

PAUL'S UNCEASING PRAYER

Colossians 1:9-12

Intro: As we read through the epistles of Paul in the NT, we cannot fail to see that he was a man of prayer. By that I mean that prayer occupied a major part of his time each day. And by his exhortation to the church at Thessalonica that they should “pray without ceasing,” we understand that he wanted all of the people of God to give prayer the same place in their lives that he did. He was not saying that he lived every day on his knees. No one can do that. But he meant that he not only had special times each day when he gave himself to prayer, but that as he went about his daily tasks, he was continually seeking guidance or blessing from the Lord as he lifted his heart to the Lord in what we call, ejaculatory prayer. What is ejaculatory prayer? It is a short prayer which we offer suddenly while we are going about our daily tasks. It may be a sudden request for guidance. Or it could be an expression of thanksgiving for some way in which God has protected us, or provided for us. The Bible is full of ejaculatory prayers. Our Lord prayed ejaculatory prayers on the Cross. “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” “Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit.” The Bible ends with an ejaculatory prayer which the Apostle John prayed: “Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” When the Psalmist prayed in Psalm 116:4, “O Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul,” he was praying an ejaculatory prayer. The dictionary defines the verb, ejaculate, as when one throws a dart. We just briefly lift our heart to the Lord in pray just like we might throw a dart into the air.

In order to “pray without ceasing,” we must make great use of ejaculatory prayers. In fact, it is impossible to “pray without ceasing” if we don’t make use of such prayers.

However, ejaculatory prayers are not the only kinds of prayer. We need to have time each day when we can spend extended periods to worship the Lord, to thank Him for His blessings, and to bring our needs and the needs of others to the Lord in prayer.

Paul had many churches on his heart, and he was personally acquainted with many believers in many different places. And he seems to have prayed for them all – not necessarily all on the same day. That probably would have been impossible for him to do. But he regularly got around to praying for them all. How many days this would have taken him, we

cannot say. You and I have many people we pray for. We can't pray for all of them every day, but possibly we have arranged those we pray for into groups so that we can get through our entire list every week, or maybe even every two weeks. We have some people we pray for every day. Others we pray for as we have time. But we can say about those in this latter group that we pray for them "without ceasing" as Paul did for the Colossians here in Col. 1:9.

But Paul probably also meant another thing when said, "For this cause we also [meaning he and Timothy] do not cease to pray for you." He meant that each time he prayed for them, he prayed for them as he prayed said here. He prayed "that [they] might be filled with the knowledge of His," *i.e.*, God's, "will . . . that ye might walk worthy of the Lord . . .," etc. His burden for them was always the same. Day by day these requests represented the ongoing needs of the believers in Colosse, just as they do every believer in the whole Portland-Vancouver area. *He couldn't possibly keep up with every need of every individual believer that he knew, but these were the main areas where every believer needs help every day!*

This is where the prayers of the Bible can be of invaluable help for each of us in our praying for ourselves, our families, our fellow-church members, and believers we know wherever they may be.

Before we look at the requests, let me point out a very interesting point about Paul's praying for this particular church.

From what Paul had to say about this church in verses 3 through 8 of this chapter, the verses we considered together last Sunday, I get the impression, and probably you do too, that this was an almost ideal church. They were trusting Christ. They loved each other. They were looking for the Lord's return. But while they were waiting, the people were growing in the Lord, and they were spreading the Gospel and seeing other people come to Christ. What more could you want in a church? Since time is precious to all of us, and we could always use more time that we have, wouldn't you be inclined to feel that since things were going so well in Colosse, we might not be so concerned about praying for them, but might improve our prayer time by praying for the Corinthian church where they were inundated with problems.

Paul was too wise to do something like that. He knew that where the Lord was blessing, was the very place you could expect the Devil to

attack. And so instead of minimizing the need for prayer in Colosse, he seems to have wanted to concentrate more prayer on that church in order that the blessing of God would continue. And the same applies to individual believers that we pray for. If somebody on your prayer list is really walking with the Lord, gives evidence of loving the Lord and wanting to please the Lord, don't drop them off of your list. Move them up higher, and pray fervently for them every day. The Devil is not going to leave that person alone, and he or she will need even great blessing from the Lord to keep going on with the Lord. I can't explain how our prayers work in with the sovereign purposes of God, but we can leave that with the Lord. What we do know from Scripture is that we all need to be praying, and we need to be praying for each other. After the Apostle Paul told the Ephesian believers about the armor they needed in the spiritual warfare we are all involved in, he said this in Eph. 6:18:

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

So we need to pray, to pray faithfully, to pray fervently, and to pray unceasingly.

