

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians **The Primacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1-23)** **The Prayer for the Gospel - Colossians 1:9-12**

9 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, 10 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; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

There is nothing simpler than the idea of prayer. Prayer in its most basic form is simply communicating with God. It is talking with God. It is speaking with God and interacting with Him by means of His Word, the Scriptures. And while we all know this simplicity of prayer, we also know how difficult prayer can be. To pray takes time. To pray take energy and effort. To pray indicates that we have issues and needs that we cannot manage ourselves. To pray makes us humble and we often want to appear strong. To pray requires thought and thoughtfulness. To pray to the one true God means knowing what we ought to bring before Him. And while it is true that He is our “Abba Father” our Daddy who loves to hear us pray, just as a little child can irritate and disappoint a parent by constantly asking for things he does not need or cannot have, we can grieve our Heavenly Father when we ask for things we do not need or cannot have. As James 4:3 so pointed puts it,

You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.

The next verse calls those who pray amiss “adulteresses” who seek friendship with the world, wanting and asking for things of the world rather than for asking about the very heart of God. So what ought we to pray for?

In our text this morning we come to one of the most delightful and pointed prayers of the New Testament. After all his introductory thoughts concerning the power and the proof of the gospel at work in the lives of not only himself and Timothy, but also in the lives of the Colossians, Paul next offers what we can call the prayer for the gospel. Paul prays for the church at Colosse. And one of the first things we ought to notice is that this prayer is not filled with a multitude of person requests for healings from sicknesses or for physical provisions for those who are needy. Not that such things cannot be prayed for, but this prayer for the church, for the people at Colosse is focused on things eternal and things that bring glory and honor to God. We know that Paul was aware of several people and of their personal struggles. Mr. Philemon was concerned about his runaway slave Onesimus. Onesimus had been concerned about his master Philemon. And of course Epaphras had come and shared with Paul all that was going on with the church, with those who were bring false teaching into the church, with those who were struggling in their walk with the Lord, with those whose marriages were shaky, whose children may have been out of control and even with those who were struggling serving others forgetting that in doing so they

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were to see themselves serving the Lord. We see all this in some of the remarks Paul makes in Colossians 3:18-25. And my point is, Paul could have easily begun verse 9 by praying for specific people and their specific issues. But he did not do this. Paul begins by both praying and asking for something that is greater and grander than individual needs. Paul begins by praying for the gospel, the good news, the message that Jesus came into the world to save sinners and by His death and resurrection to present them holy and blameless to God. What was important to Paul and of first priority was that God and His will be known and that the lives of the people who truly know God through Jesus Christ would reflect such a knowledge. I love the way Charles Spurgeon put it,

Every believer understands that to know God is the highest and best form of knowledge; and this spiritual knowledge is a source of strength to the Christian. It strengthens his faith.

Beloved, this is the gospel, to know God and to know His Son Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3) and then to have this knowledge strengthen your faith, to be reflected in the way you think; the way you live, the way you interact with others, the way you respond to your spouse and children and even in the way you worship God. Paul prays for the knowledge of the gospel to be known and to be effective in the lives of these people. And the same prayer ought to be on our own lips. When we are wondering what to pray for the church, we should find ourselves coming to this very prayer and uttering these very words, beseeching our gracious God to fulfill these very truths in us.

So then, it is my desire to present to you from our text the components of a gospel prayer. This, my friends, is what we ought to pray for our church and need to pray for the church. Let us note three such components to a gospel prayer.

I. The request of a gospel prayer (1:9)

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...

The request of a gospel prayer. Let us remember that Paul is preparing to battle against those in the church at Colosse who considered themselves the spiritual elite, as those who had a deeper, more mystical relationship to God and other spiritual beings because of some additional or special knowledge they had received apart from the teachings of the apostles and apart from the teachings of the Old Testament.

