

A PRAYER FOR A FRUITFUL MINISTRY

Philemon 4-7

Intro: Today, the Lord willing, we are going to spend our time in both of our services in Paul's short, one-chapter epistle to Philemon. In this service we will be looking at Paul's prayer for Philemon in verses 4-7, and then tonight we will look into verses 8-21 where we will see Paul's appeal to Philemon for Onesimus. We have in those verses, 8 through 21, one of the greatest illustrations that we have of the Gospel in all of the NT. So I hope that all of you will take a few minutes to read through Philemon this afternoon.

The three principal characters in this epistle are:

- 1) The Apostle Paul, the writer.
- 2) Philemon, the one to whom Paul wrote.
- 3) Onesimus, the one in whose behalf Paul was writing.

Most of us do not need any introduction to the Apostle Paul. He was a Jew who was brought to Christ in connection with a trip he made to Damascus. He was going there to arrest any Jewish Christians he could find, and he intended to bring them in chains back to Jerusalem. It was God's plan for him that he would not only be saved and become a true child of God, but that he also would become the apostle to the Gentiles.

Verse 1 of this epistle gives us the only time Philemon's name is mentioned in the Bible. But he is referred to throughout this epistle by pronouns which actually refer to him. We can assume from this epistle that Philemon was a wealthy man because he is cited for his generosity in this epistle, but also because he was the owner of at least one slave (and possibly more), and that slave was Onesimus. And it was for Onesimus' sake that Paul wrote this epistle to Philemon.

We will learn more about Onesimus tonight, what he had done to his master, where he had gone, and how he had come into contact with the Apostle Paul. It is an amazing story of the grace of God, and I hope you will be here tonight as we consider it together. But let me say at this point that the only other time that Onesimus is named in the NT is in Paul's epistle to the Colossians, chapter 4, verse 9. Let me read verse 7 through 9 of Colossians 4 so you can see why Paul mentioned Onesimus there. Paul was concluding his epistle when he had this to say:

7 All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a

beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord:

8 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts;

9 With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here (Col. 4:7-9).

Paul was in Rome, a prisoner of the Roman government--but he called himself in his letter to Philemon, "a prisoner of Jesus Christ." But in writing to the church at Colosse, and he identified Onesimus as one of them, meaning that Onesimus was a Colossian. So we assume from this that Philemon also lived in Colosse, and was a Colossian, and that Paul not only sent the Colossian epistle to the Colossian church with Tychicus and Onesimus, but that the letter to Philemon was written at the same time and delivered perhaps by Onesimus himself to Philemon.

I find it very interesting to think of Onesimus, the slave, and Philemon, his master, as I read what Paul said to servants, or slaves, and masters, in Col. 3:22-4:1. Let me read those verses for you:

22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

24 Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

CHAPTER 4

1 Masters, give unto your servants that which is just and equal; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven (Col. 3:22-4:1)..

So much for the background of this epistle. Now let us turn our attention to Paul's prayers in this short epistle.

There are actually three prayers:

1) Verse 3.

2) Verse 6 — which I want to consider with you today.

3) Verse 25.

We have seen the first and third prayers before. They have been in the prayers we have considered before, and we will meet with them again in future prayers we will have in Paul's letters. Every child of God has a daily, or could I say, *hourly*, need of the grace of God, and for the peace of God. We need His grace because we are still sinners, and are continually sinning against the Lord. We need His grace because daily God exercises His patience with us. And there is not a day that any of us lives but what we need God's peace for the trials that come our way. So these prayers for grace and peace are always appropriate for every child of God, for everyone who truly believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

This epistle indicates that Philemon was a man of some means, perhaps even wealthy. But his money would not buy grace for him, nor could it buy peace for him. Grace and peace are gifts from God given to all of His people, the rich and the poor, and everyone else in between.

In verse 4 we learn that Paul thanked his God continually for Philemon, and that he prayed for Philemon "always" in his prayers. And we have to say that Philemon was just as much a trophy of the grace of God as Paul was, and as Onesimus was. Philemon was one of those from the upper class who had be "called" to salvation through Christ. Paul told the Corinthians in his first epistle that there were not many of these who were called, but Philemon was definitely one of them. He was not just a rich man who went to church, but his life showed that he had been born again, and it was in his home that the Colossian church met. Many feel that Philemon had brought the believers together, and that it is likely that Apphia, mentioned in verse 2 was "Mrs. Philemon," and that Archippus was their son, and very likely the pastor of the Colossian church. So Paul had much for which to thank God for Philemon.

By the way the Apostle Paul is the writer of the NT epistles who calls God, "my God." The others certainly had the right to speak of God in this way, but Paul is the only one who did.

But going back to Philemon, in verses 5 and 7 we see that Philemon had the distinguishing characteristics of one who is truly a child of God. He loved and believed in the Lord Jesus, according to verse 5, and he loved the people of God--which is clear from both verses 5 and 7. The Apostle John mentioned these as some of the identifying marks of a Christian when he wrote the first of his three epistles.

Please note that Paul did not wait for some crisis to show up in Philemon's life before he prayed for him, but he was moved to pray for him because he saw the evidence of salvation in his life as well as the evidence of God's blessing in his life. We will see this again next week when, the Lord willing, we turn our attention to Paul's letter to the church at Colosse.

But now let us turn to the meaning of verse 6 where we have Paul's prayer, and then I want to point out some lessons from it.

I. THE MEANING OF THE PRAYER (Ph. 6).

There is no question but that verse 6 is a difficult verse to understand, but even though it is, we must seek, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to find out what it means.

The Greek word translated "communication" in the KJV is the word *κοινωνία*. It can and has been translated in various ways. We usually think of it as meaning fellowship, and it does. But there is in the word the idea of sharing, or giving. So Paul was recognizing that one way Philemon expressed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was by his giving. And Paul was praying that by his giving Philemon would be "effectual" in accomplishing something.

The word for "effectual" is *ἐνεργής*. We get our words energy or energetic from it. We might think that the meeting of some need was the main purpose, and it certainly is a purpose. We give so that the needs of the Lord's work can be met, or so the needs of some individual might be met. But Paul was looking beyond that to a testimony that can be given when we give for the glory of God. What was that testimony or purpose?

It was that those who give would give in such a way that people would understand that the giving was just one of many evidences that could be seen in the life of the giver that the good which he manifested was because he was "in Christ Jesus." Or the end of the verse could be translated, unto Christ Jesus. That is, it would result in praise, not for the giver, but for the giver's Savior, "Christ Jesus."

This doctrine concerning giving applies not only to men like Philemon, but it applies to all of us. Giving is a ministry. By our giving we are serving the Lord. By our giving we are not to seek credit or glory for

~~ourselves, but it should be our desire to glorify God.~~ But unfortunately the church, to a great extent, has taken on the ways of the world in giving as well as in many other things, and people are not being taught that there is a ministry, a testimony, that our giving can have even with the people of the world. Paul was indicating here (and this was his prayer), that by the ministry that Philemon had in giving others would be drawn to Christ!

The point is this: When people see the generosity of the Lord's people in giving because they want to, and not because they are asked to, or put in some position where they are forced to give, then the world may sit up and take notice that something very unusual is going on among the people of God. God loves a cheerful giver, an hilarious giver, one who gives because he loves the Lord, and one who gives because he loves the people of God, and one who gives in order that others might come to know the Savior.

I don't know how many times during the year I get mail from someone who wants to come to tell us how to raise money for our church. That is man's way, but that is not God's way. Sure, organizations can come in and possibly raise a lot of money, but who gets the glory? The organization does! And that is one thing that makes it wrong. How different it is when God works in the hearts of His people so that we give what we can because we love Him, and we do it to glorify Him--without every telling anyone how much we are giving, nor how often we give.

