



Let the river flow.

Filled with the Knowledge of His Will: Paul's Prayers for Spiritual Understanding and Christian Maturity

How the Knowledge of God's Will Becomes Wisdom, Spiritual Maturity, and a Life That Bears Fruit

The Pantry: From Information to Wisdom

Think of a pantry filled with food. Having shelves full of ingredients does not mean you know what is nourishing, what is harmful, or how to use what you have. Even a nutritional label can give you information, but the information must still be understood and applied. Information alone is not wisdom. Wisdom comes when knowledge is understood and put into practice. In the same way, knowing God's will is meant to move beyond information to shape how we live.

1. Paul's Prayers and Spiritual Maturity

Prayer occupies a remarkable place in the theology of the apostle Paul. Although Paul is widely remembered as a missionary, theologian, church planter, and defender of the gospel, his letters also reveal him as a deeply prayerful pastor. His prayers are not merely introductory formulas or expressions of personal devotion placed around theological arguments. Rather, they disclose what Paul believes God desires to accomplish in the lives of believers. They reveal his understanding of Christian identity, spiritual maturity, ethical transformation, suffering, wisdom, love, and the ultimate purposes of God.

Among Paul's most significant prayers is the prayer recorded in Colossians 1:9–14, where he writes: “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col. 1:9, KJV). Paul does not simply pray that the Colossians might know God's will. He prays that they might be filled with the knowledge of it. He immediately connects this fullness with “wisdom and spiritual understanding” and then with practical Christian conduct: “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10).

To know God's will, in Paul's prayers, is to understand God's purposes sufficiently that one's conduct increasingly conforms to those purposes. Throughout his letters, Paul repeatedly asks God to deepen believers' understanding, strengthen their inner lives, increase their love, establish their hope, and produce holiness in their conduct. This pattern gives us a framework for understanding what spiritual maturity looks like.

2. Filled with the Knowledge of His Will

The clearest expression of Paul's concern that believers be filled with the knowledge of God's will appears in Colossians 1:9–14. Paul begins by emphasizing the persistence of his prayer: “We do not cease to pray for you.” This immediately establishes the pastoral character of his intercession. The Colossians are not merely recipients of theological instruction; they are people for whom Paul continually prays. Their spiritual development matters deeply to him.

His petition is that they might be “filled with the knowledge of his will.” The language of fullness is significant. Paul is not asking for a partial or superficial acquaintance with God's purposes, but for an abundance of spiritual knowledge. Yet he also qualifies the nature of this knowledge: it comes “in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

The knowledge for which Paul prays is therefore more than the accumulation of information. It is a deeper apprehension of God's purposes that produces discernment. Paul does not envision Christian maturity as merely possessing facts about God while remaining unchanged in character. Genuine spiritual knowledge is intended to shape the whole person.

This is especially important in the context of Colossians. The letter addresses teachings and philosophies that threatened to draw believers away from the sufficiency and supremacy of Christ. Paul therefore wants the Colossians to possess genuine spiritual discernment. They need not only to know what is true, but also to recognize the implications of that truth for how they live.

3. Knowledge That Produces a Worthy Walk

Paul immediately explains the purpose of this knowledge: “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col. 1:10). The transition from verse 9 to verse 10 is fundamental. Knowledge leads to walking. Theology leads to ethics. Revelation leads to obedience.

The biblical metaphor of “walking” describes one's manner of life. Paul therefore prays that divine knowledge would shape the believer's entire conduct. The goal is a life that is “worthy of the Lord” and pleasing to Him.

This demonstrates that, for Paul, the knowledge of God's will cannot be separated from Christian behavior. A person may possess significant theological knowledge and still live contrary to the character and purposes of God. Genuine knowledge is meant to produce genuine transformation.

Paul then describes four dimensions of this transformed life:

1. Fruitfulness in every good work
2. Increasing knowledge of God
3. Strength according to God's glorious power
4. Patience and longsuffering with joy

These are not unrelated benefits. Together they form a portrait of Christian maturity.

