

SPIRITUAL GROWTH
(SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14, 2014)

Scripture Reading: Psalm 111; Col. 1:9-14

INTRODUCTION

Imagine you were writing a letter to encourage recently converted believers. How would you encourage them based on how you were praying for them?

It is amazing to consider that the believers Paul was addressing had not been Christians for very long. We know this based on the timing of Paul's ministry in Ephesus and when we believe he wrote this letter.

This is a church that had been in existence for around 5 or 6 years.

The depth of words found in Paul's prayer stands out doesn't it? There is nothing shallow or trivial in what he has written.

Though nothing that Paul says is mysterious or beyond our understanding, it is a challenge to try to summarize our text.

We are going to give attention to Paul's prayer in terms of its main request and other details. We then will consider the summary of God's gracious work of salvation presented in the final verses, the great work of the Father and Son.

What a great salvation and calling we have been given.

Is there clear evidence of spiritual growth in your life?

1. COL. 1:9-12 – PAUL'S PRAYER AND WHAT YOU SHOULD DESIRE

Col. 1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; **10** that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; **11** strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; **12** giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

How can we outline or summarize Paul's prayer for the Colossians in these verses?

First, we observe that Paul regularly and frequently prayed for the Colossians. Obviously Paul and Timothy did not or could not pray for the Colossians *constantly*, but Paul must have devoted significant time in prayer for those he knew directly and for others he loved but had not met personally.

Eph. 1:15-16 Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers:

The word reason in verse 9 is connected with what we observed last week from verses 4-8.

Paul specifically gave thanks for the faith, love, and hope of the Colossian Christians.

Second, we can see a structure or outline in Paul's prayer in part based on what we see in our English translations and even more in the original Greek.

Paul's **main request** is that the Colossians be filled with the knowledge of God's will.

The **means** of this is by having all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

The **purpose or goal** of Paul's prayer is that they would lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him.

This is then further described in four ways:

- 1) Bearing fruit
- 2) Growing in knowledge of God
- 3) Being empowered with all power
- 4) Giving thanks to the Father

What we certainly can say is that Paul is not just stringing together a bunch of nice sounding phrases, but that there clearly is great thought and purpose for each word and phrase.

I would like us to consider each of the aspects of his prayer, for this is what you should also desire for your life.

Let's begin with the main request which is found in verse 9.

That you may be filled with the knowledge of His will.

This is the only place in the NT where this exact expression is used. However, we do see many places in Scripture speaking about God's will.

What is the will of God used here?

We sometimes speak of God's will in terms of His eternal plan that includes every detail and action of all that God has created.

Do you think this is what Paul is requesting here?

The will of God also is used to speak about how we are to live according to God's Word.

1Th. 4:3 For **this is the will of God**, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;

1Th. 5:18 in everything give thanks; for **this is the will of God** in Christ Jesus for you.

Paul's request is a reminder to you that there is no area of neutrality. There is no area of life where you should choose to say, I will simply do it my way.

When Jesus faced His moment of greatest testing before going to the cross, what was His prayer?

Luke 22:42 saying, "Father, if it is Your **will**, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless **not My will**, but Yours, be done."

I think this request in verse 9 is a wonderful summary of how man is to relate to God.

Right from the beginning of creation, God revealed to Adam, this is what I expect. These are the boundaries. You are free to enjoy all these trees. There is but one tree from which you are not to eat.

To be filled with the knowledge of God's will is to be confronted constantly with the reality, I serve a God who makes it clear to me how I am to live.

Verse 9 ends with the phrase, "in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

I am classifying this phrase as the means or the way the main request is fulfilled.

Other versions here read, "spiritual wisdom and understanding."

Spiritual can here mean that which comes through the Holy Spirit.

It certainly is a contrast with man's supposed wisdom and understanding.

Why does Paul speak of wisdom and understanding?

I would say he is speaking in terms common in the OT.

Psalms 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.

We will be filled with the knowledge of God's will when we are guided not by natural instincts or worldly principles, but guided by the Holy Spirit according to God's Word.

Now in church, this type of language is of course what we expect.

I think, however, we are well aware how easy it is to be guided by earthly motives and desires rather than spiritual wisdom and understanding.

So although we might expect to read this language in the Bible and hear it in sermons, it is at the heart of the challenge of living the Christian life.

Paul's prayer for these believers has not lost its relevance nearly 2000 years later.

The purpose statement or goal then follows in the first part of verse 10.

that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing *Him*,

Paul's language reflects the OT and vocabulary of his own day.

