

“A Prayer for Maturity”

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

What are some marks of maturity? ... Would you consider yourself to be mature? Do you have someone to look to as an example of maturity? All of the adults in the room have matured in some ways. And we know the areas that we need to make improvements. However, spiritual maturity is another thing altogether. We don't become spiritually mature the moment we become Christians. The church does not mature just because there are some mature Christians in her. Business strategies and leadership books all fail when applied to the church because spiritual maturity comes from the Lord. In our passage this morning we read the second part of Paul's prayer for the Colossian Church. In the first part of the prayer, Paul gave thanks to God the various ways the Colossian Church (CC) was bearing fruit. In the second part, Paul asked the Lord to mature the church. He asked God to mature the church so that the people would know God, do his will, and worship God with thanksgiving for all God had done. As we think about this prayer this morning I think we can say that we need spiritual maturity in our lives too. We need to grow in our knowledge of God and his will. We need to live in a way that gives glory to God. We need to worship God with thankfulness. Now as we turn our attention to the text of Paul's prayer, I want us to try to pay attention to how important knowing God is to living the Christian life.

“The Lord's work for the church” (v. 12b-14)

At the end of Paul's prayer we can sense Paul lifting his eyes up from thinking about the church in Colossae to praise the Triune God for the way that he brought salvation to the church in the first place. We are starting here because Paul draws all the attention to the work of God as the basis of his prayer.

1:12“...The Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light”

Paul says that God “qualified” the Colossians “to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” The Father qualifies them to receive the inheritance. The Father makes them worthy. Though they were once rebels against him, God gave them what they needed. Everything Paul prayed for the church is based on

this. How God qualifies people for the inheritance is not explicitly explained here, but nearer the end of the chapter Paul says this (v.19-22)

Colossians 1:19-22 “For in him (Jesus) all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,”

The Father through the Son reconciles us and therefore makes us worthy of receiving the inheritance with the saints in light. The inheritance comes to the church through our true Elder Brother, Jesus. His inheritance is shared with all Christians. But it is not just for one group or another. God gives this grace to people all over the world. We share with people from every tribe, nation, and language in the world. We share this inheritance in the light. There will be rejoicing among the people of God when we come together in the end to dwell with God in the light of his presence. Though we only see this dimly now we have fellowship with one another in the light.

1:13 “He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”

God through Christ delivered them from the domain of darkness. If you like fantasy stories this line from Colossians 1:13 sounds like it could be the backstory for a fantasy novel. The Father did not just call Christians out of darkness, but he actually sent his son to rescue them from the darkness. The kingdom of darkness is dark not just because there are dark things out there in the world, but that they had the darkness of sin in their hearts. God sent Jesus into the world not just to rescue them from the dark forces or sinful things in the world, but to stop them from destroying themselves. Christians are not just saved from their sins to live their lives for their own desires. No, indeed! We, as Christians, are transferred from the darkness to the Kingdom of Christ. Our new Lord rules our lives, and we are given a new mission. We are citizens of Christ’s Kingdom. The rules of the kingdom of Christ are all different from the domain of darkness. The highest law of the domain of darkness is to take care of yourself. The law of the kingdom of Christ is to love God and love your neighbor.

1:14 “...his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

In the Kingdom of the Beloved Son, we have redemption. The redemption was accomplished by Jesus on the cross and in the resurrection. Remember we were under the dominion of darkness, sin. It was not just the evil in the world that threatened us, but the evil in our own hearts that trapped us and was killing us. Jesus died to break us free from slavery to sin. More than that Jesus also paid our debt to God. Our sin did not just bring about our enslavement to sin itself, but it also called down on us the judgment of God. Jesus paid the ransom that we could not pay to God. Jesus’ death on behalf of sinners means that we can actually be forgiven for our sins. I hope you don’t grow tired of hearing about this. When someone wrongs you it is so hard to move on from that. We are so deeply bothered when someone hurts

us, and we find it so hard to forgive, yet God is not like that. He took the initiative and sent his only Son to redeem us and set us free. We have received forgiveness. All our sins have been wiped away in Christ. We have the joy of being able to tell God that we have sinned knowing that he has and will continue to forgive us on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection.