4. Fruitfulness in Every Good Work

Paul's aim is for believers to be “fruitful in every good work” (Col. 1:10). The agricultural metaphor of fruitfulness is significant throughout Scripture. Fruit is visible evidence of an underlying life. A healthy tree produces fruit because of what is happening within it. Similarly, Paul understands Christian conduct as the outward manifestation of an inward work of God.

The order in Colossians is important: knowledge leads to wisdom; wisdom leads to a worthy walk; a worthy walk is expressed in good works; and good works accompany an increasing knowledge of God. Knowledge and action are therefore mutually reinforcing dimensions of spiritual maturity.

Christianity is not merely an intellectual system to be understood; it is a life to be lived. The person who genuinely understands God's will should increasingly become fruitful in every good work. The knowledge of God should become visible in compassion, holiness, faithfulness, love, service, forgiveness, generosity, endurance, and obedience.

This principle also appears elsewhere in Paul's prayers. In Philippians 1:9–11, Paul prays: “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment.” Again, Paul joins spiritual knowledge with practical discernment. He continues: “That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.” Finally, the result is: “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”

The parallels with Colossians are striking. Paul prays for knowledge, discernment, moral excellence, and fruitfulness. His ultimate objective, however, is not human accomplishment. It is “the glory and praise of God.”

Thus, the knowledge of God's will is ultimately God-centered. It is not given merely to make believers successful, comfortable, or certain about every personal decision. It is given so that their lives might display the character and purposes of God. Christian fruitfulness is therefore not a platform for self-exaltation; it is a response that brings glory to God.

5. Wisdom and Spiritual Understanding

Paul's phrase “all wisdom and spiritual understanding” indicates that knowing God's will requires more than intellectual intelligence. In biblical thought, wisdom concerns the ability to live rightly in light of what God has revealed. It involves discernment: the ability to recognize what is consistent with God's purposes and what is not.

A person may possess considerable intellectual ability and yet lack spiritual wisdom. Conversely, someone may lack worldly status or academic achievement and nevertheless possess profound spiritual discernment. The issue is not simply how much information a person possesses, but whether that knowledge is being brought into faithful practice.

Paul's prayer is therefore that spiritual understanding will lead to wise decisions. Discernment is an intended product of knowing God's will. Believers must learn to recognize what pleases God within the complexity of ordinary life.

The question is not merely, “What does God permit?” but also, “What reflects the character, wisdom, holiness, love, and purposes of God?” This is why Paul's prayer is broader than a request for supernatural information about future events. He does not pray that the Colossians will receive a detailed map of every future circumstance. He prays that they will possess the spiritual wisdom necessary to live faithfully wherever God places them.

6. The Renewal of the Mind

Paul's understanding of God's will is closely connected to the transformation of the believer's mind. In Romans 12:1–2, Paul urges believers to present their bodies to God as living sacrifices and then writes: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

This passage provides an important theological framework for Colossians 1:9. The knowledge of God's will is inseparable from transformation. The believer must not simply acquire information but undergo a process of renewal. The Christian mind is increasingly reoriented toward God.

Paul therefore presents Christian discernment as part of spiritual transformation. The believer who is being renewed becomes increasingly capable of recognizing what is “good, and acceptable, and perfect.” This also helps explain why Paul repeatedly prays for believers to gain deeper understanding. Spiritual knowledge is not merely an intellectual possession; it participates in the process through which God reshapes the person.

The prayer “fill us with the knowledge of His will” can therefore be understood as a prayer for divine formation. Paul is asking God to transform the believer's perception so that the believer increasingly sees life through the purposes of God.

7. Knowing God Himself

One of the most profound features of Paul's prayer in Colossians is that the process does not end with knowing God's will. Paul writes: “Increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). Paul desires both knowledge of God's will and increasing knowledge of God Himself.