Gen. 5:24 And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

Psalm 119:1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, Who walk in the law of the LORD!

This is the only time in the NT that this particular word pleasing is used but there is a related verb that is used in the NT in other passages.

Similar words also have been found on inscriptions in parts of the province of Asia and in documents noting exceptional public service.

Listen to 2 Tim. 2:4.

2 Tim. 2:4 No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.

We have to be careful to never make the Christian life about our own performance. However, those who deny that the Christian has any duty and entirely just say it is all grace have missed the point also.

The Christian life is all about grace, but this doesn't mean that you have no duty.

Walking worthy is never about making yourself worthy. It is always living in response to what God has done.

What is most important in life? It is that we seek to bring glory to the God who has created us and redeemed us.

Think about this phrase, fully pleasing.

How can a sinner ever accomplish this?

We never will reach the point of perfection.

The desire and goal should always be present.

You must always keep in mind your standing before God in terms of the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The command of perfection should always bring to your attention how much you fall short and the full reality of what God has done.

These words of Paul speak against the mindset of antinomianism or a spirit that says, it doesn't matter how you live.

Everything matters.

At the end of verse 10 through the first part of verse 12, Paul gives four characteristics or examples of what this looks like for the believer.

The first is **being fruitful in every good work**.

Paul already has used the word fruitful in verse 6 speaking of the gospel message.

Paul wants the Colossian church to bear fruit.

There should be evidence that God is clearly working in your life and that you are serving Him, and this is not restricted to just a few areas of service but anything you would do.

Some would likely say, bearing fruit only can refer to soul-winning or evangelism.

Every Christian certainly should desire that others are brought to saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, but not every believer is called to the direct ministry of evangelism.

But every believer is called to bring forth fruit. There should be clear evidence through what you do that God has by His grace transformed your life.

And the wonderful thing is that this can be expressed not just in one or two activities, but in every good work.

This is why all Christians are in full-time service, not just pastors, missionaries, and other “special” occupations.

Now everyone is busy. Everyone has 168 hours in a week.

The question is what is the evidence of the fruit that is being produced in your life through your use of time and energy.

Are you being fruitful?

Bearing fruit comes from being filled with the knowledge of His will. Bearing fruit results from walking worthy of the Lord and seeking to please Him in every respect.

The **second** characteristic is **increasing in the knowledge of God**.

Paul is praying that the Colossians will grow in their relationship with God and their knowledge of Him.

2 Pet. 1:12 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

How do you grow in your knowledge of God?

Again, it is by seeking to be filled with the knowledge of His will. It comes through the Word of God and its proper application.

Peter ends his second letter by calling you to grow.

2Pet. 3:18 but **grow** in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Is this growth something we easily measure?

I don't think there is just some simple test.

The growth is demonstrated in how you use your time, your mental energy, in your actions, attitudes, words, the spiritual fruit you are producing, your treatment of others, your love for God.

Is there evidence of a growing knowledge of God?

The **third** characteristic is from verse 11, **strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.**

This is quite a mouthful of deep, theological truth.

Paul desires the Colossians would be strengthened with all power according to God's glorious might.

And this strengthening is for the purpose of patience and longsuffering with joy.

Patience and longsuffering are very similar terms.

Endurance/Patience - the capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.

Patience/Steadfastness/Longsuffering - state of remaining tranquil while awaiting an outcome.

Imagine at the evening service tonight about 20 armed FBI agents arrested you and later beat you many times with a wooden rod.

What do you think you would be doing at midnight?

Acts 16:22-25 describes the response of Paul and Silas who were totally mistreated in the city of Philippi.

At midnight they were praying and singing hymns to God such that their fellow prisoners were listening to them.

This is an example of patience and longsuffering.

The NT speaks several times of becoming weary.

Both Gal. 6:9 and 2 Th. 3:13 call you to not grow weary in doing good.

Hebrews 12:3 also warns against becoming weary and discouraged in our souls.

The need to be strengthened is very real especially in the face of direct opposition or other forms of discouragement.

You should often thank God for the spiritual and physical strength He provides. We should also often pray to be strengthened.

The **fourth** characteristic is giving thanks to the Father.

Thankfulness is so important because it helps you counter the natural thinking that we can please God based on our own performance.

Thanksgiving helps make sure you focus on God's gracious work in your life.

Yes, you are called to walk worthy of the Lord and to be fully pleasing to Him.

But notice that the thanksgiving section starting with verse 12 focuses entirely on God's work of which we had no part.

