

SERMON NOTES ON COLOSSIANS 1:1-14

In continuation of our series on prayer today, we are looking at what we can learn from the prayers of Paul in Colossians 1:1-14. On a general note and at a basic level, we can define prayer as talking to God, or asking God to do only what God can do. But beyond that basic definition, we should also look at prayer as aligning ourselves with the purposes of God. That is when prayer can change us.

Many Christians find praying for others difficult. Apart from finding the time and remembering those who are out of sight, there is the problem of knowing what to ask God for on their behalf. The desires of our hearts, our passions in life, shape the sentences we speak to heaven.

The greeting takes the form of a prayer of adoration (v.2a) and flows into verse 8. Paul asks God that his grace and peace be given his readers. Grace expresses the essence of God's saving activity in Christ, and peace denotes wholeness and includes such ideas as contentedness, good relations with others. Paul's prayers are in three segments: (1) **Prayer of thanksgiving(Adoration)**, (2) **Prayer for Gospel living (Your will be done)**, (3) **Prayer of petition (Give us today...)**

1. Prayer of thanksgiving(Adoration) -vv.3-8

v.3. *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all God's people.* God is identified as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." The suggestion here is that the God to whom we pray is the God whom Jesus Christ made known to us in his character as Father - a challenge to those who touted so called *extra knowledge* (bothering on half-truths, human philosophy and legalism). For further study, you can read Paul's spotlights on their errors: Supremacy of Christ (1:15-23); False philosophy (2:8-15); Legalism (2:16-17).

vv. 4-8

Verses 4-8 express the grounds and occasion of Paul's thanksgiving. The apostle specifically mentions the good report that had come to him of the well-being of the Colossian Christians, probably from Epaphras (see 1:7,8,9; 2:1) While Paul was evangelising in Ephesus the Christian message was taken from there to Colossae by a new convert, Epaphras (1:7; 4:12; cf. Acts 19:10). Afterwards, Epaphras visited Paul in prison with news and questions about the new church (1:4—8). The situation must have been so urgent and pressing that he travelled close to 1200 miles from Colossae to Rome at a time when there was no mass transit.

Paul heard good news from Epaphras about the Colossian church and their display of Christ's love. The triad of "faith" (v.4a), "love" (v.4b), and "hope" (v.5a) characterises the Colossian Christianity. Some false teachers in their midst undermined the person of Jesus Christ and taught that Christ was not the triumphant Redeemer to whom all authority in heaven and on earth had been committed. At best, he was only one of many spirit beings who bridged the space between God and humanity. This is the reason why we have that beautiful passage in Col. 1: 15-20.

Paul affirms two things about the hope of the Colossians. First, it is securely "stored up" for them in heaven, like a treasure. Second, the Colossians' knowledge of hope came from hearing "the word of truth," which is here defined as the gospel that had come to them, tacitly contrasting it with the more recent and heretical preaching of the errorists.

2. Prayer for Gospel living (Your will be done), (vv.10-12)

Verse 10 tells the reason behind Paul's prayer: *And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.* **To live a life "worthy of the Lord" means to live a life that is in agreement with what the Lord has done for us and is to us. It implies acting in conformity with God's purpose for our lives, which is to make us like His Son.**

Gnostics, the revisionists and errorists in Colossae, preached and pushed for the accumulation of so-called special knowledge, but Paul pointed out that knowledge in itself is empty. **It is not what we know that brings salvation, but Whom we know and knowing Christ is knowing God.** To be "filled" with the knowledge of God's divine will suggests that such knowledge is to pervade all of our being—thoughts, affections, purposes, and plans. The Colossian errorists claimed to offer a "fullness" of blessing and truth not found, they said, in the preaching of Epaphras. Paul answers by stressing that *true fullness* is available only in Christ, in the message that has been preached to them by Epaphras.

This is the fullness that leads to the bearing of the fruit of good works in the believer's life; and comes with growth in and by the knowledge of God - the knowledge of God and His will is the means by which the Christian grows.

