

Tim Krupa - How Paul Prayed

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The lesson that I want to share with you today is a Bible study experience that I recently had. It has to do with the letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in Colossae. Now, I have always enjoyed the letter to the, to this, to the Colossians, and I suspect that one of the reasons I liked it is because it's short. I have to admit that the four chapter letter was something that I could remember and I could summarize it in.

It seemed to fit my memory capacity. But there was a recent study in our Ecclesia on this letter, and I used some translations that I had not particularly used for this kind of study before, and much to my surprise and delight, I found some statements in the beginning of the letter to the Colossians by Paul that I had missed before, and these different translations to me opened a door of understanding, and it was a small section and it actually boils down to really just two verses in the first chapter.

And I would say that by looking at the, the translations that I had normally looked at for an example, KING James is 400 years old, and I thought I understood what the basic idea of the letter was, was, and I haven't changed my mind on that. But I jumped over this little gem that was at the beginning of the letter, and the true translations that I use, I use a lot for everything else.

They're two of my favorites. One is the translation by William Barclay, Barclay, originally from Scotland, and JB Phillips. These are translations that probably have been made in the last hundred years, and in each of them it's only a few sentences, but I found them greatly meaningful, and I thought at first that this little section was just part of the opening, the introduction of this letter.

But as I contemplated it more, I saw it, it had an impact. It was connected to the rest of the letter. So we're going to talk a little bit about the letter to the Christians in Colossae. One of the things that amazes me before we almost start is that in all of Paul's journeys in his travels, he had never visited this city.

The story of Jesus and this newly growing Christian way had been brought to the city by a brother named Epaphras, and I, from my looking at this, I think it's the only letter that Paul wrote to a city that he had never visited. In some respects it makes it a little bit unique because the good news had obviously arrived there to that region, and it helps me in trying to remember how all the letters are a little bit unique, the fact that Paul never been there, wrote this letter from prison at the end of his life. It helps me just make this letter a little bit unique.

So let's start with some background about that letter, just a little bit. Where was Colossae? Well, Colossae was located in the modern country of Turkey. We remember that the famous seven churches of Revelation were all in the western part of modern Turkey, and Colossae was very close to this area.

And Colossae was not one of the seven churches of Revelation, but it was in the same geographic area and it was, in those days, one of the bigger cities in what is historically called Asia Minor. The closest town that we are familiar with was Laodicea. Colossae and Laodicea were only about 10 miles apart, and for them, they considered this a half day's journey. So we would expect that except for a very few Ecclesiastes like Laodicea, the Colossians were rather far away from the rest of the Christians.

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I might interject that their distance from Ephesus as an example was something like a four or a five day journey as opposed to the 10 miles away from Laodicea. Next question might be, why would Paul write a letter to this, to the Colossians? Well, Paul almost always wrote letters and because there was a problem, and you remember in some areas, the problem was a group called the Judaizers, and these were the people who were obsessed with the old Jewish ceremonial law.

And that group wanted the Christians to follow the old law, the circumcision, etc. That's what the letter to Galatia was all about, and the letter to Romans was pretty much the same problem of following the law. The problem in Colossae was different. We could say that the problems in Galatia and Romans were an old problem.

Old is in quotes, meaning that it was the old covenant obsession, and the problem affecting Colossae, we might say, was a new problem. New as in quotes? New as in new ideas. So here's what the problem seemed to have been.

In Colossae, there was a large group of religious people who in a strange way, said they believed in Jesus. But they did some very bizarre things with the Christian message. They invented all kinds of new ideas as to how Jesus happened to be on earth and new ideas as to what God's plan really was. They said they acknowledged Jesus, but they did some very odd things on how and why his life on earth happened. You wonder where they came up with these ideas.

They totally missed who Jesus really was. They totally missed why he came to earth. They missed why he died. They really missed the whole point of God's plan.

So why would they be so popular? And why was this a problem in Colossae? Well, one of the stories or one of the things that the historians tell us about this group was that they were smart. They were very skilled at creating allegories and metaphors, and they did this rather endlessly. It was their favorite thing.

Everything they looked at was an allegory and everything was a metaphor. They loved to speculate and make things up. They were clever people and they were clever in making pictures and double meanings out of everything. Everything they saw in the scriptures, they could say, oh, well, that's a picture of something else.