You see, when people give because they love the Lord, and because they want to give, it is an indication that God has done other things in the lives of those people. That was the burden of Paul's prayer. When a person truly comes to Christ, every part of his life is changed, and his changed attitude toward money is intended by the Lord to make the world see that that change is an indication of other, and greater changes.

Now what are some of the lessons that we are to learn from this?

II. LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM OUR TEXT (Ph. 4-7).

Let me mention four:

A. There is a definite ministry in our giving.

If you have never seen this, and what we have in this prayer is new to

— you, read the eighth and ninth chapters of 2 Corinthians. Read also the last chapter of Philippians. Go back into the OT and read what happened when Moses called for the people to bring their offerings for the building of the tabernacle. The people were so moved by their hearts to give that Moses had to tell them not to bring any more. This was a work of God, and to Him alone belongs the glory. Churches can be a testimony if they are praying about their needs, and trusting the Lord to enable them to give so that the needs can be met.

B. Only the Lord can make this effective.

This is why Paul was praying so regularly for Philemon about this very thing. He doubtless prayed for him regarding other matters, but he was concerned that the Lord would make this a blessing to Philemon, and that the Lord would use this as a testimony in Philemon's life that would have spiritual benefits in the lives of others, believers as well as those who do not believe. To see how God works and provides through His people and for His people can be a great factor in the reality of faith in a living God.

C. We need to pray for each other concerning our giving.

— It is not just that we would give, but that we would give to please the Lord and to bring glory to His Name. And the purpose in every phase of our ministry should be that God would be pleased to use what we do to turn others to the Savior. We don't usually think of giving as a means of evangelism, but Paul's prayer indicates that it is exactly that!

D. Prayer is needed to keep our motives sincere and humble.

— It is easy for us to begin to be boastful, at least in our own hearts, if the Lord has enabled us to give generously to Him. But we can only give from what He has given us, and therefore we need to be careful to remember that what we give really belongs to Him. Pride can so easily take over in our hearts, and that is why we need to be thankful, as Paul was, for any way the Lord may be pleased to use us, and this includes the ministry of giving. The Devil can so easily make us think that we are doing a lot for the Lord, when none of us is doing what we could, and what we should. Perhaps this was one of the reasons it was such a burden on Paul's heart to pray for Philemon. He wanted Philemon's blessing to grow, not to be spoiled by the pride that could so easily rise up in his heart.

Conc: It was just a short time before Paul wrote to Philemon and the church at Colosse that he had written to the church at Rome. In his letter to the church at Rome, as Paul began the practical section of that epistle, he spoke of various ministries which people in the body of Christ have. Among them he mentioned the prophetic ministry, teaching, exhorting, and then we come to these words in Rom. 12:8: **“He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity.”** This means that giving was to be done sincerely, from the heart, without any attempt to be self-seeking, that is, to take glory to one’s self, but with a single-hearted purpose. That purpose was to glorify God. And it is always true that when we do whatever we do to glorify God, people are blessed. And when I say “people,” I mean other believers, even people we know who are not saved, and God also blesses us in the process. It is not that people know that we are giving, or how much we give, but that God Who even sees the widow’s mite cast into the treasury when no one else pays attention to what she is doing, gives blessing to what we do. Then there is power in our lives which draws other believers closer to the Lord. It may be that the Lord will use us to bring others to the Savior. And in our own hearts, we experience more of the grace of God, the peace of God, the power and blessing of God. Thus, Christ is glorified in all people by all means.

We have no evidence in Paul’s letter to Philemon that he was a Bible teacher. That apparently was not his gift. Instead, he was a business man whom God had blessed materially, and he was in a position to do what others could not do: **he could give! And he did give!** And so Paul was commending him for his faithfulness, but also was continuing to pray for him that he might continue to give “with simplicity” so that God would continue to bless him spiritually and he could continue to be an instrument in God’s hand for the glory of God and for the blessing of people. It is so easy for us to lose sight of the main purpose in all that we do: the glory of God. That is why Paul prayed so faithfully for Philemon. He did not want other motives to occupy Philemon’s heart so that in the process Philemon himself would lose the blessing of giving, and would cease to be an instrument in the hand of the Lord for the blessing of others.

God uses all of us in different ways. Don’t be discouraged if He doesn’t use you the way He uses others. Just make sure that by the grace of God Paul’s word to the church at Corinth is being fulfilled in your life:

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do
all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

And, as you keep a careful watch over your own heart, PRAY for yourself

and for your fellow-believers, as Paul did, that we may not do what we do for our own glory, but for “the glory of God.” We all are to give as God enables us to give, but that may not be our special gift--as it was with Philemon. But the more we as the people of God do what we do to please and glorify God, the greater will be the power and influence that we have in the church and in the world.

PAUL'S THANKSGIVING FOR THE GOSPEL

Colossians 1:3-8

Intro: In considering the prayers of the Apostle Paul we have already looked at two of his prison epistles--the epistle to the church at Philippi, and his epistle to Philemon. Today we come to the third of the four prison epistles: the epistle of Paul to the church at Colosse. We learned last week that Philemon was a Colossian, and we also learned that it is very likely that this letter to the Colossians and Paul's letter to Philemon were both delivered by Tychicus and Onesimus when Paul sent them together to Colosse. See Col. 4:7-9.

It is not generally thought that Paul established the church at Colosse even though he knew some of the people in the church. But he had never had the privilege of instructing them in person. Therefore, he was greatly exercised for their spiritual good when he learned about the influence that the Gnostics, who were false teachers, were having in the church. The Lord willing, we will see more about that in a couple of weeks when we consider his prayer at the beginning of Colossians 2.

For today, we will be looking at Paul's thanksgiving for them in verses 3 through 8 of chapter 1. Then next week our attention on his intercession for them in the verses which follow: Col. 1:9-12. After that we will go to chapter 2.

In this prayer of thanksgiving in chapter 1 Paul was particularly thankful for the Gospel, thankful to God for the Gospel. I hope you remember that at the beginning of this series on Paul's prayers I reminded you that we give thanks to God for that which God has done. We need to remember this when we see that Paul was thanking God for their faith, and for the love that they had. It is easy for us to think that if a person believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is to be congratulated, and if he loves the Lord's people, he gets the credit. But in Paul's prayer he gives us a different understanding of both faith and love. And this is a point that we do not want to miss.

But he related all of this to the Gospel. To prove that I would call your attention to the last part of verse 5 and all of verse 6. (Read.)

Note that "the word of the truth of the Gospel" (v. 5) can also be called "the grace of God in truth" (v. 6). Some of you may remember from our study in SS of Peter's epistles some time ago that Peter spoke of "the true grace of God" (1 Pet. 5:12). The only true Gospel is the Gospel of the

grace of God. You can quickly identify a corrupted Gospel because it always is a corruption of the grace of God as well. It is “by grace ye are saved through faith.” That means it is not deserved, and it cannot be earned in any way. It can truly be said that no person is truly saved unless he comes with empty hands to God.

But now let us turn our attention to the text.

I. PAUL’S THANKSGIVING, AND THE REASONS (Col. 1:3-5).

One of the most frequent exhortations we have in the Bible is the exhortation to give thanks to the Lord. And this is one place where most of us fall dreadfully behind. And many times our thanksgivings are focused more on temporal and physical blessings than on spiritual blessing. We certainly should not neglect the temporal and physical, but, if anything, our greatest emphasis should be upon the spiritual blessings that we have in salvation, and the way those blessings continue day after day.

