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Strength and Gratitude Colossians 1:11-14

Intro: We're looking at Paul's apostolic prayer for the believers in Colosse. Unlike most modern public prayer, Paul doesn't offer a prayer for any particular healing, protection or material blessing of any kind. Not that there is anything wrong with praying for those things but, Paul's primary focus in this prayer is on the Colossians' greatest need as a body of believers – that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and understanding. As we saw last time, that knowledge type of knowledge can only come from God's Word where God's will for every believer has been revealed. There is a distinction between God's will for our lives and God's guidance in our lives.

Paul also goes on to pray that the Christian walk of the Colossians would be such that would be worthy of the Lord Himself, which means to live lives that are fully pleasing to Him. That, of course, is a tall order but it's not impossible. Paul has the sequence correct: you can't hope to even begin to be fully pleasing to the Lord if you have no clue as to what His will is for your life. The main responsibility for believers concerning God's will then is first to discover what it is, as He has declared it in His Word and then to do it. Paul then sketches out 4 characteristics of what a life that is pleasing to the Lord actually looks like. Again, these aren't the only spiritual characteristics Christians are to possess and display; they are merely typical traits that flesh out what living a life worthy of the Lord really means.

The 1st characteristic of a life that is fully pleasing to the Lord is that it will bear fruit in every good work. These are the good works that the Father has prepared in advance for each of His children to do. They were prepared before we were His children – even before the foundation of the world. It is the Father's will for His children that they should be about His business. The 2nd characteristic of fully pleasing the Lord is that we should be constantly growing in our knowledge of God. As we discover more about God from His Word, we are able to trust Him in more areas of our lives which will exercise our faith and provide us with experiential knowledge of God working in our lives. This leads to a desire to know more about God which lead to greater faith.

The Colossians were being tempted to seek out secret, even mystical knowledge of God but Paul begins to explain to them that there is a great difference between seeing the knowledge of God in abstract terms and seeing it in practical terms. The difference is that the latter is actually difficult. It's one thing for a believer to pride themselves in their own understanding of biblical doctrine and quite another to be faced with the choice between living primarily for themselves or living for the Lord; between remaining silent or confessing Christ before an angry mob. Paul's saying that a true knowledge of God's will must produce visible, practical evidence in the believer's life. He goes on to say that such an understanding of God's will requires a strength that draws on the power of God Himself.

11- The 3rd characteristic of a life that is fully pleasing to the Lord is that it will be strengthened so as to display great endurance and patience. What we need to understand here is that it is God's energy that empowers us. Paul uses 2 different Greek words for God's energy: might is *dunamis* (dynamite) - inherent power; and power is *kratos* – manifested power, power that's put into action. The grace experienced in our everyday Christian lives is simply the result of God's power at work in our lives. Spiritual growth and maturity can come only as we yield to God's power and permit Him to work in us.

We usually equate God's glorious power as being revealed in great feats of daring – Israel crossing the Red Sea, David's victory over Goliath or Elijah challenging the priests of Baal to a god-duel on top of Mt. Carmel. Or, we think of it in the context of some miracle – Jesus giving sight to the blind, feeding the 5000 or Paul raising Eutychus from the dead. Even today, our prayer for God's power to be displayed is often in feats of healing or provision and, in some circles, it's the desire for signs and wonders to be revealed. What's remarkable about this verse is that, while the power for which Paul prays is often tied to the power of the resurrection, it's demonstration among believers who are living lives fully pleasing to the Lord is not in miracles or even in their own resurrection but in all patience and longsuffering with joy.

The emphasis here is on Christian character: patience, longsuffering and joyfulness. The inner victories of the soul are just as great, if not greater,

than the public victories recorded in the annuals of biblical history. For David to control his temper when he was being severely cursed at by Shimei was a greater victory than his slaying of Goliath (**Prv 16:32**). The word patience means endurance when circumstances are difficult. It's the opposite of despondency. Patience is an important characteristic of the maturing Christian life. If we do not learn to be patient, we're not likely to learn anything else. As believers, we are able to rejoice even in our tribulations because we know that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope (**Rom 5:3b-4**).

