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Colossians Transcriptions
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Prayer Without Ceasing pt. 1

Col 1:7-12 ...just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit. 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

We're going to look at Colossians chapter 1:7-12. I know I won't get through this whole next section today, but I'm looking at this all together because Paul talks about his prayer in this section. I said that when we got to verse three I was going to defer talking about prayer until we got to verse nine, so I'm going to start on that today.

Verse seven is just talking about hearing from Epaphrus...

Verse eight is interesting—we've spent the last week or two talking about love, but Paul says here 'love in the Spirit...' I think that to him all love that he would ever talk about is 'love in the Spirit.' It's not love in the flesh. It's not man's love. I don't think that he's qualifying this for himself, I think he's qualifying this for people like us, who are confused about what love is. We've already talked about what the nature of man's love is, and how it is contrasted with the love of God.

Alright ... Prayer... Verse nine says, "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you," and then he begins to talk about what he's praying for them. I'm not going to get into some of the details of his prayer this week—I'll probably get into that next week—but what I want to try to do today is say some general things about prayer. And as I often do, I'll start by

trying to make a distinction between the spiritual reality from the man-made counterfeit. Counterfeit is a strong word, but I think it's true.

Let me just say to begin, I feel inadequate to deal much with this subject. I feel like I've been touching the reality of prayer more than I ever have, especially in the last half year. And yet, I also wish that I had another half year to see more, and to put language to some things. But here we are, bumping into this verse now, so I'll share what has come to some perspective and light in my heart recently, as best as I can. And as usual, I just ask you all not to just believe what I'm telling you. Don't just believe everything I'm saying, but bring these things to the Lord and let Him clarify them or dismiss them, whatever the case may be.

I never want any of you to just believe what I'm saying. That gives me the creeps just thinking that one of you might just listen to what I say, think it sounds true, and then that by believing it think you've learned something! That's not learning. And there's always the reality that when we see something in the light we have this propensity to mix our own ideas and thoughts with it. I know that propensity exists in me which is why I say you need to bring these things to the Lord.

I hate my own thoughts! I've never had a correct thought, spiritually speaking! Never. Not even one time. In every place where I haven't seen Christ clearly, all I have to offer – and which I try NOT to offer – are my own thoughts. That's all anyone has when they haven't seen Christ. The last thing I want to do for you guys is to take my dark, dead, scaly blindfold and pass it along to you and call it something spiritual.

I try to share according to the measure of light that I've seen, and I try not to go beyond that. And yet I know that sometimes I probably do. So take everything I say to the Lord and ask Him to show you what's real and throw away what's not.

Prayer... I think that Christians talk about prayer, as they do with almost everything else, as though anybody can do it with purely natural resources, natural ideas, natural requests, and natural desires... And I don't think that's true. **In fact it's been my experience that the first thing that God teaches someone about prayer is that they don't even know what it is or how to do it.** We first face the fact that we don't have any idea how prayer works, what working even means, what God's will is, what it means to pray in Christ's name.... etc..

I used to be involved in a prayer ministry in Kansas City. For a number of years I would pray hours a day and I had a theology of prayer. When I say "theology of prayer" I guess I mean I had a definition of what I was doing that I could fall back on when it all seemed silly. And yet when I began to see a little bit in the light—just a little spark, a little flash—I feel like the very first thing I realized about

prayer is that I had no idea what it was! People don't generally like to hear that. They don't like how it feels to not know what prayer is.

I get these emails that say, "I'm hearing these things, and seeing some truth, and it makes me feel like I don't even know how to pray anymore. And now all I can think of to say is, 'God open the eyes of my heart.'

And I always write back, 'That's great!' but I don't think that's exactly what they're looking for. They want me to explain prayer. But I'm just glad that they've realized their blindness. I'm excited because they're heading in the right direction.

We need to realize that every place that we have gone out in front of the Lord, that's a place that He needs to cut off. Every place in your heart where you have tried to be something that only Christ and His increase ARE, in His light every one of those branches is going to get trimmed back to the root; the Root, of course, being Christ.

Some people are really into prayer or intercession; some people are into ministry or missions or pastoring or whatever. But in the zeal of human desire to please God, wherever you have gone out in front of Him, you have become a thief and robber. You've taken upon yourself that which is only Him; that which is only His. And with His light, He will cut that down to size. He'll cut it back in such a way that you won't even know what the thing is anymore, because you never DID understand what it was! You just started doing something that felt like a good idea. Or maybe you tasted a little bit of life at one point, and you built a ministry around it, and before you knew it the whole thing was buried in a pile of religious ideas and customs. At least I'm speaking for myself. That's what happened to me.

