

10/7/2021 – Colossians, The Faithful Disciple

Unit II: Lesson 2, Paul's Prayer for Faithful Disciples

Reading: Colossians 1:9-14

This entire section of Paul's letter keys on the word "filled." In contrast to the claim of the Gnostic teachers that "fullness" was to be gained by ascending through the levels of knowledge granted by the angelic beings, Paul asserts that Epaphras' Gospel had already offered them fullness – in Christ. REAL "FULLNESS" IS TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL AND HAVE THE POWER FROM HIM TO PERFORM THAT WILL IN DAILY LIVING, NOT SOME SPECULATIVE TRIP!

Paul uses two Greek words to indicate his meaning - "wisdom" and "understanding." "Wisdom" implies knowledge of first principles; "understanding" is the ability to apply first principles to any given situation that may arise in life. Paul prays that the Colossians may understand the first principles that are in Christ and be able to use them in the decisions of daily life. His warning is that wrong theology cannot produce right living. Thus, he also prays that the Colossians will live a life that is full of obedience to God. He points out that this can only happen when they have the true knowledge of God that produces spiritual growth and fruitfulness in good works.

True Christian living, Paul goes on to say, has a triumphant quality about it. REALLY STRONG PEOPLE IN CHRIST DO NOT HAVE TO ASSERT THEMSELVES OR DOMINATE OTHERS. Their lives are marked by "endurance" in situation and "patience" with the maliciousness, cruelty, or unpleasantness of every others. THE "EXTRA" IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, HOWEVER, IS "JOY," A JOY MARKED BY GENUINE THANKFULNESS TO GOD EVEN IN THE MIDST OF DIFFICULTY. The danger to the Colossians is that the teachers of error will convince them that they must "qualify" themselves spiritually or morally for reaching the deity. Christ has already done that by liberating us from the captivity to the dominion of darkness. In His Kingdom light and love hold sway. THIS LIBERATION IS GOD'S WORK, NOT SOMETHING HUMAN BEINGS CAN ACHIEVE. IT IS THE MIGHTY ACTION OF GOD WHICH DELIVERS US FROM THE CHAINS OF SIN AND THE DARK FORCES BEHIND THOSE CHAINS. CHRIST IS THE KEY FIGURE IN OUR REDEMPTION, A REDEMPTION THAT HAS ALREADY BEEN ACCOMPLISHED!

Verses 9-14:

"filled with the knowledge of His will" - The key to this entire section, a beautiful prayer, is the word "filled." The Greek verb for "filled" is the same word as *pleroma* - the word for "fullness." You will remember from the introductory lesson that "*pleroma*" is a sort of catchphrase for the Gnostic. It describes the various steps or levels of angelic beings taken together as a whole. To move through all levels and arrive at the highest level of divinity was to traverse the *pleroma* or "fullness." PAUL IS COUNTERING THE CLAIM OF THE FALSE TEACHERS THAT THEY OFFER "FULLNESS" OF TRUTH AND SPIRITUAL BLESSING WHICH EPAPHRAS AND

HIS GOSPEL HAD ONLY BEGUN. THE FULLNESS PAUL PRAYS FOR IS NOT A SPECULATIVE UNDERSTANDING OF SOME ABSTRACT MYSTERY. INSTEAD, REAL FULLNESS

- (1) IS "THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD'S WILL" (verse 9),
- (2) ISSUES IN A LIFE "WORTHY OF THE LORD" (verse 10),
- (3) BRINGS FORTH A LIFE OF GOOD WORKS (verse 10),
- (4) SHOWS ITS REAL POWER IN ENDURANCE AND PATIENCE (verse 11),
- (5) EXPRESSES ITSELF IN JOYFUL THANKFULNESS TO GOD (verse 12).

REAL "FULLNESS" IS TO DISCERN GOD'S WILL AND HAVE THE POWER TO PERFORM THAT WILL IN DAILY LIVING, NOT IN SOME SPECULATIVE TRIP!

