

THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER

Colossians 1:9-12

Intro: I once asked Jerry Bridges if he was related to Charles Bridges.

He told me that as far as he knew, he wasn't, but he wished that he was. Charles Bridges lived back in the 1800's. He was a pastor in England, and the Lord blessed his ministry in a very special way. He wrote a commentary on the book of Proverbs which is one of the best that has ever been written. But he also wrote a book for pastors which is one of the best that has ever been written except for the Bible. His book is called, "The Christian Ministry," and is still published by Banner of Truth.

I have said all of this because I want to begin with a quotation from Mr. Bridges which has to do with Paul and his epistles, but, since we are studying Colossians at the present time, I want you to see how it applies to Colossians and the ministry of the Apostle Paul. This is the statement, written to pastors:

There can be little doubt but we shall find that our most successful hours of employment for our people were not those when we were speaking to them from God, but when we were speaking for them to God (quoted by H. C. G. Moule in his commentary, *Colossian and Philemon Studies*, p. 46).

That fact is certainly borne out in Paul's letter to the church at Colosse. In fact, he had never been in Colosse to minister to the church. He was ministering to them as he wrote this epistle. But from the beginning of the epistle down to the prayer we are going to look at this morning in verses 9 through 12 of chapter 1, everything that he had to say to them was about his prayers for them.

And we know from reading Paul's other epistles in the NT that we pick up the same emphasis on prayer in all of them.

Here in Colossians 1:

- 1) The last part of verse 2 is a prayer.
- 2) From verse 3 on down through verse 8 he expressed his thanksgiving to God for them and what God had done in Colosse through the preaching of the Gospel.
- 3) This morning we come to his specific intercession for the believers in Colosse, and his prayer runs on into what Paul had to say about how their lives had been changed by the Gospel.

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Now what Mr. Bridges said about prayer in no way minimizes the importance of preaching, but it does stress the importance of prayer. You will remember that in the early days of the church, when the apostles found that they could not keep up with all of the pastoral ministry that needed to be done, deacons were appointed by the church to help them so that the apostles could continue to give themselves “to prayer, and to the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4). The order there seems to be very significant – “to prayer, and the ministry of the Word.”

We don't know how large the church at Colosse was in terms of members. It was probably not large at all. But Paul was not concerned about numbers. What he was concerned about was what God was continuing to do in the lives of the people who were in the church. He had a lot to say to them about doctrine, but Paul knew that what gives power to our preaching, and power to our correspondence, is prayer, much prayer, continual prayer.

I am afraid that we have gotten away from that in today's church. Our emphasis is more on numbers and how to get them into the church, than it is the spiritual growth of those who have professed faith in Christ. If we were more concerned about building up the saints in their faith, there undoubtedly would be a greater increase in those who are coming to Christ. The church does not grow by big and multiplied programs. The church grows when pastors and people get down to the business of prayer in support of the ministry of the Word.

But let us think especially about Trinity Bible Church. Those of us who are elders and deacons are especially responsible to set the pace that Paul set for the churches to whom he ministered. And that pace was primarily expressed in prayer, constant prayer, fervent prayer. And the churches were to follow the example of the apostles who ministered to them.

But we need your prayers as well. It is always an encouragement to me when someone tells me that they are praying for me, and praying for Lucille. We all need to pray, and we all need to be prayed for. And to show us how important prayer is, what has our Lord been doing ever since He went back to heaven. Most of you know, but let me tell you just in case there may be those here who don't know. In Hebrews 7:25 we find these extremely important words. Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ the writer of that epistle said,

25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that

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come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Where are those words? In Hebrews 7:25. Nobody can minimize anything that the Lord would do, but this verse says volumes about the importance of prayer. How it should humble us that we can do in a more limited way what our Lord is doing for all of us day after day.

But let me make this point about Paul's prayer which we are considering this morning. *How much do our prayers, my prayers, and your prayers, follow what Paul prayed about?* And thinking about how the Lord prays for us, we have John 17 as an example of His praying, don't we? I think that it is important for us to pray about jobs and health needs. We need to pray for those who minister the Word to us. But how much do our prayers sound like Paul's prayers. Do we pray like he prayed.

Let us look at this four-verse prayer this morning comparing it with the way we pray for our own families, and for each other, and for others whom the Lord may have laid upon our hearts. Or, to state it another way, can we take this prayer as the way he would pray for us at Trinity Bible Church if he were alive today? My answer to that question is that he would. And I believe that the Holy Spirit not only led Paul to pray as he did for the saints at Colosse, but the Holy Spirit has preserved his prayer for us so that we would be concerned about the things for ourselves and others that he was concerned about as he prayed for the saints at Colosse over 2,000 years ago. I probably won't get through this whole prayer today, but I am more concerned that these truths get into our hearts, mine as well as yours, than I am that we hurry to get through it.

Now let us notice what the Apostle Paul had to say in verse 9.

One of the important things that we learn from the prayers of the Apostle Paul is that he did not wait until he heard about problems before he started praying a particular church, but even when he knew that things were going well, that motivated him to pray.

Read again verses 3 through 8 which we have considered together, and you get the impression that the church at Colosse was a very unusual church. In fact, those verses Paul devoted to thanking God for what He had done in the lives of those Colossian believers. It was really wonderful. They had been saved out of paganism. Probably all of them had been idolaters and held in bondage with all kinds of sin. But when Paul heard

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about what was going on in Colosse, he knew that it had to be a work of God! Remember the three words we talked about – the faith in Christ Jesus, their love for each other and for all others saints, and the hope that was secured for them in heaven. One thing that must have characterized their lives was that they talked about when the Lord was coming back to take them to heaven.