The first thing I experienced in the light was that I couldn't pray. I used to walk around at night to pray [at least I thought it was prayer] before I went to bed, and I used to just tell God all these things I'd like Him to do, or things I thought I needed, or these things I thought He wanted me to tell Him. On and on I would talk to the Lord... sometimes with tears. And I'm not saying there was nothing good in these times. I did this for years, and perhaps there was some little speck of reality in some of these prayers... I don't know.

But I remember when I started to see something in the light. I went out to do my little prayer thing as usual, and I started to say to myself, 'Wait...I can't say that! Why would I ask for that?! That's so dumb, or self-centered!' And I just went through my usual list and I felt like I didn't have anything except carnal desires and imaginations to offer up to God. And that was really confusing BUT it was better than being deceived! **Being ignorant is better than thinking you know something that isn't**

true. Ignorance is way better than deception because if you realize you're ignorant, you can be taught. But if you don't, then you just carry on with your favorite lies.

I'm not trying to discourage people from praying. I'm really not! I want to encourage it, but with the right understanding. Just like Paul says in Romans 8, we have to approach the Lord realizing that, naturally speaking, we don't know how to pray as we ought. The Spirit teaches us. And He doesn't just teach us just what to pray *for*. That's not the main issue.

Romans 8:26-27 *"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought. But the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words; And He who searches the heart knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."*

And I know that we've probably all heard sermons dealing with this verse. But I'd like to point out that this passage is not referring to the Spirit teaching us a *method* of prayer. **It's not the correct words that we lack, it's the correct mind. We lack the correct nature. By nature what we lack is the One who knows the mind of God and intercedes according to His eternal will.**

And that's what this verse in Colossians talks about, too. Paul is praying that they would know, that they would be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. He's not talking about being filled with the knowledge of His will for what you're supposed to do this morning. That's usually what we think of when we think of God's will. We think, "What do You want me to do right now, God?" Or "What do you want me to do with my life, or my job, or how many kids should I have? Or should I buy this car?"

But knowing the will of God is knowing His eternal will, His ultimate intention, His purpose for creation. The will that God begins to fill you with is His eternal perspective and purpose so that you're constrained and moved and motivated by that will. **So the thing that you lack, the thing that the Spirit of God has to begin to teach you, isn't correct prayer words. It's not that you lack spiritual vocabulary. What you lack is the right name in which to pray. You don't know what it means to pray in the name of Jesus Christ.**

You may know what it means to pray in your own name and then put His name on the end of your prayers, but that has nothing to do with praying in Jesus's name. People say, "Father, do this for the sake of your Son. Amen." Or "In Jesus's name we pray. Amen." Well that's easy to say, but that's not praying in His name! The name isn't a title. It's not like you're putting his name on your check (as I've heard it said).

There's an interesting passage in John 16, where Jesus is talking to his disciples. Now I suppose these guys were pretty zealous Jews for God, and definitely believers... I'm sure they'd all prayed before, and yet they'd never asked anything in His name. But then Jesus says:

***Joh 16:24-27** "Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full. 25 "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. 26 "In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request of the Father on your behalf; 27 for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.*

I think it's interesting here that Jesus says 'until now you've never prayed anything in My name.' It's like He's saying, "You've asked for many things and prayed many prayers, but something is about to change." He's telling the disciples that there is something that's going to become possible that's never been possible in the history of humanity—I'm going to give you a new name that you can pray in.

This is reminiscent of a few verses in Revelation, in particular in Revelation 3 where God says, "I will write on Him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem which comes down from heaven. I will write on him My new name." This is obviously figurative language. I don't expect that we're going to have Jesus tattoos or anything. But here's the relevant question for believers that want to pray: Do you know His name? I know you know what people called Him. But do you know His name? Do you know what it means to pray in His name; to live in His name; to desire out from that name?

That name is not just His title. That name is His being. It's His person, His nature, His life—it's everything that He is. The name is how God recognizes the thing. You see? That's how it was in the very beginning, even before the Fall in the garden, when Adam was giving things a name according to what he understood them to be.

Even in the Old Covenant, the name referred to God's nature, attributes, person. When God said to Moses, 'I'm going to reveal My name to you. I'm going to put you in the cleft of the rock, cover you with My hand, and then I'm going to declare My name.' When God appears, He doesn't just say, "God!"... He says, 'The Lord your God is loving; showing loving-kindness to thousands, forgiving their iniquity... etc...' He gives Moses a paragraph which He calls 'the name of the Lord,' but it's a description of His being, His nature, His kind... a description of what makes Him, Him. It's the thing that He recognizes Himself to be.