Verse 9:

"In all wisdom and spiritual understanding" – There are two key Greek words here. The knowledge of God's will shows in spiritual wisdom (*sophia*) and spiritual understanding (*sunesis*). *Sophia* in Greek means the knowledge of first principles; *sunesis* means the ability to apply first principles to any given situation in life that may arise. What Paul prays for as the chief blessings for the Colossians is that **THEY MAY UNDERSTAND THE GREAT TRUTHS OF CHRIST AND MAY BE ABLE TO APPLY THEM TO THE TASKS AND DECISIONS OF EVERYDAY LIVING. IT IS POSSIBLE TO BE A MASTER OF THEOLOGY AND A FAILURE IN LIVING. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HEAD AND HEART IS CRITICAL!**

"spiritual" Paul qualifies both wisdom and understanding with this adjective. Both come from the Spirit of God and are acquired through devotion, not rational speculation! Wrong theology will not produce right behavior.

Verse 10:

"a life worthy of the Lord" – This phrase (reflected in I Thess. 2 :12, III John 6, Matt. 10:37) often appeared as an epitaph on the tombstones of devotees of pagan deities in Pergamum - "He/she walked worthily of his lord." **HOW MUCH MORE SHOULD A CHRISTIAN REFLECT OBEDIENCE TO THE LIVING GOD AND HIS SON JESUS CHRIST!**

"fully pleasing to Him" – The Greek here suggests divine favor that is well deserved. Obedience that is pleasing to God is the goal of Christian living.

"bearing fruit . . . increasing" – Again a Gnostic "catchphrase" is used. In verse 6 the Gospel itself is described with these words. Here the Christian life is described in those terms. The English translation obscures one point, however. The Christian's life bears fruit in every good work and increases by (not "in") the knowledge of God. The basic thought is that spiritual growth is fostered by the knowledge of God and shows itself in an abundance of good works. The image of the vine as a symbol of God's people is behind these words (Is. 5:1-7, Ps. 80-14

ff.). SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND FRUITFULNESS IN GOOD WORKS BELONG TOGETHER. THE TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD PROMOTES BOTH!

Verse 11:

"strengthened" – The Greek word here is the present participle and suggests a steady increasing of strength.

"power glorious might" The "power" with which God strengthens His people is part of the "glory" of God. God's power brings into human life some of the radiance of the divine. THERE IS SOMETHING ABOUT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE THAT TRANSCENDS THE "ORDINARY"!

"endurance and patience with joy" Paul now describes what it is that characterizes the life lived by the power of God. "Endurance" is the Greek word *hupomone* and is the ability to deal triumphantly with anything that life can do to us. REALLY STRONG PEOPLE IN CHRIST DO NOT NEED TO DOMINATE OR ASSERT THEMSELVES! "Patience" is the Greek word *makrothumia* and means patience with people. This is the spirit that never gives up on people and will not let their maliciousness, cruelty or unpleasantness drive one to despair, bitterness or retaliation. THIS IS THE PATIENCE THAT GOD HAS TOWARD EACH OF US. "Joy" is the capstone. Life for the Christian is not a grim endurance. Full knowledge of God's will, showing itself in good works, in growth in obedient living, in steadily increasing spiritual power, leads to joyful thankfulness. HERE IS THE "PLUS" OF THE TRULY CHRISTIAN LIFE – JOYFUL THANKFULNESS EVEN IN THE MIDST OF TROUBLE!

NOTE: Here is the difference in those people who fancy themselves the "spiritual elite" with deeper knowledge and higher spiritual aspirations than others. SUCH A SPIRIT CAN ONLY PRODUCE SELF-ASSERTION WHEN IT IS APPARENTLY SUCCESSFUL AND SPITEFUL PEEVE WHEN IT IS THWARTED. THE HERESY BEHIND SUCH AN APPROACH IS SELF-REDEMPTION. As one writer remarks, "In Christianity, theology is grace, and ethics is gratitude!"