Now you have to admit that the Colossian church was a very special church. What a blessing it must have been to attend their meetings, and then to have fellowship before and afterwards. Notice that it was what Paul had heard about them that led him to tell them that he was “praying always” for them. And then he repeated that in verse 9. After reviewing the commendable things that he had heard about them, he said, “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you.”

So when you hear about a church, or even about a single Christian, where there is the same evidence of God’s blessing that there was in Colosse, don’t say, “They are doing so well, I am going to pray for others who are not doing so well.” Paul would have us know that where you see evidence of God’s blessing in the lives of His people, that it where you need to direct your prayers, but not neglecting others who may not be doing so well.

But I believe this is a very important point that we all need to get. Where you see the blessing of God, pray, pray always, unceasingly. And we need to pray for two reasons. One, because regardless of how well certain Christians may be doing, every Christian is weak. Who would ever have thought that David would have sinned as he did? Or who would ever have thought that Peter would deny with oaths that he even knew the Lord? We all still are capable of sinning. The most godly person on earth needs to be prayed for. That is what the Lord is doing for all of us.

So we are all weak in ourselves. We are not completely safe from sin until we get to heaven.

But the other reason is that we have a very powerful enemy in the Devil, and he has lots of help to lure the people of God into sin. Our strength, if we have any, is in the Lord, not in ourselves. And so we need to be strong in Him every day that we live.

Now what was Paul’s attitude in prayer. Will you notice the verb “desire”

in verse 9? The same verb (αἰτέω) is used in Mark 11:24 where it is recorded that the Lord said to His disciples about prayer,

24 Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.

Probably many of our prayers are not answered because they lack “desire.” Paul was not just using any word that might come to his mind, but he was speaking of a strong petition supported by his will, in which he was asking the Lord to do what was absolutely essential in the lives of the people of God in Colosse. Paul considered it absolutely essential that the believers there “be filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.”

Being his first request, Paul considered it basic. What did he have in mind? Where were the Colossians going to find “the knowledge of [God’s] will”? Where are we going to find the knowledge of God’s will? I hope we all know the answer to that question. Paul was not talking about some special impression that God might give them, or some dream. *God has revealed His will to us in His Word.* The Apostle Peter said in 2 Peter 1:3 that God by His divine power has “given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness.”

So Paul great burden for the Colossians that they would continue to believe that they did not need to go beyond the Word of God to know how they were to live and to please God.

What did Paul mean by “all wisdom and spiritual understanding”? Well, when you see the word “spiritual” used in a verse like this, you can be sure that the writer, in this case, the Apostle Paul, was talking about a work of the Holy Spirit. Paul was praying that the Lord would give them the ability to understand the truth of God to the point that they would know the difference between truth and error, and between right and wrong. “Spiritual understanding” is the ability to apply that wisdom day by day for godly living.

This needs to be the concern of a person who has just received Christ, but it continues to be what is needed in the most mature Christian. It is not enough for me to seek to know the Word, and to apply the Word to my life today, but I must do it every day. No one is ever completely “filled with the knowledge of [God’s] will,” but we must seek daily to gain more knowledge of God’s Word, and to continue to remember and apply what we have already learned.

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One of the greatest of mysteries in the Bible is to be seen in the life of Solomon. Apart from the Lord, he was the wisest man who has ever lived. But his downfall spiritually was that he had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and most of these were women who worshiped heathen gods. And so we read in 1 Kings 11, verse 4, that “his wives turned away his heart.” They turned his heart away from the Lord and from the wisdom of God which had been such an influential part of his life. And so we read this in 1 Kings 11:4:

4 For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father.

And then we read two verses later:

6 And Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father (1 Kings 11:6).

One time when Dr. Bruce Waltke was with us, and I believe it was at Family Camp, that he spoke to us on the book of Proverbs. And he raised the question about Solomon, “How was it that a man who showed so much wisdom all his life, could die as such a fool?” And Dr. Waltke pointed to Solomon’s own writings to give us the answer. It is found in Proverbs 19:20:

20 Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end.

What does this mean? It means that when we first receive Christ, we need to start paying attention to the wisdom, the counsel, that God has given us in His Word. But all through our lives we need to continue to hear the Word of God and to continue to receive instruction. Then we will be wise in our latter days. But if we begin to neglect the Word, and we start to fail to apply it to our lives, even though we have been very wise throughout our lives, and have enjoyed wonderful fellowship with the Lord, and have ministered to other people, when we neglect the Word of God, sin takes over, and we will die as fools.

Concl: But by God’s grace it doesn’t need to be that way. God’s Word, read, understood, and applied to our lives day by day will keep us from sin. But when we turn away from the Word and become disobedient, there is no telling how quickly we can fall, or how far.

Paul was writing to a church where spiritual life and blessing were flourishing. And he wanted to see it stay that way, and so he not only told them in his epistle to them,

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9 For this cause, we also (he and Timothy), 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 (God's will) in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

It is often shocking to see the way the writers of Scripture warned the people of God of the dangers of sin. Paul, in writing to the church at Corinth summarized the major sins that the Israelites were guilty of in their journey from Egypt to the promised land. But then he said this in 1 Corinthians 10:11-12:

11 Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

12 Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

By God's grace, instead of falling, let us tell the Lord, "Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa. 119:11). And let us do what Paul did: PRAY!

After closing hymn: Psalm 119: "O how love I Thy law! It is my meditation all the day."