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Prayer Deals with Complacency in Christians

Colossians 1:9-11

Congregation of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,

Complacency is one of the great fights of the Christian faith. We will all likely need to do battle with self-satisfaction at some point in our lives. You see, when we are complacent in our faith it gives us a sense of security that our flesh craves, but that security is not in God and his promises, but in ourselves.

In verses 3-8 Paul spoke of what he was thankful for in the Colossian church. Their faith, hope, and love. He is warm and pastoral towards them. Yet Paul also knows that God's people can tend towards complacency. And he is right! Sometimes when we are commended in our faith and we settle in that which we were commended for.

Complacency leads to a halfhearted faith, a lukewarm love for Christ, rather than the attentiveness to the Word that God calls us too. Complacency leads to sleepy Christians... This is one of Satan's most effective ways of bringing error into the church, when Christians become so apathetic to God's and his Word they cannot even remember what it says (Eve and the Serpent).

If Satan is continually attacking the church, seeking to lull us to sleep, to send heresies our way, how are we to combat the evil one? *"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you"* (v.9a NKJV).

Lesson: Prayer Deals with Complacency in Christians

Point 1: Pray for Perfect Knowledge (v.9)

Point 2: Pray for Godliness and Purity (v.10)

Point 3: Pray to Endure Trials with Patience (v.11).

Point 1: Pray for Perfect Knowledge (v.9).

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding;" (v.9 NKJV).

Paul moves from thanksgiving (vv.3-8) to intercession (vv.9-11) and he tells them precisely how he prays for them. Now notice with me how counter cultural Paul's prayer is. Consider all of the issues in the Colossian church, the heresies that threaten the eternal souls of the Colossian church, the impending threat of Rome threatening to crush this little church, Paul's own imprisonment, he starts with prayer. Why? If these problems were given to our churches would our first response be prayer? It's imperative, that prayer must be the first thing we turn to because it's in prayer we confess that in the problems of our lives and that it is God alone who is able to resolve them.

Thus, it is prayer the church needs, for prayer keeps us from the temptations of Satan (Matt. 26:41), it is prayer that pleases God (Prov. 15:8), it is the prayers of the righteous that are powerful and effective (Jam. 5:16). Paul starts with prayer, because prayer alone can lift them out of complacency. Prayer is the antidote, the cure, for a lukewarm faith, and a complacent church.

1.1 - The Motive of Prayer

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you" (9a NKJV).

Notice, right off the bat, the words *"for this reason"* which connects verse 9 with the preceding verse. On the basis of all of the good attributes of faith, love, and hope, of the Colossians *"we... do not cease to pray for you"*. Paul says he prays for them because they are part of the body of believers, they are Christians.

So Paul prays for them because they are Christians, but he doesn't just say that he alone is praying, he says *we* are praying. Paul means that Timothy, who is helping write this letter is praying. Epaphras, the founding pastor is praying. If you look at chapter 4:10-14, all of these people are in constant prayer for the church.

Thus we see that Paul was a firm believer in the fellowship of prayer. As an Apostle he prayed for the church and he in turn expected them to pray for him (4:3). Paul says we are to be a praying people, we are to be a people on our knees, not because we are more

spiritual or desire some zen or spiritual enlightenment but because we are Christians. The motive of prayer is that we should love the saints enough to pray for them.

Application:

1. The best way of declaring your love and affection for someone consists of this, that in the secret place with God you pray for those whom you love. To love someone is to wish good upon them, and to truly love them is to wish spiritual good upon them from God. Thus, we see the Apostle Paul truly loved the Colossians, because he prayed for them. Jesus truly loves the church, even you dear Christian, because he prays for you.

1.2 - *The Manner of Prayer*

“we... do not cease to pray for you” (v.9b NKJV).

Not only did Paul bear them up to God in prayer but he was persistent in those prayers for them to God. Paul shows us the manner in which we are to pray without ceasing. The Bible of course teaches that we are to pray unceasingly.