Now let us look at Paul's prayer here in Col. 1. It begins in verse 9, but I am not sure where it is concluded. It just flows on and on. In the KJV there is no period until we get down to the end of verse 17. But what Paul was praying that they would do ends in verse 12, so that is where I mark the end of his prayer. Verses 13 down even to verse 18 bring us to the theme of the epistle, as we have seen, to *the preeminence of Christ*.

Verse 9 gives us the one and only request of the prayer. Verse 10, 11, and 12 flow out of verse 9. If verse 9 is not being done, don't look for verses 10, 11, and 12.

What was it that Paul was primarily concerned about in the lives of the saints at Colosse? – and I might add, in the lives of all of the people of God everywhere in all generations. What would he be most concerned about in my life, and in your life?

I. THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL (Col. 1:9).

Paul had introduced this epistle with a reference to the will of God. See it in verse 1: "Paul, an apostle by the will of God . . ." Now in his prayer

he prayed that “[they] might be filled with the knowledge of His will,” that is, God’s will! And in chapter 4 of this epistle, when Paul mentioned the man who many believe was used by God to establish the church at Colosse, he mentioned that Epaphras also prayed for them, and that he, too, was concerned about the will of God in connection with their lives. Note what Paul said about Epaphras in Col. 4:12:

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

Doubtless most of you will remember Paul’s words to the church at Rome regarding the will of God. It is found 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.

How God going to answer this prayer? Before we were saved, we were concerned about doing what we wanted to do. Now that we are saved, we told that we need to “be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Our lives now are to be lived in accordance with His will. But where are we going to find out what God’s will is? There is only one place, and that is in the Bible. God’s will is revealed in His Word.

So, how do we start? By reading the Bible. And how do we continue in our search for the will of God? By continuing to read the Bible. How long do we keep on reading the Bible? As long as we live. And what is our objective? “That ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” Paul was already *praying* and *desiring* (the words are participles in the Greek) that they would keep on making progress toward the full-knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Many Greek scholars believe that the word “spiritual” modifies both “wisdom” and “understanding.” And the word “spiritual” immediately points to the Holy Spirit as the One Who teaches us the Word so that we can know the will of God. “Be filled,” is passive, meaning that it is the Holy Spirit Who fills us. It is our responsibility to be reading the Word, but to read it in dependence upon the Holy Spirit Who leads us into a true understanding of the will of God.

When a person becomes a Christian, and starts reading his Bible, he soon learns that there is a great difference between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. We don't learn it all at our first reading, or the second, or the third, but as long as we live, as we continue reading, we will be learning more and more about the will of God in His Word.

Whenever I run across the word "wisdom" in Scripture, my mind goes immediately to the book of Proverbs. Wisdom is a proper acceptance of the truth of God, how to behave in certain situations, what is right and what is wrong in God's sight. "Understanding" is the ability to use the wisdom of God at the right time and in the right way. But both with wisdom and understanding, we are totally dependent upon the Holy Spirit. That is why it is called "spiritual wisdom and understanding."

So Paul was praying for that which is most basic in the life of every child of God. And yet this is where we all have failed. In these days when life is so full, and our schedules are busy from the time we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night, it is easy for us to neglect the Word of God. We need to guard against that in the strength of the Lord. Nothing will be right if we neglect the reading of the Word, asking the Spirit of God to give us understanding, and then to show us how the Word is to be applied to our lives.

During one of the times that Dr. Bruce Waltke was with us for a series of meetings, in the course of one of his messages he raised the question as to how a man like Solomon, who was one of the wisest men, if not the wisest, who has ever lived, could give us such wonderful wisdom, and then die himself as a fool. The answer that Dr. Waltke gave was in Prov. 19:27. Let me give it to you as it is translated in the NKJV:

27 Cease listening to instruction, my son,

And you will stray from the words of knowledge.

That is what he told his son, and then he did what he told his son not to do. And if it happened to Solomon, it can happen to any of us. We need to hear the truth over and over again. Don't be impatient or resentful if you hear the same truths you have known expounded again. You and I need that. When we start to neglect the Word, and are absent when the Word is being preached, it is only a matter of time until disaster strikes.

This is a point that cannot be emphasized too much. How easy it would have been for the Colossians to feel that the blessings they had experienced in their church, was secure for ever. But it wasn't! The greatest need

that you and I have every day that we live, is the need for the Word. And we need to read it thinking of ourselves, our needs, and how it applies to us. After we have made the application to ourselves, then we may be able to help others in their need for the Word.