We must never think that patience is complacency; it is endurance in action. It's not the Christian sitting in a rocking chair, waiting on God to do something. It's the soldier on the battlefield, continuing to fight even when the going gets tough. It's the exhausted runner on the track, refusing to quit because they want to win the race. Too many Christians have a tendency to quit when circumstance become too difficult but the one thing we need to remember is that it is always too soon to quit (**Gal 6:9**). It's not talent or training that guarantees victory; it's perseverance. C H Spurgeon said, "By perseverance the snail reached the ark."

Along with patience we need longsuffering. This means "self-restraint" and is the opposite of revenge. Patience has to do primarily with circumstances, while longsuffering has to do with people. God is longsuffering toward people because of His love and grace (**II Ptr 3:9**). Longsuffering is one of the fruits of the Spirit (**Gal 5:22**) and it is also one of the "grace garments" that believers are to be clothed in (**Col 3:12**). It's surprising how some people can patiently endure trying circumstances, only to lose their temper with a friend or loved one. Moses was patient during the contest with Pharaoh but lost his temper with his own people and forfeited his right to enter the Promised Land. We are also often quick to lose our composure with others, especially if we feel that they have slighted or disrespected us in some way. But doing so reveals a greater concern for ourselves than for the spiritual well-being of others.

Patience and longsuffering go together if we are growing spiritually. In fact, Paul lists them as qualifications of a true minister of God (**II Cor 6:4-6**) and he displayed these characteristics in his own life (**II Tim 3:10**). A man with a short temper will not have a long ministry. The great example of these 2 virtues in the OT is Job; in the NT is, of course, Jesus Christ. It's easy for God to perform miracles in the physical realm because everything obeys His

command but to produce patience and longsuffering in the believer's life takes power and a lot of work. Jesus could heal Malchus' ear, but He couldn't automatically change Peter's heart and remove the hatred and violence that was in it. God could bring water out of the rock, but He couldn't force Moses to be patient and obedient.

God's power is not only evidenced in our lives by our patience and longsuffering, but also in our joyfulness. When circumstances are difficult, we should exhibit joyful patience, and when people are hard to live with (insufferable), we should offer them joyful longsuffering. There's a type of patience that endures but doesn't enjoy; a begrudging kind that Paul's not promoting. He's praying that the Colossians might experience a joyful patience and longsuffering.

We often use the words joy and happiness interchangeably, but there's a real distinction to be made between the 2. Happiness often depends on happenings. If everything is going great in our lives and people are kind to us, We're happy. But joy is separate and independent of both circumstance and people. The most joyful epistle Paul wrote was Philippians and he wrote it from prison as he faced the real possibility of being executed for his faith. Only God's Spirit working within us can give us joy in the midst of problem circumstances and problem people as it is also one of the fruits of the Spirit ([Gal 5:22](#)). Joy isn't something we work up, it's something the Holy Spirit works in.

The same can be said for patience and longsuffering. Each of these 3 virtues are so far beyond human capacity that they require the power of the Holy Spirit to produce them in the believer's life. But, when He is allowed to work, these virtues enable the believer to survive with joy when persecuted, to triumph in self-composure and contentment when insulted and to trust God's all-wise and all-gracious providence when suffering. When Jesus sees these virtues being manifested in our lives, He is well pleased.

12- The 4th characteristic of living a life fully pleasing to the Lord is thankfulness. Christians who are filled with the Holy Spirit will be joyful and thankful. In fact, not to give thanks would be a silent testimony to a catastrophic loss of perspective. Thankfulness is the opposite of selfishness. When we lose our joy, we start complaining and become critical of everything and everyone. The selfish person believes they deserve

whatever good comes into their lives and that other people exists to make them happy. The mature Christian realizes that life is a gift from God and that the blessings of life come only from His gracious and bountiful hand.

So, Paul prays for strength, for joy and for thankfulness. He holds no concept of grim and burdensome duty being the main characteristic of Christian living. He sees it as being a daily experience of joy and thankfulness. This is because it should be lived in the awareness both of the presence of God and what He has done for His people. Of course, the one blessing that should constantly move believers to thankfulness is the fact that God has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

There's a lot to unpack here. When Paul says that the Father has qualified us, he means that God the Father Himself has provided what sinners need to be considered worthy to join the people of God. God has qualified us for heaven! The "inheritance" spoken of here reflects the most common use of the term in the OT, where it's often applied to the territories allotted to the tribes of Israel within the Promised Land. Paul's not saying NT believers have any claim to OT land grants; he's applying this language to the spiritual privilege enjoyed by God's new covenant people, which includes Gentiles just like the Colossians. God has enabled us to be part of His family, and calls us His own. That in itself should be cause for rejoicing and thankfulness but there is more to come...