In order to alleviate any potential fears of those who did not have such a knowledge in the church, Paul begins by praying that each and everyone of those believers might be filled with the true knowledge of God's will, something that is available and accessible to every Christian through the word of God and that helps every believer to grow and be more fruitful in spiritual matters.

Are you not grateful for such a purpose of God and a prayer to be prayed? Each and every one of us has both the duty and the delight to be filled with the knowledge of His will. While the preacher has as his responsibility to make the will of God known to you and giving you help to understand and apply that will, it is ultimately God who fills His people with the knowledge of His

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will. How important is it that we request for one another that we might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, note that Paul is emphatic. He says in verse 9,

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

“***For this reason...***” because we have heard of the proof, the working of the gospel in your lives; that you have come to Christ by faith and seek to live for Him by faith, expressing love for all the church and speaking of the hope of eternal; because of this working of the gospel, “***we have not ceased to (1) pray for you***” – the word here speaks of the general practice of prayer; and 2) “***to ask that you***” – the word here speaks of making this very specific petition; and here is the request; “***may be filled with the knowledge of His will...***”

The prayer for the gospel is not simply about asking the Lord to reveal salvation to those who are lost. We often do pray for such things in this church. But notice that there is more to pray for in light of the gospel than just praying for the lost, the prayer of the gospel also includes praying for the church to be “filled with the knowledge of God’s will...” The word “filled” in our text speaks of something that is filled up to completion. It is used often to speak of the words of Old Testament prophets being fulfilled or brought to completion in New Testament events, with phrases like that found in Matthew 1:22, “***this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet...***” And so, until the church is filled up brought to completion in the knowledge of God’s will, we must be praying for the church to receive such knowledge from the Lord.

But what is meant here for us by the phrase “***knowledge of His will***”? The church is to know the will of God. Often when we speak of God’s will, what we mean is something like this; we want to know some particular or special direction for our lives. Is it God’s will for me to take this job or that job? Is it God’s will for me to go to this college or that college, or to marry this particular person? To be sure, God does guide us in such decisions, but this is not what Paul means by knowing God’s will. This knowledge of God’s will speaks of a deep and abiding understanding of who Jesus is and all that He means for all of creation. How do we know this, because beginning in verse 15 we are present with who Jesus is and what He means to all of creation? This is God’s will, to know God; to know His Son; to know the truth of who we are apart from Christ as well as who we are in Christ.

This is a prayer then to know God and to know Jesus all the more by means of studying His revelation to us and therefore to in the word. Spurgeon has said,

No man who merely skims the book of God can profit thereby – we must dig and mine until we obtain the hid treasure – the door of the word only opens to the key of diligence. (ME – June 9 eve)

We need to be praying that we might be filled with the knowledge of His will. But note as well that this request is not for simply knowing facts. Look at the how this knowledge of God’s will is defined, “***in all spiritual wisdom and [spiritual] understanding.***” The idea behind “spiritual wisdom and understanding” is having the ability to know what is true and then acting on that truth. *Wisdom is the gaining and organizing of God’s truth and understanding is putting that wisdom of*

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God in action in your life. Beloved, it is not enough to have insight into God’s will; to know who God is and what He has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ and then not to have that knowledge affect our behavior. The good news is that God, through His Son Jesus Christ, has made Himself known and such a knowledge is to change us. In Colossians 2:3 we read that it is in Christ **“in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”** We need to pray that the church would be filled to overflowing with the knowledge of God that affects our behavior. It has been said, **“for the heart that is fitted for communion is a hungering and thirsting heart...”** Let us pray and let us be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, who He is, what He has done, who Jesus Christ is and then allow our lives to be transformed by that truth. This is the request of a gospel prayer.

II. The reason for a gospel prayer (1:10a)

so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects...

And now, as I have been alluding to, we come to our second point, the reason for a gospel prayer. Why should we be concerned to pray that the church, that you and I be filled with the knowledge of God’s will? Because there is no other way to live a life that is please to him. We read in Colossians 1:10a; [Paul – “I pray for this knowledge of God’s will to be fulfilled and completed in the church...”]

so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects...