This means that divine will is ultimately relational. God's will is not a collection of impersonal rules detached from God's character. To know His will is to become increasingly acquainted

with the purposes of the God who has revealed Himself in Christ.

The same concern appears in Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1:17, where he asks that believers receive “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” Similarly, in Philipians

3:10, Paul expresses his own supreme desire: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings.”

The ultimate goal of Christian knowledge is therefore not simply decision-making. It is communion with God. This corrects a common misunderstanding of the phrase “God's will.” Christians sometimes approach God's will primarily as a hidden blueprint: Which career should I choose? Where should I live? Whom should I marry? What decision should I make? Those questions can be important, but Paul's prayers place them within a much larger framework.

The deeper question is not merely, “What does God want me to do?” but, “Who is God forming me to become as I know Him?” Paul's prayers suggest that knowing God's will means becoming increasingly acquainted with God's character and purposes so that one's decisions increasingly flow from that relationship.

8. Strength to Live God's Will

Paul does not stop with knowledge. He continues in Colossians 1:11: “Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.” This reveals an important progression: knowledge must be accompanied by strength.

It is possible to know what is right and still lack the strength or endurance to practice it. Paul therefore understands Christian obedience as dependent upon divine empowerment. The source of this strength is not human willpower alone. The believer is strengthened “according to his glorious power.”

Paul's prayers elsewhere make the same point. In Ephesians 3:16, he prays that believers would be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” The emphasis is inward. God strengthens the person at the deepest level of his or her being. Significantly, Paul connects this strength with patience, longsuffering, and joy.

9. The Fullness of God

Spiritual maturity is demonstrated not only in moments of religious enthusiasm but also in the ability to remain faithful under pressure. To know God's will may mean knowing that one must forgive when forgiveness is difficult, remain faithful when circumstances are painful, serve when recognition is absent, endure when answers are delayed, and trust when the future is unclear.

Thus, Paul's prayer is not simply, “Lord, tell them Your will.” It is, in effect: “Lord, reveal Your will to them, give them wisdom to understand it, and give them strength to live it.”

Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14–21 develops this theme further. He prays that believers may be “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” The prayer then moves toward comprehension: “That ye, being rooted and grounded in

love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height.”

Paul ultimately prays that believers will “know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” This apparent paradox is theologically rich. His point is not that knowledge is useless, but that the reality of Christ's love exceeds the limits of human comprehension. The Christian life is therefore an ever-deepening encounter with the inexhaustible reality of God.

Paul concludes with the prayer “that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” The concept of fullness appears again. In Colossians, Paul prays that believers might be filled with the knowledge of God's will. In Ephesians, he prays that they might be filled with all the fullness of God. The movement is toward increasing fullness: God's truth increasingly occupies the believer's understanding, affections, decisions, relationships, and conduct.

10. The Supremacy of Christ

Colossians cannot be properly understood without considering its central Christology. Immediately after praying for the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, Paul's letter emphasizes the supremacy of Christ.

Colossians 1:15–20 presents Christ as the image of the invisible God, the Creator, the one through whom all things exist, the head of the church, and the one in whom the fullness of God dwells. This context is essential. The knowledge of God's will is ultimately Christ-centered.

The question of God's will cannot be separated from the person, teaching, character, death, resurrection, and lordship of Jesus Christ. God's purposes are revealed decisively in Christ. Paul does not encourage believers to pursue spiritual knowledge detached from Jesus. Instead, knowledge of God, knowledge of His will, spiritual wisdom, and Christian maturity converge in Christ.

This is particularly evident in Colossians 2:2–3, where Paul speaks of the mystery of God, “in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Consequently, any interpretation of “God's will” that pushes Christ to the margins is inconsistent with the Christ-centered emphasis of Paul's theology.

11. Christ and Obedience to God's Will

The New Testament presents Christ as the obedient Son. Paul writes in Philippians 2:8 that Christ “humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Christ's obedience provides the clearest model for understanding submission to God's will.