“Being strengthened with all power” expresses another element in the life pleasing to God. Christians are engaged in a continuous moral conflict with the cosmic powers of a darkened world (cf. Eph. 6:12), and nothing short of divine empowerment can enable them to stand.

3. Prayer of petition (Give us today...) (vv.9-14)

The words “for this reason”, referring back to the entire discussions of vv.3-8, show that the petitionary prayer is Paul’s response to the news that had come to him of the Colossians’ experience in Christ.

In a nutshell, Paul’s prayer from verse 9 reminds us that **prayer should be regular and continuous** irrespective of people’s known needs’ (v 9). Pray that people will know God’s purpose in every part of their lives. Pray that they may have wisdom and insight into God’s will, (v 9). Pray that they may live in ways which honour him (which includes ‘speaking’ to others about him); Pray for spiritual growth and ‘fruitfulness’ (becoming more Christ-like; cf. Galatians 5:22-26) in ‘good works’ (acts of self-giving which adorn our lives), v 10. Then, pray for inner strength to endure difficulty and suffering (not to escape from it), v 11. And because life is never easy, pray that the joy of knowing God may dominate people’s consciousness and enable them to remain thankful that they are members of God’s family (v 12).

When we do marriage counselling, one of the approaches to reconciling warring partners is to identify the things that please their spouses and work towards meeting such needs. Mark Meynell explains that ‘To understand what God wants, we need to know what God is like. To know what God is like we need to spend time with him’.

Paul desires that the Colossian believers would **learn to see life, whether in sunshine or rain through God’s lenses**; to be able to **turn to Scriptures and find answers and help** and where these do not come as expected, to find a reason to trust the LORD.

For athletes to be successful, they sacrifice many things to focus on their athletics career. To grow spiritually we need to be constant in our search for God, spending time in the Scriptures and in prayer.

Some time ago a newspaper headline read, “Missing Hyphen Blamed in Rocket Failure.” It was hard to believe that a small hyphen (-) in a computer readout or program caused the destruction of a huge, powerful rocket. Apparently, that was the case here. On the day in question, a Venus space probe launch vehicle, boosted by an eighteen-million-dollar U.S. Atlas rocket, was lost because a hyphen (-) was missing from a computer equation.

Richard Morrison, a NASA official, told the House Space Committee investigating the incident that the missing hyphen caused a mathematical miscue. Said Morrison, “The hyphen gives a cue for the spacecraft to ignore the data the computer feeds it until radar contact is once again restored. When that hyphen is left out, false information is fed into the spacecraft control systems, which it obeyed, when there was no radar contact.

Who left out the hyphen? Morrison either didn’t know or wasn’t saying, but he speculated that it was the mistake of some senior official with advanced degrees in celestial navigation.

There is an important hyphen that belongs in your life, too. It doesn’t seem like much, but without it, you can crash, because you will be susceptible to information and suggestions that are not useful for your well-being. **That hyphen is time alone with God. A time to pray, a time to read God’s Word, a time to listen to God’s voice.** Just a few minutes a day is all it takes to keep our lives on course.

FOR DISCUSSION

Ice breaker: What attracts you to certain strangers? Concerning the members of your study group, what have you heard that prepares you to like them?

Questions:

1. Paul hasn’t met these believers (1:7, 2:1), yet he is attracted to them. Why? What qualities of this church would attract you the most?
2. If faith, hope, and love are the fruit of the gospel (vv.5-6), then what does this fruit look like? Feel like?
3. What does it mean to tell the whole truth about God’s grace (v.6)? Conversely, how does one betray grace? What truth about grace do you see in verses 12-14?
4. How does what Paul prays for (vv.9-12), compare with what he thanks God for?

Reflect: 1. How does your intercessory prayer compare with Paul’s: (a) In intensity? (b) In thankfulness? (c) In clarity? (d) In faithfulness? 2. How is the fruit of faith, love, and hope growing in your life: Developing well? Suffering from drought? Destroyed by the last storm? Budding? How will you help this “crop” develop?

2. Noting the items in Paul’s prayer, in which of these directions do I most desire to make progress?