

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 9/26/93 PM
Colossians 1:9-14 "How to Pray for a Church Under Attack"

Intro:

Quote: Spurgeon on prayer (in Bounds, Purpose..., 76)

Tonight we return once again to our series, "Learning to Pray More Biblically."
Our aim is just that, to learn to pray more biblically.

Approach of Series: To explore a sampling of prayers recorded in the NT.

1. Romans 1:8-10
2. Philippians 1:9-11
3. Colossians 1:9-14
4. Acts 4:23-31
5. I Timothy 2:1-2
6. James 5:13-18
7. II Thessalonians 1:3-4, 11-12

Last week we looked at Paul's prayer for the Philippians, recorded in Ph 1. We learned that prayer is an invaluable tool to help others grow. Paul prayed specifically regarding the maturity of the believers in Philippi. He prayed that God would grant them a mature love, and a mature character.

Q: What resource could you turn to to find answers to the following questions?
(Wiersbe, p 102) "Do the heavenly bodies have any influence over our lives?
The millions of people who consult their horoscopes each day would say, 'Yes!' In the U.S., there are about 1,750 daily newspapers, and 1,220 of them carry astrological data!
Is there any relationship between diet and spiritual living?
Does God speak to us immediately, in our minds, or only through His Word?
Do the Eastern religions have something to offer the evangelical Christian?"

Those are pretty contemporary questions. Yet the Bible addresses them in a book written by Paul, the book of Colossians.

Let's turn to Colossians 1. Tonight we want to explore the question...

Q: How do you pray for a church under attack?

Obviously that's a pretty broad topic. Yet God's Word includes the record of Paul's prayer for the Colossians, a group of Christians he had not personally met. And they were under attack.

By the way, so are we. Sometimes the attack is overt, sometimes subtle.

Setting:

Paul wrote the epistle to the Colossians while he was in prison in Rome. It sounds a lot like Ephesians. But unlike the church at Ephesus, the church at Colossae did not

know Paul from firsthand encounter. Paul did not start the church. He had not even been there.

Colossae had been evangelized by a good friend of Paul's, Epaphras. Paul led Epaphras to Christ while in Ephesus. Then Epaphras returned to his home town of Colossae, and apparently led a group of Colossians to Christ, and planted a church.

Colossae was 100 miles east of Ephesus. It was located on an important trade route that connected the east and west of the Roman empire.

It was a good church. Paul was thankful for the believers there, who had a solid testimony for Christ.

Vv 3-4 "We give thanks to God...since we heard of your faith in Christ..."

The Colossian church was a good church. It was also a church under attack. A subtle, yet destructive heresy had crept into the church. If not dealt with soon, it would destroy the church.

What was the heresy? We're not sure. From the bits and pieces we pick up in the letter, it was apparently a combination of Eastern philosophy, Jewish legalism, and an early form of what scholars call Gnosticism (Wiersbe).

Listen friends, there's nothing new about the New Age movement. It's merely a repackaging of pagan ideas promoted by the gnostics. Gnostics comes from the greek word "Gnosis" which means "to know." The gnostics were people who claimed to have a elite knowledge of the deep things of God.

Our aim tonight is not to probe gnosticism. Our aim is to see how Paul tried to help a church that was under attack.

First, he wrote them a letter. In it he dealt with the basics of Christianity:

1. The Person of Christ (1:15-23)
2. The Church of Christ (1:24-2:5)
3. Life in Christ (2:6-4:1)
4. Service for Christ (4:2-18)

Secondly, he helped them by praying for them. What did he pray? First he expressed thankfulness for them (vv 3-8). Then came his Requests (vv 9-14).

Prayer is a mighty weapon.

Quote: John Wesley, "Give me 100 preachers who fear nothing but sin, and desire nothing but God, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on earth. God does nothing but in answer to prayer."

Quote: Hudson Taylor stated his conviction that "it is possible to move men, through God, by prayer alone." (quoted in Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, 130)

Paul was convinced of that. Though separated by chains and hundreds of miles, and though greatly burdened for the friends he had never met in Colossae, he was confident. Because he prayed.

Q: What did Paul pray for the Colossians?

Proposition: Let's look at what Paul asked God to do in the lives of the Colossians, as recorded in Colossians 1:9-14.

- I. He prayed that they would KNOW (9).
 - A. God's Will
 - B. Wisdom & Spiritual Understanding
- II. He prayed that they would WALK (10-14).
 - A. A Walk that is Obedient to the Lord (10)
 - B. A Walk that is Pleasing to the Lord
 - 1. Fruitful (10)
 - 2. Growing (10)
 - 3. Strengthened (11)
 - 4. Thankful (12-14)
 - a. The Father qualified us for His Inheritance (12).
 - b. The Father delivered us (13).
 - c. The Father has translated us (13).
 - d. The Father has redeemed us in Christ (14).

Note: Paul did not pray alone.

V 9 "WE also...do not cease to pray"

We pray. Paul and Timothy prayed. And notice their persistence. We "do not cease" to pray. E. M. Bounds talked about the importance of what he called "importunity" in prayer, "We must not only pray, but we must pray with great urgency, with intentness, and with repetition. We must not only pray, but we must pray again and again. We must not get tired of praying." (45) Elsewhere Bounds wrote, "Heaven is too busy to listen to halfhearted prayers." (48)

Much of our praying fails because we lack persistency. Paul was persistent.

Q: What did he pray for the Colossians? His first request...

I. He prayed that they would KNOW (9).

V 9 "that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will..."