A. His thanks was addressed to God (v. 3).

Paul addressed his thanks “to God,” Whom he also identified as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” He didn’t want anyone reading this epistle, or anyone to whom it was read, to be in any doubt but that he was speaking of the one true God, the Creator of heaven and earth, the One Who planned our salvation, and Who sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world to do all that was necessary for our salvation. To Him we give thanks for our salvation. And, as the text shows, the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit are likewise included in our praise. THE POINT IS THAT EVERY BIT OF PRAISE FOR THE SALVATION OF ANY AND EVERY SINNER BELONGS TO GOD ALONE, NEVER TO ANY MAN, WOMAN, OR CHILD!

B. The reasons for his praise (vv. 4, 5).

The first of these is:

1. “Your faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 4a).

Every time the Apostle Paul referred to our Lord in his epistles, he was directed by the Holy Spirit as to how he should speak of Him. In verse 1 of our chapter he called Him, “Jesus Christ.” In verse 2 he referred to our Lord both as “Christ” and “the Lord Jesus Christ.” In verse 3, “the Lord Jesus Christ” again. But here in verse 4, “Christ Jesus.” What signifi-

cance are we to see in the fact that the faith of the Colossian believers was to be “in Christ Jesus”?

— “Christ” means the anointed One. He is the One anticipated in the OT as the Messiah. He is the One Abraham looked for. And Moses spoke of Him as the Redeemer. David and Isaiah are two others among many who were looking for the “Christ.” “Jesus” of Nazareth, God become Man, was the Messiah. He became a Man so that He could die for sinners. And Paul was indicating that there were people in Colosse who had put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and in Him alone, for their salvation.

But just a minute! If the people believed, why give thanks to God?

I suppose that when most of us believed in the Lord Jesus Christ to save us, we had the idea that it was our faith, and it was our part in salvation. It was our way of accepting the salvation that God had provided in Christ. But then as we began to learn more about our Bibles, we learned that before we were saved we were dead in trespasses and sins. We learned that it would have been impossible for us to believe because we were dead, and we needed life. So what had happened? As was illustrated in the resurrection of Lazarus, God gave us life, and then He gave us faith! We learned that Jesus Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith. And we learned that everything about our salvation is a gift from God. God had chosen us for salvation. God is the One Who was seeking us. He is the One Who brought the Gospel to us. And He is the One Who gave us the faith to believe. The Apostle Paul said in the book of Romans (10:17),

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

This is why Paul was giving thanks to God for the faith of the Colossian believers. (Quote Eph. 2:8, 9.)

Every person who is ever to be saved must believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. I could state it even stronger than that. Every person who is ever to be saved will believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior.

This truth is beautifully expressed in one of the hymns in our Hymnal, #397:

— I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
He moved my heart to seek Him, seeking me;
It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found of Thee.

Do see why some of us were not so excited about that bumper sticker that

was on many cars a few years ago which said, "I found it." In the first place, salvation is not an "it," and secondly it is the Lord Who finds us. We don't look for Him; He looks for us, and He finds us, and He brings us to Himself, making us new creatures in Christ. Our faith, a gift from God, faith in Christ Jesus, is a gift of God, and the first evidence that we have salvation, that we have eternal life.

Once we understand this, we will thank God as never before for the faith in Christ which He has given us.

What was the second reason for Paul's praise to God?

2. "The love which you have to all the saints (v. 4b).

Before a person becomes a Christian, he doesn't want to be with the Lord's people. It makes him uncomfortable to go to church. He may like some of the Christians he knows, but they are not his best friends.

But when the Lord saves us, one great change that takes place in our lives is that we want to be with the people of God. We prefer to be with them. Going to church is not a chore; it is something that we look forward to. And this preference for the Lord's people is not limited to our own congregation, but it extends to people everywhere who know the Savior. And just as faith in Christ is the first evidence that we have been saved, love for the people of God is close behind.

The Apostle John had this to say when he was writing about what we need to look for in ourselves as well as in others as identifying marks of one who is a true child of God:

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death (1 John 3:14).

And our Lord Jesus Christ said this:

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

As believers we are to see that our faith is strengthened through the Word of God and by exercising the faith that God has given us, and we are to love each other more and more. But our faith in Christ is a gift from God, and our love for each other is a gift from God, and so to God we give our

thanks for what He has given us. We would not trust the Lord, nor would we love each other, if God had not given us our faith, and our love.

— So this is why Paul was so thankful, and these are the spiritual qualities which made him thankful. But there is one more.

**3. “For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven”
(v. 5).**

“Laid up” means reserved. It means that this is something that is appointed just for us. It is a gift which we cannot lose.

Peter had this to say about our hope, or our inheritance. It is:
reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of
God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in
the last time (1 Pet. 1:4b, 5).

“Reserved,” according to Strong, means guarded from loss or injury. It means that God keeps His eye on it, so to speak, so that nothing can happen to it! In other words, it is absolutely guaranteed. We only see it in part now, but some day our hope, our inheritance, will be completely ours forever.

— What is our hope? Let us let the Apostle John define it for us:

2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure (1 John 3:2-3).

What is our hope? It is that we will be like the Lord Jesus Christ. This work in us started the moment we were saved, and it will be finished when we see Him face to face.

Does it mean that there is anything uncertain about it? No, absolutely not! It is called a “hope” because it is still future, that is, the finished work is future, but it is just as certain as our faith and our love for each other as the people of God. Strong says that a hope is that which we can anticipate with confidence and pleasure. And Paul would go on in this epistle to the Colossian believers to say that it is “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27b). This is “the hope of the Gospel” which Paul mentioned in Col. 1:23. And all of this, our faith, our love, and our hope are a part of “the word of truth of the Gospel.” See v. 5b.

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The remainder of our text gives us:

II. PAUL'S PRAISE FOR THE FRUIT OF THE GOSPEL (Col. 1:6-8).

Here we are told about the effect of the Gospel in Paul's day. It has come to Colosse by the sovereign hand of God. And it had gone throughout "the world" (probably meaning the Roman world), and what had taken place in Colosse was taking place throughout the Empire--in Ephesus, in Philippi, in Rome, in Corinth, in the churches of Galatia, and on and on. And what had happened in Colosse, God giving faith, love, and hope to His people, was the same that was happening in all other places.

You see, there is only one way of salvation, and that is of God. It never is to deserving people because there are not. It is not to people who have earned it because it can't be earned. It is "without price" as Isaiah the prophet said. And besides, no one would even want to be saved if it were not for the work of the Holy Spirit, convicting us of our sins, and showing us that only through Christ and His death on the Cross can we be saved.

Epaphras was evidently the one who first took the Gospel to them, and he was the one also who told Paul about their "love in the Spirit."

Concl: There is a great lesson for all of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior. We need to be faithful in praising the Lord that He has given us faith, and love, and a certain future hope which is comforting to think about. And we need to thank the Lord that He never calls these gifts back. They belong to us forever.

In addition, we need to thank the Lord whenever we see these evidences of salvation in others. There may still be things in other people's lives that we don't like, just as there may be things in our lives that they don't like. But even then we can be thankful that neither we nor they are like we would be if the Lord had not saved us. So the glory still belongs to the Lord.

