

SERMON Col 1: 9-14 A Prayer for Perseverance

If we think that being a practicing Christian is an easy task, then we need to think again. It takes a certain doggedness, a persistence, a type of character that the Bible often refers to as Endurance or Perseverance or Steadfastness, to maintain a Christian lifestyle.

In Matt 24 Jesus speaks about the signs of the end of the age with all its trials for Christians when he says, *“Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but those who stand firm to the end WILL be saved”*

Perseverance in the Bible is a character trait that is often emphasized in the Scriptures. In over a 100 NT texts, the Bible encourages people to live out their faith with perseverance. It looks like the ability of a believer to endure and persist and never give up in the face of difficulty is something not only *commendable*, but also very *necessary*. The famous preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote, *“By perseverance, even the small snail managed to reach the Ark and be saved from the floods.”*

And in our text today it is this perseverance that the Apostle Paul is praying about when he prays for the Church in Colossae.

They had heard the truth, understood the grace, had a functioning church and were trying to live out their faith, in the context of their society, just like us. But they were living in a time of conflicting paradigms. The young Christian Church was challenging and changing spiritual values and the paradigm shift, the change in world view, was to found in the Gospel message: the message of being reconciled to God thru faith.

In the metropolitan city of Colossae in the time of Paul there were many Gods and even more ways of worshipping them. There were false teachers, even within the ranks of the Christian believers. The truth about the Gospel was at a premium, even in church leadership. There were teachers who were *adding* their opinion and *subtracting* the truth from the Christian message. Many believers were in fact confused about their very reason for being, about their mission, about their relationship with the world and ultimately their relationship with Jesus Christ their Saviour.

Does all that sound a bit familiar to us? It should, because we are today experiencing a drastic change in world view that is impacting tremendously on the church.

There is a Post Christian and Post-modern world view out there that is challenging the very fabric of church life and Biblical truth as we have known it.

Today we are asking ourselves again, *“What does it take to be a Church? What is our mission? How do we relate to the world and to Jesus Christ in these times?”*

And the Apostle Paul prays for the Church, and his prayer extends over centuries to cover the believers of all times. Paul is praying for us, for you and for me, even at this time.

But what is this prayer? The text in Colossians 1 vs9 makes it clear that whatever it is, it has something to do with a *knowledge of God’s will*, and seeking it thru spiritual wisdom and understanding.

So Paul prays for us to take a step back for a moment from what we are *doing* and then look *with spiritual eyes* on **how we should endure, or go forward, or persevere, in a way that will please God.**

And he prays for the believers to persevere in *many* areas of endeavour:

1. To persevere in *bearing fruit in good work*: the Colossians were asked to re-assess how they served WITHIN the church, how they served AS the church in a community of largely other-minded or indifferent people. Bearing fruit in good works means doing things from an INNER motivation rather than reacting to outside influences. As Jesus once said in Matthew 12:33 *"Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad, for a tree is recognized by its fruit."*

2. The prayer was also that they should persevere in *growing in the knowledge of God*. If we look at Col 1 vs 15 onwards we see that this knowledge is nothing less than acknowledging the *Supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things*, "He is the image of the invisible God" says that text. We have to know and love Christ to grow in a true knowledge of God. Jesus said to his followers in Matthew 11:27 *"No one knows the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."* And he followed it by saying *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."*

The Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit, has to open our spiritual eyes thru our study of the Bible and our devotion to prayer, and our fellowship with believers, all in Christ's name.

3. And then Paul's prayer is to also persevere in *being strengthened with the mighty and glorious power of God*.

Has anyone here made any New Year Resolutions? Every year I make resolution *not* to make a New Year resolution. That's because my will power buckles under the weight of a piece of chocolate. Or whatever else I may be trying to give up. We cannot make a *resolution* to persevere, because we cannot persevere in ANYTHING without the power of God and the Spirit of God. We cannot depend on ritual or ceremony or cold charity. We cannot depend on our status or background or personal will power. In living a life worthy of the Lord we have to depend totally on God to work for us and thru us, so that WE become the love of Christ sent into the world.

4. And then the Apostle prays for the believers to persevere in *giving joyful thanks to God*.

We have to give thanks because God has made us who we are. None of us is self-made. Our text in vs 12 reminds us that it is the *"Father who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the Kingdom of light"*.

God has put the stamp of Jesus Christ on us and given us a Kingdom. And Jesus himself was a model of thankfulness. Whether it was breaking bread with his followers or breaking the power of death over his friend Lazarus, every gift from his Father was received with thanksgiving. It can be no less for us as his followers.

5. Our text also assures us why we *can take confidence* in this prayer of perseverance of the Apostle, why we *should* be living a life worthy of the Lord, why we *should* please the Lord in every way.

Our text in vs 13 puts our striving and perseverance into perspective, for it was Jesus Christ, says Paul, who persevered *for us*, who endured *for us*, who delivered *us*, who saved *us*:

"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."

As we go out today into a New Year of challenge, we can all be assured of one thing by this Apostolic prayer of perseverance: And that is that our strivings should always be to the glory of God.

When times are hard, when difficulties pile up, we can say with the Apostle Paul in Rom chapter 5: *“And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

Let us pray: Gracious God, we thank you for the knowledge of your Word and your Will given us thru the Scriptures, by the power of your Holy Spirit. We thank you for the strength to endure and for the gift of hope, the hope of glory. And we give joyful thanks to you for the gift of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord in whose name we pray Amen.