

Title: A Great Way to Pray
Date: February 10, 2019
Subject: Prayer about living according to God's will
Scripture: Colossians 1:9-14

If you were in prison, what would you pray for? Safety, early release, tolerable food, someone to visit? Paul may have prayed for those things but they didn't make it into Scripture. His focus was on other requests.

“Paul's prayers are tremendously instructive and often stand as a rebuke to the way many Christians pray. These prayers are not only brief and explicit, but they are spiritually strategic in nature. They center on the great spiritual issues facing individual believers and the body of Christ as a whole. The Christian life is a spiritual warfare and our prayer life should illustrate this by the way we pray. In war or military combat, the objectives usually fall into three areas: the strategic (the primary and essential objectives), the tactical (the more immediate, less long range operations), and the logistic (distribution of supplies, men, and material, etc.). Today, the prayer life of many Christians centers primarily on logistics, on health and wealth issues. By contrast, Paul's prayers focus mostly on the strategic and the tactical” (J. Hampton Keathley, III, bible.org/seriespage/3-filled-knowledge-his-will-col-19).

If Christ followers were surveyed about the area of their walk with the Lord that could use the most improvement, probably most would rank prayer near the top. Prayer is too often viewed as a last resort, relegated to when times get rough. Everything else has been tried, so we might as well try prayer.

I don't think we should read into Paul's praying for the Colossians that they spiritually deficient. He was praying from a concern for their continued spiritual growth as well as protection from false teachers. Prayer is a powerful weapon we should utilize more and more in alignment with God's Word. Last week we discovered the “why” of Paul's prayer. This week is the “what.”

I. To be filled with the knowledge of God's will. v. 9

The continual nature of the request is better communicated by “be being filled.” Plus Paul stated they had not stopped praying and asking God for this to happen and keep happening. If it were a onetime thing, he wouldn't have to keep praying for the same thing. There is always more for us to know of what God wants.

Ray Stedman, “The chief aim of a believer's life ought to be to know God's will. Here is where many young Christians go astray. They think the will of God is an itinerary they must discover: where God wants them to go, and what God wants them to do. Most of their prayers are addressed with those thoughts in mind. What should I do today? Where should I go? Whom should I marry? Etc.? Paul is speaking of divine insights into human life---how to understand ourselves and how the world functions---which God reveals, but of which natural man knows nothing, no matter how well educated he may be...it's what God thinks about life.”

God's will is his moral will as recorded in his word. It's the embodiment of all truth and the complete rule of faith and practice for those who are Christ followers. It's the entirety of the gospel which someone said

is “a body of truth to be believed; a person to be received; and a life like that person's to live.” It’s his design for living.

It’s through the Word we gain spiritual wisdom and understanding. Most of the translators use “in all spiritual wisdom and understanding” rather than “through.” The repetition of knowledge, wisdom, and understanding indicate there’s no need to go searching for some other fountain of knowledge. The three words are often used interchangeably. If we want to make a distinction we could define wisdom as knowledge of first principles, sound doctrine, the great truths of Christianity. Understanding is critical knowledge, the ability to apply first principles to any given situation. It’s about knowing spiritual things and applying them to ourselves, our lives, our situations.

II. The Purpose of the prayer vv. 10 – 14

A. Lives be conformed to God’s intended purpose. Two phrases. The first is “may live a life worthy of the Lord.” Phillips translation, “We also pray that your outward lives, which men see, may bring credit to your master’s name.” There’s the idea of potentiality. A person may or may not live that way. There’s a choice involved in this and the next area.

Dr. D. A. Carson, research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, explains that “living a life worthy of the Lord” had a more profound meaning in the first century, where most cultures were shame-based. In America we don’t usually think this way, but in shame-based cultures, to dishonor your father is a really big deal (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation* pp. 105-106).

Stedman describes this life: “When you understand what God has made you to be, though you don't deserve it at all--his child, cherished by him, your guilt and sin taken care of, and that God is your loving Father who protects you, guides and guards you, and when you see him in all his majesty and beauty then you will become concerned about whether your behavior reflects his beauty, and what others will think of your God when they are watching you. That is "a life worthy of the Lord.””

