

What To Know For A Life Of Worth (Colossians 1:9-14)

Outreach Pastor Sam Creagar | Faith Evangelical Free Church

Sunday, May 8, 2022

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, 10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1 (NIV)

I once came across a quote from an art curator that struck me as really interesting. As a professional curator her primary job was finding, purchasing, selling, and presenting great works for art for her clients. She spent every day searching the entire world for incredible paintings, beautiful sketches, and unique creations. But when asked to describe what she loved about her work, she gave a surprising answer. She said,

“One of my favorite parts of my job is taking the pieces to frame. I am often amazed at how the presentation of artwork can affect the piece positively, or even make the piece look bad. Experience has taught me that showcasing a work of art is almost as important as selecting the piece itself. When selecting a work of art to be hung on a wall, the frame may be overlooked. But do you realize how much the right (or wrong) frame can affect the overall appearance of the art, changing the experience and emotion which the collector is striving for in placing the work in that specific location? Instead of an afterthought, a frame must truly be considered as important as the work itself.”

Regina De Con Cossio, Sybaris Collection

This idea, that *the frame is just as important as the work itself*, kept coming to mind as I read Colossians 1:9-14 this week. In this passage, the Apostle Paul describes what the life of a believer and follower of Jesus should look like. He says, in v10, that a Christian should be committed to good works, eager to learn more about God, characterized by endurance and patience, and joyfully thankful to God for all He has done. Paul “paints” a beautiful word-picture of a people striving to live lives worthy of the Son of God, *“in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

It’s easy for us to read this passage and focus only on those commands for how to live, but in doing so we may miss out on the importance of what Paul says must come before our pursuit of a life-well-lived. In vv10-12 Paul may have curated for us a good picture of the Christian life, but that picture sits within a frame that should not be overlooked. Our perception and understanding of the life we want to live will be greatly affected by what Paul calls *“the knowledge of the will of God”*. Because we need the structure and support of this knowledge in order to *“live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way.”*

So what was it that Paul was praying for the Christians in Colossae to know in order for them to do the sort of things he said Christians needed to do? And how was his prayer for them a hope we should have for ourselves as well? That’s what we’re going to take a look at this morning.

Last week, as Pastor Brian got us started on our summer study of Colossians, he gave a brief summary of the historical situation and possible circumstances that prompted the writing of this letter. I won't repeat everything Brian pointed out (if you are curious you can find his sermon on our website), but there are two things that are important to remember about the challenges the Colossians were facing:

First, the ancient city of Colossae was originally built at the crossroads of two major Roman trade highways. This means that, for a time, the city was a well-traveled and diverse place.

It is unsurprising, then, that Colossae was known to be full of competing religions, worldviews, and philosophies. And it was this diversity of thoughts and beliefs that was causing problems for the Colossian Christians. Later in the letter we will see that Paul warns his readers of being led astray by "false teachers" who insisted that the Colossians needed to add more to what they believed. The Gospel they had learned about from Christian ministers (specifically a man named Epaphras), according to these teachers, was not enough. *Jesus was not enough*. If they really wanted to know the truth, these teachers said the Colossians needed more than what God had to give.

This is often the message we receive from the wisdom of the world, isn't it? We are told that what we know, what we think, what we believe is never enough. Following just one God, or hoping in just one Gospel, is too exclusive. It's too narrow minded. We are told that it's arrogant for us, as Christians, to claim we know the truth. We hear that if we really want to be loving we need to be open to just about everything.

Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians to push back against arguments just like these. In 1:1-8 he told his readers that when he prays he always thanks God for their faith and for their ongoing confidence in the truth of the Gospel. Then, in 1:9-14, Paul gets specific about exactly what it is he asks God to do for the Colossians. And, as we will see, what those believers needed over 2000 years ago, we also need as we seek to live faithfully in a world trying constantly to convince us that the truth we find in Scripture and the confidence we have in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus isn't enough. Let me assure you...that's just not true. I have every confidence that Jesus is indeed enough. I believe we really and truly do have everything in Christ.

So, after Paul says in 1:1-8 that he's heard great things about the faith of the believers in Colossae, he goes on to say in v9:

9 For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,
Colossians 1 (NIV)

"*We have not stopped praying for you*" is one of those phrases that makes many Christians feel a little sheepish about their own prayer life. But I think it's safe to say that Paul wasn't telling the Colossians he was praying for them every moment of every day (after all...he clearly paused his prayers at some point to write this letter!). Instead, Paul assures the Colossians that during his times of prayer, he always remembers them and asks God to enrich their hearts and minds with greater knowledge of who He is and what He's up to on their behalf.

We won't spend anymore time on this point, but I do think it is worth noting how important Paul felt it was to pray for his fellow believers. He knew persistent prayer for his brothers and sisters in Christ was important.