Jesus taught parables that his disciples would “*always ought to pray and not lose heart,*” (Lk. 18:1); 1 Thessalonians 5:17 simply says, “*pray without ceasing*”. You will hear people quote this scripture to you from time to time, but how does one “*pray without ceasing*”? Are we to pray 24/7? Now Paul is not advocating for a monastic lifestyle, where someone removes themselves from the culture to fast and pray all day (though at times we should). But instead showing us to live our everyday lives and to soak them in prayer. Prayer that is unceasing, says one pastor, is:

- 1) Dependent on God.
 - a) Unceasing prayer recognizes that our lives are utterly dependent on God.
- 2) Persistent with God.
 - a) We are to be like that widow in the parable of Christ who is so persistent that the plea is heard (Lk. 18).
- 3) Steadfast to God.
 - a) Continuing like Daniel, despite persecution, to pray steadfastly to God (Dan. 6:10).

So our prayer is to be unceasing in its dependence, its persistence, and its steadfastness. Brothers and sisters let me encourage you, if you have been praying that one prayer, time and time again, for that family member who isn't yet saved, a church not yet mature, the sin that so easily entangles you. And if every day you beg of God, hear my prayer! Save my son. Build your church! Free your child from sin! Do not give up in prayer, for God hears you. Be persistent and steadfast, continue to bring your requests. If not after the first thousand, pray a thousand more, if not then than another, but know that God has not ceased to hear your prayer. The manner of our prayers are to be dependant and unceasing.

1.3- *The Sum of Prayer*

“we... do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (v.9b NKJV).

Here Paul unfolds the whole point of his prayer, “*That you may be filled*”. The Apostle has already shown that they have faith, love, and hope, and other spiritual gifts; but now he asks for something greater from God. “*wisdom and spiritual understanding*”.

Wisdom, according to the scriptures is a knowledge of faith and godly living coupled with a desire to obey it. The fact that it is spiritual tells us that it is not produced by man but by the Spirit of Christ. So in one sentence what is the Apostle praying for? He is praying that God would reveal to the Colossian church the truth of his Bible.

The only way to combat the false teaching and the philosophy of the world, to be brought out of complacency that threatens the health of the church is to be filled with the *knowledge of his will*.

Paul understood that it is *vain* to try to serve God without knowing his will. So he prays, and he does not pray for an abstract or theoretical knowledge that any nominal person can understand. He prays that the church would have a penetrating insight into God's wonderful, redemptive revelation of Jesus Christ, and how to live a life in service to him (v.10). That they would have a rich, and deep experiential knowledge of God's will. That they would not be satisfied in themselves, but in God Almighty. (The complete opposite of complacency).

Point 2: Pray for Godliness and Purity (v.10).

“that you may **walk** worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;” (v.10 NKJV).

Paul’s second exhortation in his prayer is that they would “live a life worthy of the Lord”, that they would be godly people. Throughout the Bible we have heard these Hebrew phrases “to **walk** in the statues of God” (Lev. 26:1,3), or “I say then: **Walk** in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). These passages reminded us that Christianity is a journey to the celestial city of God. There will be various trials and afflictions but we must keep walking forward.

So how are we to live a life worthy of the Lord?

2.1 - Pleasing God

“that you may walk worthy of the Lord, **fully pleasing Him**” (v.10b).

Now Paul moves to the practical purpose of his prayer, pleasing God. Now Paul says we are to “*please him in every way*”. This is in a sense emphatic. Why does Paul think it so important to please God in every way?

Answer: Because the end determines the heart of the moral things done. What does that mean?

Say you had a child, and the child only obeys their parent out of duty. The only reason they clean their room is because of fear of discipline, instead of out of love and respect. We want our children, our spouses, to serve us out of love for us not out of fear, or duty. That just frustrates us more!

So it is the same with God. The scope of our whole life ought to be this, that we may please and glorify him. We serve him not out of mere duty and obligation, but we want to please him because he is worthy of our love.

Beloved before we move on, I must ask you a question, how is it that sinners such as us can be pleasing before Almighty God? I have many failures and weaknesses each day, how can I please God? How can the average Christian please God?

First, take heart brothers and sisters, for if you are a Christian by faith you are always pleasing and acceptable to God, not because of your goodness, but as a member in Christ the head of the body of believers. Romans 8:1 says, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*” (NKJV). We, first, are pleasing to God *in* Christ.

Second, the good works we do as imperfect and as miniscule as they are, are nevertheless pleasing to our heavenly Father; for they are covered and adorned with the most perfect and blessed obedience of Christ.

