

THE APOSTLE'S PRAYER

Colossians 1:9-12

Part 2

Intro: I just got started last week in dealing with Paul's prayer in Colossians 1. When we read the epistles of Paul it is easy to see that he strongly believed in prayer. And he believed that God answers prayer. Before he was saved I am sure that he said a lot of prayers, prayers which were routine with the Jews, but he never really prayed until the Lord saved him. He looked upon prayer as a responsibility which the Lord has laid upon all of us who know Him in salvation. And verse 9, which is the first part of his prayer, makes it very clear that he began praying for the Colossian church when he first heard of the work that the Lord was doing in them, but verse 9 also makes it clear that he had continued praying for them right up to the time that he wrote this letter to them. And we can assume (and I think very correctly) that he continued to pray for them after he wrote to them. When you add the other churches that Paul was concerned about, and the many individuals he prayed faithfully for, we have to say that Paul's life was a life of prayer. And in that he was an example for us to follow.

I am sure that many of the Lord's servants who have been greatly used by the Lord in the past, have been people of prayer. I have mentioned to some of you before that Charles Spurgeon used to meet his people on the streets of London with the question, "Do I meet you praying?" One of Paul's parting words in this Colossian epistle are, "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." This is in Colossians 4:2. But then running on down to verse 12 we come to Paul's commendation of Epaphras, who probably was their Pastor. You can see what Paul said about Epaphras:

Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God (Col. 4:12).

Now what Paul was praying about according to verse 9 doesn't happen over night. In fact, this is a life-long responsibility that is addressed to every child of God. What is it? It was the delightful task of learning all that we can about the will of God. And by the will of God we mean what God wants us to know, and how He wants us to live. Now where are we going to find that information? In just one place: in the Bible, the infallible, unchanging Word of God.

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Now we can't do this on our own. That is why Paul was praying about it. Once a person becomes a Christian, the Bible becomes to him, or her, the most important book that there is. The Bible contains all that God wants us to know about Himself, about Christ, about the Holy Spirit, about ourselves both before and after we were saved. As I reminded you last Sunday, the Apostle Peter wrote in his second epistle that God "hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue" (2 Pet. 1:3). You and I don't need any more teaching than we have in the Bible in order to know God and to be able to live the way He wants us to live. I hope that truth is firmly established in your heart.

Now as we learn from the earlier part of this epistle, the Colossian church was a good church. They were trusting Christ. They loved each other. And they were waiting for the Lord's return. But the gist of Paul's prayer was that he was praying that their love for the Word of God would never diminish, but that it would be increasing all of the time. God has revealed His will about all things in His Word. But how am I going to be "filled with the knowledge of His will "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"?

It begins by reading it. And it continues by continuing to read it. We need to read it all, and there are times, like now, when we need to be reading portions of it over and over. We need to pray that the Lord will teach us as we read. He does this by His Spirit Who is the Teacher of the Word. This is why it is called "spiritual understanding." We need to be as regular in reading the Bible for the nourishment of our souls as we are in eating food for the nourishment of our bodies. We need to desire the Word like a little baby desires its mother's milk. If you don't desire it, ask the Lord to give you that desire. We are all disciples; we are all learners. And there is always much more to learn. It is not unusual for Christians to start out well, reading the Bible and praying, but then something happens that they don't read it regularly, and don't pray, for whatever reason. Then the blessing stops, and their hearts get cold. We need to keep reading, and to keep praying that the Lord will teach us by His Spirit. And the more we understand of the Word, the greater will be our joy and our blessing in our fellowship with the Lord. And the more we will want to learn.

So we are all to be reading the Word, learning the truth, and trusting the Holy Spirit to show us how the Word is to be used in our lives. But what

is to be the practical result of all that I am learning? Let us go on to verse 10 and we will see.

The main burden of Paul's prayer is stated in the words, "that," or, *in order that*, "ye might be filled . . ." But specifically in verse 10 the best translation would be simply "To walk." So that reading the latter part of verse 9 and running into verse 10, we would have this:

"in order that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; to walk worthy of the Lord . . ."

