent in order to set the stage for the letter body.

3. The longest single element in this second sentence is the ἵνα clause beginning in the middle of verse nine and grammatically extending through verse twenty. Paul follows a rather typical pattern in introducing this declaration that defines the content of his intercession for the Colossians. The primary prayer request to God for them is that God might fill them. This core idea is then expanded in quite a number of directions as the apostle paints a portrait of what it means to be a

²³In the epistolary structure of Paul's letters, the Proem of thanksgiving grows mainly out of the Salutatio prayer wish in the Praescriptio. The literary role of the Proem is to lay the foundation for the remainder of the letter, as well as to strengthen ties between Paul as the letter sender and the designated recipients of the letter. Sometimes he includes both thanksgiving and intercession in the formal letter Proem. But in Colossians the intercessory prayer section follows the Proem with its exclusive emphasis on thanksgiving. Instead, the intercessory prayer section in verses nine through twenty serves to transition into the letter body.

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dynamic Christian. From the report given him by Epaphras, he assumes this approach to Christianity is already being carried out by the Colossians. But he wants them to understand the full implications of this way of doing Christianity based on the Apostolic Gospel.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

In recapping our study, let me highlight the historical and the literary aspects that we have uncovered in this passage.

Historical Insights:

The picture is enlarging step by step from the beginning Praescriptio (1:1-2) to the Proem (1:3-8) and then to the Intercessory Prayer emphasis (1:9-20). The entire picture will continue to unfold as we get further into the text.



Here's the picture thus far. During Paul's lengthy ministry at Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia, during the early 50s, Epaphras, a native son of Colossae, came under the influence of Paul's preaching of the Gospel. Epaphras was converted and returned home to the Lycus River valley and began preaching the Apostolic Gospel in the three principle towns of the valley, Hierapolis, Laodicea, and Colossae. The response was very good and house-church groups of believers arose out of that ministry. Philemon was one of those converted and he formed a group that met in his home. This ministry of Epaphras continued for some years with an ever large number of conversions to the Christian faith.

Sometime around 57 AD word came to the Lycus River valley that the apostle Paul had been taken prisoner in Jerusalem by the Roman authorities and now was being held by the authorities at Caesarea on the coast, where the governor's palace was located. The Christian community in the valley decided to send Epaphras, and probably some others, to Caesarea in order to convey to Paul their love and support of him.



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After making the trip of around three weeks, Epaphras arrived in Caesarea in the province of Judea. With the help of local believers he was able to gain permission to visit Paul in custody. In that meeting, he reported to Paul all that had been taking place with the preaching of the Apostolic Gospel that Epaphras had learned from Paul earlier. Epaphras also stressed how much these folks loved and appreciated the apostle. Paul in response began lifting the folks up in his prayers with thanksgiving and intercession. At some point in a subsequent visit with Paul, the decision was made to compose a letter and send it to the Colossians with the understanding that it would be read to the other groups in the valley as well. Unfortunately, Epaphras was taken into custody by the Roman authorities sometime after arriving there.

During this period of Paul's confinement in Caesarea (approximately. 57-60 AD), issues arose over the runaway slave Onesimus whom Paul had led to Christ, and also in the Christian community at Ephesus. So the decision was made to compose three separate letters to be sent together back to Asia.²⁴ The first letter -- labeled to the Ephesians -- would function as a 'cover' letter to be read first as a background setting for the other two letters. One was addressed to Philemon in behalf of Onesimus and the other was addressed to the Colossians. Philemon lived at Colossae, so the issue of how to handle this runaway slave would quickly become public information.

Timothy served as Paul's writing secretary for the composition of the letters. And he would lead the group who traveled to Asia to deliver these letters. All three letters were structured in the standard fourfold pattern of Greek and Latin letters at that time. The one

²⁴Actually a fourth letter, one to the Laodiceans, was also written and included in the group of letters (cf. Col. 4:16). This has become one of the lost letters of Paul that was not included in the New Testament.

exception was Ephesians since as a cover letter the written specification of recipients in the Adscriptio at the beginning was left blank. Whoever read the letter to an assembled group would orally insert the appropriate geographical reference at that point in the reading. Upon finishing the reading, a discussion of the contents of each letter among the individuals in the assembly would take place. Timothy, as the actual writer of the letters, would be best able to explain the contents and answers questions from the assembled group. An optimistic tone dominates all three letters.

Literary Insights:

The common structure of the typical letters of that day is found in all three letters. And the Praescriptio section is almost exactly the same words in all three. One difference, Paul is the exclusively designated sender of Ephesians, while Paul and Timothy are so designated in Philemon and Colossians. In the two letters to groups, Ephesians and Colossians, Paul uses the title ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ, "apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will." But in Philemon the self designation is δέσμιος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, "a prisoner of Christ Jesus," which is more appropriate for a personal letter. The prayer-wish greeting in the Salutatio is almost the exact same wording in all three letters. Philemon slightly modifies the wording: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, "Grace to you and peace from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ". Ephesians reads: χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου* Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." But Colossians is slightly shorter with χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father."

The Proems in Colossians and Philemon center on thanksgiving, while Ephesians lifts blessing to God:

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Colossians: Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι,

“We give thanks to God, Father of the Lord our Jesus Christ, always as we pray for you.”

Ephesians: Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ,

“Blessed be the God and Father of the Lord, our Jesus Christ.”

Philemon: Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου πάντοτε, μείαν σου ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου,

“I give thanks to my God always, as I make mention of you in my praying.

From this point on, these three letters go their own way, each being appropriate for the individual setting of each letter. All three, however, will contain a mixture of religious beliefs, Paul’s circumstance, and admonitions for Christian living. The common thread through all three is a focus on the Apostolic Gospel as the exclusive way to divine salvation.

Can we find something to preach and teach from Colossians 1:9-11a? I suspect our dilemma will be finding too much to preach or to teach in one message. The general theme of intercessory prayer which dominates the second sentence in verses nine through twenty is a good starting point. The first subsection in verses nine through the first part of verse eleven should provide a lot of rich ideas that our modern audience needs to hear. This we will explore in detail in Part Two: Exposition of Colossians 1:9-11a, our next study.