

Lesson 3
PRAYER FOR THE WILL OF GOD
Colossians 1:9-12a

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is the number one weapon the Christian has in his arsenal to fight the battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. Second Corinthians 10:4 says, ***“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”***

Prayer is so basic to being an effective warrior for Christ, yet this is often the most neglected spiritual exercise. Christians often do not know how to communicate with God or even for what they should ask. Prayers can be ritualistic: “God is good; God is great. Thank you for this food!” Or prayer can be a cliché: “Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray the Lord my soul to take.” Or prayer can be trite: “I pray for me, my wife, my son John, his wife; us four and no more.” Real prayer is alive, meaningful, and down to earth. In prayer we see man at his highest and lowest moments. In his highest moments, we see him as a rational creature carrying on a rational conversation with God. In his lowest moments, we see him on his knees confessing his complete and utter dependence on God for all things.

When we read Paul's letter, we see the importance he puts on prayer. When we read Colossians 1:4-14, we sense Paul's commitment to prayer. This prayer is not ritualistic, a cliché or trite. It is vital, alive, meaningful, understandable and spiritual. Paul probably prayed this prayer aloud with his eyes wide open as he paced back and forth in his jail cell with a secretary recording his words. He prays diligently for these Colossians even though he had never met them personally but they were brothers and sisters in Christ.

As Paul prays for the Church of Colosse, it is interesting he did not pray for the numerical growth of that tiny church. He did not pray for more money to come in to carry out their needed building program. He did not pray for the success of their church programs. He prayed that these Colossian Christians might know the will of God for their lives. His prayer was for their spiritual welfare.

REASONS FOR PAUL'S PRAYER (1:9a): ***For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you...*** --When Epaphras, the pastor - teacher of the Colossian Church told Paul in Rome about the situation in Colosse with the Christians, they (Paul, Timothy and others) intensified their prayers for the church. Whenever God burdened their hearts or brought to mind the Colossians, they stopped and prayed for them. Notice the word “we.” Paul and others believed strongly in the power of prayer in groups. There is a dynamic to group prayer that one cannot experience in private prayer. The thing which prompted Paul to begin serious petition is found in the words, “For this reason.” This goes back

to what he had been thanking God for in 1:3-8. What was that?

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The Spiritual Life of the Colossians. Paul thanked God for the faith and the love of the Colossians and their reputation was well known in the province of Asia.

The Gospel the Colossians Received. Paul thanked God that the Colossians had heard the true gospel, believed it and continued to propagate the good news to others. What is the good news? Jesus Christ saves hell-deserving sinners, forgiving their sins, removing guilt, granting a purpose for living and guaranteeing those persons an eternal reward in heaven.

The Life of Epaphras the Colossian Pastor (1:7-8): ***You learned it (the gospel) from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister on our behalf, and who also told us of your love in the Spirit.*** --Paul lastly is thankful for Epaphras who brought the good news to the Colossians.

The bearer of the gospel. Epaphras brought the gospel to the Colossians. He was a faithful witness for Christ.

A dear fellow servant. Epaphras was not just a fellow servant with Paul but a “dear fellow servant.” Paul loved this man because he was loyal to Christ and loyal to Paul. The name “Epaphras” means “handsome”, but it was not because of good looks Paul loved him but because of his love for Christ. In Colossians 4:2, we are told something else about him, “Epaphras, who is one of you and a servant of Christ Jesus, sends greetings. He is always wrestling in prayer for you...” Epaphras was a man of prayer. When Paul found a man who really knew how to labor in prayer, he called him, “Dear Epaphras.”

The prayer life of a Christian is a fairly accurate barometer of his true spirituality.

A story about Charles Haddon Spurgeon reminds me how important it is to wrestle in prayer.

D.L. Moody was visiting Spurgeon. Mr. Moody would never preach at the Tabernacle when Spurgeon was there, but he just loved to sit and listen to the Prince of Preachers exalt Christ and preach the gospel. Moody had Sunday lunch with Spurgeon and then they went to prayer about five o'clock. Mr. Spurgeon began to pray and prayed for two solid hours in absolute agony. After two hours of wrestling with God, Spurgeon got ready for the evening preaching meeting. He perspired so much during that prayer that they had to change all his clothing. Spurgeon was so weak they had to help him to the platform. But when he started to preach, his strength revived and he preached for one hour on the text, “HE WAS DELIVERED FOR OUR OFFENCES AND RAISED AGAIN FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION.” Mr. Moody later commented, “How many people were saved that night we'll never know until we get to eternity.”

A faithful servant. Epaphras was ordained and commissioned by Paul, and he was faithful to his ordination vows. Notice he was not a faithful minister of the elders or of the congregation or of the denomination but a faithful minister of Christ.