And what about those of you who do not know the Lord? The very fact that you are here today may be evidence that the Lord is seeking you, and intends to save you. Don't worry about how you are going to believe; look to Him for your faith. Seek the Lord while He may be found, tell Him that you want to be saved, and you will see that the Lord will do the work. Forget about anything you have been trying to do to make yourself

acceptable to God. That is something that you can never do, nor do you need to do it. God can only accept you in Christ. Christ did everything necessary for the salvation of all who will ever believe in Him. So believe Him, trust in Christ, knowing that it is the Lord Who is working in you to desire salvation and to seek His forgiveness through Christ.

A CHRISTIAN'S GREATEST PRIORITY

Colossians 1:9-14

Intro: If I were to ask any of you who knows the Lord, “What one thing should have your greatest and most constant attention as a Christian?”, I am reasonably certain that most of you, possibly all of you, would say, “To live each day so as to please the Lord.” That is the right answer; any other answer would be wrong. This is what Paul was praying about as he prayed for the Colossian believers. You can see it in verse 10 of our Scripture reading: “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.”

“Unto all pleasing” means that we are to strive to please the Lord in all things! Nothing is excluded. It is the guiding principle for every Christian every day that he lives. Nothing is excluded. This is our responsibility twenty-four hours of every day.

Paul said the same thing in his first letter to the church at Thessalonica. This is what we read in 1 Thess. 4:1:

Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, **that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.**

In Paul’s first letter to the church at Corinth he said the same things while using different words. Listen to 1 Cor. 10:31:

Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, **or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.**

Earlier in that same epistle Paul exhorted the Corinthian church with these words four in 1 Cor. 6:19-20:

19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

And who could forget those well-known words in Rom. 12:1, 2:

1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

2 And 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.

— So there is no question but that **A Christian's Greatest Priority** is to please God--and when I say "God," I mean God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

The verse which gives us Paul's purpose in his life is 2 Cor. 5:9. This is how it reads in the KJV:

Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

The meaning of what he said is a little clearer in most of the more recent translations. For example, the NASB renders it this way::

Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him.

— "Labour" in the KJV can be translated ambition, or goal, or aim. The NKJV uses the word "aim." Whatever word we might use, this verse tells us that it was Paul's primary concern in life and in death, or going to be with the Lord, to be pleasing to the Lord in every detail of his life. There can be no greater purpose in life, and the saints of Scripture illustrated many times how far they were willing to go, even to death, to be faithful to this life-purpose. The only ambition that is justified by Scripture is the ambition to please the Lord. And even there we need to make sure that we are doing it for the Lord's glory, and not just to build up ourselves in our own eyes or to have the commendation of our fellow-believers.

While we are thinking about this let us remember that we are considering the Apostle Paul's prayer for the Colossian church. And so this means that we can never expect to fulfill such a purpose, to achieve such a goal throughout our lives, without the help of the Lord Himself. We can be so easily tripped up. Our old nature can so quickly get the best of us. We need the Lord's help every day, or we will never be able to reach the goal set for us by the Word of God.

Now let us look at our text. Clearly the first part of verse 10 gives us the main request in Paul's prayer, but it is very important for us to see how we can reach this goal, and what the results will be.

— So let us consider from verse 9,

I. THE MEANS FOR REACHING SUCH A GOAL (Col. 1:9).

Paul knew that the only way they could possibly what was involved in such a life was that they would be “filled with the knowledge of his [God’s] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Where do we find the knowledge of God’s will?

There is only one place: in the Bible, the Word of God! What God wants us to be, and what He wants us to do, is all spelled out for us in the Holy Scriptures -- from Genesis to the Revelation. We are not only to seek to please the Lord by what we do, but by what we are. In fact, it is impossible to please the Lord by what we do unless it is the expression of our hearts, and if it is to be the expression of our hearts, then it must be an expression of what we are. This does not mean that we have to reach perfection before we can please the Lord, but it does mean that our obedience must not be just an act, but it must be the sincere expression of our hearts. We love the Lord; we want to be what the Lord wants us to be, and we want to do what He wants us to do.

This means that we be “filled with the knowledge of his will.”

Now let me make it clear that no one can ever know everything about the Bible that it is possible for us to know. Some of the greatest saints who have devoted their lives to the study of the Word of God have come to the end of their days only to confess how much they still have to learn. But this is the standard, to be filled, lit., with the full-knowledge of His will. The Word translated “knowledge” is the Greek word ἐπίγνωσις. It speaks of “a larger and more thorough knowledge” (St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon, p. 204). We are not to be satisfied with anything less than a complete understanding of the Word of God. But since this is impossible, Paul’s point is that we must never be satisfied with what we know, but we must always be pressing on to know more, and to know what we do know more clearly.

Spurgeon said, “When a measure is full of wheat there is no room for chaff” (Vol. 29, p. 533). And then he added, “True knowledge excludes error.” So up to our capacity we are to be full, but the more we grow in the Lord, the more capacity we have for the truth.

But what did Paul mean when he said, “In all wisdom and spiritual understanding”?

It seems to be generally agreed by good expositors that the word “spiritual” goes with both words. So we have spiritual wisdom and understanding, or spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding. Both are

“spiritual” because they are given to us by the Holy Spirit. All spiritual life has to do with the Holy Spirit.

— The meanings of these words are closely related to each other. Both are practical in their emphasis. “Wisdom” is the ability to judge what is the will of God in contrast with what is not the will of God, and “understanding” (some translate it intelligence) is the ability to apply the truth to life and its problems that a believer faces day by day. The point is that the Holy Spirit not only enables us to understand the Word of God, but He is the One Who guides us in its use, in its application to our lives each day.

And therefore it can be said that a believer understands a certain truth or doctrine in Scripture when he sees how it is to affect his life on a daily basis. We need to know the teaching of Scripture, but we also need to know how to use the Scriptures in our lives in a practical way.

As we move from verse 9 to verse 10 we see what I pointed out earlier in my message:

II. THE PURPOSE FOR SUCH KNOWLEDGE (Col. 1:10a).

— It is that we might live in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, seeking above all else to please Him in everything. This includes what we do in private as well as what we do in public. It includes what we think (because God knows our thoughts) as well as what we say. It includes what we are as well as what we do. Of course, it is both positive and negative. It means not only do what pleases the Lord, but not doing what displeases Him.

That little verse I gave you several years ago, and which Dr. Lockwood found some music for, tells it all. It is insert “C” in our Hymnals, and it goes like this:

In the sweet fear of Jesus let me begin each day,
Fearful lest I should grieve Him, fearful lest I should stray,
Fearful lest earthly longings ever my hear should share,
Taking the throne of Jesus, placing an idol there.

— In the sweet fear of Jesus let me begin each day,
Serving or resting, always under His gentle sway;
All that I say, directed; all that I plan, conceived
With the remembrance present, **Jesus must not be grieved.**

We are not to determine our behavior on the basis of what will be the best for us, but what will be pleasing to the Lord. If our purpose in life is to please the Lord, then we really don't need to worry about anything else.

But, as always, pleasing the Lord brings special blessings. What did Paul have to say about the blessings of such a life?

III. THE BLESSINGS WHICH WILL BE FOUND IN A LIFE THAT IS PLEASING TO THE LORD (Col. 1:10b-14).

Paul mentioned four blessings in these verses. We only have time to touch on each one briefly, but we want to make sure that we notice what they are.

A. "Being fruitful in every good work" (v. 10m).

What does this mean? Does it mean that we will always accomplish what we set out to do for the Lord? Does it mean that we will be able to win every person to Christ when we give them the Gospel? Does it mean that we will have no problems serving the Lord, or living for the Lord?

"No" is the answer to all of those questions. "Being fruitful" means that we can expect to see the blessing of God upon our lives, and that we can be assured that God's purposes will be accomplished in us, in other believers, and in the world as we continue to walk with the Lord. This is a verse which speaks of the spiritual growth which we will experience through the experiences of our lives and whatever we do to please the Lord.