This reaches an especially explicit expression in Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane: “Not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Although this is not a prayer of Paul, Jesus' prayer provides

essential background for understanding Paul's theology of Christian obedience.

Paul's prayers ultimately direct believers toward the same Christ-centered posture of submission. The goal of knowing God's will is not self-fulfillment but faithful surrender. A believer who asks God to reveal His will while remaining unwilling to obey it has misunderstood the purpose of revelation. Paul's prayers assume that knowledge and submission belong together.

12. God's Will and the Christian Community

Another important feature of Paul's prayers is their communal character. His prayers are generally directed toward the maturity of the whole church. In Colossians 1:9, he prays for "you," referring to the Christian community. In Ephesians 1, he prays for believers collectively. In Philippians 1, he prays for the congregation as a whole.

This challenges an excessively individualistic understanding of God's will. The knowledge of God's will is not given merely so that an individual may discover a private destiny. It is intended to build up a community characterized by love, wisdom, holiness, service, unity, endurance, and fruitful works.

Paul's prayer in Philippians 1 demonstrates this clearly. He prays that the Philippians' love would abound "more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." Spiritual discernment is therefore connected to the health of the community. In Ephesians 4, spiritual maturity is likewise described corporately as the body of Christ grows together toward maturity.

In Paul's theology, God's will is tied to relationships. His concern is how believers love God, love and serve one another, and represent Christ through their lives.

13. Knowledge and Love

Paul also connects knowledge with love. Philippians 1:9 states: "That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." This is significant because Christian knowledge without love becomes distorted.

Paul famously argues in 1 Corinthians 8:1: "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth." He desperately wants believers to grow in knowledge, but that knowledge must be governed by love.

This provides an important corrective to religious intellectualism. A person may know Scripture extensively, understand theological concepts, and possess sophisticated doctrinal vocabulary while remaining governed by a fruitless life. Such knowledge has failed to achieve its intended purpose.

For Paul, genuine knowledge of God produces love because God Himself is known through Christ. As believers know God's character, they increasingly reflect that character in their relationships. Therefore, the prayer for knowledge of God's will is also, in part, a prayer for the

transformation of relationships.

14. God's Will in Suffering

Paul's prayers are particularly striking because they were written within the context of suffering and opposition. In Colossians 1:11, he prays for "patience and longsuffering with joyfulness." In Ephesians 3, he prays for inner strength. In Philippians, Paul writes about joy while experiencing imprisonment.

This means that God's will cannot simply be identified with comfort or prosperity. Sometimes knowing God's will means remaining faithful in circumstances one would not have chosen.

Paul's own life illustrates this. He experienced imprisonment, persecution, rejection, physical hardship, and uncertainty. Yet he continued to understand his life in relation to God's purposes. The mature Christian therefore asks not only, "How can I escape this circumstance?" but also, "How can I faithfully live God's purposes within this circumstance?"

This is one of the deepest implications of Paul's prayers. Spiritual maturity does not consist in always receiving circumstances that conform to one's desires. It consists in becoming increasingly capable of trusting and obeying God even when circumstances are difficult.

15. Knowledge That Produces Thanksgiving

Colossians 1:12 adds another dimension to Paul's prayer: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." The prayer begins with knowledge and moves toward thanksgiving. This is not accidental. True knowledge of God's will produces gratitude.

Paul then identifies reasons for thanksgiving: believers have been delivered from the power of darkness, translated into the kingdom of God's Son, redeemed, and forgiven. God's will must therefore be understood within the larger story of redemption.

The Christian does not seek God's will as a slave desperately attempting to avoid punishment. The believer seeks God's will as one who has been rescued and brought into God's kingdom. This distinction is fundamental. Christian obedience is a response to grace, not a means of purchasing grace.

The movement can therefore be expressed simply: Because God has redeemed me, I desire to know Him. Because I know Him, I desire to know His will. Because I know His will, I desire to walk in it. This is the theological movement of Paul's prayer.