Paul does not like this, and when Paul writes this letter, he uses strong words to warn the Colossians of this threat. He says things like this can be deceiving to you. This can be beguiling. He says he uses words.

He says their words are enticing. He says they can seduce you. He says it's a delusion, and he calls all of this, quote, the teachings of men, unquote, to Paul. This is not the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And Paul also says that they do this as an expression of their self pride.

But it was still popular, and why would we think it was so popular? Well, I'm not sure, but I guess that everybody likes a good story, a good allegory, and when someone can be very clever in making up complicated stories, it can be impressive. I suspect that's what happened here.

The more complicated the ideas, the more people were impressed, and then they throw in once in a while that they do believe in Jesus.

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So as a result, they were becoming popular. But this was a very, very different belief system, and they were infiltrating the Christian brotherhood.

Paul, of course, recognizes this as a threat, and it was particularly happening in Colossae. So he wrote them a letter, a simple letter, a short letter.

So what kind of problem would we say this was? How could we characterize the problem? Well, it was not like Corinth, where morality was one of the issues. This wasn't like Galatia, where it was the battle about the law covenant. It wasn't like Thessalonica, where there was confusion about the Lord's return and the resurrection having already taken place.

This was something different. This was a thinking problem.

And how was Paul going to get them to think more spiritually?

Well, before we look at the verses that I was so impressed with, it can be boiled down to two verses. Before we do that, let's review how Paul deals with the overall problem. Okay, what was the big problem at Colossae? And this issue of this strange twist of Christianity, and let's see if we can do a one minute review of the letter to Colossae.

Okay. In the first chapter, Paul's major point is all about Jesus Christ.

Too often believers, after getting an idea of what Jesus did and why he came to earth, they go off and they get enamored with some side issue in God's plan. A lot of times it's something from the Old Testament. It can be the tabernacle, it could be the temple.

It's something that fascinates them, and Paul says nothing compares to the superiority and the importance of Jesus mission, his sacrifice and his future work of reconciling humanity with Jehovah his Father. That's chapter one. Then chapter two focuses on the errors of that new religious group that I talked about, and then finally the last two chapters, Paul tells them how to live a life like Jesus.

And he lists something like 25 behaviors, values that a believer has to be like their master.

So that's, that's my one minute review of Colossians. I, I, I didn't time myself. I don't know, I wonder how I did. But anyway, that's the one minute summary. The superiority of Jesus, the problems of the new religion and how to live a Christian life.

It's a short letter.

The strongest point I think that Paul makes is the superiority of Jesus and the purpose of what he did and will do to reconcile mankind with their creator, and speaking of Jesus, in the first chapter, verse 20, I'm going to use the Phillips translation, he says that through him, referring to Jesus, God planned to reconcile everything on earth and in everything in heaven by virtue of the sacrifice of the cross.

You can't say it any better than that. If any group loses sight of the importance of Jesus, Paul sees this as a thinking problem. If a group of believers loses sight of the purpose of Jesus, sacrifice being a step toward reconciliation, Paul sees this as a thinking problem. It's almost as if Paul is saying, what are these people thinking?

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So not only does he write about what they should be thinking about and what they should not be thinking about, but he says, and this is the part that I jumped over before I missed it until I looked at these other translations. He mentions this at the beginning of his letter, that every time he prays for them, this issue, this subject is in his prayers. Every time he tells them that what he wants for them are some qualities, some attributes, some skills that have to do with how they understand Jesus and his role in reconciliation, and he says, for them, my prayers are for you to have wisdom, insight, understanding, recognition, discernment.

Now he uses three Greek words from what I can tell.

And the meaning of those words in a collective sense means what I just read to you. Wisdom, insight, understanding, recognition, discernment. These are all concepts of how to think, how to think properly spiritually.

Now notice that he does not pray that they should have knowledge. There's a difference between knowledge and wisdom, insight, understanding, recognition and discernment.

So this brings us back to the exact problem facing the Colossian brethren at this moment. What he prays for is connected to the issue they are facing.

Remember, they're being influenced by a group of supposed Christians who were overly impressed with knowledge.