Jesus does the same thing in John 17 - "Father I have made known Your name to these people." Well that wasn't a sign Jesus carried around! It was a continual manifestation of the nature, purpose, will, character, kind, etc., of God, so much so that He could say, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father.' He was manifesting the name.

So that's the name out from which we're supposed to live and to do all things. A little later in Colossians 3:17, which we'll get to eventually, he says whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to the Father through Him... Again, this isn't about attaching Jesus's name to the things you do. This is about seeing, knowing, experiencing, abiding in the life—the name—that is sum total of all that Christ is and that Christ offers, and doing all out from that name.

I think real prayer in the name of Jesus—I mean the prayer that accomplishes much, the prayer of faith-- becomes possible to the measure that we learn a totally new name that He writes on our hearts. It's a totally different name, a name we have not known. And in my mind, without any question, this is linked to the inward experience of the cross.

Just like anything else, man's prayers come out from man's nature. Just like man's works or activities or man's understanding of the Bible, or man's *anything*, it comes out from a particular nature. And to the extent that the fallen, evil, sin-enslaved nature has not been cut off by the cross, and another nature revealed, known and experienced, everything that we do is going to be the expression of the wrong man. Everything.

I always say these kinds of things, and at the risk of being repetitive, let me say it again: *you are the wrong kind*. You have the wrong nature, the wrong name. You are Adam. And the cross is God's incredible gift and the way by which He puts to death one seed in your soul and brings forth Another. But everything that comes out from the first man in us is rejected. As we see in every single picture of the first and the second throughout the Scripture—the first is rejected and the second is accepted. The first is the wrong offering. It's the offering of Cain. But the offering of Abel is accepted. The first is the wrong seed. It's the seed of Ishmael, the wrong son, the son of the flesh, not of the promise. It's the wrong wife. It's Leah, not Rachel. It's the wrong king. It's Saul, not David. It's the wrong birthright and the wrong inheritance. It's Esau and not Jacob.

The second is what He receives; the second is the name that He recognizes; the name that He honors. The first is the name that God does not know.

Getting back to prayer, I could say it like this: The first thing I began to understand is that I'd always been praying in my own name. I'd known prayer in the name of Jason. And I began to realize that

His name doesn't mix with ours. It's a name that He'll give you. His name is a name that He'll write on you and share with you. It's a name that He'll allow you to pray in, but it's not your name by nature. It's a totally different name.

I'm not trying to be cryptic when I'm talking about the name this way. The name of Christ is simply what God understands Christ to BE. The name is how God recognizes His Son. And when we pray in that name, we are praying in the mind, nature, and life of the Son. We pray according to the name. And He gives us a name that we can pray in, not a name that we can attach to our own prayers or to our own name. We pray in Christ's name as those who have no other name. His name defines who and what we are.

Christ is the source, the means, the recipient, and the provision of prayer. Christ is all things of prayer. Praying in Christ's name has a different origin, or source, than we've known. We're accustomed to thinking of God as the recipient of our prayers, but we think that we are the author of our prayers. And we think that 'stuff'—I mean things, and usually natural things—is the provision of our prayers.

But I want to say that Christ is the all things of prayer. He's the actual source of the prayer working in you. He, or the Father, is the recipient of our prayers. He's the means by which we *can* pray... In other words, coming into Him, living with Him, being hidden with Christ in God is the only way we can offer prayer. And He's also the provision, the great Offer of God, the thing God is providing. **God answers our prayers by making some aspect of His Son more real, more alive to our soul.**

Now Christians usually think about the outward effects of Christ when we think about answers to prayer. We think of prayer that Christ will *do* something; to heal or provide or fix something that's broken. And He can do that. That's possible and it is a manifestation of Christ in some way. But I think the greatest answers to prayer—the ones that your heart begins to long for and cry out for, the things that your soul is really desiring more than anything else... the prayers that God puts into the human heart— are answered by a greater knowledge and experience of Jesus Christ as death, as life, as light, as truth, as love, as righteousness, as perspective, as freedom, as humility, as peace, as the anchor of the soul... With a clear view, anything that Christ can do in the natural realm pales in comparison to knowing the substance itself, to knowing the actual person.

