

Colossians – July 20th, 2014 – Colossians 1:9-14

Last week, we saw, in verses 3-8, that without hesitating a moment, Paul dove into responding to the Colossians concerns regarding whether or not they were already true believers and whether or not they had already received the full teaching about Christ.

His points to them were that they had come to believe things and do things that do not come natural to human beings. Thus, their own lives already bore witness to the fact that God was involved with them, had accepted them, and that they were already in a vibrant relationship with God Almighty.

These facts about what God was doing in the Colossians' lives brought tremendous joy into Paul's heart. When Paul himself was commanded by King Agrippa to give an account of what Paul thought he was doing, preaching Jesus to Gentiles, Paul summed up his ministry in Acts 26:18 by saying to King Agrippa, Jesus sent me to the Gentiles, 'to open their eyes so that they might turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they might receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in God.' Hence, to see this happening across Asia, and specifically, in the city of Colossae, brought Paul intense satisfaction. The Jews had always been God's chosen people, but now the door had been opened to all men and Paul was at the center of that!

Paul's happiness about this turn of events is part of the explanation for Paul's exultant prayers for the Colossians. It has been said by many that the next six verses of this book, which recount the content of Paul's prayers for the Colossians, teaches us more about the essence of a Christian's prayers for other saints, than almost any other passage in the New Testament. Have you ever wanted to pray for a friend, a relative, a Christian acquaintance, but didn't specifically know details of their life and therefore, didn't know for what exactly to pray? Paul's prayer in this passage provides a model for that situation. Obviously, if we know specific needs of a person's life, we can pray for those needs. Short of knowing that, here is a prayer that expresses the heart of prayer's concerns for others.

The essence of prayer's request 1: 9-14

The structure of Paul's prayer is difficult to work through. It is typical Paul, sort of a rambling array of comments that is difficult to follow, yet rich with content and important detail, worthy of our attention if we can struggle through the sentence construction.

The outline of Paul's prayer for the Colossians follows. Paul asks that:

Vs. 9 ñ God would fill them with the knowledge of His will as it relates to:

- a. **spiritual wisdom**
- b. **understanding**

Vs. 10a-b ñ they are to have **spiritual wisdom and understanding**, 'so that you may live life worthy of the Lord, pleasing Him in every way'

Vs. 10c-12 ñ If a person were to be filled with God's spiritual wisdom, understanding, and if they were to live in a way that pleases the Lord, FOUR things would result

Vs. 10c ñ the Christian would be 'bearing fruit in every good work'

- Vs. 10d ñ the Christian would be growing in the knowledge of God
- Vs. 11 ñ the Christian would be strengthened by God, with power, so as to have:
 - a. endurance (in circumstances)
 - b. patience (with people)
- Vs. 12 ñ and be able to joyfully give thanks

What we might call the asking part of the prayer ends in 12a. Paul now gives reasons why they (and we) can be joyfully thankful to God.

- Vs. 12b ñ they, and we, have been qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints
- Vs. 13a ñ they, and we, have been delivered from the domain of darkness
- Vs. 13b ñ they, and we, have been transferred to the kingdom of Jesus
- Vs. 14a ñ and in Jesus, there is redemption
- Vs. 14b ñ and in Jesus, there is forgiveness

What do these words of Paul really mean? What is he saying?

The prayers of a saint for his friends are precious, and that is what we hear in this passage. As we examine the details of Paul's words, a better understanding of his prayer shines forth.

Vs 9 ñ When Paul says in verse 9, be filled with the knowledge of His will, in regards to spiritual wisdom and understanding, he means this.

So often in prayer, we are really saying to God, Thy will be changed, when we ought to be saying, Thy will be done. Imagine this prayer, "Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be changed, i.e. to what my will is!" **Get it!!** We frequently don't want God's will to be done; we want our own will to be done, which we secretly think is superior to God's will; since we think we know more than does God regarding what is best for us! But Paul prays for, and calls us, to an understanding and recognition of God's will in our life, and to a submission to it. He asks that God will reveal His will for our lives to us.

But what does that mean in terms of practical living in daily life. Paul tells us. Linked to knowing God's will in verse 9 are two other words; "spiritual wisdom" (Greek is sophia) and "understanding" (the Greek is sunesis). With these two words, Paul has explained what he means to know God's will. "Sophia" defines the state of having knowledge of "first principles," or knowledge of the basics. "Sunesis" is what the Greeks described as "critical knowledge," meaning, the ability to apply first principles (i.e. the basic truths about Christianity) to any situation that may arise in life. So when Paul prays that the Colossians might have wisdom and understanding, he is praying that they may understand the great truths of Christianity and may be able to apply them to the tasks and decisions which meet them in everyday living. Or said another way, that the Colossians will know God's will for how they should act in regards to every situation they encounter every day in life. As in:

- How do you respond to the guy that just cut you off in traffic
- How do you respond to the dirty look that came from the person you just cut off in traffic
- How do we respond to unjust criticism
- How do we respond to accolades and glory that comes our way
- What is our work ethic

The proper response in these and all circumstances we encounter constitutes the goal expressed in Paul's prayer as seen in verse 9.

Vs. 10 ñ As we live according to the tenants expressed in verse 9, we find ourselves treating people as Christ would treat them; with dignity, Christian love, justice, which is what Jesus

wants all of us to do, even in dealing with those whom we find disagreeable. When we do so, we are emulating our Lord's treatment of others and it pleases Him when we do that. As Paul says here in verse 10, this type of lifestyle is "worthy of the Lord, and pleases Him in all respects." [Note to Jim: tell story of John and his son Greg. How John told his son to remember what his last name was when he was working for me. Also, review the Alexander the Great story and his treatment of the cowardly soldier.]