A positive man. Epaphras came to Paul in Rome to tell about the Gnostic heresy which was affecting the church. However, when he got there, the first thing he told Paul was about their love in the Spirit. He found more good in his flock in Colosse than he found bad.

This is the whole book of Colossians. Why? These heresies infecting the church were degrading Christ, so Paul puts emphasis on the person and work of Christ not the Holy Spirit.

SUBSTANCE OF PAUL’S PRAYER (1:(b)): *And asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will...* --Paul prays that the Colossian Christians, who are already saved saints and possessed a saving knowledge of Christ, should have a sanctifying knowledge of God's will. The word for knowledge means “full knowledge, clear knowledge, deeper knowledge, mature knowledge.” The Greek word used is *epiginosko* which literally means “upon knowledge” or “higher knowledge.” Paul uses this word because the Gnostic heresy invading that little church at Colosse spoke of superior knowledge which was based on a mysterious, occult knowledge and could only be entered into by secret rituals given to those who were initiated into the Gnostic cult. The words “knowledge” and “wisdom” and “understanding” were all part of the Gnostic cult terminology which set them apart as a spiritual and intellectual aristocracy. What Paul does is take these words of the Gnostics and applies them to a Christian context. Paul is saying a Christian must have a deeper, clearer, higher, more mature understanding of God's will. Paul's point is there is much more for the Christian than just his initial salvation experience. The Christian is always to go deeper.

Christians are told to have a full, clear knowledge of the will of God. Surely this includes a clear understanding of God's providential will for the Christian - where we are to live, what we are to be doing, how we are to serve, where we are to work and many other things. However, the immediate context is that the Christian might have an understanding of the moral will of God for him; that is how God wants us to live and conduct our lives. ***“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*** (Rom. 12:1-2). ***“It is God's will that you should be holy; that you should avoid sexual immorality...”*** (I Thess. 4:3). If the Christian is in fellowship with Christ, living a moral life pleasing to Christ, doing what he is suppose to be doing everyday, it doesn't make much difference where he lives or what job he is in.

When we want to know the will of God, we are not trying so much to make God listen to us as to make ourselves listen to Him. We are not trying to persuade God to do what we want but to find out what He wants us to do. So often our prayers are, “Thy will be changed” rather than “Thy will be done!”

Paul was not satisfied that these Christians would simply have an intellectual command of full, clear, deeper knowledge of the will of God but he wanted them “to be filled” with this knowledge. Knowledge of the divine will was to pervade all their existence – thoughts, affections, purposes, and plans. Christians are to be filled, controlled by, and dominated with the will of God for their lives because apart from Christ there is no meaning or purpose to life.

His Will Through Wisdom. ***Through all spiritual wisdom.*** --Discerning the will of God comes through spiritual wisdom. The word “wisdom” means “the ability to discern the facts.” Where do we get this wisdom? We get it from the Bible.

His Will Through Understanding: ***And understanding.*** --This word seems to imply the ability to apply knowledge to real life situations.

Where do we get the knowledge to apply knowledge to life? In the Bible! We cannot live by truths we do not know. A person may be an intellectual master at theology but be a total failure in living because he cannot apply truth to life.

The difference between wisdom and understanding can be illustrated by the quarterback who was not very smart. He never got to play until the third string quarterback was hurt. The team was backed up to its own 10 yard line. The coach said, “Jimmy, I want you to get out there, run three running plays and punt.” “Huh?” “You heard me - three running plays and then punt.” On the first play, he called a quarterback sneak and made 50 yards. On the second play he called a quarterback roll out and made 20 yards. The third play he called a quarterback draw and made 15 yards. He had taken his team to the opponent’s 5 yard line. So on the fourth play, he punted the ball. He understood the facts, but he did not know how to apply them to a real game situation. He had some wisdom of the game of football but when it came down to the practical application of it, he was deficient in understanding.

PURPOSE FOR KNOWING GOD'S WILL (1:10a)

To Live a Life Worthy of the Lord: ***And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord...*** --The reason Paul wants the Colossians to know God's moral will was that they might lead a godly life of which their Lord approves. We don't live perfectly and we never feel worthy in ourselves, but we can live a life which Christ approves. All Christ wants is for the Christian to walk consistently with his high position in Christ.

Paul makes it very clear there is no dichotomy (cleavage) between knowledge and practice. Right knowledge will lead to right practice.

To Please the Lord: ***And may please him in every way,*** --We are to seek to please the Lord in everything we do, say or think. The Christian is to live life to bring satisfaction to Christ, to bring joy to his heart.

As Christians, we cannot please everybody. If we try to please everyone, it is because “we like to be liked” and want to be popular. Sometimes the Christian cannot be popular if he is going to please the Lord. As much as is in us, we want to live peaceably with all men but sometimes we cannot because to do so we must compromise truth.