B. "Increasing in the knowledge of God" (v. 10b).

"Increasing" means growing. And knowledge is the same word for knowledge which we had in verse 9, meaning full knowledge. It does not mean that we will have perfect knowledge of God, but that our knowledge of Him will move closer to a perfect knowledge which we will have in heaven, and this will lead to a growing and more intimate fellowship with God.

To be seeking to please the Lord in every aspect of our lives means turning away from sin and becoming more holy in God's sight which, in turn, leads to a more precious fellowship with God. Remember what the Apostle John said about this:

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in

darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

The prophet Amos was commissioned by the Lord to ask sinning Israel this question: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). The more our lives are freed from sin, the greater will be our fellowship with the Lord. Knowing God, increasing in our knowledge of Him, is really the test of spiritual growth. Remember how Paul had left everything else behind “for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil. 3:8). “The knowledge of God” is a term which includes Christ and the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father. Our knowledge of the Members of the Godhead, in doctrine and in fellowship, is a relationship that will grow and grow the more we seek to please the Lord.

C. “Strengthened...” (v. 11).

Did you notice that we have three words for power in this verse. The first two are from the same root, *δυναμῶ*. Bishop Moule translates “strengthened with all might,” “**in all power empowered**, continuously” (p. 50). But this is not our strength increased in and of itself, but “according to his glorious power.” The word for “power,” *κράτος*, according to Bishop Lightfoot, “is applied solely to God” (p. 206). So this means that the person who is seeking to please the Lord is being continuously empowered with divine power. But it is not as we might expect.

This power is “unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.”

Now we don’t ordinarily think of being strengthened to be patient and longsuffering, but, if we stop to think about it for a moment, the reason that we become impatient and short-tempered is because we don’t have the strength to continue on. Here Paul was teaching us that both patience and longsuffering require divine power, or we will neither be patient nor longsuffering. What is the difference between the two?

“Patience” is the attitude which does not give up and quit under trial. It perseveres, and lit. remains under the burden, whatever it might be.

“Longsuffering,” on the other hand, does not seek to retaliate when someone does something wrong toward us. But as Paul described this blessing, he indicated that both patience and longsuffering were shown to

be “with joyfulness.” It pictures a child of God under trial. But even in it he continues to seek to please God. And the strength is there so that he is able to behave like our Lord, “Who when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself unto Him that judgeth righteously’ (1 Pet. 2:23).

We all recognize that to be patient and longsuffering requires more strength than we have, but to do both “with joy” makes it imperative that we find in God the power to please Him in times of suffering, and possibly persecution.

The final blessing:

D. “Giving thanks unto the Father...” (vv. 12-14).

Oh, how God is pleased when we give Him thanks! That is the reason there is such a strong emphasis in the Word upon giving thanks.

Please notice, too, that God is referred to here as “the Father.” The more we walk with God, seeking to please Him in all things, the more we will understand the loving care that God gives us because He is our heavenly Father.

But notice the nature of our thanksgiving. We are thankful for our health, and we should be. We are thankful for our homes, our food, our clothing -- and we should be! But you and I who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior have reasons to be thankful that the world knows nothing about. Paul gives us three reasons to be thankful, and they all have to do with our salvation.

- 1. By His grace God has qualified us to share with the saints in the inheritance we will have in glory (v. 12).**
- 2. He has delivered us from Satan and the powers of darkness, and has translated us to the supreme authority of our Lord Jesus Christ (v. 13).**
- 3. Through the shedding of Christ’s blood, we are redeemed and forgiven (v. 14).**

The first has to do with heaven, the second has to do with our present deliverance from sin, and the third has to do with our redemption and forgiveness. And so Paul concludes his prayer with the clear indication that the more we seek to please God, the more we will delight in the

Gospel and in what God has done for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Conc: The Apostle Paul has given us some wonderful prayers in his epistles. It is hard to say that one is better than another, but this one certainly has to be classed among the very best, if not the best. He prayed this prayer incessantly for the believers at Colosse, and probably for believers in other places as well. This means that we never outgrow the need to desire to please God in every aspect of our lives.

But look where it starts. It starts by devoting ourselves to the Word of God, reading and re-reading it, meditating on it, praying over it, seeking from the Spirit of God increased knowledge of God's will, and understanding it from a spiritual point-of-view. When we give ourselves to the Word, the desires of our hearts are going to be changed, and we will find that more and more we will want to please the Lord. And that in turn opens the heart of God to us so that His blessings flow into our lives, teaching us how wonderful it is to know God, and how sufficient He is to meet the needs we have in our hearts.

This is a Spirit-inspired prayer. That is why it is in our Bibles. Let us pray it for every Christian we pray for, and let us pray it for ourselves. This is the path to blessing, and this is the road to great and lasting joy. May God give us the desire to please Him above all else, and may He show us even today the changes that need to be made in our lives. What a great time this is for us to come together to the Lord's table to remember Him in His death.

PAUL'S CONFLICT IN PRAYER

Colossians 2:1-3

Intro: When we consider the prayers of the Apostle Paul, it is important for us to become acquainted not only with the substance of his prayers, but with what Bishop Moule called, the manner of his prayers. That is, if we were with the Apostle Paul, and had the opportunity of hearing him pray his prayers, what would we hear? This prayer gives us a valuable hint as to how the Apostle prayed. We have it in the word, "conflict."

That word in verse 1 of Colossians 2 is carried over from the last verse of chapter 1: "Whereunto I also labour, **striving** according to his working, which worketh in me mightily." The verb which Paul used here which is translated, "striving," is the Greek verb, ἀγωνίζομαι. It is an athletic term which speaks of the struggle that a combatant would go through in the public games. We get our word agonize from this Greek word. The noun from this word Paul used in the first verse of our text for today, and this is the word translated "conflict." The Greek word is ἄγων. It means the contest itself, the struggle, the conflict that Paul was going through on behalf of the church at Colosse.

If we stop for a moment to think about the Apostle Paul's circumstances as he wrote this epistle, we realize that he was a prisoner of Rome. And although he was allowed the privilege of having his friends come to visit him, yet he was chained to a Roman guard twenty-four hours of the day. Privacy was one thing which was denied to Paul during his imprisonment, and privacy had been a major part of his life up to the time of his arrest. The one thing that he did which required privacy was to pray. However, this was where Paul had to change. He could not cease praying. That had been a vital part of his life ever since he was first saved. And so, if we are to have an accurate picture of Paul during those days, we must think of him continuing with his prayers, probably praying most of the time audibly. One after another the guards would have heard the earnestness with which he prayed. They would have witnessed his fervency. And there is little doubt but that they would have seen his tears. They had never had such a prisoner, and it seems that the Lord used Paul in the salvation of several of the guards who were with him during those days. Paul couldn't go anywhere during those days, but he could touch the ends of the world with his prayers, as it was known in those days.

Paul was struggling with God! He was doing what Jacob did that night at Peniel when he wrestled with a man only to realize later that he was

wrestling with the Lord. And the attitude which must have characterized Paul's praying was that which characterized Jacob's praying when Jacob said to the Lord, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me" (Gen. 32:26). Paul was wrestling with God, and he intended to be victorious--not that he would convince God to do something contrary to His will, but that He would persevere in praying for the will of God until the Lord granted his request.

All of us who pray know that the Lord rarely answers our prayers immediately. Sometimes He does, but not often. An immediate answer is the exception rather than the rule. It is not that God is reluctant to answer our prayers; it is that He tests how much we want His blessing, and He uses the time to strengthen our faith.