The second phrase is “may please Him in every way.” Moffatt renders it “entire satisfaction.” In all aspects of our lives we are to give pleasure to the Lord, not just when around other believers or when go to church. People used to have “Sunday go to meeting clothes” that were worn only for church. When got home, changed into regular clothes. Many did the same with their lifestyles. The time at church was for show and the rest of the week was for them to live the way they wanted. They figured they had done their duty. They really were more interested in pleasing themselves. That’s the choice – pleasing self or pleasing God. It’s a fascinating study to dig into the Scriptures to “find out what pleases the Lord” (Ephesians 5:10).

Sometimes these ideas are expressed by using the word “lordship.” Who’s going to be in the position of lord or ruler of our lives? An author connected with the Navigators organization defines lordship and describes its impact this way. It’s “the daily submission and surrender of our entire self to the authority and leadership of Jesus Christ, recognizing his sovereign right to rule preeminently over us. The acknowledgment of Christ’s lordship is the abdication of self from the throne of our life and the enthronement of Jesus in self’s

place. The lordship of Jesus Christ in a believer's life is the most crucial issue in Christian living. It is absolutely necessary and foundational to Christian discipleship. In fact, this major doctrine of Christianity determines how useful a person will be to God...We cannot experience the fullest in Christian living until we commit ourselves unreservedly to the lordship of Christ" (Francis Cosgrove, Essentials of Discipleship, p. 37).

We are to please the Lord and bring credit to him in the ways we run our businesses, choose our entertainment, or relate to people. Do no harm to the Lord, his name and his cause.

There are four results of living lives that are worthy of the Lord and pleasing to him.

B. Outworkings as evidence

1. Bearing fruit in every good work. Actions. There are other kinds of fruit such as the fruit of the spirit – love, joy, peace, etc. (Galatians 5:22, 23), fruit of praise and worship (Hebrews 13:15), fruit of people becoming Christ followers. The fruit in view is that of good works. People who come into a relationship with Christ as Savior through his grace are "God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). They aren't a prerequisite for salvation but are an outflow of the life within. It's works of service to others which involves sharing the good news of Jesus and all the "one anothers."

2. Growing in the knowledge of God. Mind. We might think that this aspect would have been listed first when giving the order. After all what's in the mind/heart is the influencer for what comes out in peoples' actions. Well, it really was given first as we've saw in v. 10 with the triple emphasis on knowledge and wisdom and understanding.

Now the stress is on the need for continued growth. A Christian can't get content and think they've somehow reached the mountain top. There are always more summits to climb. It's not mere accumulation of facts about the Lord. It's growing in relationship, to get closer. This is the aspect of intimacy.

I heard of a celebrity (Lindsey Lohan's mom) who wants to marry a man she has talked to and emailed for 5 years but never met. He lives in San Francisco, she in New York City. She doesn't know what he looks like as they haven't Skyped, Facetimed or even had a picture sent to her. Her friends tell her it's a scam but she insists it's the real deal. Seems fishy to me. A person might think that they could somehow arrange a meeting.

We can only get to know a person who remains at a distance so well. Need to get up close and personal. God chooses to get up close and personal. He has revealed himself through His Son and His Word.

3. Being strengthened so that you may have great endurance and patience. Stamina. To get the sense of this we have to smooch together the ends of verse 11 - being strengthened so that you may have great endurance and patience. The middle part describes how we're strengthened. It comes from God. It's his power and since it's according to his glorious might, it's pretty substantial. That's like saying the surface of the sun is warm. Martin Luther in A Mighty Fortress, "Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing."

Moffatt translation – "May his glorious might **nerve** you with full power to endure and to be patient cheerfully, whatever comes." It's the Englishman's way of saying that we'd be give some backbone, courage.

The purpose of the strengthening is so that we can have great endurance and patience. The question arises: when do we need great endurance and patience? When everything is going okay? No. When there are a few hiccups in life? Maybe a little of them is needed. Great endurance and patience are needed when life gets tough and messy, when the days are horrible, terrible, when life throws one sucker punch after another. Life, it's trials and temptations, demands them. They're needed because we're engaged in a great battle for the souls of men, women and children. They're needed because we don't know the future. And if we want to be a little snarky, we need them because you and I are surrounded by people like you and me. According to John Piper, "Patience is the evidence of an inner strength. Impatient people are weak."