This last week Tim Spillman and I rode to presbytery together. He told me an interesting story. Tim and Stephanie were at her folks for dinner. All of her folks claim to be Christians, but all attend very liberal Presbyterian churches. The discussion at the table got around to the movie “Ghandi.” Almost everyone agreed that Ghandi would be in heaven because of his good works, and, of course, all they knew about Ghandi was from the movie. They knew nothing of his adulterous relationships and political shenanigans. Tim spoke up and said, “I do not believe Ghandi will be in heaven because he was not a Christian, and to say he was would be to declare that someone could get to heaven apart from the Cross.” Immediately the whole family turned on him and began to call him narrow, a fundamentalist, lacking in love and so forth. Even a brother and sister who are evangelicals sided with the family because they wanted peace at all costs. Tim was right and in this case could not live peaceably with non-Christians.

RESULTS OF LIVING A LIFE PLEASING TO CHRIST (1:10a-12a)

Bearing Fruit: ***Bearing fruit in every good work***, --Paul goes on to describe the evidences of one who is living a life to please the Lord. One of the marks of a Christ-pleased person is that he is bearing fruit. The fruit bearing refers to works, praise, prayer, righteousness, good deeds, kindness and works of sharing Christ. The Christian is to be continually, constantly and presently doing good works. Good works do not save the Christian - only faith in Christ as Lord and Savior saves. However, good works give proof and demonstrate the reality of saving faith in one’s life. The Apostle James in essence said, “No works as a Christian then no saving faith!” Paul argued that we are not saved by works, but that we cannot be saved without works. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” (Eph. 2:8-9).

Growing in Knowledge: ***Growing in the knowledge of God***, --In 1:9, Paul prayed for God to fill the Colossians with the knowledge of God's will, but now he prays that the Colossians would be continually growing in the knowledge (full knowledge, high knowledge) of God himself - not just His will but His person, deepening in a full knowledge of who God is not just what He does. No Christian can reach any real depths of maturity until he falls deeply in love with the person of God - ever increasing in knowledge of God, not merely of His things or His will but of Himself. “This is what the LORD says: ‘Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts, boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,’ declares the LORD.” (Jer.

Being Strengthened with Power: ***Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience with joy,*** --Another mark of a way a Christian pleases the Lord is to be calling upon the power of God in the life to deal with all adversaries and circumstances. Christians are to be habitually using God's power. Apart from supernatural power, we are incapable of performing any spiritual act. We can do what appears to be spiritual in the flesh, but they are in reality carnal acts in the flesh. Philippians 4:13 says, ***"I can do everything in the strength of him who makes me strong."*** (TCNT), or my own translation is, "I can do all things in Christ who keeps on pouring power into me." This power is available to us "according to his glorious might." Not "out of" but "according to." A multi-millionaire might give a large donation out of his financial resources which would look large but be very small according to his total assets. However, if he gave a person one-thousand blank but signed checks and said, "sign for whatever you need or want," then he would be giving according to his seeming unlimited riches. We Christians draw from God's unlimited power bank. God not only tells us His will but gives us the power to accomplish that will. The greatest problem in life is not what to do (most of us have an indication of that) but to do it. The problem is always putting knowledge into action. We can only do that by calling upon God's infinite power by faith.

The purpose for receiving this supernatural power is not for great displays of spirituality, not for mighty acts of evangelism, not for charismatic manifestations; but for "endurance" and "patience." "Endurance" is to stand for Christ under the trials of circumstances - trouble with things. "Patience" is to stand for Christ when we face the anger, malice, hatred and wrath of man -trouble from people.

We need power not only to endure and show patience but to do it with joy. Power from God gives us the ability to endure not with a grim and glum spirit of resignation but with joy. There is supernatural power but it must be appropriated by faith.

Giving Thanks: ***Giving Thanks to the Father...*** --The last mark of a Christ-pleasing person is that he has a spirit of thankfulness about life. "Be joyful always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." (I Thess. 5:16-18).

I have a charismatic Christian brother who, whenever any crisis comes, will shout out, "Praise God, hallelujah, thank you, Lord. Amen!" I nicked named him, "Praise God, Hallelujah, Amen, John." At first he seemed weird to me but as I grow older I realize he was just verbalizing what God has commanded him to do in Scripture.

CONCLUSION

For you without Christ, would you like to know about supernatural power - power to defeat sin, to change a lifestyle, to break a habit, to restore a positive self-image, to reconcile enemies and to make life an exciting, positive and thrilling experience? You can know this power but it comes through Jesus Christ.

You need Christ to forgive you, to cleanse you, to bring you to God, to save you before He will grant you this supernatural power.

The moment you receive Jesus as your Savior from sin and acknowledge Him as Lord of your life, giving Him the right to rule over you, you will be saved. Then supernatural power will be available to you to claim by faith.