This wonderful work of God on our behalf makes the church. It makes the people of God. It gives God's people a place in Christ's Kingdom. The Apostle Paul's prayer for the church then is that based on the great work of God they will mature into what they have already been given.

“Paul's prayer for the maturity of the church” (v. 9-12a)

Paul started praying for the Colossian Church when he heard about them. In verse 9 Paul says

Colossians 1:9 “and so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you...”

What is Paul referring to when he says “from the day we heard?” In verse 8, Paul says that Ephraim told him about the Colossian Church's “love in the Spirit.” Paul is specifically praying for them because of their connection to the rest of the Christian world. The Colossians were likely sending support for the poor and supporting the ministry of the Apostles. And so, from the day Paul started praying for the church he prayed that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will, walk in a manner pleasing to God, strengthened to endure in the Christian life, and that they would give thanks to God for all the work that he had done for them and for all believers. This prayer doesn't expressly mention the word “maturity”, but that is what Paul is asking for. Increasing wisdom, holiness, endurance, and thankfulness is what maturity looks like.

Paul asked that they would be filled with knowledge of the will of God. To put it another way Paul prays that they would have the spiritual wisdom to know what is wise before God and that they would have a deeper understanding of the gospel. This knowledge is not simply information that they can study. It is spiritual knowledge that reforms the life of the church. This is a matter of faithful reading and studying of the Bible. Reading the Bible with faith in the Triune God will reshape the values of your life. An increase of knowledge of the will of God should be accompanied with an increase in the three great Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love. The increase of faith, hope, and love will lead to a different lifestyle, which is why Paul continues his prayer for the church by saying “so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.”

Paul says that he is praying that they will bear fruit in every good work and that they will be “fully pleasing” to him. That is an astounding prayer. Paul says that he cannot break free from the power of sin in his own life in Romans 7, so he is not praying for something that cannot come to pass. Paul is praying that the church will keep on trusting the gospel. The works of the church and the church members should be increasing because they keep on believing the message that there is redemption in Jesus. Paul is praying that they believe the gospel, live it out, and learn more and more about God.

The next part of the prayer points to a part of the Christian life that many people do not like to think about today. Paul continues his prayer by asking that the CC be strengthened with all power for endurance and patience with joy. In other words, he is praying that they be ready to suffer and endure it with joy. Rich or poor, male or female, local or foreigner; life is full of struggles. The Christian life is an enduring life. It is not just about gritting our teeth and bearing under the stresses of life. It is about enduring with joy. Joy is happiness or satisfaction with life. (Do you feel satisfied with your life?) Even in the tough times, Christians can live with satisfaction. How can this be? The answer lies in the final part of the prayer.

In verse 12, Paul prays that the church give thanks to God for the salvation that he worked in their midst. Even though they will likely suffer in this life, Christians should have joy and give thanks to God because of the work that he has already done. Do you remember the last part of the prayer? The Father qualified us to be co-heirs with Jesus. He redeemed us by forgiving our sins. We endure with joy and give thanks because of everything that the Lord has done for the church.

Conclusion and Application

Paul loved the church in Colossae because of their love for the Lord. He prayed for them because he wanted all of the church to grow up into maturity. We are praying for the same thing today. Most of us believe that the church is more than just a weekly event. It is part of who we are as Christians. We long to see the church reaching out with the truth and the love of the gospel. In order for the church to mature, we as Christians must be committed to pray for that maturity.

The work of the Lord on our behalf is vital. We have to trust the Lord to work in our hearts and in the church. We cannot imagine that it is our job to create or apply maturity in Christ, but that is not to say that we have nothing to do except wait for the Lord to do something in our lives. First we must be praying for these things. The Triune God has started this work and will fulfill all his promises and bring this work to completion. From there we have two things to do. Obey the commands of God and to love one another. A good place to start obeying the commands of God is what is often called the 10 Commandments (take special note of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:21-48). To learn what Christian love is like read 1 Corinthians 13. Applying these things to your personal life and then to the life of the church takes wisdom and patience. Just like maturing physically, spiritual growth takes time and there are awkward phases. We always need to be reminded of the gospel. The Triune God's gracious saving work on our behalf doesn't stop when we become Christians. God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, is still working in us. So we pray like Paul for the Lord to mature us in the faith.