In the same way, Jesus also wants to be proud of His children, i.e. us, the Christians. So Paul calls for us to walk in a way that is worthy of our name, of our calling.

Vs. 10c-12 "Increasing in the knowledge of God" (10c). What is Paul's ultimate goal for the Colossian Christians as seen in this prayer? His goal is for their **Christian maturity**. Parents don't stand over their new born baby yelling at the 3-day old for not being potty trained. None of us have Christ-like maturity as new Christians; it takes time to grow spiritually, like the crab walk on the beach. But spiritual maturity is what Paul, and Jesus, wants for the Colossian believers.

Just as a weight lifter discovers, the more weight you lift, the larger your muscles grow, the larger your muscles grow, the more weight you can lift, the more weight you lift, the larger your muscles grow, etc., in the same way, the more we enact God's principles for life into our daily existence, the more we learn of Him, the more power for living we incur, the more Christian character develops, at least that is the way it is supposed to be.

Hence, as we gain an understanding of God's will, vs. 9, and as we live that out in our daily life with "spiritual wisdom and understanding" (again vs. 9); and as we live in a way that pleases the Lord and is worthy of Him (vs. 10a-b), **four results take place**, that is, four additional qualities develop (like the increased muscle from increased weight lifting). Here are the results that come from living verses 9 and 10: a.) "bearing fruit in every good work," b.) "growing in the knowledge of God," c.) "we are strengthened by God with power," and d.) "able to joyfully give thanks."

Vs. 10c "bearing fruit in every good work" simply means that our kindness, compassion, patience, forgiveness of those who wrong us becomes deeper and more second nature to us, that is, our fruit, referred to here, IS our coming forth with increased "good works."

Vs. 10c "growing in the knowledge of God" means that our relationship with Him deepens, knowledge of His ways and His trustworthiness increases, the relationship all becomes more meaningful to us, more intimate, more personal and important.

Vs. 11 "strengthened with all power" is an interesting aspect of the Christian life. Phil 2:12-13 helps explain this phrase. It shows that it is God who is infusing the Christian with "desire" to do what is right and the "energy" to do so. God helps us in our walk as a Christian by supplying the will and strength to live for Him.

Interestingly enough, Paul says here that the "strength" that God infuses into the Christian is designed to help the Christian attain unto something, "all steadfastness" (vs. 11) and "patience" (vs. 11). "Steadfastness" and "patience" are two great Greek words which often keep company with one another. Steadfastness is *hupomeno* and patience is *makrothumia*.

Hupomeno is translated as "steadfastness," or "endurance," and literally means "abiding under." *Hupo* = "under" and *meno* = "to abide or reside." Thus, to remain under a trial in such a way as to deal triumphantly with anything that life can do to us, "endurance" in all circumstances.

Matrothumia is translated as "patience" or long-suffering. It basically has "people" in mind and is the quality that enables a person to bear with people in their unpleasantness and maliciousness and cruelty in a way such as will not drive us to ultimate bitterness, despair, or hopelessness.

So Paul prays for *hupomeno*, the fortitude that no situation or circumstance can defeat, and *makrothumia*, the patience which no person can ultimately defeat. God can strengthen us in such a way as we mature that our endurance in events and patience with people can be indestructible.

Vs. 12 "joyfully giving thanks to the Father." This fourth quality that comes as a result of living out verse 9 in a way that pleases God is truly a byproduct of living for Christ. We cannot force "joy" into our existence. It results from knowing the Lord God and His ways. It is a sunny-hearted attitude towards life, an inner radiance that is joyful in any circumstance.

How is it that anyone could have a joyful thankfulness to God regardless of outward circumstances? Paul reviews the reasons why to the Colossians (and to us):

Vs. 12b "they have been qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (NIV). Wow! The spiritual kingdom of God is a kingdom of "light." The first privilege that they have is this; there has been given to the Gentiles a share in the inheritance of the chosen people of God. The Jews had always been God's chosen people, but now the door has been opened to all men, even those in Zionsville, Indiana. It wasn't merited; it was a gift, a "qualification" that God enacted.

Vs. 13a "they, and we, have been delivered from the domain of darkness. Life without Jesus is darkness, men stumble and grope, not knowing what to do, as if walking in the darkness. "Evil" more easily operates in the "dark." Life is lived in the shadow of doubt and in the darkness of ignorance. From this dark oppression, the Colossians have been delivered!

Vs. 13b "He transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son." They, and we, have been transferred to the kingdom of Jesus. The word Paul uses for "transfer over" is *methistemi*, a military term. When one country conquered another in ancient days, it was the custom to take the population of the defeated country and transfer it lock, stock, and barrel to the conqueror's land. God transferred the Christian to God's own kingdom.

- 1.) This meant transference from darkness to light.
- 2.) This meant a transference from slavery to freedom, a "redemption" (buying back) (vs. 14). "In Christ, we have redemption."
- 3.) This meant a transference from condemnation to forgiveness (vs. 14). "In Christ, we have forgiveness of sins." Man in his sin deserves nothing from God but condemnation, but through the work of Jesus Christ man discovers God's love and forgiveness. The Christian is no longer condemned as a criminal but is now a lost son for whom the way home is always open.

No wonder Paul declares that in spite of circumstances, in spite of the mistreatment that we may experience at the hands of other people, still, the possibility of joyfully giving thanks to the Father in all situations is not only possible, it is likely, when we reflect on the glorious truths that Paul has just described.