If the church under attack was to survive, it needed to know. Paul prayed that they would know, that they would be filled with knowledge (contra the claim of the pre-nostic group).

Paul prayed that the believers would know 2 things...

A. God's Will

V 9 "filled with the knowledge of His will"

What does Paul mean? He prayed that his friends would see all of life from God's perspective. They needed to remember that it's what God says that matters, not what people say.

Illust:

Q: How do obtain this knowledge? Notice the second thing Paul prayed they would know...

B. Wisdom & Spiritual Understanding

V 9 "in all wisdom and spiritual understanding"

"wisdom"--Paul used the word 6 times in this letter (see 2:3); Wisdom, as used here, refers to practical knowledge that comes from God.

"understanding" = applying knowledge to a variety of problems

Please notice Paul's assumption. Wisdom and understanding is available to all of us who are in Christ. Contrary to what the opponents were saying, God doesn't intend for their to be a group of spiritual elites in the church.

So he prayed that God would enable the Christians to know.

Key: We'll never grow if we don't know.

If we're going to grow, we need to learn, to get to know God and His truth better. We need to renew our minds with the Word of God. A renewed mind and knowing God's will go hand in hand (see: Rom 12:1-2).

Now remember, this is a prayer. Paul is telling the Colossians what he's praying for them. "I'm praying that you will know."

Challenge: We must never stop growing in our knowledge of God!

Illust:

Q: How can you tell whether someone truly has a handle on the knowledge of God and His will? You can't tell by having them take a Bible quiz. We're not talking about that kind of knowledge.

Key: When we really know God, it's apparent in the way we live.

V 10 "That ye may walk"

Tran: Paul prayed that they would KNOW. Next he prayed that they would WALK.

II. He prayed that they would WALK (10-14).

Paul prayed for a walk characterised by 2 marks.

A. A Walk that is Obedient to the Lord (10)

V 10 "worthy of the Lord"

Notice this connection. Knowledge is not an end in and of itself. Knowledge is a means to an end. The goal is one word--Obedience. The reason he prayed for knowledge was so that that knowledge would reveal itself in transformed lives.

The false teachers in Colossae missed this. They prided themselves in offering spiritual knowledge. But they didn't relate their "knowledge" to life.

"worthy"=of equal weight (related to our word "axis"; the picture of a balance)

We are to walk worthy of the Lord. People ought to be able to see Christ in us.

I read with great interest the newspaper coverage of the Billy Graham crusade this week in Columbus. The comments people made about the evangelist really caught my eye. One person said he took vacation so he could be at the crusade because he knew Mr. Graham could help him get right with God. Another said, "When you look at his life, it's like you're looking at Jesus."

That ought to be said of each of us.

Q: Can people see the Lord when they look at your life?

Paul prayed for a walk characterised by a second mark.

B. A Walk that is Pleasing to the Lord

V 10 "unto all pleasing"

A worthy walk is a pleasing walk. Please notice the proper goal for the Christian. It's not to please people. It's to please the Lord.

Paul didn't pray that the Colossians would please him. He didn't expect them to live up to HIS standard. His sole desire was that they would please the Lord.

II Jn 4 "I rejoice greatly when I found of thy children walking in the truth"

III Jn 4 "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth."

Q: How can we tell if we have a walk that is pleasing the Lord?

If you'll notice what follows, you'll see 4 participles, revealing 4 things which will be apparent in the life of a person who is pleasing God.

A walk that is pleasing to the Lord is...

1. Fruitful

V 10 "being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God"

We're not saved by good works, but we are saved unto good works. Good works are not optional. Paul prayed that they would exhibit the fruit of good works.

see: Heb 10:24 "Let us consider o.a. to provoke unto love and good works."

2. Growing

V 10 "increasing in the knowledge of God"

Notice the circular effect. Paul prayed that the Christians would know. Then he prayed that they would do. Then he prayed that they would know.

As Wiersbe points out (111), "There's no separation between learning and living."

I remember when my home church started a S.S. class to minister to young married couples. When the class studied topics like marriage, there was great enthusiasm and interest. But then the class did a study using J. I. Packer's book, Knowing God. After several weeks, interest seemed to dwindle. There was a sense in which, "Let's study something more practical."

The type of knowledge Paul has in mind here is very practical. Knowing God better is not a theoretical task for a secluded monk. It's the privilege and responsibility of every Christian.

Q: Do you know God better today than yesterday?

Q: What steps are you taking to get to know God better?

A walk that is pleasing to the Lord is fruitful, growing, and...

3. Strengthened

V 11 "Strengthened with all might..."

God wants His children to be strong and stable. He offers us His power for daily living. When we pray, we tap into that power.

4. Thankful

Christians that please the Lord are thankful Christians. Paul was thankful. And he reminded the Colossians of their need to be thankful. He highlighted 4 reasons they (we) ought to give thanks to God.

- a. The Father qualified us for His Inheritance (12).
- b. The Father delivered us (13).
- c. The Father has translated us (13).
- d. The Father has redeemed us in Christ (14).

Q: Did you realize that God did all these things for you?!

Tragically, many Christians never have grasped this. And because of this lacking, they live pessimistic, defeated lives.

What Paul prayed was this. "Father, help my friends in Colossae to realize what you've done for them. Help them to get a handle on Your great salvation."

Once that happens, there's but one natural response. Thankfulness.

Conclusion:

Q: How do you pray for a church under attack?

Ask God to help the believers to KNOW. And then to WALK.

Discuss: What lessons about prayer can we learn from Paul's prayer here?