Here is the reason Paul prays. More than anything else, it is his desire that the church, this collective “you” – that each and everyone, would **“walk”** – a idiom, a saying that speaks of one’s behavior or conduct; of how you will live your life. And how should everyone who has the knowledge of God’s will so live His life? Of course, **“in a manner worthy of the Lord”** or maybe better understood for us as being in a manner consistent with the standard of the Lord; a life that is patterned after the Lord. As we read in 1 John 2:6, **“the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.”** Beloved, it is the one who seeks to walk or live in the same manner, for the same purpose to glorify the Father who is then able **“to please Him in all respects...”** What a prayer! Oh that we would pray this for the church, that from the youngest to the oldest; from the simplest to the wisest, and from the most destitute to the most affluent among us – that each of us would be so filled with the knowledge of God’s will that our lives would be patterned after Jesus and please the Lord in everything we do. We have been called to live in a way that this consistent with our identification with the Lord who saved us. We have been called to be holy; to be separate from sin and to live unto and like unto the Lord. As Spurgeon once noted,

We must not forget that the gospel of Christ is holy. It never excuses sin; it pardons it, but only through atonement. If our life is to resemble the gospel, we must shun, not merely the grosser vices, but everything that would hinder our perfect conformity to Christ. (ME – May 24 morn)

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What needs to be shunned in your life, your walk today? Remember that the purpose of the knowledge of God that is requested in verse 9 is for the reason to bring God pleasure and glory. Let us pray this for the church.

III. The results of a gospel prayer (1:10b-12)

...bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

Our final consideration this morning for the prayer for the gospel is looking at the specific results of such a prayer. What should we expect to gain and to see as we pray such a prayer to be filled with the knowledge of God's will? From the end of verse 10 through verse 12, we are presented with three such results.

The first result of being filled with the knowledge of God's will, that is the gospel, and the first evidence that we are pleasing to God and walking in a manner worthy of the Lord is that we are **“bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”**

Where the gospel of God is preached and known, it will be bearing fruit and Paul's prayer is that such fruit would be continually evident in these believers' lives. The phrase, "in every" is in the emphatic position in the Greek, meaning that the gospel understood produces a passion for God that affects everything we do and will manifest something of God's glory and grace. Please note that "bearing fruit" is in the present tense, and so implies that your fruit never goes out of season as a Christian. We are to never arrive and never stop with bearing fruit. Remember that we are told just a few verses over in Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” Our fruit-bearing implies that evidence of God's grace in our lives shows through our service and actions toward others.

Additionally, the gospel preached will also result in our understanding of God and His Word being affected. With the statement, “increasing in the knowledge of God” we come full circle in our text. If the lives of believers are to be properly affected, we need to be filled with the knowledge of God. And the true knowledge of God, as we noted always affects our behavior; the way we live, the way we worship God and even in the way we serve one another – the bearing of fruit. And being engaged in all these things then results in a further increase our knowledge of God! The **“increasing in the knowledge of God”** speaks of our continual growth in understanding the revelation of God. As we engage in those good deeds for which we were created and which were prepared in advance by God that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10), then our capacity for understanding more of who God is and what He has done increases and multiplies. *And the more we know about God, the more we will want to know. The more we serve the Lord, the more we will be consumed with the passion of knowing Him.* For the Colossians, there were those who taught that they had arrived at the knowledge of God through some mysterious way. But Paul prays that Christians would know the simple gospel, being filled with the knowledge of God's will, a knowledge that bears the fruit of the gospel and increases in its understanding of the gospel. Let us pray for such in the church!

The second result of being filled with the knowledge of God's will is that found in verse 11 where we read that we are **“strengthened with all power according to His glorious might.”**

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Here we see how we are to conduct this life that is lived in a worthy manner of the Lord and pleasing Him in every respect. It is by the power of God. *Beloved, know this, God always gives to us what He also demands of us.* To be strengthened speaks of being supplied, or armed for the task. God is the one who equips us to know and then live according to His will.

