

The Importance that Paul Placed on Prayer

Colossians 2:1-3

Colossians 2:1-3 - *“For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh, that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”*

Background Notes

In verse 1, the conflict or struggle that Paul mentioned is about prayer. He wasn't going through a physical battle – he was “wrestling in prayer” for the Colossian believers (v2). He was concerned that the Colossian believers would not be taken in by the false teaching that had begun to spread in the Colossae area. Paul did not want the Colossian believers to be ensnared by this false teaching, so he was wrestling in prayer for them.

And Paul said that he was not only praying for the Colossian believers – he was praying for the believers in Laodicea as well. Laodicea was located not far from Colossae. In fact, they were part of a tri-city area situated along the Lycus River valley. Colossians 4:13 mentions the third city, Hierapolis. Paul was concerned that the false teaching would not penetrate any of the churches in that area.

The apostle Paul was not known personally to a number of these believers. “As many as have not seen my face in the flesh”(v1). He had never met some of those believers. In fact, there's a good possibility that the apostle Paul never visited Colossae. In our studies of chapter 1 we said that the church at Colossae was probably founded when Paul was ministering in Ephesus, during his third missionary journey. Colossae was about 100 miles from Ephesus. (Philemon and maybe Epaphras visited Ephesus and heard Paul preach. They became believers, went back to the tri-city area with the gospel, and thus these churches were established. Read Acts 19:10.

The church at Colossae appears to have met in Philemon's home. As these churches grew, there were a number of believers whom Paul had never met personally, but he was praying for them – and that's a great lesson for us!

Doctrinal Point

1. The nature of prayer is more than serene repose.

What do we mean by “serene repose?” Serene means calm and tranquil. Repose means to be at rest or remain still. There is an aspect of prayer that is quiet and restful worship. When we come into the presence of God in prayer, and we reflect on His greatness, His goodness, His grace, we experience serene repose. We find rest and serenity.

But in these verses, we see that the nature of prayer is far more than serene repose. The word “conflict” or “struggle” is used in verse 1. That’s the word from which we get our word “agonize.” It’s the language of the arena, and a fierce struggle such as a wrestling match. Many of us don’t know much about this aspect of prayer, but we should.

Why is prayer a struggle or conflict? I think there are two reasons. One is that we struggle against the tendencies of the flesh. Let’s face it: we’re lazy. It’s hard to spend time in prayer. It’s work! But there’s another reason as well. We struggle against the spiritual forces of evil. In Ephesians 6:12 we read, *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*

Let’s ask ourselves: When was the last time we struggled in prayer? When was the last time we cried in prayer concerning the salvation of a friend? When was the last time we sensed the spiritual battle mentioned in Ephesians 6:12? Not long ago I wrestled in prayer concerning a Christian girl who was wrongly convinced that she should have an abortion. I sensed the fierce spiritual battle that was going on. The forces of evil were very active.

Church pastors and elders who struggle in prayer for the flock are to be highly commended. We need to do more wrestling in prayer. The nature of prayer is more than serene repose.

2. The scope of prayer is more than self-interest.

Paul prayed for people he didn’t even know personally (v1). We always tend to pray in small circles, don’t we? My self interest, my family, my job, my schedule, my vacation, etc. Paul reached out well beyond his own self-interest circle. He prayed in wide circles.

We need to do the same. We need to pray for our brothers and sisters around the world. Short-term missions trips to other nations or cultures will encourage you to pray in wider circles. The scope of prayer is more than self interest.

In our family devotions, we’ve always tried to reach out beyond our own family circle. When we pray, we pray for at least one foreign missionary and the country where they serve the Lord, or one person or need beyond our own family needs.

Of course we all will pray for our family's needs, but we should try to reach out and pray in wider circles. Parents, introduce your children to praying for others in your family devotion, so that they become familiar with this biblical pattern of praying for others, even people they don't know. The scope of prayer is more than self interest.

3. The content of prayer is more than secular concerns.

The word "secular" means that which is of the world, or temporal, and it's not wrong to pray for our temporal needs. However, notice that Paul always prayed more from an **eternal point of view**. Verse 2: *"That their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, that is Christ."* Paul prayed for what's really important in the long run. He prayed for more than just temporal or secular concerns, and we should, too.

Paul prayed that they would be encouraged, particularly in reference to meeting the threat of the false teaching. He wanted them to be encouraged. He also wanted them to be united in love. A church that is united in love is a strong and effective church, and Paul wanted to see that unity develop in the Colossian church. We need to pray for that as well.

Paul wanted the Colossian believers to attain the riches of full assurance of understanding. Do you want to be spiritually rich? Do you want to be able to appreciate and appropriate all your spiritual blessings in Christ? How does that come about? It will come about more and more as we get to know and understand what God has revealed in His Word. That's what Paul was driving at here - he wanted them to understand and come to the knowledge of the mystery of God, that is, Jesus Christ. That word "mystery," as it is used in the New Testament, refers to something that is concealed in the Old Testament but now is revealed in the New Testament.

What information about Jesus Christ was "concealed in the Old Testament but now revealed in the New Testament"? The incarnation? No. The death and resurrection of Christ? No, that is all included in the Old Testament. But what about the great truth of Christ forming a new body, the Church – Jesus Christ being the Head and all believers (Jews and Gentiles together) – united in one body? That was a great mystery, not revealed in the Old Testament but revealed in the New. Colossians 1:27 - *"Which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."* So this great truth of the Church being formed – the Body of believers with Jesus Christ as the Head, and Christ indwelling this Body - **this** is the great mystery!

And notice verse 3: *"In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* Our wisdom and knowledge doesn't abide in our bodies, but in our heads. That idea is being brought out here in reference to the mystery. Believers are the Body and Christ is the Head, and in the Head, in **Him** are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Practical Applications

1. All that you ever need is found in Christ.

Again, verse 3: *"In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."* The great theme of the book of Colossians is the supremacy and the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ. The false teachers around Colossae were saying that Christ was not enough. That false teaching is refuted here. All that you ever need is found in Christ!

Do you need salvation? It's found in Christ. Do you need fulfillment in life? It's found in Christ. The void that you may be feeling right now will not be filled by a new philosophy or some new exciting sport or pleasure, or getting on some new physical fitness program, or some great career accomplishment. Psalm 37:4 says, *"Delight yourself in the Lord and He will grant you the desires of your heart."* All that you ever need is found in Christ!

2. Tell people that you're praying for them.

Do you see what Paul did in verse 1? He not only prayed for the Colossians - he told them that he was praying for them! *"I want you to know,"* he said in verse 1, *"what a great conflict I have for you."* How would you like to know that Paul was praying for you? Wouldn't that be a great encouragement? Although we're not the apostle Paul, we certainly can follow his example. So pray for people - and tell them that you're praying for them!

I know some of you pray for me as a teacher of the Word of God, and for our ministry - the Devotions for Growing Christians that we send out, and the Growing Christians internet website. It's a great encouragement to know that people are praying for us! People write and tell us that they're praying for us, as well as requesting us to pray for them. So as much as possible, we write back to them and tell them that we're praying for the specific request they have made.

Let's not just pray for people - let's tell them we're praying for them! It's a great encouragement for people to know that you're praying for them.