

Colossians 1:1-14
(Luke 10:21-24)
“We Have Not Ceased to Pray for You”

Introduction

Paul writes from a Roman prison to a church that he has never visited, but which was a daughter congregation of the church he had planted in Ephesus, making Paul a sort of spiritual grandfather to the Colossian Christians. The letter was occasioned by a visit from a man named Epaphras who apparently planted the church in Colossae (1:7). The report he gave to Paul was mixed: he was encouraged by the faithfulness and growth of the Colossian church, but concerned about the presence of new teaching that threatened to divert these new believers from the heart of the gospel. *The teaching in question did not deny the gospel, but added to it*, and in this letter Paul warns them not to be taken “captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition” (2:8). Again, he warns them to let no one “pass judgment” on them in matters of food and drink, and to let no one “disqualify them” in matters of asceticism, visions and worship of angels (2:16-18).

The problem at Colossae was a lust for something new, for some hidden wisdom or mystical experience or path to power, in addition to Christ. The Colossians were being told that they needed philosophical and mystical knowledge in addition to the gospel they had been taught by Epaphras, and that they needed to adopt certain acetic practices and follow certain traditions in matters of food and drink, observance of holy days in addition to the gospel, if they would know a higher spirituality. Against all this, Paul held steadfastly to the simplicity of the gospel and to the gospel’s sufficiency in granting us all of the riches of salvation. Any “addition” to the gospel may have “an appearance of wisdom” but is actually “of no value in pursuing a life of holiness” (2:23).

In these opening verses, Paul gives us another of his compelling illustrations of how we ought to pray for one another. There is no greater gift that God has given us than immediate access to him in prayer. In him are found all wisdom and power, and no mystical experience could match intimacy with the living God. Yet, too many of us seldom avail ourselves of this privilege, and those who do often wonder whether their prayers matter much in the scheme of things. Paul was convinced that his prayers mattered, and he frequently asked those to whom he wrote to join with him in prayer, believing that the concerted prayers of the people of God were pleasing to God and mighty in their effects. But his prayers were different than most of our prayers. They were marked by three things: thanksgiving to God for his goodness, intercession on behalf of God’s people, and confident expectation that God would not only hear his prayers but would act in response to his prayers.

I would encourage you this morning to look carefully at this prayer as instructive for your prayer life.

Body

1. Why does Paul pray with such gratitude (1:3-8)?

*He recognizes the unmistakable marks of new life: faith, love and hope (3-5).
He recognizes the nonnegotiable means of new life: God's Word, God's messenger, and God's Spirit (6-8).*

2. What does Paul pray for God's people (1:9-11)?

*Knowledge of God's will – God's Word (9).
Power to do God's will – God's Spirit (10-11).*

3. How can Paul pray with such confidence (1:12-14)?

*God has delivered his people "from the domain of darkness" (12).
God has transferred his people "to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (13-14).*

Conclusion

Note three things in closing:

*Only in God's Word is the wisdom needed to deliver us.
Only in God's Spirit is the power able to deliver us.
Only through God's people is this liberating gospel carried to the world.*

© John M. Wood, all rights reserved