

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Meaningful Prayer

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness. (Colossians 1:9–11)

Have you ever visited a church whose warmth and grace simply lingered with you and refreshed you every time you thought of them? I have, and the experience is amazing. Paul will confront a rather disturbing influence in the Colossian church, but it appears that he views them as a strong, stable church, fully capable of dealing with the problem and with maintaining their spiritual bearings. Proverbs draws a humorous though pathetic contrast as it describes the opposite person or church.

Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a broken tooth, and a foot out of joint. (Proverbs 25:19)

Whether we apply the idea to an individual or to a group, such as a church, most of us have encountered just such a person. For Paul, perhaps the Galatian churches served as this constant, nagging pain, but he seems to be more confident in Colosse's spiritual character.

For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you. Epaphras brought good news to Paul, news that sent him to his knees in grateful prayer for his brothers and sisters in this church. Unlike many of the other churches we discover in the New Testament, this church was located in a sleepy village, not a thriving metropolis. However, neither its rural location nor its smallness insulated this church from the sophisticated Gnostic teachers whose error largely motivated Paul to write them.

Paul seems wholly encouraged by the news he received of this church. Nevertheless, he makes a major point of praying for them and of telling them that he is praying for them. Some of the most encouraging moments in my life have involved hearing from someone who simply told me that they had me on their mind and were praying for me.

What should we pray for the Lord to do in the lives of the people we love? Paul's list gives us an excellent starting point.

...and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.... In the last hundred fifty years or so the amount of knowledge available to the human mind has increased exponentially. Paul has a different kind of knowledge in mind here. In fact, this expansion of human knowledge in the sciences and arts may actually hinder the spiritual knowledge of which Paul writes. How do we know what is, and what is not, the will of God in any particular matter?

A major threat to the early New Testament churches from the Gnostic presence was syncretism, the mixing of ideas in a relativistic form. Tom Constable cites an observation from Warren Wiersbe that illustrates the frightening depth of our present need to know the danger of this philosophical syncretism in our own age.

This is an age of 'syncretism.' People are trying to harmonize and unite many different schools of thought and come up with a superior religion. Our evangelical churches are in danger of diluting the faith in their loving attempt to understand the beliefs of others. Mysticism, legalism, Eastern religions, asceticism, and man-made philosophies are secretly creeping into churches. They are not denying Christ, but they are dethroning Him and robbing Him of His rightful place of preeminence.⁸¹

Perhaps the greatest danger faced by twenty-first century western Christians is the same deceitful error that threatened the Colossian church. While naïve Christians are desperately trying to find a way to make all ideas and religions into equally acceptable and attractive ideas, each being only

^{8 8} 8. Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, 2:105.

¹ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).

one of many ways that are equally pleasing to God, they are succeeding in "...not denying Christ, but they are dethroning Him and robbing Him of His rightful place of preeminence." We do not learn the will of God by contemplating the sound of one hand clapping, or by gazing off into space and waiting for a "revelation," a "word from God." We discover God's will as we search the pages of God's ultimate revelation, all sixty-six books of that Great Book, with no additions or supplements to "explain" it—or to explain it away. We do not discover God's will by probing the Gnostic-like philosophy of presuming to know God's "secret will;" if we really did know it, the only logical basis on which we could appeal to it as grounds for what we believe, it would no longer be a secret, would it? We discover God's will and the knowledge that enlightens us to His will through Scripture alone. We cannot know all of God's will, but, known or unknown by us, God's will has not and will not ever contradict His Word in Scripture. A low view of Scripture guarantees us of lingering confusion and spiritual myopia.

A people never needed the knowledge of God's will more than when error dons the wardrobe of Christian truth and announces a fashion trend of newly discovered ideas that either were lost and forgotten by the church (the claim of Mormonism and many other errant religions of our time) or were never known by the church in the first place. Wisdom and spiritual understanding are not philosophical attainments. We do not gain them by obtaining a college education, but rather by obtaining a "God-education," by learning from Him.

Wisdom is a capacity of the mind; in the OT it involves both knowledge and the ability to direct the mind toward a full understanding of human life and toward its moral fulfillment. Wisdom is thus a special capacity, necessary for full human living, but one which can be acquired through education and the application of the mind.²

The education that produces wisdom grows out of the classroom of life, life lived in fellowship with God and in authentic obedience to the teachings of Scripture. **Intelligent skill in the art of living** depicts the quality that Paul prays to guide and protect the Colossian church. This skill occurs only when we maintain a proper—Biblical—relationship with God.

OT OT Old Testament

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2149 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988).

Paul further qualifies his objective, *spiritual understanding*. **Spiritual understanding applies the quality of wisdom to the path of life.** We realize the answer to Paul's prayer only as we gain our wisdom from God through Scripture and apply that knowledge to the way we live. I enjoy reading thought-provoking commentaries. On occasion I find a degree of mental stimulation in reading Christian philosophy, though I usually become more frustrated than edified by much of non-Christian philosophy. But when I face the complex issues of life as we should live it before our God, there is only one Book that commands my interest and attention. Only Scripture contains the simple and enlightening truths that guide me on the course that honors God. That is Paul's prayer for the Colossians—and for us.

That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing.... At first glance, this double objective, walking worthy of God and pleasing all, at least all who deserve to be pleased, might seem impossible. However, I believe it teaches us a greater truth than we might realize. Occasionally over the years I have observed angry, arrogant, malcontented people who claimed to be Christians, but who seemed to possess an amazing talent of irritating and alienating large numbers of good people around them. When questioned about this problem, they usually respond with a certain smug pride, "Well, you can't please God and man. I'm pleasing God, and I don't really care whether man likes what I do or not." I strongly question that a person consumed with such a self-serving attitude is pleasing God at all. When I examine the characteristics of a professing Christian's relationships with other Christians, I increasingly suspect that I am seeing a mirror of that person's relationship with God. If he/she tries to get his/her own agenda served by manipulating or by bullying others, it is highly likely that he/she tries to do the same with God. When such a person realizes that they cannot "bully" God, they simply ignore God and work harder at manipulating and intimidating other people. They are mad at life, you say. Likely so, but I suggest that their greater problem is that they are also mad at God. Hmm, I believe the parable of the two prodigal sons has something to say about that attitude. The son who stayed home was clearly mad at his father for being so forgiving of that undeserving brother. We obviously need to avoid imitating the prodigal son who left home and indulged his lower appetites in open sin, but we equally need to avoid imitating the **prodigal son who stayed home**, but ended up being mad and out of fellowship with his father in the end. As we interpret and apply this parable, do we not see the father in the parable as relating to God, our heavenly Father?

*When a man's ways please the LORD, He
maketh even his enemies to be at peace with
him. (Proverbs 16:7)*

Quite a surprise to stay-at-home, self-righteous religious prodigals, God doesn't give bonus points to His children who make a career out of irritating and offending His little ones. If we are living in true fellowship with God, we shall discover amazing fellowship with His people. We discover many parallels between Paul's Colossian letter and his Ephesian letter, so the thought suggested from Ephesians logically applies to our study.

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech
you that ye walk worthy of the vocation
wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and
meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one
another in love; Endeavouring to keep the
unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
(Ephesians 4:1-3)*

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor