

Praying for Perspective

Colossians 1:9-14

“so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him”

Introduction: “Times they are a changin’” was a ballad that Bob Dylan wrote in 1964 as an anthem for change for the time of political and social change that was occurring. The song has been covered dozens of times over the years (by Bruce Springsteen in 2008) as each successive generation has picked up the anthem and equated it to shift in thought and policy of their era. *But is it true? Are the times a changing?*

We are going to walk through a passage in the book of Colossians addressed to a church that was bombarded with false teaching that left them **confused, frightened, and possibly ineffective**. It was a church founded by the disciple of Paul (named Epaphras – Col. 1:7; 4:12), but a place that Paul had not actually visited. They received the gospel, grew, let it be known that they were followers of Christ, but now were faced with uncertainty. A heresy called *Gnosticism* had come in with the Gnostics claiming to be people “in the know”, spiritual elites who offered to help the weak Christians to attain deeper spirituality. They taught that matter was evil but the spirit was good. This meant that they could keep people in bondage through asceticism (forbidding people from eating foods or partaking in marriage), secret passwords (borrowed from Eastern mysticism), a study of astrology, and mixed all together with elements of Christianity (like applesauce to a Dutchman). This created a **syncretistic religion** of not only control, but one that relentlessly **marginalized Jesus Christ**. Since Jesus was made a man and entered into humanity, He was viewed as a lesser emanation of God, stripping Him of any power. In other words, they acknowledged Jesus, but viewed Him as nice, part of a solution, but not someone who was supreme or who was Lord, or who had bearing on all of life.

Nothing has really changed. The teaching is different, but the issue still out there: our world wants to marginalize Jesus Christ, convince us that what we believe in is neither powerful nor logical, and cause us to live in reactive fear, uncertain confusion, and tension filled ineffectiveness. What we find in the letter to the Colossians is *how Paul set out to instill confidence in a group of people he had never seen to KNOW who they were in Christ so that they could LIVE it boldly in the midst of opposition*. He addressed their thinking first, then their action that resulted. He wanted them to grow and be maturing, which was the best antidote to the pressures they faced around them.

I. **Praying That We Remember What Matters the Most** (9)

Colossians 1:9 *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,*

A. **Praying Intensely**

So often we pray for what we really believe, or really want in life. If we believe that life is to be lived on this world alone, we will hope for an outcome on a horizontal level. I was at the gym the other day and had a conversation with a mom of three grown sons (all conversations at the gym are awkward – there’s obligation mixed with fatigue as I’m on the elliptical machine – so I try to keep this type to a minimum). She said she had hoped that her sons would each have an education and a good job, and had seen her last son move out to get a scholarship at a college. Her hope was fulfilled, but it at the same time felt hollow and empty, saying “now what”.

Notice that Paul prayed **intensely and consistently** for this group. First he gave **thanks** to God for the work of the gospel among them (1:3). Paul’s prayer would often overflow in thanksgiving for what God had done through His word and gospel. Second, he made **intercession** for this group, asking God for

wisdom on their behalf. What Paul *asked for* showed what he hoped for regarding the lives of the church. Notice next what he does and does not pray for:

B. Praying to Know God's Will

At any point in our day, week, or month, there are a myriad of things to pray for. Health issues, trials, money worries, and upcoming events make up the normal list of prayers that we offer. Here, Paul teaches us by example what consumed the primary nature of his prayer life. He prayed that this group of people that were facing all the normal pressures of life, as well as the invasion of false thinking, would clearly, completely, and utterly know the will of God in their life. This is certainly a key question for all of us to ask: "**what is God's will for me**"? This has particular relevance to anyone facing a big decision: *should I get married, should I date this person, should I switch jobs, should I move my family, how should I school my child, etc.* We often look for specific answers in Scripture for these questions and miss the overall understanding of God's will. God's will is defined as:

- **A passion to know His Word and to obey it in its entirety**

When life does not make sense - Psalm 143:10 Deliver me from my enemies, O Lord! I have fled to you for refuge! Teach me to do **your will**, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!

To Be Transformed - Romans 12:2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the **will of God**, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

To Live in Wisdom - Ephesians 5:15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,¹⁶ making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the **will of the Lord** is.

To Grow in Submission - 1 Peter 2:13-15 Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution...for this is the **will of God**, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

- **To grow in sanctification, which means our desire/action of sin lessens as we know Him more**

1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the **will of God**, your *sanctification*: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

Colossians 3:5-6 - Put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you...On account of these the wrath of God is coming. In these too you once walked, when you were living in them. But now you must put them all away.

- **We see all circumstances as part of His sovereign plan and use it as an opportunity to grow, give thanks, and trust in Him**

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always,¹⁷ pray without ceasing,¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the **will of God** in Christ Jesus for you.

*"It is folly to pretend to seek **God's will** for your life, in terms of a marriage partner or some form of Christian vocation, when there is no deep desire to pursue God's will as He has already revealed it."*¹

¹ D. A. Carson, "A Call to Spiritual Reformation" p. 102.

