

**Lesson 3: “The Essence of Prayer” Colossians 1:9-12 Craig Crawshaw**

**Colossians 1:9-12** *For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.*

**THE GREAT PRAYER FOR OTHERS**

In today's passage, Paul offers a prayer for the church at Colossae. And in so doing he instructs us in the essence of how best to pray for our loved ones and brothers and sisters in the Lord. If we be honest with ourselves, our prayers for others usually focuses on physical needs – health, protection and well-being. And although these are of daily importance, they are not as critical as the spiritual needs of eternal importance.

The disciples asked Jesus, “teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). And in this passage of Colossians we can learn prayer from the Lord through the prayer of Paul, considered by many to be Paul's most precious prayer recorded in Scripture.

This is not to say that this passage alone teaches us how to pray. We learn prayer from many wonderful passages of Scripture. √ The bulk of the 150 Psalms teach us that we can talk to God with any emotion of hurt, pain, frustration, discouragement or even anger, as well as with joy and praise of thanksgiving. √ And no Psalm teaches us more about worship of our great shepherd, Jesus, than the beloved 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm. √ Jesus Himself taught us how to pray to our Heavenly Father in His Sermon on the Mount in what we call “The Lord's Prayer.” Here we learn the basics of praise, submission and petition for daily needs, forgiveness and protection. √ And in the Savior's upper room prayer in John 17 we learn the heart of Jesus for His church, praying for our unification, sanctification and glorification. But it is in today's passage of Colossians that we best learn how to pray for one another's deepest spiritual needs.

**THE PRAYER'S OPENING**

*“For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you...”*

*“For this reason also”* refers back to “the Word of truth, the gospel” in verse 5, and then what follows. It is the Word of truth, the Bible, and specifically the gospel message of Christ's death and resurrection to save the world that inspires Paul to pray this prayer for others. And likewise, this should be our primary motivation to pray for others – that the power of the gospel message might ignite in their hearts.

*“Since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you,”* taken literally, might lead us to think that Paul was not praying for the Colossians before he received the report from pastor Epaphras, and then when he received the report he began to pray for them without stopping. But of course, that doesn't seem reasonable. Rather, the inference should be that from the moment of the report from Epaphras that there were concerns of heresy at Colossae, Paul began to pray all the more fervently, and as often as the Lord prompted him. We can relate, for when we hear of an urgent need we begin to pray with urgency and frequency. And well we should. That certainly is the meaning here.

**THE 2 PRIMARY REQUESTS**

Here Paul's prayer is one run-on sentence, which extends all the way through verse 15! I guess Paul was just excited to share this message. Commentators differ on how many requests he makes – 5, 7 or more. But I see two primary requests with multiple sub-points to explain and expand the two:

1. That they might know God's **WILL** for them  
*"to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will"*
2. That they might walk **WORTHY** of the Lord  
*"that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord"*

Are these not in essence what should be the two continual desires of any sincere Christ-disciple? - (1) To do God's will and (2) to please God in the fulfillment of that will. So would we not want to pray these for those we love above all else? The Greek word translated "knowledge" here is "*epignosis*," which means a super-knowledge. The Gnostic heresy in Colossae claimed to have a super-knowledge, though it was contrary to Scripture. Here Paul makes it clear that the only "super-knowledge" comes from asking God, the giver of true "super-knowledge."

**The first of these two supreme requests** we learn from our Savior when He prayed in the garden of Gethsemane immediately before His arrest. You recall Jesus prayed, and thus taught us to pray, "*Not my will but Yours be done*" (Luke 22:42). This prayer should be the heart-beat of every request we utter, whether it be for direction, healing, provision or protection. With this proviso of "Your will, not mine," we have every right to request, but never a right to demand or claim. The so-called "name it and claim it" philosophy of many religious leaders had no place in the prayers of Jesus, nor should they have a place in our prayers. We must ever submit to the will of the Father, as did Jesus. And as we submit to Him, we trust and believe that "Father knows best!" After all, hear God's own words through the prophet Isaiah:

**Isaiah 55:8** *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."*

**The second of these two supreme requests** are taught many places in the New Testament epistles, but never more clearly than in Ephesians 4:1.

**Ephesians 4:1** *Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called.*

This particular Scripture is the pivotal verse of the book of Ephesians. Preceding it are the 3 chapters of doctrine that give us our great calling as believers. And following it are the 3 chapters of practical teaching on how to walk the walk that is worthy of that high calling. As representatives of the King of kings and Lord of lords, we are ever and always to be men and women of integrity, grace and moral character in all our intentions, actions and reactions. Thankfully, we have the indwelling Spirit to aid us in that daunting task!

## **THE 2 SUB-POINTS TO KNOWING GOD'S WILL**

Our text reads: "*to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*" I think we all realize the difference between knowing what is God's will and having the wisdom and understanding to faithfully carry it out. Yes, we want to know God's will, and His Word unfolds it to us. But we must "know" and then obey. So I see the two clarifying sub-points of knowing God's will as:

1. **Wisdom** (Gk: *sophia*) – application of knowledge skillfully to any given situation
2. **Understanding** (Gk: *sunesis*) – comprehension of knowledge – truly appreciating the depth of it's meaning

So as you pray for others to know God's will, these two will clarify and specify your request. How do we come to understand the will of God and learn to apply it in wisdom and understanding? - by the Word of God, the Bible. In the Bible God has given us His will for us. He has given us the doctrine He wants us to know, as well as the practical instructions for how to walk worthy of our calling, living out that will.

## THE 7 SUB-POINTS OF WALKING WORTHY OF THE LORD

You can find each of the following as you examine our passage. They are each requests of Paul for the Colossians, amplifying the request of walking worthy of the Lord. We could say that these are the primary ways we can walk that worthy walk.

- √ *PLEASING God as a decision by decision goal ("to please Him in all respects")*
- √ *FRUITFUL in every good action ("bearing fruit in every good work")*
- √ *KNOWING God more each day ("increasing in the knowledge of God")*
- √ *STRENGTHENED to do our best ("strengthened with all power")*
- √ *STEADFAST - unwavering and triumphant in faith and duty*
- √ *PATIENT – not letting the many frustration of life get to you*
- √ *THANKFUL – ever grateful to God for His many blessings ("joyously giving thanks")*

The Colossians did not need a new spiritual experience. They needed to grow in the spiritual experience they already had been given. And so it is with us. We often wrongly seek a new spiritual manifestation, or a deeper experience. But Jesus said in Matthew 16:4 that *"a wicked and adulterous generation demands a sign."* Then he went on to say that the only sign they would receive was the sign of the prophet Jonah, referring to His ultimate resurrection from the dead. And we believers need to grow in the spiritual experience we already have been given in resurrected life with God.

## IN REMINDER AND TO PRACTICE

How precious that God would let us hear the heartbeat of Paul's prayer for the people of Colossae. Not just that we would know his prayer for them, but also that we would have an excellent example of how we could and should pray for those we love.

1. For them to be filled with the knowledge of God's **WILL** for their life, with **UNDERSTANDING** – comprehending the richness of what God desires, and then having the **WISDOM** to apply it in everyday situations
2. For them to walk **WORTHY** of the Lord – striving to **PLEASE** Him, and bearing good **FRUIT** in every deed. And for them to increase in **KNOWING** God more each day, and **STRENGTHENED** to do their very best. May they be **STEADFAST** in their faith, and **PATIENT** with others, always being **THANKFUL** to God for His many blessings.

Let's say a prayer like this for someone we love right now, to begin the practice of doing so more often! Thank you Lord, for teaching us to pray.