

Text: Colossians 1:9-12

Title: Prayer for Maturity

Truth: The Christian must know God's will and walk worthy of Him.

Date/Location: Sunday July 5, 2015 at FBC

Introduction

In verses 3-8, the apostle who had never seen the Colossians face to face told them that he prays regularly for them—giving thanks to God because of their faith, love, and hope. He is thankful that the good news is bearing fruit and growing out from their city.

I. Paul's Further Prayer

A. In verses 9-14, he explains more about his prayer for the Colossian church, reporting that he has not stopped praying for them since Epaphras came with the news of their faith.

B. We should realize two things about this prayer.

1. The things for which Paul prays are not just random nice things.

Rather, they are the specific things that he knows the church really needs. Based on the report he has heard, he has ascertained that these areas of Christian maturity are what the Colossians need most. They should have perked up their ears when they heard what he was praying for them, because this told them just what they needed to bring into focus in their Christian lives.

2. The things that Paul prays for are the things he thinks are important.

And I see that he does not pray for their physical comfort or success in career or other mundane things. By way of application, I venture to say that **what you pray for shows what you think is most important**. Sometimes people request us to pray for them, and I “augment” or “adjust” the request in accordance with what I sense is the more important need attached to that request. Perhaps the prayer has to do with health or a job; but maybe the more important need is for patience or diligence or growing in faith through trials, or whether you should even be working outside the home at all! These things can be easy to overlook when you are in the midst of a busy life and just doing things the way you always have done them.

c. There are two key verbs in the content of the prayer on which the essential message hangs. These two also form a high-level outline of the entire book of Colossians.

II. Filled with the Knowledge of God's Will, 1:9 → 1:15-2:23

A. Knowledge.

1. This one little word has generated some controversy, because it is “epi-gnosis.” It has been supposed by some that it most certainly refers to a fuller kind of knowledge than just plain old “gnosis.” Some have defined the word used here as a more intensive form, or fuller, experiential knowledge as opposed to simple head knowledge. I concluded a study that I did some years ago on these words with this:

The primary extra-Biblical source material does not demand that “epi-gnosis” always means more than its non-prefixed counterpart. However, the prefixed form is not indistinguishable from the non-prefixed form either. The word “epi-gnosis” can mean fuller knowledge, because of the words surrounding it, but there is nothing inherent in the word that forces it to be used exclusively in that manner. Nevertheless, the NT does seem to use “epi-gnosis” in a slightly more nuanced fashion than earlier Greek literature. There are several ways in which the word is used: sometimes it is synonymous with “gnosis,” other times it refers to true Christian knowledge, and other times it relates to salvation.

Bottom line? True Christian knowledge is not merely academic or book-knowledge. It is real, actualized knowledge. Now, about what?

2. The cults often indicate that you can have some kind of special knowledge if you get into the teachings of this or that special person. Sometime after Paul's writing, the gnostic heresy grew in influence. It said that by obtaining their special type of knowledge you could achieve a higher or more “spiritual” existence. The common denominator of these cults is that they are almost entirely disconnected from knowing God's word, or have just enough of a connection to it to be alluring.
3. This knowledge Paul prays us to have concerns the will of God. God's will is not a mystical thing which you hope to have revealed to you as you go along through life. Rather, it is found in Christ (Col. 2:3) and in turn, in the Bible. A thorough study of God's word will bring you to a thorough knowledge of God's will. The man or woman who knows the Bible the best—and again I mean not just academically—will be the one who knows God's will for his or her life the best.

B. Filled. What we have discussed above is the content with which Paul wants you and me to be *filled*. He wants us to be actually overflowing with this knowledge and actually be effected by it. Just like when we say someone is “full of wine” we refer to the wine’s effect, so we mean similar when we say someone is “filled with the Spirit,” or “filled with the knowledge of God’s will.” The filling indicates an impact of that knowledge into real-life practice.

C. Spiritual Wisdom and Understanding.

1. The filling engages the complete mind of the believer. Our mental equipment is put to maximum use in order to live in a way that shows wisdom and understanding. Christianity does not require or even want you to leave your mind behind; it requires a full engagement of the mind to the task of knowing and skillfully applying the Word of God to specific situations.
2. The “spiritual” part of both wisdom and understanding indicates **first** the source of this wisdom, the Holy Spirit who inspired the words of Scripture and moved the men who were apostles and prophets; **second** the teacher who helps us apply it, the same Spirit but as He indwells and illuminates us; and **third** the contrast of this wisdom from that of the world. We do not follow the wisdom of this world. A classic “non example” of this is when a Christian church or school hires non-believing advisors to tell it how to “brand itself” or “advertise” or whatever. Those people have no idea what the church is about or how it is to work. We cannot find godly wisdom by going to ungodly sources!

III. Walk Worthy of the Lord, 1:10-12 (and 13-14) → 3:1-4:6

This prayer request logically follows the first, as a worthy walk is not possible without proper Christian knowledge. Paul, in other words, prays that we would be filled with the knowledge of God’s will **so as to walk worthy** of God or **so that you may walk worthy** of God. This is like the ESV or NIV translations, which do good job at this point.

You are familiar with the idea that “walking” means “living.” It has to do with your conduct. Worthy conduct is that which “fits” being a Christian and being in the family of God. It is not how you get into salvation; it is how you live after you have salvation.

The Christian is naturally concerned with how his or her life may please the Lord. Paul is praying for that here. But how? Four ways are specified clearly in the text by four participles (“-ing” words):

- A. Bearing Fruit. The first way that a life filled with the knowledge of God’s will is exhibited is through bearing fruit in good works. This is a wide-open expression that is not limited to certain kinds of good works—as long as they are truly “good” in the sight of God and done in a way that demonstrates the product of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).
- B. Increasing in (or by?) Knowledge. The Christian is like a fruit tree that can bear fruit one time, grow more, and bear more fruit the next time. Our life should not be like an “annual” flower that bears fruit and dies, but rather be like a “perennial” and can spread and grow and produce more fruit every year. Actually, we should not even think in those terms because there should be no winter in the Christian’s life! We should be more like a tropical fruit tree that always produces and always grows!
- C. Being Strengthened. This strength comes from the Holy Spirit (Eph. 3:16). It is in connection with patience and longsuffering, which will be needed in your life if you really are living for God. Furthermore, the resources of this strength come from God’s omnipotent and glorious power. That power raised up Christ from the dead (Eph. 1:19) and it is available to work in our lives today. You may think some things are hard to face in your Christian life, but probably not so much if God’s strength is applied!
- D. Giving Thanks to God
1. We ought to give thanks to God because He is at work to enable and help us to walk worthy. Additionally, we have the privilege to participate. We thank God because He doesn’t leave us in the dark about His will; because He helps us live properly; and because He strengthens us.
 2. Also, we give thanks because God has given us the qualifications we need to share a portion of the inheritance that belongs to believers. “In the light” is a phrase that might throw you for a loop. Often light symbolizes holiness and purity, as with God or the presence of God (1 John 1:5). But the word saints already indicates separateness from sin and the world. So perhaps light is indicative of the location of believers in the future heavenly state. We have a share in that!
 3. A thankless walk is not a worthy walk (2 Tim. 3:2, Rom. 1:21)!

Conclusion

The remainder of Colossians is about the right kind of Christian knowledge and the right kind of Christian practice. Let’s put into practice that which we have studied thus far and look forward to more!

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