

Living a life worthy of the Lord

Colossians 1:9-14

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The book of Colossians is a letter from the Apostle Paul, who was being held in a prison in Rome. He was writing to this new group of believers in the city of Colossae, which was in what would now be modern-day Turkey. This church had been started by Epaphras, who is believed to have been one of Paul's students during his earlier ministry in Ephesus. Colossians was written almost 30 years after Christ had lived.

It was 62 A.D. At this point Paul had been a believer for about 25 years. He had already taken his three missionary journeys and written most of his letters that we find in the New Testament. He had witnessed miraculous works of God and been victim of tortuous persecution from man. He was in the prime of his ministry, with enough experience to now teach others what God had taught him through the years. He would soon be freed from prison, but would then be arrested again about 6 years later and executed at Nero's orders in 68 A.D.

This young church in Colossae possessed a faith that had already resulted in a love for all the saints. Even though surrounded by a pagan culture and vastly outnumbered, they were able to love each other because their eyes were fixed on heaven and the eternal life which awaited them all. They were a congregation of Jews and Gentiles, masters and servants, rich and poor, and yet their faith in Christ had birthed in them a love for each other. This love had truly become proof that they were followers of Christ (John 15:34-35).

With this in mind, we now approach Colossians 1:9-14. Remember the Apostle Paul is writing to them as their spiritual grandfather as he pens these words:

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:

Epaphras had come to Rome and shared the great news with Paul about what God was doing in Colossae. Since that first day that Paul had heard about the gospel taking effect in the lives of these new believers, he had not ceased praying for them.

This does not mean that Paul was praying for them every moment, but that, on an ongoing basis, the church in Colossae continued to be on his mind, in his heart and in his prayers.

Paul's concern for this young church drove him to support them the best way he could. He prayed. God has ordained prayer as the most powerful way that we as Christians can join Him in His work. Yes, we can volunteer, or give donations, or even tell others about Jesus, but nothing in the Christian life ushers the work of God into a situation like prayer.

We see it throughout scripture. As Jesus' disciples prayed in the upper room, in Acts 2, the Spirit came, and 3,000 people put their faith in Jesus.

In Acts 4:31, in the face of persecution, ***"They prayed, and the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."*** In Acts 6:6, they pray as they chose the first deacons. As a result, ***"the word of God increased, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem."***

In Acts 9:40, Peter prayed over the body of a woman named Dorcas and she was miraculously brought back to life. In response, ***"It became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."***

In Acts 10-11, prayer played a key role in Gentiles coming to Jesus and being admitted to the church. In Acts 12:6-19, the church prayed for Peter's rescue from prison and God sent an angel who miraculously freed him.

In Acts 13:1-3, the church prayed and were led to send out the first missionaries, Paul and Barnabas.

As has been said before, when we work, we work. When we pray, God works.

At this point we need to take note of how the Spirit led Paul to pray. Paul prayed that they would be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

It was not to merely to know about God, it was to be filled with, lorded over by, the knowledge of His will. It echoes Jesus' words in the Lord's Prayer, ***"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven"*** (Matthew 6:10). We see it again in the Garden of Gethsemane as Jesus prayed, ***"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done"*** (Luke 22:42).

It was an expression of "if you seek, you will find". Or, as we see in James 1:5, ***"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him."*** It was a seeking that recognized the frailty of the logic of man and longed for the revelation of God.

This "knowledge of God's will" at times reveals itself as a very clear and specific word from God. At other times, it is a general knowledge of God's character and principles that help us discern His will. In some ways, it is similar to a child obeying his or her parent. At times, the child obeys with the parent's clear command in mind. At other times, the child obeys with the parent's character in mind.

It takes humility to receive the knowledge of God's will. An awareness that we need wisdom from outside of ourselves. A teachableness of spirit to seek out, listen for, receive and submit to the knowledge of His will. It reminds us of Proverbs 3:5-6, where we read, ***"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."*** In this verse we see the same. Trusting in the Lord with all that we are and not trusting in our own ideas, logic, knowledge or supposed wisdom.

