

*An Intercession for Knowledge and Godly Conduct (1:9–14)*¹

Bibliography

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Translation

⁹ *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped earnestly praying for you that God may fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,* ¹⁰ *in order that you may lead 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,* ¹¹ *being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may show great endurance and patience, and joyfully* ¹² *giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light,* ¹³ *For he has rescued us from the tyranny of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,* ¹⁴ *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Form/Structure/Setting

The second major section of Paul's thanksgiving paragraph commences at verse 9, διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς. ἀφ' ἧς ἡμέρας ἠκούσαμεν κτλ ("for this reason, since the day we heard about you"), and it spells out the content of his intercessory prayer report. The links between the thanksgiving and the intercession are strongly emphasized by: (a) the words διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς ... οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι ... ("for this reason ... we have not stopped praying for you"), verse 9, pick up and echo those of verse 3, εὐχαρισ τοῦμεν ... πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι ("we give thanks ... always when we pray for you"; cf. Phil 1:9; 2 Thess 1:11 where a similar device is used to link the two sections); and by: (b) the repetition of terms and ideas already used in the thanksgiving: so, for example, "since the day" (vv 6, 9), "we heard" (vv 4, 9), "knowledge" (vv 6, 9, 10), "bearing fruit and increasing" (vv 6, 10), "giving thanks" (vv 3, 12), "the Father" (vv 3, 12), "the saints" (vv 4, 12), "spiritual" of verse 9 corresponds to "in spirit" of verse 8, while "the inheritance ... in light" (v 12) may well overlap in meaning with ἐλπίς as the "object of hope" (v 5). It remains only to draw attention to the repeated use of "all"

¹O'Brien, P. T. (2002). *Vol. 44: Word Biblical Commentary : Colossians-Philemon*. Word Biblical Commentary (18). Dallas: Word, Incorporated.

BEvT Beiträge zur evangelischen Theologie

SUNT Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck)

cf. *confer*, compare

(παῖς) in both sections (vv 4, 6, 9, 10, 11). “The resumption of these phrases and concepts clearly indicates that the thanksgiving and intercession are closely connected” (Lohse, 24).

After the main verb “we have not ceased to pray” (οὐ παύομεθα ... προσευχόμενοι, v 9) the content of the prayer is indicated by the ἵνα-clause: “that you may be filled ...” (ἵνα πληρωθῆτε, v 9). An infinitive construction indicates the purpose for which the readers are to be filled with a knowledge of God’s will, namely “to walk worthily of the Lord” (περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου, v 10) while the four participles which follow, “bearing fruit” (καρποφοροῦντες, v 10), “increasing” (αὐξανόμενοι, v 10), “being strengthened” (δυναμούμενοι, v 11) and “giving thanks” (εὐχαριστοῦντες, v 12), define more precisely what is involved in walking worthily of the Lord and pleasing him in all things. Each of the four participles is modified by a prepositional phrase, and so the whole paragraph may be structured as follows:

διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ἡμεῖς ...

προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι ...

ἵνα πληρωθῆτε ...

περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου ...

ἐν παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ καρποφοροῦντες

αὐξανόμενοι τῇ ἐπιγνώσει τοῦ θεοῦ

ἐν πάσῃ δυνάμει δυναμούμενοι

μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες ...

In verses 13 and 14 which are probably to be understood as an exposition of verse 12 (being fitted for God’s inheritance in the realm of light meant that he had delivered them out of the realm of darkness, translated them into the kingdom of his beloved Son and given them redemption) two relative sentences occur (ὅς ἐρρύσατο, v 13, and ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν, v 14), the first of which has two lines in contrasting parallelism:

13a ὅς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους

13b καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ.

Not all commentators, however, are agreed that Paul’s intercession extends to verse 14. A considerable and influential body of continental scholarly opinion is convinced that the prayer-report concludes with the words about patience and long-suffering in verse 11. μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες (“joyfully giving thanks”) introduces the community’s confession of faith in Christ. On this view verses 12–20 are understood as a unit with verses 12–14 being regarded by Käsemann (*Essays*, 154, 155) and others as an introit to a baptismal liturgy (Bornkamm, *Studien*, 188–203, and N. A. Dahl, “Anamnesis. Mémoire et Commémoration dans le Christianisme primitif,” *ST* 1 [1948] 86, 87, understand the hymnic confession in a eucharistic context). Our criticism of this division (cf. *Introductory Thanksgivings*, 71–75) is threefold: first, it is not at all clear why εὐχαριστοῦντες is to be separated from the preceding participles (which we have suggested define more precisely what it means “to walk worthily of the Lord”) and understood as a summons or in an imperatival way. Second, although εὐχαριστέω was used in a wider sense than simply the giving of thanks for personal benefits received it is doubtful whether it was

employed as a technical term to introduce a confession (cf. Bornkamm, *Studien*, 196, 197, and note Deichgräber's criticisms, *Gottes hymnus*, 145, 146). Third, Käsemann's particular view of the whole section being "an early Christian baptismal liturgy" is unproven. We do not know enough about early Christian liturgies to be able to make pronouncements with this certainty.

Paul's thanksgiving period extends from verses 3–14 (containing a thanksgiving report, vv 3–8, and an intercessory prayer report, vv 9–14). It does not have a well-rounded and clear-cut climax, but passes almost imperceptibly from the form of a prayer to that of a creed or hymn. Some of the terms and ideas of verses 12–14 may have been associated with baptism but in their present context are the basis of joyful thanksgiving to the Father.