PRAYERS OF LONGING: PRAYING WITH PAUL Water from Rock, July 25, 2017, Tim Smith

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people together to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.” (Antoine de Saint- Exupéry, author of *The Little Prince*)

**LEARNING TO PRAY WITH PAUL (Prayer of Longing #3) Colossians 1:3-14**

*3 In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 4for we have heard of your* ***faith*** *in Christ Jesus and of the* ***love*** *that you have for all the saints, 5because of the* ***hope*** *laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel 6that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God. 7This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow-servant He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, 8and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit. For this reason since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. 11May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Background to the Prayer

1. Paul spent three years in Ephesus ministering in a rented school. It was during this time that all of Asia Minor heard the Word (cf. [Acts. 19:8-10, 26](javascript:%7b%7d); & 20:31).
2. Epaphras was a young man from Colossae who heard the Gospel from Paul in Ephesus and was converted and went back to Colossae to plant a church (Colossae 1:7; 4:12).
3. As far as we know Paul had never been to Colossae and knew only a few of the believers there and yet Paul prays for the church there continually. Around A. D. 61 – 62, while Paul is under house arrest in Rome, Ephapras brings him news about the Colossian Christians, including disturbing news about false teachers in the church.
4. The false teachers are “gnostics” claiming special knowledge (gnosis) of the mysteries of God. They are a syncretization of Jewish legalism, mystical speculation, and asceticism. They purported to introduce people to the “fullness” (pleroma) of spiritual realities.

The Prayer

Paul first offers up thanks for the Colossian Christians, for their faith, love, (1:4) and hope (1:5) that is bearing fruit among them (1:6).

***For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you***

*“For this reason”* (i.e. their faith, love, and hope) links vv. 9-14 with the thanksgiving in vv. 3-8.

***we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,***

Essentially, Paul is praying for two things: the discernment of God’s will and the power to do that will. It is one thing to know the will of God, but another thing to do it. Paul prays for both!

**v. 9 *“that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”***

1. The false teachers claimed “fullness” (pleroma) in the spiritual life. Paul prays for the Colossians to be “filled” (pleroma) with the “knowledge” (epignosis) of God’s will. He wants them to have full knowledge in applying God’s truth to their lives.
2. “Prayer begins by asking that we may be filled with an ever-growing knowledge of the will of God. Its great object is to know the will of God. We are trying not so much to make God listen to us as to make ourselves listen to him; we are trying not to persuade God to do what we want, but to find out what he wants us to do. It so often happens that in prayer we are really saying, ‘Thy will be changed,’ when we ought to be saying, ‘Thy will be done.’ The first object of prayer is not so much to speak to God as to listen to him.” (William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*)
3. The prayer for full knowledge of God’s will has an intended purpose: *“so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.”*

**v. 11 *“* *May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power…”***

If God merely told us what His will for us was, that might well be a frustrating situation. But God not only tells us His will, but also strengthens us to perform it with His glorious power!

***11May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience…***

God’s glorious power strengthens us for “endurance” with “patience” and “joy”.

* “**endure**” hupomone (hupo “under” + meno “abide, remain”) It speaks of “remaining under” a trial without giving in. This word is translated as patience, endurance, fortitude, steadfastness, and perseverance.
* “**patience**” makrothumia (makros “long,” “big” + thumos “temper,” “passion). It speaks of having a “long fuse.” This word is translated as “longsuffering,” “even-tempered”. It is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22).

Endurance (hupomone) relates primarily to circumstances; patience (makrothumia) relates primarily to people and a willingness to wait and not pay back. It has to do with willingness to forgive and not take revenge.

Paul prays for God’s “glorious power” to “endure” with “patience” while “joyfully giving thanks.”

There is an anonymous prayer that asks: “Make me, O Lord, victorious over every circumstance; make me patient with ever person; and withal give me the joy which no circumstance and no man will ever take from me.” This second triad (endurance, patience, and joy), interact with the first triad (1:4-5) of faith, love, and hope. This is new life in Christ!

**CONCLUSION**

“There is nothing in this world so practical as prayer. It is not escape from reality. Prayer and action go hand in hand. We pray not in order to escape life but in order to be better able to meet it.”

William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible*

“Thanks be to Thee, my Lord Jesus Christ, For all the benefits Thou hast given me, For all the pains and insults Thou hast borne for me. O most merciful Redeemer, friend and brother, May I know Thee more clearly, Love Thee more dearly, Follow Thee more nearly.”

Richard of Chichester (1197-1253)