Jacob was praying for himself, and his life was at stake because Esau had said that he was going to kill Jacob. Paul prayed for himself also, but here in Colossians 2 his burden was for the believers in Colosse. Paul called his praying not just a conflict, but a great conflict. He meant that it was a burden of great importance. What he was asking the Lord to do for the Colossian believers was greatly needed by each one of them in their walk with the Lord.

The fact that this conflict which Paul was referring to was a conflict in prayer, is supported not only by the request that follow, but by his used of this same verb, ἀγωνίζομαι, in Col. 4:12. (Read.) The translators have translated it here, "labouring fervently." Epaphras was "always labouring fervently for them in prayers." If we all knew more about such praying, doubtless we would see greater blessing in the work of the Lord today.

Notice another thing before we get to the prayer.

Paul wanted them to know that he had this "great conflict" for them, and for the believers at Laodicea. Prayer is not always this intense and this difficult. But it is probably true that the greater the need, the greater the conflict. It seems that there are always things which stand in the way of our praying--perhaps physical weariness, or the pressure of other duties that are calling for our attention, or the lack of a suitable time and place. It probably was a part of Paul's conflict that he had to pray with another, usually an unbeliever, so close to him.

Bishop Moule had this to say about prayer:

Prayer is never meant to be *indolently* easy, however simple and reliant it may be. It is meant to be a infinitely

important transaction between man and God (emphasis is mine). And therefore very often, when subjects and circumstances call for it, it has to be viewed as work involving labour, persistency, conflict, if it would be prayer indeed (Colossian and Philemon Studies, p. 124).

Another word by way of introduction: Did you notice that Paul wanted them to know that he was praying in conflict for them, even though there were many of them who had never actually seen him? See verse 1. To pray like this for those we know, is probably very unusual, but to pray like this for those we have never seen, is most exceptional. And it ought to be an example to us, and an encouragement for us to do the same.

But now let us consider the prayer. The requests in this prayer are like links in a chain, one leads to another, and together the prayer is directed toward the objective which was on the heart of the Apostle Paul as he prayed. False doctrine had threatened the fellowship of the believers in Colosse, Laodicea, and perhaps Hierapolis as well. Paul was preparing to refute those doctrines, but before he did, he wanted them to know of his deep concern for them which had led to this additional prayer for them.

I. THE FIRST REQUEST (Col. 2:2a).

Paul's first request was "that their hearts might be comforted." This means that he was praying, as he did in chapter 1, that they would be strengthened and encouraged.

Paul expressed this same concern in his letter to the church at Ephesus. See Eph. 6:21, 22:

21 But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do,
Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the
Lord, shall make known to you all things:
22 Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that
ye might know our affairs, **and that he might comfort
your hearts.**

I have had a number of opportunities to tell you in the past that to comfort anyone is to encourage him, or her. And when a person is truly encouraged, he is strengthened. It seems that one thing that we all are in continual need of, is encouragement. Life has its many discouragements, and they can sometimes be very discouraging. If I were to ask you today if you need encouragement, I am sure that most of you would answer that you do. I don't hesitate to say that I will take all of the encouragement

that I can get. But we want true encouragement, not false encouragement. If you have been reading Jeremiah recently, you know that the false prophets among the Lord's people were false encouragers. They told the people that everything was going to be all right when God said that it was not going to be all right. Actually Jeremiah, though he predicted judgment, had the real encouragement for the people. He offered them real hope.

Do you know that the Members of the Godhead are all called our Encouragers? Listen to 2 Cor. 1:3-7

- 3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and **the God of all comfort**;
- 4 Who **comforteth** us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to **comfort** them which are in any trouble, by the **comfort** wherewith we ourselves **are comforted** of God.
- 5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our **consolation** also aboundeth by Christ.
- 6 And whether we be afflicted, it is for your **consolation** and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be **comforted**, it is for your **consolation** and salvation.
- 7 And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the **consolation**.

Comfort, consolation, encouragement -- all are correct translations of the same word in the Greek. So we can see from this passage that God is greatly concerned about our encouragement. He is the great Encourager.

You know from John 14, 15, and 16 that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter. And in John 14:16 when the Lord Jesus said that He would send "another Comforter," He was implying that He had been a Comforter, and that He was sending the Holy Spirit to take His place and to carry on this work of comforting the people of God.

So the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all our Comforters, and they comfort us not only to meet our needs, but so we can comfort others with the comfort that we have received from Them.

But notice another thing about this comfort which Paul was so concerned about: It always has to be in our hearts. The Lord does not always change the situation which has caused us anxiety, but He gives peace even while we still have our problems with us. God's comfort often

means “peace that passeth understanding.” And we need to remember that when the Scriptures speak of the heart, it includes our wills, our emotions, and even our thoughts.

So there is no question but that God has made abundant provision for our encouragement so that we will be able to persevere in doing His will even though heavy burden may rest upon us.

I have been speaking about comfort, or encouragement, in general, but the Colossians, as well as the believers in the other cities mentioned in this epistle, were facing a special need for the comfort of God because of the false teaching that had come to them. False teaching discourages, and it divides. The preservation of true doctrine is one of the major responsibilities of any servant of the Lord. This explains why Paul was praying this prayer.

II. PAUL’S SECOND REQUEST (Col. 2:2m).

It was that they might be “knit together in love.”

Paul uses this same verb again, “knit together,” in the latter part of v. 19. In Eph. 4:16 Paul used this verb to describe the close relationship that the members of our bodies have to each other, loving each other, working together with each other, depending upon each other.

However, it is one thing to know this, but another to live it out in our fellowship with each other. One thing that false doctrine does is to divide us. False doctrine destroys fellowship. And so, according to Paul’s prayer, one of the greatest safeguards that we have against false teaching is the love that we have for each other. We need to be so knit together in a practical sense that false teachers cannot come in between us. We see in the book of Galatians how false teaching regarding the Law had not only turned the Galatians against each other, but it had turned them against Paul. So Paul was praying that the fellowship of the believers would not be adversely affected in any way, but instead, strengthened and made to increase.

Paul followed this with a third request.

III. PAUL’S THIRD REQUEST (Col. 2:2m).

Here the Apostle Paul began to emphasize the importance of the Word of God. His request is that they might come “unto all riches of the full

assurance of understanding.” “Riches,” of course, suggests wealth. “Full assurance” here refers to a strong, unshakeable confidence in the truth of the Word of God which comes from the ability to lit., put things together. Paul was praying that the people would realize what inexhaustible riches they had in the ~~truth~~, and that their understanding of the truth would give them such confidence that they would not be turned aside to any false teaching whatever it might be. So we don’t need to understand the particular problem which the Colossians and others were facing because Paul’s prayer would apply to any false teaching whatever it might be. The people who stand against error are the people who are convinced in their hearts that the Bible is the Word of God, that it is complete and unchangeable, and that it is sufficient for all of our spiritual needs. But in addition to that, Paul was praying that their confidence in the Scriptures would grow out of an understanding of the truth. It is one thing to be told that the Bible is the Word of God, but it is so much better to be thoroughly convinced of that by our own personal acquaintance and understanding of the Word.

Now, when we come to the Word, what is the most important truth, the most important doctrine that we need to be concerned about? It is the knowledge of God. As I have said many times, the Bible is not only a revelation from God, but it is preeminently a revelation of God. If we want to know God, the place to go is to the Word of God. And the word “acknowledgement” suggests the true knowledge, the full knowledge, of God. God has given us His Word to tell us about Himself. Everything He wants us to know about Himself, we will find in this book. Be suspicious of anybody who tries to change anything that you find in the Word, or anybody who tries to add to what we have in Scripture. We probably will learn much more about God when we get to heaven, but all that we need to know now is in this Book. We get ourselves into trouble when we go beyond the written Word of God.