It does not mean blind faith or that Christians are not supposed to be proficient at reasoning and thinking deeply. It just means that in the midst of striving to be great thinkers, we never forget that there is a wisdom that is greater than us and that can only be revealed through God's Word and through the Spirit who guides us into all truth (John 16:13).

Trusting in the Lord is marked by an absence of insubordinate debate, arguing, rationalizing and delayed obedience against what God reveals to us. Instead, it is accompanied by a heart that has already committed to obedience and to walk in it, even before they have heard God speak.

I heard a missionary once talking of discipleship and helping new believers grow in their faith. He referred back to the Great Commission and Jesus' words right before He ascended to heaven:

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20)

He focused on that phrase, ***"teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."*** As we make disciples, our goal is not to usher the young believer to the point that he knows and obeys every command in the Bible. We can never know all of God's commandments perfectly. The goal is to teach them to obey all things. That means that that lordship of Christ will be so prevalent in that person's life, that he or she will have a heart that is already committed to obey every command that he or she becomes aware of in scripture.

That is similar to the heart that is prepared to receive the knowledge of God's will.

Verse 10 then tells us why Paul was praying that the believers in Colossae would be filled with the knowledge of God's will. As our lives are filled with the knowledge of God's will, we are then prepared ***"to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord"***.

"Walk" refers to the manner in which we live. It is not just a one moment event. It is the ongoing direction or trajectory of our lives.

In the scriptures we see the word "walk" used many times. Ephesians 5:2 says to ***"Walk in love"***. In Psalm 81:13, God wishes that ***"Israel would walk in my ways"***. Psalm 1:1 talks of ***"How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked"***. 1 John 1:6 tells us that ***"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."*** 2 Corinthians 5:7 reminds us that ***"we walk by faith, not by sight."*** As we read these verses we see that "walk" refers to the manner in which we live. It is our way of life. We are to walk in His ways, thus live in a manner that is worthy of the Lord.

This knowledge of God's will, for which Paul is praying, is not just right theology or doctrine. It is more than being the person in your Bible study group who knows the answers to more questions than anyone else. It is a person who puts the Word of God into action in their lives.

It is a knowledge and wisdom that results in a person walking in a manner that is worthy of the Lord. It is the person who day by day is growing in likeness to Christ in his nature, character and attributes. It is beyond rightly knowing and has overflowed into right living.

In the words of Benson's commentary, *"It is a practical knowledge of divine things, very different from that mere speculative and notional knowledge of them with which many feel satisfied, though it neither changes their hearts nor governs their lives."*

The 1998 movie *Saving Private Ryan* tells of a true story of a family who had 5 sons who fought in World War II. Four of the sons were killed in battle, so the government sent a group of soldiers to find the fifth son and return him home safely, because surely no family should lose all five sons to war.

The movie follows this group of soldiers who finally find the fifth son. They eventually are caught in a battle that costs most of them their lives while saving this young man. In one of the closing scenes the captain of this group of soldiers is mortally wounded and is about to die. He draws the fifth son close to himself and whispers in his final words, *"Earn this."* In reality the captain was saying, "we have given our lives for yours, live a life worthy of our sacrifice."

This is similar in meaning to Paul's words here when he says, *"to live in a worthy manner of the Lord."* Christ came and took upon Himself our sins so that we could receive the righteousness of God.

"Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:6-8)

"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." (Isaiah 53:3-6)

May we walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, not out of guilt, but out of an indebted love for our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Paul then goes on to describe a life lived worthy of the Lord:

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.

Paul is praying that they will be filled with the knowledge of God so that they will live in a manner that is worthy of the Lord. Paul then describes what this life will be like. To the Colossians this likely served as an encouragement of what was possible and a goal that they could seek to take hold of in Christ.

