

PRAYER, ONE OF PAUL’S FAVORITE SUBJECTS

Colossians 4:2-4

Intro: As I have been seeking to impress upon your minds and hearts each week as we have gone through this delightful and very important letter from the Apostle Paul to the believers in first century Colosse, there is much to be learned by the order in which Paul wrote his letter to them. And it is important to remember this.

Paul always had a doctrinal purpose in the letters that he wrote, and the teaching of the truth was the foundation of the letter. He did not always follow the same pattern in each letter, but this was ordinarily his plan. He usually greeted them, and told how he had been praying for them. And then he got right to the point.

His message in Colossians was the preeminence of Christ – His preeminence in the Gospel, His preeminence in the Church, and His preeminence in the lives of His people. But when it comes to the way we live, we have responsibilities. Godliness does not just happen with us as the people of God. The Lord tells us what to do, and then He gives us the enabling power to do it. Paul said in Colossians 3:4 that Christ is our life, and in Colossians 1:27 he said that “Christ in you” is “the hope of glory.” He is the certain prospect that we will be like Him.

And so in the first four verses of chapter 3 we are told to seek Christ in 3:1, and to set our affections upon Him is to “seek Christ.” We are to be looking for Him in the Word, in the Bible, and in His providential dealing in our lives, and then we are “set our affections” on Him, which means that we are to “think Christ.” We are always to be thinking of Him so that we will be living the way He wants us to live.

A brief account of what the Lord wants us to do, as well as what He does not want us to do, is given to us in the first seventeen verses of chapter 3. These apply to every true child of God. And so as you read those verses, you need to examine your life in the light of what they say. And I need to read those verses applying them to myself. If we are being obedient, we need to thank the Lord for His blessing upon us. If we are failing the Lord at any point, we need to seek His help so that we will live like he wants us to live. And that is a life-long task for all of us. God searches our hearts by His Word. If we are not reading the Word, there is no way for us to tell where we are spiritually – except that the Lord may trouble

our consciences so that we will get back to the Word.

This all takes us down, as I have said, from the first of chapter 3 to verse 17. Then Paul gave the Colossians some other ways in which obeying the Lord is going to make a difference. It is going to make a difference in what we are at home (Col. 3:18-21). It is going to make a difference in what we are “on the job” (Col. 3:22-4:1). And what I want to emphasize with you today is how it is going to affect your prayer life. And next Sunday, the Lord willing, we will see, at least in part, how it will affect our relationship with people who are not Christians, “them that are without” are those who are “without” Christ.

And all of this describes what it means to do what Paul gave as His first practical exhortation which is found in Colossians 2:6. (Read.)

Now this morning I want to examine with you Colossians 4:2 through 4.

And the first thing that Paul said here about prayer, is that you and I and every Christian who has ever lived from then until now must

I. “CONTINUE IN PRAYER” (Col. 4:2a).

Now this exhortation was addressed to every believer in Colosse – to adults, to young people, and even to children who knew the Lord. And down through the years from that day back in the early 60's A.D. and on down to 2009 A.D. it has been a message to all who have been saved through faith in Christ. It applies to me, and it applies to you if you know the Lord.

And Paul stated it in such a way as to indicate that this is what we are to be doing constantly, not just once in a while, but all of the time! The NIV translates this word, “continue,” as “devote yourselves to prayer.” The NASB translates it with exactly the same words, “Devote yourselves to prayer.” The idea is that we are to give the greatest attention to our prayers, but not just as a duty, but as something that we delight in. In other words, the person who is really living in obedience to God, will constantly give priority to prayer as something that he finds the greatest pleasure in doing.

Now this leads me to ask you about how much prayer is a part of your daily life? Prayer is a very personal matter, and you don't need to tell me

how much you pray, but I am asking you so that you will think about it. Do you pray every day, or just when you have some special need to present to the Lord? The Bible says that we are to “pray without ceasing.” Would you say that that describes the place that prayer has in your life? Do you enjoy praying? Is pray just a habit, or is it a blessing to you because you know that prayer, true prayer, is talking to God. I read in a book recently written by a man who has had the opportunity to study the prayer habits of Christians, and he came to the conclusion that many who profess to be Christians do not pray at all. Reading the Bible, would you think from the people that are mentioned there, and reading the prayers that they prayed, that they represent the place that prayer as fellowship with God what your life is? Is the back of our Tableau what you use to keep up with what is going on in other people’s lives here at Trinity, or do you take those requests to the Lord in prayer.

Have you ever asked the Lord to teach you to pray as the disciples asked the Lord to teach them?

You know that there are at least five kinds of prayer that we find in the Bible:

- 1) Worship - when we go to the Lord just to delight ourselves in Him.
- 2) Repentance for sins that we have committed.
- 3) Intercession - when we pray for others.
- 4) Thanksgiving - for answered prayer, and for God’s many blessings.
- 5) Petition – when we bring our own needs to the Lord in prayer.