After making this powerful request for the Colossians, he went on to mention five results a healthy relationship with the Word under the blessing of the Holy Spirit, will produce in our lives. And if you are truly saved, these are five fruits that I am sure you will want in your life.

II. FIVE RESULTS THE WORD PRODUCES IN OUR LIVES (Col. 1:10-12a).

A. A life that is pleasing to the Lord (Col. 1:10a).

It is significant that faithful attention to the Word of God produces in our hearts an intense desire to please the Lord in all things, and the ability to do it. How do we please the Lord? By doing what He tells us to do, and by not doing what He tells us not to do. Bishop Moule says that “unto all pleasing” means meeting all His wishes. Even when the Word may not address itself to some particular situation, the child of God whose heart is full of the Word, somehow discerns that course of action which is pleasing to the Lord.

The second result:

B. “Being fruitful in every good work” (Col. 1:10m).

Will you notice the order here? Verse 9 says that the Word must come first. The first part of verse 10 says that the walk, a life pleasing to God, will follow. And now here in the middle of verse 10 we have the work. – “being fruitful in every good work.” The Lord uses each of us in different ways, and each one in a variety of ways. It does not mean that every person we speak to will turn to the Lord. Or that we will become well known by our works for the Lord. A work is fruitful if the Lord’s will in that work is done – that we do it for God’s glory, and for the blessing of those to whom we minister, but not for our glory. We do the work that the Lord places before us, leaving the results to Him.

The third result:

C. “Increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10b).

This is our own spiritual growth. A knowledge of God implies a greater understanding of His ways. We often have troubles in our walk with the Lord because we are baffled about some of the things that happen to us, as though they were what Peter called “strange,” things that just don’t seem to add up to us as something that the Lord would do. See 1 Pet. 5:12-13, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing . . .”

The fourth result is:

D. “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power . . .” (Col. 1:11).

What are we strengthened for? “Patience” can also be translated *perseverance*. “Longsuffering” really needs no translation. These words in the NT are often associated with persecution. We have the idea that a life pleasing to the Lord is a life that will be pleasing to people. But that is not true. In fact, just the opposite may be the case: a life pleasing to the Lord may make a lot of enemies for you. But it is from the Holy Spirit and the Word that we are given strength to persevere even under great difficulties when we set our hearts of on living to please God. The Lord does not promise us an easy time, but He enables us to stand when we are fortified by the Word.

Finally,

E. “Giving thanks unto the Father . . .” (Col. 1:12a).

From this point on for several verses Paul spoke of things that we need to be thankful for. We will come to those verses, the Lord willing, at another time. But for the present just notice that giving thanks to the Father (Who is our Father) – that attitude of thanksgiving to the Father is also a product of having a heart and mind that are filled with the Word. This, too, is one place where we manifest that we are very deficient. Every trial is a part of what the Lord is doing to prepare us for our inheritance which is yet to come.

Concl: We are going to find as we go through this epistle, and you know it already, that while Paul was able to rejoice in the present

condition of the Colossian church, he knew that among them were those who would turn them away from the Word of God, and away from the God of the Word, and away from the Lord Jesus Christ. If that happened it would rob them of all of the blessings they were presently enjoying. So what was their safeguard. *It was the Word of God, the Word of God under the ministry of the Spirit of God.* But Paul knew that a letter of warning was not enough to protect the church at Colosse. He knew that only the Lord could make them realize the great danger that they faced from the false teachers, and that only in answer to prayer could the people of the Colossian church be made to realize how important, how absolutely essential, it was for every member of their church to be in the Word daily, seeking to be fortified with the truth of God so as not only to have a strong defense, but in order to be strong in the Lord to overcome all that the Enemy was seeking to do.

Let me ask as I close: Have you been faithful in reading the Word this past week? And before you read, did you ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and bless you as you read, and to show you how what you read could be applied to your own life? We live in a world which has no place for God, nor for the Lord Jesus Christ, nor for the Bible, nor for the Holy Spirit, nor for you and me as the people of God. Paul's prayer is one we ought to memorize, to pray for ourselves, and to pray for each other.

Today is Mother's Day. Be sure to thank the Lord if your mother is still with you. And those of us who have our mothers in heaven, can thank the Lord for what they have meant to us. But let me suggest a gift that those of you who are still living with your parents, could give to your mother, a gift that will last all year. You know, mothers are among the busiest people on the earth. Why not offer to help your mother in some way, doing some of the work that she does, so she can have time to go to her room to read the Word and to pray. She will benefit from it, and so will you because you know that your mother can't go to her knees in prayer without praying for you. May the Lord help all of us to see how much we need to be in the Word every day.