A life lived worthy of the Lord is to bear fruit. Scripture describes both fruit within us such as the fruit of the Spirit that is evident as we are made more like Christ, and the lasting fruit that come from our lives such as service to others, evangelism, making disciples or answered prayer. John 15:5 tells us clearly that the bearing of fruit comes only as we abide in Him. A life lived worthy of the Lord is a life that abides in Christ and bears fruit.

A life that is worthy of the Lord is also characterized by an increasing knowledge of God. Not just an increase in our knowledge about God, but in our relational knowledge of God. As we walk faithfully with Him we experience His promises and His provisions personally. It becomes a firsthand “knowing” as we experience Him working in and through our lives.

A life worthy of the Lord is strengthened by God for all endurance and patience with joy. The people of Colossae must have been encouraged to hear that God provided the resources needed to live the life to which they were called. Yes, their situation was difficult. Endurance and patience were needed, but in the midst of their weakness God would be their strength. In addition, He would be the source of their joy.

A life worthy of the Lord would lastly be characterized by gratitude to the Father. As the Christians in Colossae bore fruit, they came to know God in a more intimate way and were strengthened by God; there was nothing for which they could take credit. It is similar to Ephesians 2:8-9, ***“By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast”*** (Ephesians 2:8-9). Walking in a manner that is worthy of the Lord is only made possible as God works in our lives. Through Christ God has qualified us to share the inheritance that is reserved for the children of God. Because of this, a life worthy of the Lord must be characterized by gratitude.

In Christ, we join with all the saints who have been made righteous in Christ. We no longer walk in the dominion of darkness. We now are in Christ, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

The Bible describes spiritual darkness as a battle between good and evil (Isaiah 5:20), between holiness and sin. Scripture speaks of spiritual blindness that plagues all who do not know God. There is a constant spiritual darkness that can’t be avoided because the person is spiritually blind.

Some walk in blindness because they do not know God and have never been ushered into the light. 2 Corinthians 4:4, speaks in these words: ***“In their case the god of this world (Satan) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*** It is these who are in the domain of darkness.

In Acts 26:18, Jesus explains to the Apostle Paul why He is calling Him to preach the gospel, ***“To open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”***

It is in the forgiveness of sin that we are redeemed and bought out of the darkness of sin and into the light, in the kingdom of Christ.

Paul ends these group of verses with these words:

“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.”

The dictionary says that redemption is, “*the action of regaining or gaining possession of something in exchange for payment.*” It is buying something back. This is what Christ has done for us.

This idea of redemption is displayed in the Old Testament book of Hosea. In this book God instructed the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute. He obeyed and married a woman named Gomer. Together they have several children and then she chose to turn her back on her marriage vows and returned to her life of prostitution. In Hosea 2:5, Gomer says, ***“I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”*** Finally God brought Gomer to a point of desperation where she ended up being sold, as property. How did God instruct Hosea to respond? ***“Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods.”*** In obedience, Hosea bought Gomer back. He redeemed Gomer, who was rightfully his, and continued to love her as his wife. This is the picture of the redemptive love and forgiveness that God has for all who put their faith in Him.

This is our story as well. We walked in darkness, rebellion and sin. But now we have been bought by the blood of Jesus Christ. Our debt had been paid and through faith our sins had been forgiven. Now we walk in the light of Christ and the amazing grace of God. With this mind, may we live in a manner that is worthy of God.

Discussion questions:

- 1.** What did you find most interesting in this sermon?
- 2.** Paul never ceased praying for the church in Colossae. When was a time in your life that God gave you a burden for someone or something that you regularly prayed for?
- 3.** If you were praying for a church that just started, what might you pray for?
- 4.** Paul prayed that the Colossians would be *filled with the knowledge of God’s will*. How would you say this phrase in your own words?
- 5.** Why do you think some people find it difficult to commit to obey God’s will before they know what it is?
- 6.** What were the different characteristics of “a life lived in a manner that is worthy of God” in these verses? Which of these do you find most difficult and most natural in your life?
- 7.** What do you need to remember from this sermon?
- 8.** What actions do you need to take in response to this sermon?
- 9.** How can we pray for you?