Verse 12:

"giving thanks to the Father" – The spirit of joy and thankfulness is itself the final mark of spiritual progress. Note also that joy at its root is a result of knowing the Father, not of human attainment.

"qualified us" – God is the One who makes us worthy of our high destiny. The glory of heaven is gift, not merit.

"to share in" – The Greek literally says "for the part." Here again there is an emphasis on the part each individual has in the corporate destiny of the church.

"the inheritance" – The word *kleros* here means "lot" and was used of the holdings assigned to veteran soldiers who were pensioned on land after their fighting days were done. Heaven here is meant, and the picture is one of the abode of those whose spiritual warfare is over.

"saints in light" – Each believer will have a place in the light which is apportioned to the saints. The mention of light here sets the stage for the contrast with darkness in the next verse.

Verses 13-14:

"transferred us" – The word used here for transfer - *metestesen* - is the technical term for mass deportations of population by a conquering king. God has delivered His people from the rule of another. **HE HAS CONQUERED THROUGH CHRIST!**

"dominion of darkness" – Paul had spoken of the saints' inheritance in light. Now the meaning becomes plain. The word for "dominion" - *exousia* - suggests the sphere in which power is exercised. **GOD HAS DELIVERED HIS PEOPLE FROM THE REALM IN WHICH DARKNESS HOLDS SWAY. WHY, THEN, RETURN TO LIVING IN IT AGAIN?**

"kingdom of His beloved Son" – Literally, the Greek says, "the Son of His love." What is meant is that **JESUS EMBODIES PERFECTLY THE LOVE OF GOD FOR HIS PEOPLE AND IS THE BASIS OF HIS RULE OVER THE HEARTS OF MEN. GOD TRANSFERS HIS PEOPLE FROM THE DARK TYRANNY WHICH HELD THEM CAPTIVE AND BRINGS THEM INTO HIS KINGDOM WHERE LIGHT AND LOVE HOLD SWAY THROUGH CHRIST. THIS IS NOT ACHIEVED, BUT IS A GIFT OF GOD'S LOVING ACTION IN CHRIST.**

"redemption, the forgiveness of sins" – The idea behind redemption here is deliverance by a mighty act of God's power. "Forgiveness of sins" describes the breaking of the chains in which men were held until deliverance by Christ. **NOTE THE WORDS THAT TALK ABOUT BEING RULED. HELD IN BONDAGE. ENSLAVED IN THESE VERSES.** Human beings often consider themselves the "doers" in spiritual matters. Here the real truth emerges. **THE HUMAN RACE IS RULED EITHER BY GOD OR BY THE FORCES OF EVIL!**

"has delivered . . . has transferred . . . have redemption" – Note that these great actions of God are already accomplished. For the Colossians this is a necessary emphasis because **THE ERROR BEING PROPAGATED AMONG THE COLOSSIANS WAS THAT THEY STILL HAD TO PROPITIATE SOME KIND OF HIGHER POWERS AND WERE STILL UNDER THE DOMINION OF SUPERIOR BEINGS WHO CONTROLLED THE UNIVERSE. NOT TRUE, SAYS ST. PAUL. CHRIST IS THE KEY FIGURE IN OUR REDEMPTION, A REDEMPTION ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED!**

Questions for Discussion

1. Terms like "economic determinism," "dialectical materialism," "behavior patterns," and "complexes" turn up in the news almost every day. How would this section of Colossians help us respond to these ideas?
2. What does "the will of God" have to do with our daily living according to Paul? How is that will of God discovered?
3. What point does Paul make about wrong theology in this section? How have you observed this?
4. According to this section, what constitutes "life lived to the full"? Is this really true as you observe life and live it?
5. What's the "plus" in the Christian life that only God can offer? In what ways do people try to "achieve" this instead of receiving it as a gift in Christ?