Application:

1. Sometimes we think because our obedience is so feeble or often unsatisfactory to ourselves that we should just not offer it to God at all. We are like children who make a macaroni artwork for their father but throw it away because it's not a Picasso or a Rembrandt. Yet, that is not what the Apostle prays for and God has not asked us to be the greatest, he has asked us to be faithful. He accepts our macaroni artwork, he accepts our obedience, if we come through the Son seeking to please him.
 - a. He sees when you call a widow to comfort her. He sees the attempt to share the gospel. He knows when you are shamed for your faith. He loves your obedience in Christ.
 - b. Therefore continue to seek to please your heavenly Father.

2.2 - Fruitful

“that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, **being fruitful in every good** work and increasing in the knowledge of God” (v.10 NKJV).

Bearing fruit is obviously an analogy from a fruit bearing tree, which of course our Lord used often in his ministry on earth. Now each time the Bible talks of bearing fruit, people tend to either misunderstand it, or dismiss it. This afternoon I will attempt to simplify it for us;

Bearing fruit is **from** God. No tree can bear fruit without its life giving sap. This life giving sap comes from God himself, thus the fruits are works of God. It is him that gives you the life and ability to do so.

Second, bearing fruit is **to** God. A fruit bearing tree is pleasing to its owner when it bears fruit for him. We are not commanded to bear fruit for the world, for our own salvation, but for our master, God himself.

Third, bearing fruit is **for** God. The fruit we bear is not our own. It belongs to God. So our fruit is then from the power of God, to his glory and pleasure, and for his ownership.

Paul attaches a high value to good works viewed as the fruit - not the root - of grace. You are not saved by good works, we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from works (Eph. 2). Works are simply a necessary evidence of faith, done from the power of God, to the glory and pleasure of God, for his own purposes.

Application:

1. Paul prays that they would rise up from that state of complacency, that would abound in godliness and purity. What this teaches us is that when we see our churches faltering, doctrinally, in charity or in good works, the right response is prayer. Too often we turn to gossip about the pastor, elders and deacons. Or, we quit on the church. Or, stop trusting the church. Yet, the Apostle, whom we are to mimic in the faith (1 Cor 1:11) prays.
 - a. When we see doctrinal problems in our federation, may we be known as people of prayer. Disagreements with leadership should be done in godliness and purity and that is done by being people who are dependent upon God in prayer.
2. Complacency, laziness, anger, distance from God all of these things are soothed with the balm of prayer. Let us take our burdens to the Lord, let us intercede for others know that God uses our prayers to produce obedience and fruit in the church.

Point 3: Pray to Endure Trials with Patience

“being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully” (vv.11).

It was the Lord Jesus who said, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”* (Matt. 16:24). We will all experience crosses in our Christian lives. The Colossians were going to face crosses in their life of obedience, so the Apostle prays for strength.

Yet ask anyone who has been a Christian for any amount of time and learn that the strength to fight Satan does not come from us, the strength to fight the flesh does not come from us, the strength to fight the world does not come from us, we need God’s glorious might to fight the battle. And it is glorious because it comes from the Holy Ghost who breathes his wonderful might into us.

And the Spirit comes to us by the mediation of Christ, who reigns in heaven, who is seated at the right hand of the Father, and who by his Spirit is truly united to his church on earth. Brothers and sisters, you are not alone as you carry your cross. He will give divine strength so that we might have patience and endurance.

Application:

1. You will not be able to endure the trials of life alone. Thomas Watson says the most precious words of the Bible are *thy God*. Christian, he is your God. The God of heaven is your strength in life. Communion with him often. Seek him daily, he alone can hold you in life’s darkest moments (Ps. 23:4).
2. Join in the fellowship of prayer. The saints should be praying for one another.

Conclusion:

In all cases, Paul counters Satan’s attacks against the faithful saints in Colossae by prayer. Satan attacks God’s Word with vicious heresies, Paul prays that they *be filled with the knowledge of his will*. Satan seeks to lull the church asleep by various spiritual trials, Paul prays that they might *“live lives worthy of the Lord.”* Satan seeks to persecute and attack the church, Paul prays they would *endure*.

What is your need this day dear saint? How is Satan seeking to make you complacent? What is the great need of your church? Can God not supply all that we stand in need of? Can he not save you by his glorious might? Can he not wake up the sleep congregants and denominations? He can! He can! He can! Oh let us be like Paul, who without ceasing prays for his church.