Interceding for one another is both an expression of our love for each other, and our trust that God listens and responds to our prayers.

And what was it that Paul was asking of God on behalf of the Colossians? “*We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives...*”

Whew...that is a mouthful! There is a lot going on in that request, so let’s break it down a bit.

The “knowledge of his [God’s] will” could mean one of two things:

1. Paul could be saying “I’m praying for you all to be filled with the knowledge of what God wants **from you**, what he wants you to do, how he wants you to act, and for you to understand what obedience to his expectations really means.”
2. Or, Paul could be saying “I’m praying for you all to be filled with the knowledge of what God wants **for you**, what He has done on your behalf, and for you to understand what God has accomplished...especially in the person and work of His Son, Jesus Christ.”

Deciding between the two of these interpretations is tricky (and both ideas are biblical)...but in my opinion, the better meaning is the second one: ***Paul is praying for the Colossians to be filled with the knowledge of all God has done for them.*** To have a deep and abiding understanding of the truth that God wanted to save humanity from sin and death, and that He did exactly that through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus.

This doesn’t mean that Paul didn’t care if the Colossians knew how to live good, obedient lives (as we will see in a moment, that is precisely the concern he takes up with his next request in v10), but it does mean that Paul knew it was ***crucial for the Christians in Colosse to have their faith founded on, and framed by, the incredible truth that it is God’s will – God’s desire, God’s sovereign decree – for salvation to be offered to those who repent of their sin and believe in Jesus.***

What God has done for you is the foundation and framework of the entire Christian faith. We do not ask ourselves the question, “*what must I do to get God to do something for me?*” We shape our lives around the conviction, “*what must I do now that I know God has already done everything for me?*”

But before we go any further, we need to be sure we catch how Paul says this knowledge will come to us. Because it’s not something we acquire on our own. We can’t fill ourselves with the truth of what God has done for us. Instead, we receive this knowledge as a gift from a very special source:

*We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will **through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives,***

Colossians 1 (NIV)

The Holy Spirit is our source for the wisdom and understanding needed to know God’s will. To process His love for us. To fully grasp how much he’s done for us. It is the wisdom from the Holy Spirit that allows us to navigate the competing worldviews and philosophies that try to tell us that God is not enough.

In light of all this, I think we need to ask an incredibly important question: ***To what extent does the knowledge of God's will shape your life?*** How much does the realization that what God wants for you is life – and life abundantly, free of pain and sorrow and death – impact the kind of person you aspire to be? The kind of life you seek to live? Does the Gospel change and transform who you are...or is it just a story you know, competing for a place of influence in your heart, soul, and mind?

This is a question both believers and non-believers of Jesus should ask.

- If you already follow Jesus, then do a quick mental or spiritual inventory: does the Gospel truth shape how you understand and interact with the world? If someone looked at what (or hopefully, who) you worship, how you treat others, the quality of your relationships, the topics of your conversations, the character of your social media posts...would they think, “that is someone whose life is shaped by something powerful and good”, or would they think “that is someone shaped by the world and its fickle, little values”?
- If you are not a follower of Jesus, I'd still encourage you to think about how your life might be shaped if you believed a good God truly loved you. The hope of the Christian message is that God so loves you that he sacrificed everything to save you from the worst things of this world. Even death is overcome by God. How might your life change if you discovered that promise...was really, wonderfully true?

Paul's prayer was that the knowledge of God's will – of what He truly wants the people loves – would fill the Colossians in such a way that they would never be the same. I pray the same is true for us.

May the Holy Spirit make clear to us what God has done for us.

If he does, then we can go on to live the life of worth Paul describes in the next few verses.

10 so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, 12 and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

Colossians 1 (NIV)

Our knowledge of what God wants for us and what He has already done for us should inspire us to “*live a life worthy of the Lord*”. Back in 1:3 “The Lord” was a title assigned to Jesus. So, Paul's argument is simple: we're on the right path when our *character, actions, and attitude most closely resemble that of Christ*. We want to be like Jesus. And, in the following verses, Paul suggests a few ways we can do just that.

It is important to note that the four habits or hallmarks of a Christian's life that Paul describes in vv10-12 are not the only things we need to do in order to live in a way befitting a follower of Jesus. Most likely, the things Paul highlights here were what he knew the Colossians were struggling with the most. We will follow along with the letter and consider just these four this morning, but remember that all of Scripture has a lot more to say about what it means to have a character consistent with that of Christ.

So, what might the life of someone who is filled with understanding from the Holy Spirit of what God has done for them in Christ look like? Paul outlines four traits for good, godly, Christlike conduct:

“bearing fruit in every good work” – In light of all God has done for us, it is only fitting that we should be people committed to doing good work. But these good deeds and quality efforts must not be done while grumbling or with a heart of bitterness within. Our good works are to be accompanied by and indeed flow from an inner life of *“fruit”* – which, pretty much any time you find it in Scripture, is alluding to virtues of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, an self control (among others).

