

Read: Co 1:9-14

I ended last Sunday’s message by saying:

How you live your life matters. **What** you live your life for matters more. **Who** you live your life for matters most.

I also said that Paul went on to talk about the changes God brings about in the lives of believers in Jesus Christ in vv 9-14 and that we’d look at them this morning.

What prompted his prayer was the encouraging report he received from Epaphras about them in vv3-8. Epaphras spoke of:

1. Their faith in Christ
2. Their love for all believers
3. Their hope of heaven
4. Their trust in the Gospel
5. Their openness to the Gospel message, and
6. Their love in the Spirit

And in vv 9-14 Paul prayed for their spiritual growth in Christ.

Paul stopped writing for a moment at the end of v8, took a deep breath, and then once again began to pen another long sentence from v9 to v20, 218 words.

What is noteworthy about Paul’s prayer of thanksgiving to God in vv3-14 is that it was for the Colossian believers, not himself and it concerned spiritual things not material blessings.

Two passages of Scripture highlight the importance of praying for each other. The first is 1 Thes 5:16-18 “Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” These verses are a unit of thought and go together. Our approach to God in prayer is to always be one of joy, which like love is the result of the Holy Spirit’s work in a believer’s life. We are to continually have an attitude of prayer. Our joy filled and continually prayerful attitude is God’s will for believers in Jesus Christ. The second passage is Jas 5:16 “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” What makes a man righteous is not that he is always doing the right things, it’s the fact that the righteousness of Jesus Christ is within him, that’s what makes our prayers powerful and effective.

It’s instructive to recognize that Paul in the act of writing these verses was modeling the very nature of the kind of prayers we as believers are to be praying for one another.

Paul asked God to “fill them with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” (v9). If you recall from the introduction to this letter, I spoke about false teachers within this young church who claimed to have a superior secret knowledge that was available only to an enlightened few.

As believers in Christ, we don’t need anything outside of Christ and what He provides us with in Himself to be complete as Paul makes clear in Co 2:10. We already have fullness in Christ and this happened when we believed in Him and received Him into our life.

The false teachers used words like knowledge, wisdom and spiritual understanding, put their own religious definitions to them and made them part of their vocabulary. Paul took the opportunity in this letter to define these terms Biblically.

Paul presented the knowledge that was available to believers through faith in Jesus Christ and that was accessible to everyone. This knowledge was the revelation of God in Christ. What made the knowledge of God's will so superior to that of the false teachers was that it was God-given not man-derived. This God-given knowledge came through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Paul in Co 2:3 said he wanted them to have the full riches of complete understanding and that this was possible for them in a relationship with Jesus Christ "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." This knowledge would prevent them from being deceived by the fine-sounding arguments of false teachers." (Co 2:4). In Christ we have the capacity to know God's will for every life situation.

Paul wanted them to have spiritual wisdom of every kind and understanding to enable them to live lives that reflected the character of God and so to please Him in every way. "Live" is the English translation of the Greek word '*peripateo*' which literally means, 'to walk', "to order one's behavior", "to conduct one's self".

The only way to be filled with the knowledge of God's will is to spend time in His Word, which reveals His will.

We have from God in the Bible the authoritative source for truth which is our absolute standard for what we are to believe and how we are to live. What the Bible says is foundational to Godly living. Why is it so important to know what the Bible says and to claim it as your authoritative source for absolute truth?

Paul says this is our safeguard as believers in Eph 4:14. "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming." He takes this a step further in vv 17, 18 where he states, "You must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them."

Our greatest need is not physical, material, or emotional, it is spiritual.

God wants us to know and understand what His will is. In Eph 5:16 and 17 Paul gives us this exhortation, "Be very careful, then, how you live – not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."

Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers was simply this: that they be filled with the knowledge of God's will so they could live in a God honoring way. How does knowing what God says in the Bible help you to live in a way that honors Him? It doesn't. Knowing what God says isn't enough.

The term "Fill" in v9 has the force of 'a filling out to completeness' and carries the idea of being fully equipped. It was used to describe a ship that was ready to sail. In 1:16 gives us this sense, "from the fullness of His grace we have all received on blessing after another."

"Knowledge" – a full deep understanding; an intense personal experiential awareness; accurate comprehension – this is the foundation for Christian character and understanding. However, we can know something very well and yet not act on the basis of what we know when it comes to applying it.

First of all, the kind of knowing being described here isn't simply the result of a surface level reading of the Biblical text. There's a preposition used here that suggests that the knowledge being referred to is a deep and thorough knowledge of the will of God. Today we have God's revealed word in its complete form in the Bible. If it's not in the Bible it's not God's revealed will. God has given us His standard enabling us to distinguish between what He has said and what he hasn't.

Illustration: God's Will – in The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart by Chuck Swindoll from Leslie and Bernice Flynn, God's Will: You can know it.

“The way some people attempt to know the will of God would make a great series entitled *That’s Unbelievable*. I read this last week of a lady who had a lifetime ambition of going to the Holy Land. She got a pamphlet on the Holy Land tour and read it over carefully. She had the time and the money to make the trip, but she wasn’t certain if it was God’s will. So before going to bed that night, she read the pamphlet again and noticed in the details that they would be flying on a 747 jumbo jet, there and back. She wrestled through the night, tossed back and forth, wondering what God’s will might be. When she woke up that morning, she looked at her digital clock, and it read 7:47. She was convinced that it was God’s will for her to make the trip. *That’s Unbelievable*.”

There’s a necessary spiritual dynamic of life that is required for God’s truth to translate into the kind of practical Christian living that pleases God. It’s through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. It is the Spirit of God who enables us to discover and bring together principles from the Biblical text that address life situations and to understand God’s will, that is, to apply those principles in daily living.