Let's consider in our time remaining from verses 12-14, God's gracious work of redemption.

2. COL. 1:12-14 – GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF SALVATION

12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. **13** He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, **14** in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Notice from these verses that there are three statements that speak of what the God the Father has done and then two statements which focus on God the Son.

Notice also as I previously mentioned, that there is no hint of man's participation in any of this great work.

When it comes to God's work of salvation related to regeneration, adoption, and justification we are **monergistic**, meaning we believe it is God's work alone.

What has God done for you in saving you from your sins and His wrath?

1) God has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

As we have observed earlier, Paul's choice of language is strongly influenced by the OT and the same is true in this first statement.

The words partakers and inheritance both call to mind the land of Canaan, the Promised Land, which was divided into portions for the children of Israel.

Here the inheritance is much greater than a portion of land in Israel.

Also as we observed last week, the word of God here directs your attention to the glory that awaits us.

Verse 5 – the hope which is laid up for you in heaven.

The reference to the **light** at the end of verse 12 also speaks of the glories of heaven.

Frequently our thinking should be directed to considering the glory that awaits us.

It is not a fool's dream or empty quest that motivates us. No, it is the certain reality that God has promised that His people will enjoy the greatest inheritance, far beyond what we could ever imagine or dream.

This inheritance should not only motivate you in terms of thanksgiving but all your other acts of service.

It is never in vain to give your all in serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

Give thanks for the glorious inheritance you will one day enjoy.

2) God has delivered us from the power of darkness.

The verb deliver or rescue is used in the Lord's Prayer. "Deliver us from the evil one."

Luke 22:53 When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."

It is not merely that we were in darkness, but that we were under the authority of a wicked power.

This is why we believe that in terms of regeneration, God alone must act.

The unbeliever is *not* free to exercise his will. The will of the unbeliever is in bondage.

And so it is God alone who has so powerfully rescued us.

3) God the Father has conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

The NKJV uses the word *convey* which is from the same root as the word convoy. The verb in Greek was used to speak of population resettlement.

The imagery is that we have been delivered from the darkness and tyranny of Satan's rule and his demons and have been transplanted as free citizens into the peaceable kingdom ruled by Christ.

The term kingdom of the Son is not often used. It speaks of the time from Christ's resurrection to His final coming.

Verse 13 ends with a reference to Jesus Christ as the Son of His love.

Rightfully we give attention to God's love for us.

I am not sure that we give sufficient attention to the Father's love for His Son.

Matt. 3:17 And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved **Son**, in whom I am well pleased."

It is the Father's great love for His Son that is the assurance of His love for us as we are in union with Jesus Christ.

The reference at the end of verse 13 to the Son of His love also is a transition statement as focus now is given to our Lord starting with verse 14 through the rest of this chapter.

In Jesus Christ we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins.

Redemption speaks of our release from captivity, from bondage as slaves to sin.

When did this redemption take place?

It took place as Jesus Christ paid for our sins on the cross.

But we can say that this redemption is applied individually at the moment of true faith and belief in Jesus Christ for salvation.

Redemption can also be understood as verse 14 ends in terms of forgiveness of sins.

How can you ever express sufficient thankfulness for what God has done for you?

Let's say that through some foolish business deal, you ended up owing someone several billion dollars.

What hope would you have in trying to pay this money back?

Imagine then a year later, this debt was forgiven. I doubt you would be able to express how profound a weight would have been lifted from you.

Now let's further say that to show your appreciation, you bought one of the most expensive gifts you have given to the person who was able to get your debt forgiven. You gave to this person something worth several thousand dollars.

We would say that is quite a gift. We don't normally give anything so valuable to another person.

Would you ever think that your gift worth several thousand dollars could ever be equivalent to what you were forgiven?

And this illustration is nothing in comparison to being forgiven all your sins and have the punishment for your sins carried by Jesus Christ.

It would be more impossible that you could pay God back than it would be for you to pay off the national debt of over \$18 trillion dollars.

The Christian life then is never about paying back what you have been given or making yourself worthy or deserving. It is always a response to God's undeserved grace. It is always about thankfulness.

CONCLUSION:

Is there evidence of spiritual growth in your life?

How do I even measure spiritual growth?

You measure it based on God's Word as the standard.

It is not that we simply go through a check list, but rather we seek that our goals and desires are in agreement with God's Word.

We seek to remove the distractions that can steal away precious resources.

Let us humble ourselves before God seeking the blessings of this passage.

Prayer

Hymn: 95

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.