Again, I don't want to discourage people from praying, but I want to want to discourage people from assuming that prayer is a natural ability of the natural man. There is so much assumption when it comes to prayer. There's the assumption that you know the will of God. There's the idea that God wants the things you naturally want to ask for. There is the idea that you understand His name, or

that by attaching His title to the end of your prayers, He's going to do what you want. There are wrong understandings of the cross, the purpose of God, etc.

We usually don't even bring these kinds of assumptions or questions before the Lord. We just start praying whatever we want, or whatever somebody tells us that God wants.

Ok, let me spend the rest of the time trying to describe a bit of how I have been seeing and experiencing prayer recently.

I see prayer now as kind of a drawing. I don't mean the scribbling kind of drawing; I mean the "drawing from a well" kind of drawing. I see it as a drinking...a receiving. Those are the three words that come to mind to describe it: **Drawing, drinking, and receiving. It's like receiving, drawing, and drinking from that which God is perpetually offering.**

It's like there is a perfect constant stream of Christ that is being offered to the human soul in every conceivable kind of experience and knowledge. God has this stream of the person and provision and position of Christ—not that we become Christ, obviously—but it's this constant extension of Himself to our soul. He offers us Christ—all that Christ is and has. **And prayer becomes the God-ordained, God-given way to lay hold of that. First He brings us into Christ, and then He, in Christ, perpetually extends to us this ongoing ever-present experience of Christ. We can lay hold of that in a constant, perpetual receiving, in a prayer that is a position, a position of taking, receiving, turning, seeing, watching. It is like daily bread... in the same way that you eat every day for the continual life and nourishment of your body. Prayer receives God's offer. Prayer receives Christ.**

I was trying to think of a couple of analogies to describe prayer... I'm not sure how helpful they will be, but I was picturing Christ as this huge apple tree, filled with a never-ending supply of fruit. A tree where fruit is just constantly appearing and hanging off the branches. And prayer actually picks the apples and eats them.

Or I thought of Christ as like Niagara Falls, and prayer turns your mouth upward and opens it up and drinks. It's Niagara Falls for the thirsty soul, and prayer opens the mouth to drink.

True prayer seems to me to be a receiving of Christ, a turning and receiving that comes out from a consciousness of the need of Christ that God works in the human soul. In other words, by His light, God begins to work in your heart a perspective, a real true sense of your true needs; the needs of the body of Christ.

And I don't mean the physical, natural needs. In fact, those seem to get pushed to the margins. I'm not saying God doesn't deal with them, but they don't even feel like your real needs. They get pushed so far out of view that honestly in my limited experience, I don't usually think about praying for natural things. Just to be totally honest, not to sound super-spiritual or anything... that's what I feel like when it comes to praying for natural things. I know He *can* do it, but why would I ask for natural things that are for personal benefit? If I'm going to turn and receive from Him, why wouldn't I want to turn and receive something eternal, spiritual? I want something that doesn't just fix my shell, but transforms my soul. And the other things just seem to get pushed to the outside.

And personally (now this is just me) but in the light of God's appearing in my own heart, I have never felt the impulse to pray for something natural. I just haven't. I'm not dismissing that as being impossible—it could very well be something that happens—I just haven't had that experience.

I think that God creates in our hearts the sense of our true need, the spiritual need of the soul, and prayer moves in and to receive it. Prayer lays hold of it and drinks up what God is offering.

And that's the thing that has just recently become more real in my heart. It's almost like the more I turn my heart to Him and the more I see in His light, the more I'm filled with the awareness of my lack, the awareness of my need to drink Him in. I'm conscious of what my soul really needs, and I know that He's the source and the supply and the provision.

So I position my heart in a way where I am putting myself in this relationship of prayer that He's offered me—putting myself in a position to eat and to drink—and finding everything in Him. It's not like I'm finding a theology or a discipline. It's not mental. It's not a theology. **It's a relationship of prayer where my soul continually feeds and takes and possesses and grabs the things of Christ that are continually being offered to my heart.**

And truth working in the inner man is what makes that happen. When Paul's praying for the church, it always has to do with true spiritual understanding and wisdom... true spiritual knowledge. And it's like the pressure of that truth working in your heart comes out as this awareness of your true need and the desire to find it in the only place that you can find it.

So prayer becomes a position of constant taking and requesting and desiring and hungering for the things that are provided in Christ, that are provided *as* Christ. Prayer becomes a continual state— involving words or not involving words—but it's definitely not formal, recited words that you've memorized, unless those words happen to be the true hunger of your soul.

Prayer is not a spiritual discipline. I don't really even know what spiritual discipline means anymore, because everything that's spiritual flows out of desire and joy.