“Spiritual wisdom” is ‘to have insight that discriminates between what is false and what is true’ and it is the Spirit of God who provides it. This is the ability to understand something and act on it - It’s practical know-how which comes from God. God knows better than anyone else how to apply His will to practical everyday life situations – He’s the Master of it.

The wisdom that we need to make good decisions and to live in God pleasing ways come from the Spirit of God through the Word of God. Consider how James describes it in Jas 3:17, “...the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.” All these attributes of wisdom have to do with how we live our lives.

“Understanding” involves a clear analysis of life situations and applying God’s will to them. When we grow in the knowledge of God’s will our strength and courage increase. There is a deeply felt realization of the Spirit’s presence in our lives and we can say with conviction “I can do everything through Him who gives me (Php 4:13).

God’s “will” concerns how we live our lives. The aim of knowing God’s will and living a life worthy of God is to please Him in every way. What rain and sunshine are to seeds planted in fertile soil, the knowledge of God’s will is to the truths of God planted in the minds and hearts of believers. Continual growth is the result and it is God who makes this happen.

There is a powerful truth presented in vv 9&10 and it is this: Knowledge of the will of God is necessary for a life lived for the glory of God. We are to learn the truths of the Bible so we can live them. You will not find anywhere in the Bible where knowing what God says and doing what God says are mutually exclusive. You can’t separate them. God gave us His truth to change us from the inside out. He transforms us inwardly to conform us outwardly to the image of His Son. Christ demonstrated who He was by how He lived.

A life that is shaped by the knowledge, wisdom and understanding of God’s Word results in a life that is lived in a way that is worthy of the Lord.

“Worthy” means ‘weighing as much as another thing.’ Our lifestyle is to be as weighty as the kind of life Jesus lived. We are to be like Christ in all that we say and do. That’s what pleases God.

The reality of God’s presence inside a person’s life is made visible but what happens on the outside of a person’s life.

Several evidences of a worthy God-pleasing lifestyle are given in vv10-12. They are:

1. Fruitfulness – “bearing fruit in every good work” (Ga 5:22,23; Jn 15:4,5,8)
2. Knowledge of God – “growing in the knowledge of God” – a rich, deep experiential knowledge (Co 2:3)
3. Strength – “being strengthened with all power” (Php 4:13)
4. Endurance and Patience – “that you may have great endurance and patience”
5. Thankfulness – “and joyfully giving thanks to the Father”

Our overriding purpose as believers is to please God in every one of these ways. This was Paul's ambition. That's why he said in 2 Co 5:9 that we are to make it our goal to please God.

Although my strength, endurance, patience and joy are limited, God's are inexhaustible. When all of my human resources are depleted, God's remain intact and as powerful as ever and they are available to me as a reservoir of hope.

Endurance is the grace to bear with perseverance the hard circumstances and difficult trials of life, particularly in our relationships with people. Have you noticed that? We become frustrated when things don't work out the way they're supposed to, or when what we were expecting doesn't pan out the way we thought it would, or when the weather doesn't cooperate with our plans, but most of our deeply seated struggles in life revolve around our relationships with people. This is where we really need to be in touch with the extent of God's forgiveness of us. It puts us in a much better position of forgiving others in spite of how badly they may have treated us.

Verses 12-14 address the fact that Jesus has rescued us, repositioned us, redeemed us, and reconciled us. More often than I care to think, I come to God asking Him for things, or to put it more bluntly, to use Him to get what I want. How do you feel when everyone who comes to you only makes demands of you? It's draining and causes you to believe that the only thing people are interested in is what you can do for them. What happens when someone comes to you and is simply grateful to you for who you are? You feel invigorated and encouraged. God deserves our gratitude before anything else for who He is and what He's already done.

It is God who has "qualified" us (this term means, "to make sufficient", "to empower", "to authorize", "to make fit" – it is as a result of what God has done for us through His Son's death on the cross that we enter into the privileges of sonship and become heirs of God's eternal promises and blessings). Because of this, we share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (1 Pe 2:9). Jesus qualifies us for heaven. Nothing else can and nothing else will.

It is God who "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves." "Rescued" means, 'to draw to oneself'. God drew us from Satan's domain to His. "Darkness" in Scripture is symbolic of ignorance, falsehood and sin. "Brought" is a word that was used in secular literature in reference to removing a person from one country and settling them as citizens in another country. As I pointed out last Sunday, our citizenship as believers in Jesus Christ is not of this earth. In Christ we are citizens of heaven (Php 3:20). This happened at the moment of conversion.

We now live under the authority and sovereign rule of Jesus Christ and are no longer under Satan's control like the rest of the unbelieving world is (1 Jn 5:19). It is in Christ that "we have redemption" – the freedom made possible by the payment of a ransom – Christ's atoning sacrifice for our sin. Emancipation expresses the idea well. "We have" indicates that our deliverance is a present possession – from the slavery of sin to freedom in Christ.

We also have experienced "the forgiveness of sins" – we've been pardoned and released from our bondage to sin. Forgiveness speaks of the removal of our sins from us, so they no longer separate us from God. Forgiveness is not an excuse for sin it is an encouragement for willing service.

A God honoring and God pleasing lifestyle grows out of a deep and full knowledge of God's will concerning the Christian life. It is the Spirit of God who enlightens our understanding of the Word of God and enables us to apply its truths in everyday life so that we become spiritually fruitful and by His strength face all of life's circumstances with endurance and patience, and with a joy filled and thankful heart. When you consider all that God has already done for us how could we do any less.

Benediction: "May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word." (2 Thes 2:16).