If you went back and looked at all the good deeds Jesus did that are recorded in the Gospels you’ll notice something pretty cool: they are always accompanied with compassion and kindness for the recipient. Jesus never said “alright, I healed you, now leave me alone”. He never rolled his eyes while listening to the needs of others, or whined while turning a few fish into enough to feed thousands of people. Jesus was patient. He was kind. In every one of his actions he bore beautiful spiritual fruit that only enriched the blessings received by others. That’s our model. When we do good work, we ought to bear good fruit, too.

“growing in the knowledge of God” – When you know about something good...doesn’t it make you want to know more? The knowledge of who God is and what God has done for us is like exploring the ocean or surveying the stars of the universe. You’ll never see it all and you’ll always find something new each time you take a look. This is why we encourage the rhythms of prayer, reading your Bibles, and having spiritual conversations in your lifegroups or church communities. There is always more to learn about God. For over 2000 years Christians have been studying, talking about, and writing about God. And for thousands of years before that the Hebrews did the same thing. And we STILL have only scratched the surface. A commitment to growing in the knowledge of God is one of the most rewarding, fruitful practices you can pursue in your day to day life. But you should do it in a way that best suits you.

For example, I love studying. Give me a stack of books with dead, ancient languages and big ‘ol theological words, and I will go for hours seeking some new little bit of knowledge about God. My wife, on the other hand, could not imagine a worse way to connect with the Creator of all things. For her, study or “quiet time” is richer and more meaningful if she is drawing, painting, singing songs, or even having a good conversation with a close friend. Both ways of growing close to God are good. Both are 100% legitimate. You might enjoy some of these two, or relate to God in a completely different way. Spend the time to discover what helps you grow in the knowledge of God and then enjoy doing so as often as you can.

“being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience” – This is a really interesting one, because if you miss the verb that conditions the entire clause, you miss the point entirely. We need strength in order to have the endurance and patience necessary to be a follower of Jesus in a world that is still opposed to him and his Gospel. But where does that strength come from? It is not the strength of our own will or the might of our own fists. The only way we can find the strength we need is to acknowledge, humbly, that it must be given and provided by God. Paul says that Christians are *“being strengthened [passively, from another source]...according to God’s glorious might”*. We are to rely on the strength, endurance, and patience that God gives, day by day. And if you wonder about how we are to spend that strength...remember that we are striving to live a life worthy, in imitation of the Lord Jesus Christ. His strength was spent for the good of others. His strength was spent sacrificially on the cross. We are to be a people strong in sacrifice, powerful in love.

“giving joyful thanks to the Father” – I know a little bit more about what it looks like to give joyful thanks to a father, because now I have a two year old. And let me tell you, there is a very obvious difference between when she feels obligated (or is told) to give thanks...and when she wants to. When Abby wants to say thank you it is a joyous, genuine, smiling, full-hearted explosion of gratitude. And while I don’t expect you all to hop around and clasp your hands over your cheeks while exclaiming “tank-you” to God, I do think it would be good if our hearts were a little bit more childlike with our gratitude for God’s love, mercy, gifts, and grace. Giving thanks to God who loves us should be a celebration of the heart. It should be lovely. And it’s something I know I need to work on, and perhaps you do too.

Bear fruit in good works.

Grow in your knowledge of God.

Humbly accept God’s gifts of strength for God’s purposes of strength.

Give joyful thanks.

My suggestion to you would be to prayerfully consider these four habits of a life worth living, a life worthy of a follower of Jesus...and maybe pick or two intentionally work on. For me, I have to work on accepting God’s strength and not trying to do too much (or prove too much) on my own.

I’ll leave which one you pick to your discernment and the leading of the Holy Spirit. But this summer, as we study Colossians, Paul will have more to say on each of these ideas. So take the invitation seriously. You can grow in these areas. And in doing so, you will grow closer to the God who loves you, too.

Before we wrap up this passage, we need to notice one more thing. Paul doesn’t leave his readers with a quick list of spiritual self-improvement. He is careful to remind them, and us, that all of this is only possible because of the work and love and awesome victory of Jesus Christ:

12...[the Father] who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1

Everything we’ve talked about this morning is possible and worthy of pursuit only because of everything we have in Christ: a rescue from darkness, a new home in God’s kingdom, and redemption thanks to the forgiveness of our sins. It is always, always because of this Gospel. Christ’s Gospel.

May the Holy Spirit make clear to us what God has done for us in Christ,

So that we will seek to live lives worthy of Jesus, who saved us.