All of our Bible reading and study, and prayer, is primarily designed to effect our walk. What did Paul mean by this word, "walk"? Most of you know that "walk" is a verb brought over into the NT from the OT which speaks of *the way we live*.

The first time we find it in the OT is in connection with Enoch, that he "walked with God." (Gen. 5:22, 24). We are also told that Noah "walked with God" (Gen. 6:9). In Gen. 17:1 God spoke to Abraham and said, "I am the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect." In Ephesians 2:1 Paul indicated that before the Ephesians were saved, the "walked" one way, but after we are saved we walk another way – we walked the way people in the world walk, but after we are saved, we are to walk to please God.

John Eadie, a Scotch Presbyterian Pastor and Bible scholar who lives back in the 1800's described the word "walk" in this way:

It describes the general tenor of one's life, his peculiar gait and progress in his spiritual journey, who are his companions, and what are his haunts (by which he meant the places where he usually goes); whether he holds on his way with a steady step, or is seduced into occasional aberrations (*Commentary of the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians*, p. 24).

The way we as Christians are to live, or walk, is in a manor that is "worthy of the Lord." This means that we are to live the way that we would expect the Lord to live. And we have four major books in the NT which tell us how our Lord lived: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Plus we have a great deal of teaching in the remainder of the NT as to how the Lord Jesus lived on earth. None of us can follow the Lord perfectly, but that is to be our goal. And we need to remember that while the Lord Jesus was here on earth, He said, "I do always the things that please

Him,” speaking of the Father. See John 8:29. Our Lord also said,
38 For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the
will of him that sent me (John 6:38).

The Father’s will for His Son was in many respects very different from His will for us, but basically there are great similarities. Our Lord came to do the Father’s will for the Father’s glory. And those are the guidelines for us. God’s will for us is to be obedient to His will as it is revealed in Scripture.

But Paul describes our walk in another way here in verse 10. He called it “unto all pleasing.” This means pleasing Him in all things. How could the standard for our lives be any higher? And who of us would claim that we have succeeded in doing this? None of us can, and none of us ever will in this life. But that is to be our goal. And how can we know what is pleasing to the Lord? Ah, this takes us back to God’s Word, doesn’t it? The Word tells us what pleases God and Christ, and the Word tells us what displeases them. The Holy Spirit is the only One Who can enable us to please our Lord, and we are going to find out later in this epistle that the Lord Jesus is our life. And so God tells us what pleases Him, and what displeases Him. And we have both our Lord and the Holy Spirit enabling us to live in obedience to Christ, and to God. Whatever pleases Christ, pleases God and pleases the Holy Spirit. And whatever displeases Christ displeases God and displeases the Holy Spirit. And so because we are indwelt and united to Christ and to the Holy Spirit, Paul does not hesitate to say, “unto all pleasing.”

Thus far in Paul’s prayer we have had two important words which begin with the letter *w*. In verse 9 we had the word *will*, God’s will. In verse 10 we have the word *walk*, our walk with the Lord. Now also in verse 10 we come to a third word which begins with a *w*. It is the word *work*. And this is the proper order. The Word comes first. The walk comes second. And the work follows.

Let me remind you of three verses in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians in which he spoke of *works*. Two of the verses are very familiar to most Christians because they have to do with salvation, but it may be that we are not as familiar with the third verse. Here they are. They are found in Ephesians 2:8-10:

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

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10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

We don't work for our salvation. We couldn't if we had to. Salvation is a gift, a gift which none of us deserves. It is ours by God's grace. We don't work up to salvation, but we work from salvation. But notice that we are God's workmanship. Christians are not self-made; they are God-made!

Actually there is a very close relationship between the words *walk* and *work*. We may think of *work* as teaching Sunday School, or preaching a message, or seeking to win people to the Lord, or what we give to the Lord. And these are works. But works include the way we live which the Lord may use to draw others to Christ.