But there is something else here in Paul’s prayer that Paul was stressing.

The best MSS would give us as the latter part of verse 2, “to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, **even Christ.**”

The word “mystery” in Scripture means a secret. It tells us that God did not reveal everything about Himself at one time, but throughout time, as men have written about God, God had made Himself known a little bit at a time until Christ came! Then the full revelation was made. God has fully revealed Himself in Christ. Christ is such a complete revelation of God that He said, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John

14:9). He did not mean that He was the Father, but that the revelation of God which we have in the Word was finally completed when the Son of God came into the world. And so if we really want to know God, we need to know Christ. And yet how many there are in our churches today who talk about God, but never have anything to say about the Lord Jesus Christ. Or if they talk about Christ at all, they make Him less than the perfect Son of God. Who in His flesh was equal to the Father in His Deity.

And so the real test of any doctrine can be seen if we ask one question: What place does it give to Jesus Christ? If it harmonizes completely with the Word of God, it is true; if it is different in any way, it is not true. In Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” A true child of God will spend His life digging into the treasures hidden in the Word which will reveal to us the majesty, the glory, the greatness, the perfections, of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the more we know of Him as He is revealed in Scripture, the more we know about God. And the more we know about God in Christ, the greater will be our fellowship with Him.

Conc: Can you think of a more needed prayer than this is for the people of God today? Oh, to be so much in love with the Lord Jesus Christ that we will be looking for Him as we read the Word, and we will be delighted with any servant of the Lord who opens the Book to tell us of Him. God finds all of His delight in Christ, and we need to find all of our delight in Christ, too. May the Lord increase our encouragement, and bind us more closely together in the love of God, and give us a greater love for the Word because it is in the Word that we learn of God and that our knowledge of God increases as we learn of Christ.

THE GREATEST OF ALL THANKSGIVINGS

Ephesians 1:3-14

Part 1

Intro: In our consideration of *the Prayers of the Apostle Paul* we have looked at three prayers in his epistle to the church at Colosse: two in chapter 1, and one in chapter 2. There is one more in which Paul gave some requests for the church to remember as they prayed for him. You will find those requests in chapter 4, verses 2-4. (Read.) I am not going to include this prayer in our studies because we find essentially the same requests in his epistle to the Ephesians, chapter 6, verses 19, 20. So we will take up those requests as we consider the prayers of Paul in Ephesians. Today I want to turn your attention to the first main prayer in Ephesians, a wonderful prayer of thanksgiving, which we have heard in our Scripture reading.. And because of the content of the prayer in chapter 1, verses 3 through 14, I am not going to try to cover it all in one message. The prayer is far too important for that.

You will see that verse 2 is the prayer that we have found at the beginning of all of Paul's epistles, a prayer of immense importance, and yet a prayer which we might be inclined to overlook because of the frequency with which we find it. We all have a moment by moment need for the grace of God and of the peace of God, both of which come to us not only from God, but from our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was probably indicating that it comes from God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And we know from other Scriptures that grace and peace are administered to us by the Holy Spirit. Our need is continual, and the supply is unlimited. So let us pray this prayer for each other, and spend a few moments meditating on it every time we come to it in Paul's epistles. So the fact that I am not going to include it again today is not because it was just a formality with Paul, and therefore not as important as his other prayers, but simply because we have considered it before.

Today I want to begin with verse 3. I have entitled my message, The Greatest of All Thanksgivings. By this I am not thinking of next Thursday, hoping it will be the greatest day of thanksgiving that you and I have ever had. I hope it will be that, but that is not what I have in mind. By my subject I am saying that what Paul was thanking God for in these verses was the highest level of thanksgiving which we can offer to God. We are all thankful for our families, for our homes, for the work that the Lord has given us to do, for the health that we have, for the food we eat, and for the friends the Lord has given us, and our thanksgivings should include all of these blessing, and whatever other special blessings the

Lord has given us. But those of us who know the Lord Jesus Christ as our Savior have many more blessings, much higher blessings, which the world knows nothing about. These are the blessings that we have “in Christ.” These are our spiritual blessings, blessings which we will enjoy throughout eternity, and for which we will continue to praise the Lord even in heaven. So we are on high ground here -- the highest ground of all, holy ground. And yet it is sad that we often put all of the other blessings we have ahead of these blessings. But these are the best! And perhaps we never touch the heart of God any deeper than when we express to Him our joy and our gratitude for all that we have “in Christ.” All of our spiritual blessings added together make up our salvation. Here we all stand together. Our praise to God in other areas may differ according to our circumstances, but this prayer is a prayer of thanksgiving which we all can, and we all should, offer to God.

From time to time I have told you some of the peculiarities of my computer. Let me tell you another of its quirks. Whenever I have a document checked by the computer’s spell checker, it always wants to capitalize the word thanksgiving. The only explanation that I can come up with for that is that my computer thinks that there is only one day out of the year that we need to give thanksgiving to God. So when I use the word thanksgiving, my computer is thinking, Thanksgiving Day! My computer doesn’t know that every day is thanksgiving day for those of us who know the Lord. I am glad that we have a national Thanksgiving Day, but let us remember that we need to be thanking God every day for His blessings, and usually several times a day. And let us remember another thing. “Thanksgiving Day” means being thankful to God, not just to have a feeling of gratitude in our hearts. And when I say God, I am talking about the only true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is from Him that all blessings flow. So to Him, and to Him alone, must all of our thanksgiving be directed. So I hate to admit that I have a pagan computer, but I do. However, I am working on it so it will really OK my words when I write thanksgiving with a little “t.”

Now let us turn to the Scripture text. In verse 3 we have:

I. A DESCRIPTION OF PAUL’S THANKSGIVING (Eph. 1:3).

He tells us Who is the object of his thanksgiving, what is the subject of his thanksgiving, and where the blessings are to be found.

Before we get to those, however, let me call your attention to the word, “Blessed.” We are probably more familiar with this word in Scripture as

it is used in what we call, the Beatitudes. They are found all through Scripture, in the OT and in the NT. For example, we have it in Psalm 1:1. (Quote.) We have it also in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for their’s is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3). But this word which is translated “blessed” means happy. Sometimes it means how happy, or oh, the multiplied happinesses of the man... It expresses overwhelming joy, a joy which only the people of God can experience.

The word which Paul used in Eph. 1:3 is a different word altogether. This word means that we are praising God. We are worshiping Him. We are eulogizing Him. This is really a tribute to God, not just expressed in a formalistic way, but in a spirit of adoration. Paul was expressing not only His praise to the Lord, but his love for the Lord. These are words which attract the attention of even the angels in heaven. A great note is sounded with the word, “Blessed.”

But now let me emphasize again:

A. The One Who is the Object of Paul’s praise.

It is none other than “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul used this same expression in 2 Cor. 11:31, and using the same word for “blessed” that we have here, says that He is “blessed for evermore.” That is, we bless Him today, we bless Him tomorrow, we bless Him as long as life lasts, and we will bless Him through all eternity. One thing we can be sure that we will do through eternity is to give adoring tribute and praise to our God, “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Oh, how we fail here! And all of us should take steps today to remedy any lack of praise and thanksgiving that we have in our hearts toward “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

But now let us notice:

B. The Subject of Paul’s praise.

It is that He “hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings.” Bishop Westcott pointed out in his commentary that Paul did not say that God is blessing us, nor that He will bless us, but that He has blessed us. These are blessings which He has already conferred upon us. We have them now. All of us have them all. If someone were to be saved this morning, he or she could join with the one who has known the Lord the longest, and using the very same words could lovingly offer the same praise to

God for His blessings. The older Christian might be able to offer praise with a greater depth of feeling, but the words of this verse are not limited to any group within the body of Christ; they are words that belong on all of our lips.