Phillips translates it this way, and this is from the second chapter. Be careful that nobody spoils your faith through intellectualism or high sounding nonsense. Such stuff is at best founded on men's ideas of the nature of the world and disregards Christ.

Verse 8. Paul also says, I write this to prevent you from being led astray by someone's attractive arguments. That's verse two, chapter two, and then in verse 18, Paul says that these are unscriptural imaginations.

Now what makes this situation confusing is that this group who made up, I would say this new religion, they call themselves the knowledge people.

They actually used the Greek word for knowledge, which is gnosis.

Forgive, please forgive my, my poor Greek accent.

So when Paul prays for the brethren to have wisdom, insight, understanding, recognition, discernment, we noted before that he does not pray for knowledge.

The people who were the problem, who called themselves the knowledge people, called themselves Gnostics and they called their religion Gnosticism.

So in this situation we see it is not possible for Paul to even use the word for knowledge. If he would have said, I pray for your Gnostic or I pray for your Gnosis. Gnosis, it would have been terribly confusing to these brethren because that's the same name as the group that's giving them the problem. Now here's the three words that Paul uses that he does use, okay?

Sophia, Sunesis, and the big Gnosis.

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So those are Strong's Sophia 4678. Sunis 4907, and I really messed up the pronunciation on this one. Ignosis 1922. Now I am not mentioning these words because I think we should study them or memorize them or suggest even that we study them a whole lot.

But the point is that Paul uses different words different word than the usual Greek word for knowledge. These are different words. The point is that Paul is not praying for them to have knowledge or they using the normal, everyday Greek word for knowledge. So I just got to emphasize this one more time. If Paul had used the word gnosis, his readers and listeners would have been confused because that's the name of the group down the street.

What Paul wants them to grow spiritually is in wisdom, insight, understanding, recognition, discernment.

And remember, when he talks about the other group, he uses words like deceit, beguiling, says their words are enticing. He uses the word seduction. He says it's a delusion.

Now, in the verses at the beginning, in chapter one, I would say it's part of the introduction, and in Phillips, it's really verses 9 and 10.

Here's what Paul says, according to Phillips. Paul says, I pray for you that you can see things the way God sees them.

To me, that's a priceless statement, though, that we could see things the way God sees them.

I thought this is the most important point of this whole letter because the translations that. The translation that we grew up with as kids, King James from 1600s, 400 years ago, it says that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will. Okay, there's nothing wrong with that, but it really doesn't compute with my brain, and as far as I'm concerned, Phillips really gets the point, and he says.

Paul says, I pray for you that you could view everything in the same way God views things. I pray for you that you could view everything in your life the way God views it, that you could view everything in the world events the way God sees things.

Now, the reason that I was so impressed with these two verses, especially that phrase of seeing things like God sees them, is because that's what I needed.

I get depressed when I think about what's going on in Ukraine. I get depressed when I think about what's going on in Gaza. My natural mind says, isn't this enough?

Isn't it time for the kingdom? I understand the idea of the permission of evil, but there's been over 40,000 people killed in Gaza in the last 12 months. In the Ukraine, there's been over 400,000, 400,000 people killed between Russia and the Ukraine.

Phillips uses the idea of viewing things. It's like we frequently say, do you see what I mean? Or we'll say, I don't see it that way. We're not talking about the physical vision or our physical eyes. We are talking about mental understanding.

We're talking about discernment, recognition, insight. You see what I mean?

So that's why the expression of Paul's prayer meant so much to me.

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I pray now more fervently that I can see things how God sees them.

Now, I mentioned that there were three Greek words, and I went through the dictionaries the best I could, and I extracted from them five English words that I thought got the essence of those three words. So that's where I got my list of the wisdom, the insight, the understanding, the recognition.

So I'd like to briefly discuss the first of the words from the Greek, and that's Sophia, and this is, to me, this is a sweet word. It's usually translated wisdom. That's a good translation.

In the Gospel of Luke, it's used a number of times. In the second chapter, we're in Luke, speaking of Jesus, it says, and the child grew strong in the Spirit, filled with Sophia, wisdom. Child. Jesus is a child. That's such a great verse.

Later in Luke, the second chapter, it says, Jesus increased in Sophia and stature in favor with God and man. Again, Sophia increased in Sophia. In the 11th chapter, Jesus speaks of the Sophia of Solomon, and also in that same chapter, the word is used again, the Sophia of God, and then this one is maybe most relevant for us personally.

