

Further Bible Study Questions

- A) The Apostle Paul never seemed to shy away from calling on followers of Jesus to go deeper in their relationship with the Master. This exhortational style continues to be inspiring for everyone who reads Paul's many letters to the church. Despite this effective style, we seldom speak or write to one another with any exhortation or encouragement to "go deeper" in relationship to Jesus Christ. Is this true in your relationships? How could Paul's writings be challenging you to change in this area. Is there someone you love who you could share an "exhortation" with this week?
- B) Prayer in the church can often be reduced to extreme emergencies or, even worse, the totally insignificant. But the Bible paints a picture of prayer which is very different. One of those differences is in a passionate commitment to show "love in the Spirit" (Colossians 1:8) by praying for others. Do you regularly pray for others? Do you tell them about it, ask them about how you could be praying more for them, do you encourage others with your words of prayer (as Paul did for the Colossians)? Who could you be expressing love toward by praying for them -- instead of praying for yourself? Try it out this week, and then the next week. It will change your life. It might even change the world...
- C) Sometimes people speak about "knowing the will of God" like it's a mysterious challenge, kind of like finding a needle in the middle of a haystack while blindfolded and wearing bulky gloves... Yet no one in the Bible ever speaks of God's will in this manner. God's will is clearly known, because God has told everyone what His will is in Scripture (the Bible). Now comes the big question... Do you know the will of God for your life? It sounds like a mysterious or mystical question. But it is not. The question really is, do you know God's Word well enough to allow it to "exhort" your life? Is it true of you, do you know God's will for your life? If not, what stops you. If so, in what ways is God calling you deeper with Him?

We Pray For You

Long Beach Alliance Church • July 15th, 2007 • Pastor Chris Lankford

FOR THIS REASON ALSO, SINCE THE DAY WE HEARD OF IT, WE HAVE NOT CEASED TO PRAY FOR YOU...

~COLOSSIANS 1:9A (NASB)

1) From Congratulations To Exhortation

- A) If you will recall, the Apostle Paul and his key assistant Timothy (Colossians 1:1) give thanks to God in prayer in a congratulatory manner (1:3-6) for the Colossians.
- B) Their thanks to God is centered on the Colossians success at living out the content of "the gospel" (1:5) which had been given to them by Epaphras "in truth" (1:6-7).
- C) Continuing their prayer, Paul and Timothy shift from a congratulatory tone to a more Spirit-driven "filling" (1:8-9) with an exhortational* tone (beginning in 1:9).

* Exhortation (παρακαλέω - parakaleo) is a common biblical word which means "to encourage someone to," or to "call someone to..." The word is seldom used in English any longer, and its meaning sometimes can be perceived (wrongly) as being rather negative. On the contrary, exhortation is a positive biblical word with encouragement as its driving nature. The word is intimately related (in form and meaning) to another important word, parakletos (παρακλήτωρ), which means "one who is a helper or advocate for another person. The Holy Spirit (Colossians 1:8) is our "parakletos," which helps us in "pleasing the Lord in all respects" (1:9). This is Paul's thrust to the Colossians, that they live exhorted "in the Spirit" (1:8-9ff).

2) Prayer Focused On Others

- A) Paul reinforces his encouraging message of “praying always” (1:3), noting that he and Timothy “have not ceased to pray for you...” (1:9).

- B) This idea of praying for others is a strong theme in Paul’s writing, and in the rest of the Bible (cf. Ephesians 6:18, 2nd Samuel 24:17ff, 1st Timothy 2:1, Hebrews 13:18). Jesus Himself almost always prayed for others and not for Himself!

- C) The biblical example is, as one Christian leader states, that “prayer is a tool for the follower of Jesus Christ to utilize in ministry to others”[†].

- D) While prayer in the Bible is not always for others (e.g. Psalm 31), there is a sense in which Christian prayer fulfills its essential purpose when it is offered on behalf of others (cf. John 17, Jesus’ prayer for His followers).

- E) Many Christians pray for themselves because they believe no one else cares to pray for them. Rather, Paul provides us with an example of praying for others, while depending on others to pray for ourselves (Colossians 4:2-3).

- F) Note also that Paul’s prayers are not for temporal situations, but for a deeper understanding of God and His will (1:9).

[†] Darrin McWatters, staff pastor and director of the Joshua Wilderness Institute in a sermon given at Hume Lake Christian Camps on May 26th, 2007.

3) We Must Drink From The Fountain Of God’s Will!

- A) Interestingly, Paul prays for only one thing for the followers of Jesus in Colossae, that they would know God’s will (1:9). This was to be the controlling aspect of their lives -- the knowledge of God’s will!

- B) This “knowledge of God’s will”^Δ was to be one of “spiritual wisdom and understanding” (1:9), as opposed to a worldly wisdom which appeared wise but proved vacuous and hollow (cf. James 3:13-18).

- C) There is a connection between “being filled” and “the Spirit” and “the knowledge of God’s will.” The Spirit of God which indwells all followers of Jesus Christ is the One who “teaches all things and brings to remembrance” the words of Jesus Christ (cf. John 14:16-17, 26).

- D) Where does this wisdom of God and His will come from? Through His Word, the Bible (2nd Timothy 3:15-17; Romans 12:2). Paul’s earnest and singular prayer from which all other Christian characteristics flow is that the Word of God would be the controlling factor of every follower of Jesus Christ!

^Δ Paul’s use of “knowledge” (ἐπίγνωσις) here might be by way of contrast with the much-canvassed *gnosis* of the false teachers. Heretical *gnosis* was speculative and theoretical while the knowledge for which the apostle prayed concerned the “will of God” (θέλημα θεοῦ; cf. Romans 12:2; Ephesians 5:17; 1st Thessalonians 4:3; 5:18) — it was comprehensive and demanded an obedience visible in a person’s actions. This perception of God’s will consisted “in wisdom and understanding of every sort” (πάς, “all,” applies to both nouns), while the addition of πνευματικός (“spiritual”), in an emphatic position, indicates that both the wisdom and the understanding are on a spiritual level. As such they stood in sharp contrast to the wisdom of the false teachers, which at best was only a show (λόγος σοφίας, 2:23), an empty counterfeit calling itself “philosophy” (φιλοσοφία, 2:8). At the same time “spiritual” suggests that the full knowledge of God’s will, for which Paul prays, comes through the insight God’s Spirit imparts. Excerpt from Peter T. O’Brien, *Word Biblical Commentary #44, Colossians & Philemon*, pages #21-22.