

EXPOSITORY TEACHING ON THE LETTER TO THE COLOSSIANS

MESSAGE FOUR: THE CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE

SCRIPTURE: Colossians 1:9-14

- ❖ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

INTRODUCTION:

Paul introduced himself, gave greetings and expressed his thanksgiving to God for the fruit of the gospel in the lives of Colossian believers. Now he shares about his prayers for them, for their growth in the gospel of Christ, from which we learn the characteristics of an effective prayer life.

1. AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE IS PEOPLE-CENTERED, NOT SELF-CENTERED.

Scripture: “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased *to pray for you* [Colossian believers]” (Col. 1:9).

Note: Reading his letters, we observe that in all his prayers, Paul prays much for others, for the church, rather than for himself.

- Paul was people-centered in his prayers, not self-centered.
- We must pray for ourselves (for our needs), but we must pray more for others.
- Those who pray more for others will grow more in their prayer life.
- A self-centered person can never become a man of prayer.

Observe:

- Epaphras established Colossian ministry. Colossian believers were the fruit of Epaphras’ ministry. Yet, Paul unceasingly prayed, not only for the fruit of his own ministry, but also for the fruit of Epaphras’ ministry, for ultimately all fruit is God’s fruit.
- Paul didn’t even see these believers face to face and yet how fervently he prays for them.

Question: Are we praying much for ourselves or for the church?

2. AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE IS CONSISTENT AND PERSISTENT.

Scripture: “And so, from the day we heard (about their conversion), *we have not ceased to pray for you*” (Col. 1:9).

- Paul consistently (not occasionally) and persistently (without giving up) prayed for Colossian believers.
- Not only Paul, every believer must pray this way, for it is written, “praying at all times (without ceasing) in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication....for all the saints.” (Eph. 6:18)
- Without prayer, we cannot expect fruit in people’s lives. And to see fruit in people, our prayers must be consistent and persistent. Prayers that lack consistency and persistency will not bear much fruit.

Question: Do we consistently and persistently pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ (church)?

3. AN EFFECTIVE PRAYER LIFE IS SPIRITUAL-MINDED RATHER THAN EARTHLY-FOCUSED.

Question: How do you pray for others? For what do you pray when you pray for the church?

In his prayers for believers, Paul’s focus was not on earthly things and material blessings. His focus was on their spiritual growth in the knowledge and ways of God, for this is more important than the things of the world.

i. Paul prayed for believers to be filled with the knowledge of God’s Will

Scripture: “And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that *you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.*” (Col. 1:9)

Paraphrase: I am praying continuously for you that you would be filled with the knowledge of God’s Will and have His great wisdom and understanding in everything.

Note: The false teachers [Gnostics] in Colossae emphasized on “higher” and “deeper” knowledge, but not on the knowledge of God’s will.

- Knowledge is important. Christianity is not anti-intellectual.
- Some emphasize only on practical things, ignoring the knowledge. But knowledge comes before practice, for there is no doing without knowing.
- But we need the knowledge of God’s will, not mere worldly knowledge. The false teachers in Colossae (Gnostics) were encouraging believers to seek higher knowledge which is not Christ-centered. Even today, many books in Christianity offer human knowledge and wisdom, which are not filled with the Lord’s will.

“Knowledge of God’s will” – We may abruptly understand this as God’s will for one’s direction of life. But Paul had something more in mind. He is speaking about knowing God the Father and the Lord Jesus more and more [His character and nature] and living in a way that pleases Him.

- ❖ Similar unceasing prayer by Paul in **Ephesians 1:16-17** that God, “*may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him...*” [No greater knowledge than knowing God]
- ❖ Sad expression by God in **Hosea 4:6**, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.”

“Filled” with knowledge of God’s Will: When filled with sorrow, we are controlled by grief. When filled with anger, we are controlled by our aggression. *When we are filled with the knowledge of God’s will, we are controlled by His will. Paul prayer is not just to know God’s will, but also to be controlled by it.*

Holy Scripture: God’s knowledge and His will are revealed in the Holy Scripture, and we must prayerfully and diligently study it to learn His will and allow it to control our lives.