In 21, Luke 21, very near his death and his departure, he promises his disciples that when they get into difficult situations, they will be given eloquence, the right words to say, and Sophia. We have been promised this Sophia. So I find that those words. That's a beautiful translation. It's a beautiful word.

And the two words are so gentle. Sophia and insight and wisdom. So that is Strong's 4678. You can use the same process with the other words, sunis is understanding, etc. Now, the.

The third Greek word that I listed and that Paul uses. Looking at the dictionaries again, the first trans. The first suggested translation in Strong's is recognition. Paul is praying for them daily that they would have recognition, and I particularly love that because as I go through my daily life, I wonder all the time about events that happen.

And I can't figure out, did that come from God, did that come from Jehovah, or was that just an experience that my neighbor has the same experience all the time. So it's an issue of recognition, and I want to get better at being able to recognize when it's an action of Jehovah and when he's trying to tell me something.

So as I said, a little bit before. There are two reasons why this letter to the Colossians is confusing or can be confusing. First of all, it's that other group down the street, so to speak, related to Christianity, and they called themselves Gnostics. They called themselves the knowledge people.

And they really didn't understand why, why Jesus died as the ransom, or that he is the main part of the plan of reconciliation. But they still picked a title out of the Scriptures, and this makes for confusion, especially for the brethren that lived in that day. The second possible problem is that that same Greek word, gnosis, it almost has a dual personality. It almost is like two persons.

And the problem is that there's a second Greek word that is created from this first word, and all they do is add a prefix to it that's confusing. Let me say it again. The word gnosis has a fundamental meaning, but then there's a second word that is created by adding a prefix to it. Now, in this case, the prefix is EPI E, P, I.

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So we now have two words. One is a gnosis and the other is prefix epi gnosis. I don't think it's pronounced that way in Greek, but you get the point that there's these two words. One of them is a creation from the first word. Well, the second word does not have the same meaning as the first word.

They're related, but the second word has an additional, has a different meaning. Gnosis means knowledge. The second word means more a complete or a Barclay says a growing knowledge. There's a big difference between knowledge and. So there's two problems here that these people had to live with.

They got the group that calls themselves a scriptural word as their label, and it's far from being accurate, and second, we've got the potential conflict of these two words, of trying to figure out which means which. I call that complicated. It's not our purpose today to discuss these conflicts.

But if you want to get into it more, in 1st Corinthians 13:12. 1st Corinthians 13:12, both words are used, and I think the distinction is really clear, and it's the quote that says, at the present we know just a little bit, but at the end we will know completely. The two different words are contrasted. This is also in the same chapter.

The apostle says that, remember that kind of hard to understand phrase, knowledge shall pass away? Well, it's the gnosis shall pass away. That's the first word. That's the incomplete knowledge. I have come to the conclusion through all this to simplify for my Brain is that that first word means more like information.

It. It basically means data, and that that's what's going to pass away. Data changes information, fact, facts even change. So we can see why Paul said the gnosis is going to pass away, but this other additional word of complete knowledge will never pass away.

Okay, sorry for that detour, but that's the confusion that was being laid upon the Colossians.

So the next thing, and we're almost finished here, after he talks about what he prays for the, and all these qualities of understanding and wisdom, he then prays that their outward life, their daily life, will bring credit to Jesus name.

Now, in a lot of respects, okay, I lost my computer help here.

In a lot of respects, I had the feeling, I thought there was no Paul yet. You didn't need to even say that. That the, your outward lives need to show this. If you absorb into your white life that wisdom, that insight, that understanding, you're going to live the right life. So it's almost, it's almost inevitable.

But it's nice that he says that. He says he prays that they bear genuine Christian fruitage. The same, same point there. So let's summarize and close.

Number one, I would suggest that the most critical issue Paul is dealing with in the letter to the Colossians is do not lose your focus on the superiority of Jesus in God's plan.

The superiority of Jesus. Secondly, Paul shows them by what he prays for that this can best be acknowledged by wisdom, insight, understanding, recognition.

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And thirdly, we can remember that if we focus on those things, we will more and more see everything the way God sees them.

Thank you.