13-14- God has rescued His people and like the exodus from Egypt, He has brought them out of the authority or power of darkness and has transferred them into the kingdom of His Son! This passage contains a beautiful spiritual illustration. First, there are 2 basic powers in the world and human beings are under the sway of one or the other. The first is the rule of darkness, a term which is both moral and spiritual. Without God, there is ultimately no hope, no purpose and no final measurement of right and wrong. I'm not saying that followers of pagan religions or no religion are necessarily wicked and immoral people; it just means that the goal and purpose of life are hidden to them.

But, since eternal life is based on a relationship with God, the chance of finding eternal life apart from Him would be problematic, to say the least. However, the Christian has been moved away from that groping darkness

and now sees a clear path to follow. They're no longer under Satan's domain but now live under the authority and rule of Christ and, as such, they should acknowledge His rightful leadership and sovereignty over them. We have been delivered from the clutches of a cruel task master and have been placed under the rule of a loving Savior.

The word translated conveyed had a special significance in the ancient world. Today, we use the word almost exclusively as a way to transfer an idea or meaning but it had a much more vivid meaning for Paul. In ancient times, even before the Greek and Roman Empires, when one empire conquered another, the custom was to take nearly the entire population of the defeated empire and transfer it completely into the conqueror's land. That's exactly what happened to the Northern kingdom of Israel, by the Assyrians; and the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians.

It is in this particular sense that Paul says we have been conveyed into Christ's kingdom. Everything we have and everything we are now belongs to Him. This reality results in some great consequences for the believers daily life. Again, C H Spurgeon hits the nail on the head when he said, "Beloved, we are still tempted by Satan, but we are not under his power; we have to fight him, but we are not his slaves. He is not our king; he has no rights over us; we do not obey him; we will not listen to his temptations."

The redemption Paul mentions in v14 has the idea of a release (from debt or guilt) by a legal ransom. We saw this concept many times in our study of Leviticus. Whether one was guilty of certain crimes or had become ceremonially unclean, they could be released from their guilt or cleansed by paying the stipulated ransom. The price for our release from the power of darkness was paid by the very blood of Jesus Christ. His blood is the receipt that shows our lawful purchase as the redeemed people of God.

The word translated forgiveness is an ancient Greek word that is most literally rendered as "a sending away." This also calls to mind the ritual of the scapegoat that occurred on the Day of Atonement. The High Priest would take 2 goats, one to be sacrificed and upon the head of other one, all the sin and iniquity of the children of Israel would be transferred by the laying on of the high priest's hands. That goat, the scapegoat, would then be led out into the wilderness and by its departure, the sin and iniquity of Israel would be sent out of the camp, never to be seen again. That's the

idea Paul is stressing here: our sin and guilt is sent away, as far as the East is from the West, because of what Jesus did on the cross. Our sins have been removed so that they're no longer barriers separating us from God.

Jesus came to address humanity's greatest need. If God had thought that our greatest need was economic, He would have sent us an economist. If He'd thought that our greatest need was entertainment, He would have sent us a comedian or an artist. If God had perceived that our greatest need was political stability, He would have sent us a politician. If He had thought that our greatest need was health, He'd have sent us a doctor. But, God perceived that our greatest need involved our sin, our alienation from Him, our stubborn rebellion, our ultimate death; so He sent us a Savior.

What Paul's saying here is that to live a life worthy of Jesus Christ is simply to overflow with joyful thanksgiving in the light of the salvation we have received at His hand. If we have been transferred out from the dominion of darkness and into the kingdom of the Son beloved by God, our only appropriate response is joyful gratitude.

As we study this marvelous prayer, we can see how penetrating it is. We need spiritual intelligence if we are going to live lives that please the Lord. We also need practical obedience both in our Christian walk and work. But all of this can only result from possessing Holy Spirit power within our inner person. It is only this divine, spiritual power that enables us to practice joyful patience and longsuffering, with heart-felt thanksgiving.

Have we been praying this way; praying like an apostle? 😊