

Introduction

- Don't you just love Church?
- nice place; fellowship; friendship; safe haven from changing world; nice music...
- Nice - **except for the people there!**
 - many of them are simply unbearable! If only we could enjoy church without the people.
 - of course - not **all** the people. Some of them are alright. **But it would be a much more wonderful place if significant numbers were immediately transported to some remote corner of the earth!**
- When we put our resentments so ludicrously we are quickly forced to acknowledge our own self-righteousness!
- What's more, **church is people** - including me!
 - not buildings, denominations, or any other structure - **just people**
- So, as part of the church, we will always be asking:
 - "**what's best for the people of God?**"
- That is essentially what Paul is grappling with in Colossians:
 - **in general**, in correcting the faults he'd heard about, the looming problems in the fellowship, **through his letter**;
 - but **also more personally**, in these opening verses, where he expresses his feelings about these Colossian Christians:
 - his **thankfulness for them**, as brothers and sisters in Christ, who are growing in faith;
 - and his **passionate desire** that they **grow yet further** in that faith, expressed in his prayer for them.
- Lets spend some time picking out some key lessons from these verses.

Lessons from the Setting of the Prayer

- Prayer really comes in verses 9-14.
- First, some lessons from the setting of the prayer:

1. Paul prays for Christians he has never met personally

- (v.9) *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, ...*
- Retract what I said last week!! Seems Paul had almost certainly **never met them!**
- Fellowship probably established by **Epaphras** (v.7), possibly a convert of Paul's in Ephesus.
 - he's **added these strangers to his prayer list**, and each time he hears of them it becomes grist to Paul's constant interceding to God for them!
- How extensive is our praying?
- **Do the majority of our prayers revolve around our own families, our own church, our own friends?**
- Of course, we have a **primary responsibility** for those in our own circle - if we don't pray for them, who will?
 - but if that is the farthest reach of our prayers, we become **parochial and introverted**
 - wouldn't it be dreadful if our prayers simply revealed how small and self-centred our world is?
- This is one of the reasons we pray together in the Prayer Meeting:
 - **forces us** to look beyond!
- **Paul prays for Christians he has never met personally**

2. Paul prays unceasingly

- (v.9) *For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you ...*
- Paul's exaggerated language doesn't literally mean he was constantly praying - **he did sleep, and eat, and so on!!**
- What Paul is saying is that since he heard about the Colossians he has **made it a point to intercede with God for them** in his disciplined, regular prayer times:

- he has "not stopped praying" for them!
- This implies some things we need to go on praying for!
 - not just a reaction to the current situation, say someone's illness
- Let me give some examples:
 - **it will not do** to pray once every six months that I will become more personally holy, more like my Lord!
 - **it will not do** to pray occasionally for the on-going witness of a congregation to its community! (not just in the summer with the Holiday Club, or during some other particular outreach); **again, this a very good reason for the early morning prayer meetings...**
- Opportunities are there to **help** us pray... use them!

3. Paul links prayers of thanksgiving to prayers of petition

- OK, so if there are things we need to ask for **again and again**, what are they?
- We've mentioned a few possibilities, but perhaps its worth looking at the kinds of things **Paul had in mind**:
 - for he **links his prayers to his thanksgivings!**
 - **he prays for the kinds of things he has just given thanks for:**
(v.9) **For this reason...**
 - for **faith**, and **love**, and **hope**, and **grace**, and **truth**...
- **These are the kinds of things we should be praying for rather more than we do!**
- What's more, these are **on-going things**; going concerns, if you like, rather than only praying in situations of dire emergency!
 - yes, he prays in particular situations, for particular needs;
 - but that is always in the wider context of praying for on-going situations.
- We need to learn to do the same!

Lessons from the Content of the Prayer

- Those were three lessons from the setting of the prayer:
 - 1. Paul prays **for Christians he has never met personally**
 - 2. Paul prays **unceasingly**
 - 3. Paul links **prayers of thanksgiving to prayers of petition**
- What, then, does he actually pray for these Colossian believers?

1. Paul asks God to fill believers with the knowledge of his will

- (v.9) **For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**
- What does Paul mean? **"knowledge of his will"**?
- **We tend to assume:** does God want me to take this job, get involved in this venture, speak to that person about Jesus...
- But **that is not what Paul** - nor most of the rest of Scripture - **means when he talks about the will of God.**
- (Psalm 143:10) **"Teach me to do your will, for you are my God;"**
- To do the will of God is virtually the same as **obeying what God has said**
- This is a kind of **knowledge** which **transforms our actions!**
- What Paul is praying is that these believers would be **like Jesus**:
 - not just in what they think or believe, **but in the way they act!**
 - he realises that you don't really believe something until you do it.
- **It is folly to pretend to seek God's will** for your life, your marriage partner, your job, your school, college or university course choice, or whatever, **when there is no deep desire to pursue God's will** as he has already revealed it.
- Paul's prayer for the Colossians is worth praying for ourselves and one another.

2. The purpose of Paul's petition is that believers might be utterly pleasing to the Lord Jesus

- Why should we bother obeying?
 - **aren't we saved by grace, not by what we do?**
- Yes - **by grace** - not what we deserve, and salvation is something we can never

deserve.

- (v.10) *"And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: ..."*
- But verse 10 gives the clue:
 - Paul's purpose is that the believers be **pleasing to God**;
 - **not that they be saved** - they are already - **but that they please God!**
- I am Peter and Andrew's and Mark's daddy
 - **there is nothing they can do that will ever change that!**
 - but they can **please me**, or they can **really annoy me** - and they're not even teenagers yet!
- **If we really love God, we will want to please him** - so we will obey, do his will.

3. Paul sketches, in terms of four characteristics, what a life pleasing to the Lord looks like

- Finally, Paul tries to capture the essence of what that pleasing to God life will look like.
- He suggests four characteristics:
 - *Christians bear fruit in every good work* (v.10)
 - fruit - life will start to bear, to bring forth, good works
 - *Christians grow in the knowledge of God* (v.10)
 - Paul never satisfied with the status quo - always wanting growth, more of God
 - *Christians are strengthened to display great endurance and patience* (v.11)
 - Life ain't easy - one particular area we always need to grow in!
 - *Christians joyfully give thanks to the Father* (v.12)
 - **"thanks, dad!"** Brings such joy! Characteristic of a true perspective on life; most particularly an appreciation that our truest and deepest need is of a Saviour, and that that is what Jesus alone is for us
- Paul is praying that the Colossian believers would grow in these four characteristics:
 - that they would, indeed, be more Christ-like!
 - **fruitful, knowing God's will, enduring, and joyfully giving thanks!**

Conclusion

- Started with the thought that the church was nice... **except for the people!**
 - well, **get praying for them!!**
- And learn from Paul's example, to **broaden** and **deepen** our prayers for the Lord's people!