Often prayer is a combination of all of these.

When the Apostle Paul was saved as he was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians there, do you remember that the Lord told Ananias where he could find Saul, as he was then, and what he would be doing? The Lord said, “For, behold, he prayeth.” As I have said many times, before Paul as a devout Jew had *said* many prayers, but he never really prayed until he knew the Lord. And from that moment on prayer and preaching made up the main portion of Paul’s life.

Read his epistles. He couldn’t write a letter without greeting the recipients with prayer, and often going at some length to tell them what his burden was for them. Look back in chapter 1, and read the last half of verse 2. That is prayer.

Then in verse 3 we see Paul’s thanksgiving for them in the first part of the

verse, and then he told them why he was praying for them, and how regularly he prayed for them. And then when you get down to verse 9 he tells that what his regular prayer for them was. It is a wonderful prayer.

And we learn as we go on in the rest of chapters 1 and 2 that Paul knew that there were false teachers who had their eyes on the church in Colosse, and he wanted them to be so established in the truth of God that they would not be deceived by those false teachers. You see, Paul prayed before he taught, and prayed as he taught, and prayed after he taught. I believe that it is probably true that the condition of the Church of Jesus Christ is where it is today, spiritually down, because of the lack of prayer in the churches for the continued blessing of God upon the reading of the Word and upon the teaching of the Word and upon the application of the Word to the lives of believers.

Even before Paul was saved, we read of the early church,

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:41-42).

A Christian is a person who is trusting Jesus Christ as his Savior from sin. And he manifests that he is a Christian because he prays! And so Paul says to us today, "Continue in prayer."

But there is a second part to Paul's statement:

II. "AND WATCH IN THE SAME WITH THANKSGIVING" (Col. 4:4b).

What does this mean? It means two things. We persevere in prayer, but watchful against anything in our lives that might hinder our prayer, and at the same time to wait fully expecting that the God to Whom we pray, will answer us, and we wait with thanksgiving prepared in our hearts to offer to Him. In other words we are to pray in faith, expecting that God will answer, if not immediately, certainly in his own time. It suggests that doubts and/or fears may hinder our prayers. But if we stand guard over our own hearts, we are prepared to thank the Lord even before the answer comes.

Look at the combination of commands the Apostle put together in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18:

16 Rejoice evermore.

17 Pray without ceasing.

18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

And in Psalm 50:23 we read:

23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God.

We must carefully guard the condition of our hearts before, during, and after prayer, and always remembering that our conversation, or conduct before God, is a vital part of being able to pray effectively.

But then the Apostle Paul added:

III. HIS PERSONAL REQUEST (Col. 4:3-4).

I don't think that the Apostle ever manifested his belief in prayer, and his dependence upon God in answer to prayer more than when he asked prayer for himself, and here he included Timothy because he said, "us."

We are inclined to think that a man like the Apostle Paul, who had had all of the experience that was in his life, would be so self-confident that he would not think of asking anyone to pray for him, especially from people who for the most part, he had never seen. But this is just the point: Paul's experience had taught him how absolutely dependent he was upon the Lord in his ministry, that he was continually asking others to pray for him. You see, the older we get, and the more experience we have, the more we realize the truth that the Lord expressed to His disciples as He walked with them for the last time from the Upper Room to Gethsemane, and evidently walked past a vineyard. Here are His words which I am sure most of you will remember. They are found in John 15:4-5:

4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

It is just as true of the most experienced, the most seasoned man or woman of God, as it is of a newborn babe in Christ, that, as the Lord said to His disciples, "Without Me ye can do nothing"! Here in Colossians 4

the Apostle Paul put himself in the same need as the younger Timothy.

We often ask the Lord to give us the courage to speak to people about the Gospel when we have an open door. But the Apostle Paul asked the Lord to open doors of utterance for himself and for Timothy, “to speak the mystery of Christ” for which he was wearing chains, “that,” as he said, “I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.” His request made him sound just like a beginner, didn’t it? Well, every opportunity was like that for him. He felt just as dependent upon the Lord then, as he had when he first preached the Gospel to whomever it was.

What is “the mystery of the Gospel”? Remember that the word “mystery” as it is used here means *a secret revealed*. It is the completed revelation of Christ, Who He is, His work of salvation on the Cross, and the hope, the certain prospect that we have when we will not only be with Him, but like Him forever.

Concl: But the big question for all of us from these three verses is, What is the condition of my prayer life? Do I have one? Do I pray daily? Do I pray really expecting that God will answer my prayers? Have I seen the vital connection between the need for godly living if I am to experience the blessings of answered prayer? Each one of us needs to answer these questions for ourselves. Hopefully we are learning more about an obedient life which carries with it the prospect of more answered prayers. May the Lord lead all of us to know in our own experience the special joy that comes when we see our prayers answered, and God glorified through them.