Paul does something interesting here in this verse as he makes a play on words. The word for strengthened and for power is actually from the same Greek work, *dunamis*. We might translate this to say, “that you might be empowered [by God] with all power.” This “power” is founded in the inherent, sovereign strength of God's glory. What we are to see is that God Himself, by His own unlimited power, is going to strengthen us so that we might persevere in the trials that come our way.

And beloved, the power that God give us is not to show off or to oppress others with. Rather we read next that God grants us power “for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience” when challenges to our faith come. Beloved, being filled with the knowledge of God's will and increasing in that knowledge means you will persevere. Here then is a prayer for the church to keep pressing on regardless of the circumstances, regardless of what comes along to challenge the truth of the gospel no matter how well sounding or beautifully packaged. As we grow in the knowledge of God, we will grow in our faithfulness to God and to live for God and in all this we also find the very strength to persevere.

The final result that we will look at is this, where the gospel is preached and we are filled with the knowledge of God's will, we will also be **“joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”** As believers consider how much they have been given, that they have been on the receiving end of some many blessings, the only proper response, and one that reflects this attention to the gospel is the joyful giving of thanks to God. Notice again that the emphasis here is not on our power; not on our ability; not on what we have done either as vile sinners or even in our attempts as saints; but rather the emphasis is upon what God has done. It is the Father who has qualified, or most literally, “made us able” to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. Beloved, our salvation from sin as well as our future entrance into God's sinless presence is based solely upon the gracious activity of God. Let me ask you this, “how can you know if you are growing in the grace and knowledge or our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ?” You can know you are growing, that you are bearing fruit and increasing when you find yourself continually pointing back to grace that God has brought to your life and the hope that you have of heaven. You can know you are growing when it is your increasing desire to bear fruit for His glory and then find yourself thanking Him for every good work you find yourself doing. Beloved, it is in thanksgiving to God that we know we are walking in humility and dependence upon God.

This process of bearing fruit and increasing; and being empowered by God with the power of God and then of joyfully giving thanks to God for all that He is working in us is just another picture of the process we call sanctification, of becoming more and more like Jesus, of becoming more and more holy; of becoming more and more conformed to the purpose of the Gospel. One of the men in the church sent me this quote from John Piper and I will share it with you as it speaks to this point.

“One of the greatest sources of joy and endurance for the Christian is knowing that in the imperfection of our progress we have already been perfected-- and that this is owing to the

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*suffering and death of Christ. ‘For by a single offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.’ (Hebrews 10:14) This is amazing! In the same sentence He says we are being “sanctified” and we are already “perfected”. Being sanctified means that we are imperfect and in process. We are becoming holy--but are not yet fully holy. And it is precisely these--and only these-- who are already perfected. **The joyful encouragement here is that the evidence of our perfection before God is not our experienced perfection, but our experienced progress. The good news is that being on the way is proof that we have arrived.**”*

Paul prays for the gospel to be effective and realized in the church at Colosse. We need to pray for the gospel to be effective and realized in the church here, to pray for the gospel message to continue to sanctify us; to make us holy; to make us different so that we might shine as lights in a dark world. This is a prayer that the church might know that as she is filled with the knowledge of God’s will so that she might please the Lord in all respects, she will bear fruit in good works, she will increase in the knowledge of God, she will be strengthened with the power of God and made steadfast and she will be filled with joyful thanksgiving.

May such things be descriptions of us. May such things be descriptions of you. It may seem impossible and undoable, and it is; that is without our commitments to never cease to pray and to ask the Lord that we might be filled with the knowledge of His will; so that we might burn with a renewed and brighter passion to please and glorify the Lord in all we do so that we might stand strong in the Lord and give Him thanks not matter what may come. Let us pray for such things to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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