But what was Paul praising the Lord for? It was not only for “spiritual blessings,” but that we have “**all** spiritual blessings.” These are the blessing that Paul will speak about as we go through the words of his praise to God. They are the blessings of salvation. Paul has not mentioned all of them here, but he has mentioned enough so we have no question about what he meant. All of us who are saved have “all spiritual blessings.” Not one is still to be sought. We can understand more about them, and we can enjoy them more and more, but they are ours right now, every single one of them.

But now to complete verse 3,

C. The place where they are to be found.

Paul said here that they are “in heavenly places in Christ.” The point is that these blessings are only to be found “in Christ,” and only by those who are themselves “in Christ.” This introduces us to a theme of the greatest importance: our union with Christ. Christ is in heaven, seated at the Father’s right hand. See Eph. 1:20. And we are seated there in Him. See Eph. 2:6. This is a subject which we cannot fully understand, but it means that because of our union with Christ in His death, we now possess, and possess eternally, all that God purposed for Christ to accomplish for us in His death, and all that He did accomplish. But the work of Christ was the carrying out of the work of redemption which the Members of the Godhead planned, as we will see, before there was a world, and before there was any man on earth.

The fact that our spiritual blessings are spoken of as “in heavenly places in Christ,” shows that they are absolutely secure. We can’t lose them. No one can take them away from us. They never decay and disappear. They are securely ours “in Christ.”

But what are they?

This is the question we are going to be answering for several Sundays. We only have time for the first one today, but this is one that is well worth all of the time we can give to it. Paul immediately, with no hesitation, and no apology, introduces us to the doctrine of election.

II. THE FIRST SPIRITUAL BLESSING: ELECTION (Eph. 1:4-6).

Here Paul was going back to the very origin of our salvation. And again, let me point out that this applies to every single one of us. As Paul said, speaking by the Holy Spirit, we all were “chosen...in him before the foundation of the world.”

I have in my library several sets of sermons which I value very highly. One of them is a by Charles Simeon. He was a priest in the Church of England back in the late 1700's, and was associated with Cambridge University from his university days on throughout his life and ministry. He is credited with having started what became the Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. He was a godly man, a powerful preacher, and was greatly used by God. His sermons fill twenty volumes, and they are always rewarding to those who read them.

As he came in his preaching to the book of Ephesians, and had gotten to the subject of election, this is what he said:

In our progress through the Holy Scriptures, we are necessitated to investigate, in its turn, every doctrine of our holy religion. There are indeed some doctrines which appear to be almost wholly prescribed: but we do not conceive ourselves at liberty to pass over any part of the sacred records as improper for discussion, provided we enter into it with the humility and modesty that become us. It is undeniable that the apostles mention occasionally, and without the smallest appearance of hesitation, the doctrines of predestination and election: and therefore we are bound to explore the meaning of the inspired writers in reference to these passages, as well as any others. We are aware that great difficulties attend the explanation of these doctrines; (although certainly not greater than attend the denial of them); and we are aware also, that they are open to abuse: but there is no doctrine which has not had its difficulties; nor any which has not been abused: and, that we may not be supposed to entertain an undue partiality for these obnoxious tenets [meaning truths which are offensive to some--my explanation], or wish to establish them on inadequate grounds, we have selected a large portion of Scripture which cannot easily be perverted; and which is indeed so plain, that it speaks for itself. We shall be careful also to bring them forward precisely in the way in which they are declared by the Apostles themselves, that is, not in a speculative and controversial way, but in a practical manner, as incentives to holy gratitude and obedience (Vol. 17, p. 265, 266).

It would be wonderful if all believers would treat the Scriptures as Charles Simeon did, not to deny anything that the Scriptures teach, nor to ignore it, but to explain the Scriptures in such a way that we are true to the Apostles teaching, not in an argumentative or controversial way, but seeking to evoke from the Lord's people the same kind of praise that filled the heart of the Apostle Paul, and the same kind of love. So if any of you have not been exposed to the doctrines of election and predestination, I trust that you will join me in seeing what the Scriptures say, and accept it, and rejoice in it as much as in any other doctrine found in the Word of God.

Paul declared here that God chose each one of us "before the foundation of the world." And this would apply to all who had been saved up to the time that Paul wrote this, and it would apply to everyone who has been saved, or will be saved, to the end of time. "The foundation of the world" is an expression which means before the creation of the world.

How amazing this is, and yet it is not inconsistent with a sovereign, eternal, omnipotent, and loving God! Long before any of us was born, God chose us to be saved. We need to understand this about our salvation. We did not make the initial choice; God did, and He did it before we were born, before we had done anything either good or bad. He chose us knowing that none of us deserved to be saved. He chose to set His love upon us, and to claim us for His own.

Did God choose everybody? No, because if He had, everybody would be saved. But since all are not saved, we know that His choice was limited to those who are.

But notice two little words here which are very important: the words, "in him." The "him" cannot refer to anyone but Christ Who is mentioned at the end of verse 3. God did the choosing, and He chose us in Christ. We were chosen to be united with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection, so that our salvation was to rest solely on the merit that we have in Christ. This was true of OT saints, and it is true of those of us who have been saved since Christ came. They looked forward to a Redeemer Who would come; we look back upon the same Redeemer Who has come. God chose us, but He chose us in Christ because we had to be in Him in order to be acceptable to God.

Now let us get this part of the doctrine clear in our minds. For the moment forget the objections you have heard, and let your mind dwell on the simple, clear statement of Scripture. Paul will speak of faith later on in

the prayer, but here he was viewing salvation from God's side--which is the place where we all need to start.

— But why did God choose us? And after I point this out, we will have to stop for today.

God chose us "that we should be holy and without blame before him." I agree with the commentators who put the words "in love" with verse 5, not verse 4.

When the Lord saved us we were unholy and full of blame. We were defiled by sin, and with many charges against us because of our sins. The purpose of God in choosing us and redeeming us, is that positively we should be holy, and negatively that God would find nothing for which we could be blamed by Him, "before Him." It was God's purpose in choosing us that everything about us would eventually be pleasing to Him, and, at the same time, there would be nothing that would be displeasing to Him. In other words, His purpose in saving us was to make us perfect in His sight.

— God's purpose in election extends from eternity to eternity, and God never fails in anything He has determined He will do. Can you and I not see why Paul's heart was so full of love and praise to God for this marvelous salvation that we have in Christ? And one way you and I will know that we understand this great doctrine of election will be when we feel like praising God for our salvation the way Paul did in this passage.

Conc: You can see why I am not trying to get through this prayer in just a Sunday or two. There is too much here for us to hurry over it and yet profit from it the way we need to.

But let me say this in conclusion. This year on our national Thanksgiving Day, let us praise God for all of His blessings, but let us place special emphasis on the fact that He chose us, sent Christ to die for us, sought us and found us by His Holy Spirit, and now is at work in our hearts to make us "holy and without blame before" Himself. When His work in our hearts is finished, we will be like our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. This is why the Lord chose us, and why He is continuing to work in our hearts.

— So let us bless His holy Name. And you don't need to wait until Thursday. Begin today if this is not your habit, and keep on praising Him for your salvation every day of the year.