4. Joyfully giving thanks to the Father. Attitude. Be joyful and thankful not because it makes a person feel better. Not because we'll be nicer to be around. Not because God will give us something. Joyfully give thanks because of the actions of the Father. He has already given us something, much more than we could ask or imagine. He's qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Sergey Sudev was a journalism student in Berlin, Germany. One day in October of 2008 a man brought him the sad news that his uncle had died. The last time Sergey had seen him was 10 years earlier. There was more news. The uncle had written Sergey into his will ... to the tune of \$1.3 billion. He became the richest person in his country of Moldova.

What do we learn from that story? Be nice to your uncle. Second an inheritance like that would change everything. Sergey no longer had to struggle with paying bills while going to college.

Our inheritance is out of this world. It changes the way we approach life now and in preparation for the future. Verses 13 & 14 shed more light on the inheritance. Rescued from the kingdom of darkness. I heard of a woman who had been blind for 50 years. She was informed of a surgery that had the promise of giving her sight. She underwent the procedure and when the bandages were taken off, she could see a world full of vibrant color, full of light. She was no longer restricted by living in a dark world.

Brought into the kingdom of the Son he loves. In a different kingdom. We've switched territories. We're in a new realm, a heavenly one. We're under new authority.

Redemption. A missionary in West Africa was trying to convey the meaning of the word redeem in the Bambara language. He asked his African assistant to express it in his native tongue. "We say that God took our heads out." "But how does that explain redemption?" The man told him that many years ago some of his ancestors had been captured by slave-traders, chained together, and driven to the seacoast. Each of the prisoners had a heavy iron collar around his neck. As the slaves passed through a village, a chief might notice a friend of his among the captives and offer to pay the slave-traders in gold, ivory, silver, or brass. The prisoner would be redeemed by the payment. His head then would be taken out of his iron collar.

God took our heads out of sin's iron collar. He bought us from the slave market and now we're free.

Forgiveness of sins. Christian missionaries met in Delhi, India with representatives of other religions to discuss their beliefs. A member of a major non-Christian belief system said to a missionary, "Tell me one

thing your religion can offer the Indians that mine can't." The missionary thought for a moment and replied, "Forgiveness! Forgiveness!"

British Bible teacher and lecturer David Pawson says, "I have talked to the most devout Muslims who pray five times a day, have journeyed to Mecca, have fasted during Ramadan, and are more devout than many Christians. But when I ask, 'Do you know if your sins are forgiven?' they've said, 'We don't. We just have to hope for the best.'"

These men hit the nail on the head. Those who hope in Christ have the promise from God that their sins are forgiven - unlike the followers of any other belief system.

Verses 12-14 highlight some of the change that takes place when a person becomes a new creation in Christ Jesus. The upshot of the prayer is that believers shouldn't live beneath their privilege that comes with the new life.

On Wednesday at youth group the emphasis was on the new life we have in Christ. The video conveyed a story about a British woman who roamed the streets of London with her shopping cart full of plastic bags. She lived on the streets, collecting bags and other things to recycle. She begged for money or other handouts. She was known to get angry and attack people who didn't give her money. When she died her funeral wasn't what many expected. Instead of being lots of homeless it was attended by well-dressed relatives who were businessmen, lawyers and part of the higher levels of society. The truth about the woman was that she was quite rich, had a nice home and could have lived comfortably but she didn't want to leave the comfort of the old life.

Some believers are the same way. They get comfortable in settling. They think they will miss something if they turn their back on the past and move closer to the Lord. They're only hurting themselves.

David C. McCasland of Radio Bible Class wrote about "a group of ordinary and unassuming veterans who have one thing in common - their nation's highest military award for bravery. Almost all of them agree that the Congressional Medal of Honor has transformed and redefined their lives. For many, it has thrust them into the public eye. One recipient, assessing its effect on his thought and behavior, said, "You're representing everybody and everything the medal represents."

McCasland applies them to Christ followers. "As Christians, we share a distinguishing mark more defining than any medal - the name of Christ. We profess to be followers of Jesus, servants of the Lord. For that reason, the apostle Paul prayed for his fellow believers to "walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him." He urged Christians to be "fruitful" in good works and to be characterized by such qualities as patience, joy, and thankfulness. Our conduct should not be guided by expectations that come from ourselves or the people around us. They must come from the Lord, who has redeemed us, called us, and given us His name. Rather than feeling trapped by a set of external standards, we can celebrate the honor of bearing Christ's name and the freedom of pleasing only Him."