Paul maximized his prayer for those he loved the most. He knew that if his spiritual grandkids had a large view of God's will, lived their life to the glory of God, passionately pursued Him in love, and lived to magnify Christ, then their decisions would be according to God's will. It was not that Paul was not concerned with each temporal decision that they would make, but those decisions would simply be opportunities for them to exercise trust in a great God in whom they placed their trust. His prayer showed that he had **perspective** and his view of God was large.

Is that our passion for ourselves, our families, and those we interact with that claim to know Christ? Do we pray in such a way that reflects an understanding that knowing God's will is most important to us and for those that we love?

C. Praying for Counter-cultural Knowledge

The way that we will be able to know God's will is when we **think** differently about ourselves, God, and the world around us. God's will is not hidden but it is veiled to those whose eyes have not been opened by the Spirit of God:

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person **does not** accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are **folly** to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. ¹⁵ The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. ¹⁶ "For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" **But we have the mind of Christ.**

Notice that he prays for "spiritual" wisdom and understanding. The word is in an emphatic position which means Paul is using it to counter the artificial and earthly wisdom touted by the false teachers. Understanding would allow them to come to mental grips with God's will, and wisdom would help them put it into practice.

The reason that Paul prays for spiritual wisdom and understanding is because we are all prone to think wisely according to the wisdom this world keeps (James 3:15). What Paul prays is that this group of people would have their eyes open to God's plan, His mind, His heart, and that every decision, every thought, every action would reflect what God wanted. Instead of looking for answers and contentment everywhere besides God alone, we fix our focus, attention, and desire on knowing God and understanding what He wants from us. This led D.A Carson to pen these words:

*"Is there anything that our generation more urgently needs than this? Some of us have chased every fad, scrambled aboard every bandwagon, adopted every gimmick, pursued every encounter with the media. Others of us have rigidly cherished every tradition, determined to change as little as possible, worshiped what is aged simply because it is aged. But where are the men and women whose **knowledge of God** is as fresh as it is profound, whose delight in **thinking God's thoughts** after him ensures that their study of Scripture is never merely intellectual and self-distancing, whose **desire to please God** easily outstrips residual and corrupting desires to shine in public."*²

II. **Praying That We Live For What Matters the Most** (1:10-14)

Colossians 1:10-11 so as to **walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.** ¹¹ May you be **strengthened** with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, **giving thanks** to the Father...

² Carson, p. 103

This is an astonishingly high standard. We are to live in a way that is worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ in every aspect of life, recognizing His supremacy over all things. We are to live for His pleasure above our own, believing that the greatest gain we can have in life is to know Him. There are two key principles we must understand before we can live a life that pleases Christ in every way:

- We cannot do enough to be acceptable to Christ, but can live out a pleasing life because we have already been accepted by Christ. We cannot conjure up righteousness in ourselves (Rom. 3:10-11), so we must have the righteousness of Christ inputted to us (Rom. 3:21-23; 5:19) and that by faith (Rom 1:17). This is one of the great truths that we each rest in our walk with Christ. We now have freedom to live and walk because He has broken the power of sin in our lives and we now have the choice to follow Him. For us in the church, it means that we can live in a way that knows we are **fully known and simultaneously fully loved**.
- We cannot have an apathetic view toward sin in our life and live a worthy walk to His pleasure. The plague that we face in the Western church is that of indifference, where we have men who are bored and people who do not care if they sin or not. There is a key difference between bringing home **my daughters** and one of their **American Girl dolls**. I expect that my girls will grow as they sleep, eat, and exercise (even to Amazonian sizes). American Girl dolls are just creepy, sitting there looking at you, never changing no matter what era they are from. Paul prays that this church would be cured of the virus of complacency, and would show that they desire to please Christ in every way by using four participles that are the *means* of walking worthy:

A. So we will live worthy of the ONE we confess

1. By **bearing** fruit

This is the logical, rational, and normal response to walking worthy of the Lord. Our lives are no longer about the praise of ourselves, but we now live for the service of others. This means we acknowledge that our salvation was not about us alone, but it was given so that we will glorify God by living out the good works that He had prepared for us beforehand (Eph. 2:10). We must remember that the type and amount of fruit differs among us (John 15:1-7), but if we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit (John 15:8)

- **Prepared** by God (Eph. 2:10)
- **Produced** by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22)
- **Presented** to Christ as proof of our discipleship to the glory of God (John 15:8)
- **Proclaiming** the gospel as it bears fruit in us and given to others (Colossians 1:6-7)
- **Practice** these toward others - by loving others (2:2) in the church and living wisely to reach out to those outside (4:5)

2. By **growing** in the knowledge of God

The key phrase to keep in mind is not that Paul does not call for people to know more **about** God, but to know God Himself. It means that we crave God's Word (1 Pet. 2:2) so that we will know Him more. It means that we will spend time in prayer and seek intimacy with Him because we know that is what pleases Him. God does not want us to have a conversation with Him one time in our life and forget that He exists the rest. He desires an ongoing relationship with us.