The point that the Apostle Paul was making here in his prayer was that when by God's grace we are walking, or living, as the people of God are expected to live, seeking to please God, or Christ, in all that we do, certain blessings follow which Paul brought out very clearly in the way he wrote these verses. Let me point out what the fruits of a holy life are so that we can look for them in our own lives. Here they are in the order in which Paul mentioned them. There are four specific blessings that we can look for:

- 1) "Being fruitful in every good work" in the middle of verse 10.
- 2) "Increasing in the knowledge of God" at the end of verse 10.
- 3) "Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power" in verse 11.
- 4) "Giving thanks unto the Father" in verse 12.

These are the fruits that are promised to the child of God who faithfully gives himself, or herself, to the study of the Word in order to be able to live to please God. These are some of the prominent characteristics of a life, as Jerry Bridges would say, who is *pursuing holiness*.

"Being fruitful in every good work" describes a person whose life is going to be pleasing to God, and who will be a blessing to others. Have not you seen this in the lives of Christians who really love the Lord and whose lives as such that you enjoy being around them. They are touching peoples lives in ways that they are not aware of. They help others when they do not know that they are being helpful.

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What about the second characteristic of a person who is really walking with the Lord? They are “increasing in the knowledge of God.” This is a person who delights in God. God is a great reality to Him. He reads the Word looking for the Lord, yearning to know more of Him in personal daily fellowship. God enters into his conversation because God is so real to him. And while I am saying “his” and “him,” this also applies “her” and “she.” Some of the most godly people I have met during my life have been women. Often, men, our sisters in the family of God are a way ahead of us when it comes to really knowing God. But what they have is for us too.

But look at the third fruit that you can expect to find in a person who really means business with the Lord, and who lives to please Him. You have it in verse 11. (Read it.)

Doesn't it grieve you that so often we display more weakness in our lives than we do the strength of the Lord. We are always going to be weak in ourselves. But the strength that we need is the strength that is “according to His glorious power.” We don't need our weakness to be turned into strength. What we need is to be strengthened by the Lord, “with all might, according to His glorious power.” But where in the life of a true Christian is God's power to be seen? What did Paul say? Where had he experienced the power of God in his life? Notice the words, “unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness.” This is how we need to think of the power of the Lord, and where we need to look for it. We need patience and longsuffering primarily in dealing with other people; we need it in facing the frustrations and trials that we face in our lives where people may not be involved at all. We often act patiently, but there may not be much joyfulness in it. Our time in the Word, and our time in prayer where we seek the blessing of the Lord, will be where we find the strength to cope with the aggravations of life.

But I have one more blessing for us from our text this morning. It is in verse 12. (Read it.)

I have heard some Christians criticized by others who say that they are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good. But I haven't met many people like that, have you? Just the opposite is true. The person who is the most heavenly minded is the person who is the most earthly good. Why was Paul praying so faithfully for the believers at Colosse? Because he knew that the person who is living to glorify God is the

person who is going to be thankful for what awaits him in glory. With the way things are going in our country, we could be very close to that time when the Lord will descend from heaven and we will be caught up to meet Him in the air. But we must never forget that we have not earned that hope. It is ours by grace. I am looking forward to seeing my mother again. She died in 1953, and my Dad died in 1944. But they are both in heaven. And there are a lot of other people I am looking forward to seeing again. And I don't think there is anything wrong in looking forward to the reunions that will take place. But if we are pursuing our fellowship with the Lord day by day, probably the first thing that we will do when we get to heaven either before the Lord comes or when He comes, will be the desire to do what we should be doing now, thanking our heavenly Father for all He did to make us qualified to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.

Concl: My reaction to Paul's prayer for the believers in Colosse, is that I want to see all of that fulfilled in my life. What an amazing prayer it is! This describes what we all should be doing now, searching the Word to learn the truth that we might live to please our Triune God and to bring glory to Him, that his blessing might be seen in an ever-increasing way in each one of our lives. Paul was praying for that which ought to be true in all of our lives. This is not the exceptional Christian life; this is normal Christian living. It is what God desires for all of us.