16. Filled With the Knowledge of God's Will

The phrase “that ye might be filled” deserves special attention because it summarizes Paul's vision of spiritual maturity. To be filled with the knowledge of God's will means that divine truth increasingly occupies the believer's thinking, desires, decisions, relationships, and behavior.

It is not simply having more information about God's will. It is allowing the knowledge of God's purposes to become formative. The idea of fullness is particularly appropriate in Colossians because the letter emphasizes the fullness found in Christ.

Paul writes in Colossians 2:10: “And ye are complete in him.” Consequently, Paul's prayer for fullness is not a prayer that believers would discover some secret spiritual reality beyond Christ. It is a prayer that they would increasingly experience the implications of what they already possess in Christ.

17. A Pattern for Christian Prayer

Paul's prayers provide a model for how Christians should pray for themselves and for others. Modern prayer can easily become dominated by requests for circumstances: financial provision, physical needs, employment, relationships, protection, success, and relief from difficulty. Such requests have a legitimate place in Christian prayer.

Yet Paul's prayers demonstrate a larger priority. He repeatedly prays for:

- spiritual wisdom
- knowledge of God
- discernment
- love
- holiness
- fruitfulness
- strength
- endurance
- joy
- understanding of Christ
- maturity
- and the glory of God.

This suggests that one of the most powerful prayers a Christian can pray is: “Lord, fill me with the knowledge of Your will.” But Paul's prayer teaches us to continue beyond that request:

“Give me spiritual wisdom to understand Your will. Transform my mind so that I recognize what pleases You. Strengthen me to obey what You reveal. Make my life fruitful. Teach me to endure with joy. Increase my knowledge of You. Make me more like Christ.”

This is considerably deeper than asking God merely to tell us what decision to make.

18. The Vision of Christian Spiritual Maturity

Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9–14 provides one of the New Testament's most comprehensive visions of Christian spiritual maturity. His petition that believers be “filled with the knowledge of his will” is not a request for information detached from life. It is a prayer for transformation. Paul desires believers to possess knowledge, but knowledge accompanied by wisdom and spiritual understanding.

He desires wisdom, but wisdom expressed through a worthy walk. He desires a worthy walk that produces fruitfulness in every good work. He desires fruitfulness accompanied by increasing knowledge of God. He desires knowledge accompanied by divine strength, enabling believers to demonstrate patience, longsuffering, and joy. And all of this ultimately results in thanksgiving and the glory of God.

Paul's other prayers reinforce this same theological vision. In Philippians, knowledge and judgment lead to discernment, excellence, sincerity, and the fruits of righteousness. In Ephesians, wisdom and revelation lead believers toward a deeper knowledge of God, inner strength, comprehension of Christ's love, and fullness in God. In Romans, the renewal of the mind enables believers to discern God's good, acceptable, and perfect will. Taken together, Paul's prayers reveal that the will of God is not merely a secret plan to be discovered; it is a divine purpose into which believers are progressively formed.

The deepest knowledge of God's will is not simply knowing what God wants me to do next. It is knowing who God is, what God has accomplished in Christ, what God is forming His people to become, and how one's life can increasingly participate in those purposes. This makes Paul's prayer profoundly relevant for Christian life and ministry.

The believer should not merely pray for an answer but for wisdom. Not merely for direction but for transformation. Not merely for information but for communion with God. Not merely for circumstances to change but for strength to remain faithful within them.

The prayer of Colossians 1:9 can consequently become a pattern for the whole Christian life: “Father, fill me with the knowledge of Your will, in all wisdom and understanding. Let that knowledge transform the way I walk. Make me fruitful in every good work. Increase my

knowledge of You. Strengthen me by Your power to endure with patience and joy. Conform me to Christ, so that my life may become an expression of Your will and bring glory to Your name.” For Paul, this is the essence of spiritual maturity.