How does this knowledge grow? The key is acting on what we already know:

"Since the participles which define the walking worthily are all in the present tense and stress the notion of progress, it is probably right to conclude that the Colossian Christians would receive further knowledge as they were obedient to the knowledge of God they had already received."³

This gives us a two-fold approach to *growing deeper* in our knowledge of God (which is a question we receive often): 1) Crave the Word - read it, study it, meditate on it like a love letter from a spouse overseas. Consume it often, but secondly 2) be consumed by it - be obedient, living out what we know. Its wringing out the sponge, allowing us to absorb more. When we simply suck up the truth but never let flow out, we cannot absorb more, weighing us down, drowning us in knowledge **about** God, but not a knowledge **of Him**.

3. By **being strengthened** with power

This means that the call to please and walk worthy of Christ is that we are committed to the long haul, to the long term, tedious grind of pursuing Christ faithfully throughout our whole life. This is an acknowledgement that we can only do this through the glorious might that He provides us, but because He has provided it, we can endure all things in life with joy and patience. We remember that life does not get easier when we commit to Christ, but we remember that there is a purpose behind everything that happens, and that God is working all things out to His glory and our good, so we rest in joy and patience by the strength He gives.

4. By **giving** thanks joyfully

It is interesting that Paul ends this list with thanksgiving, because failure to give thanks in the midst of trial would somewhat invalidate the testimony of the other marks of walking worthy. When we give thanks when things are going well, we acknowledge God's goodness as the giver of every good gift. But when we give thanks when trials hit and circumstances have us low, we acknowledge Him as Sovereign and kind, and it's that kindness that separates our hope and faith from others. Paul launches from this idea of giving thanks and moves to the reason that we give thanks:

Thankfulness is the antidote of complaining and discontentment. When Jesus addressed the Philippian church, the way they were to be blameless and shine in the midst of a crooked and perverse world was to do all things without **grumbling and questioning**. One would think it would be battling lust, or laziness, or some other overt sin, but Paul focused on lack of contentment that caused complaining.

There is never a time that we are more counter cultural as when we are thankful for all things, good and bad, hard and easy, plenty and want. The world has no equivalent for this, and cannot comprehend how this could be. True thankfulness keeps us away from the onslaught of materialism that faces us every day. I just read a news article that said half of all millenials post pictures from their vacations simply to make others jealous. Thankfulness keeps us away from the humble brag (I'm so thankful God gave us _____, or my kid did _____, or we made _____ at work. This type of psuedo thankfulness does not truly value Christ above all, and does not have enough power to thank God during trial or loss.

Notice that what Paul is praying for is not that they would be thankful for what they had (though he himself demonstrated this in chapter 4), but they were thankful for a positional reality of who they were. If they were able to grasp this, they could find true contentment with joyful thanksgiving.

B. So we will live presently based on a future reality

³ Peter T. O'Brien, *Word Commentary on Colossians*, p. 23

Colossians 1:12-14 ...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.

1. Because He has **qualified** us for an inheritance

The word “qualified” means to be made sufficient, to empower, or to authorize. The word is in the present tense, which means we have the promise of a future blessing now. What Paul is referencing by use of inheritance, or literally “the portion of the lot” is the partitioning of Israel’s inheritance in Canaan (Num. 26:52-56; 33:51-54; Josh 14:1-2). What we are qualified for is threefold: We have been qualified for eternal life (Matt. 19:29), which is both endless existence as well as a quality of life (Gal. 2:20; 1 John 5:20); Second, we have an inheritance in the future Millennial kingdom on a restored earth (Rev. 20:6); Third, we inherit all the promises of God in Christ.

We live now awaiting some of those promises, even though they are already ours. It is much like being engaged or promised to another. You have surety that it will happen, and even share in some aspects of a future relationship, but await something new in the future. For us, we have the Holy Spirit as a guarantee that our inheritance is real and set (Eph. 1:13-14)

2. Because He has **delivered** us from a death's grip

Christ not only qualified us, but delivered us from the power or jurisdiction of darkness, which was under the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2), which was death itself. In other words, what salvation does is it ships us from the authority and power of one to another, in this case, its from the power of death and sin, into the domain of light.

3. Because He has **transferred** us to a Loving Son

What Christ did on the cross was pay a ransom on our behalf, and God transferred us from the Kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son or His love (literal translation). Christ took our sin on the cross and God forgave our sin because Christ paid for them completely on the cross because He was willing to take our place. When we are released from a place of death and domain of darkness, we are moved to Christ’s Kingdom, where we are subject to Him, and the rest of our life we live as representatives of the King. And although Christ does not yet rule on earth, He is not less a King.

Discussion points:

- Who do you fervently pray for? What is the content of that prayer? Do most/all of your prayer have to do with the physical and temporal, or does it reflect what Paul prayed for?
- How do we determine the will of God in our life?
- How do we assure that we will continue to grow? What are areas of discipline that we set up in our lives to make sure that we are walking by the Spirit, by His grace, to abide in Christ?