- Seeking God’s knowledge and His will by ignoring the Holy Scripture is like ignoring food and water, and seeking physical energy elsewhere.

Spiritual wisdom and understanding: This is different from natural wisdom and understanding.

- Spiritual wisdom and understanding comes from the Holy Spirit. This speaks about understanding God’s will and having the wisdom to apply it to our practical lives.

Note: We even need God’s “wisdom and understanding” (interrelated) in special circumstances.

- **Example:** When Nehemiah was distressed due to the broken walls of Jerusalem, opened to the enemies attack, he was dependent on God’s wisdom and understanding to approach the king.
- ❖ **Nehemiah 2:4-5,** Then the king said to me, “What are you requesting?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. And I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers’ graves, that I may rebuild it.”
 - We need God’s wisdom and understanding about how to approach people with the gospel.
 - We need God’s wisdom and understanding about how to counsel and help people.
 - We need God’s wisdom and understanding about how to balance our spiritual disciplines amidst busy work schedule.
 - We need God’s wisdom and understanding about how to handle difficult personalities.
 - We need God’s wisdom and understanding in how to get through problems in life (**Jas. 1:5**, in the context of trials, “if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask God...”
 - Beware of depending on your own smartness and intelligence. Acknowledge your foolishness and pray for God’s wisdom and understanding.

ii. Paul prayed for believers for the purpose of living a life pleasing to God.

Scripture: "...so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col. 1:10)

Note: The false teachers in Colossae emphasized on "greater" knowledge, but not on "humble" obedience to God's will.

Paul's goal for believers in praying for the knowledge of God's will is this:

- *Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord:* Living as the Lord wants, honoring to His Name
- *Fully pleasing to Him:* Pleasing God in everything and giving delight to His heart
- *Bearing fruit (present and continuous) in every good work:* Excelling in good works (serving people)
- *Increasing (present and continuous) in the knowledge of God:* Progressing in knowing God more...
 - **Observe:** Excelling in good words (serving people for their welfare) and increasing in the knowledge of God goes together. They are inseparable.

Warren Wiersbe:

In the Christian life, *knowledge* and *obedience* go together. There is no separation between *learning* and *living*. The wisdom about which Paul prayed was not simply a head knowledge of deep spiritual truths. True spiritual wisdom must affect the daily life.

In my pastoral ministry, I have met people who have become intoxicated with "studying the deeper truths of the Bible." Before long, they get so smart they become dumb! The "deeper truths" they discover only detour [divert] them from practical Christian living. Instead of getting burning hearts of devotion to Christ, they get big heads and start creating problems in their homes and churches.

[Be Complete, pg. 35-36]

Observe the phrases:

- "knowledge of his will [God]"
- "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord"
- "fully pleasing to him [God]"
- "bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God"
 - God is the center and focus of all goodness, morality, ethics and good works. All things must be done to *reflect* Him, to *please* Him and to *grow more* in Him.
 - Many preaching and books today offer good principles (humanistic) without God being at the center (theocentric). Even atheists and other religious people like these books because Christ is not the center.

Questions for Reflection:

1. In this part one of “The Characteristics of an Effective Prayer Life”, what three lessons do you learn from Paul’s prayers for the Colossian believers?
2. Do you spend time in prayer more for other believers or for yourself?
3. Are you praying consistently and persistently for the godly fruit to bear in believers’ Christian life?
4. For what did Paul essentially pray for the believers?
5. What is the knowledge of God’s will and how important do you think it is in believers’ life?
6. Do you pray for God’s wisdom and understanding to cope with difficult circumstances and people?
7. Do you diligently and prayerfully study the Holy Scripture to grow in the knowledge of God’s will?
8. What kinds of books do you think are biblically sound and spiritually beneficial?
9. How did this message help you in your Christian life and what decisions have you made after you heard it?