

3. Priorities from Paul: A life pleasing to God

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Preacher: Euan Dodds

[0 : 01] Our gracious God and our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you, Lord, that we gather once more in the name of Christ. We thank you that another week has gone and that you have been faithful to each of us.

We thank you for your kindness shown to each one of us in so many different ways. We thank you for your goodness, Lord, in giving us all things we need for life and godliness. And we thank you, Lord, that you tell us to count it joy when we consider trials and temptations of many kinds, knowing that the testing of our faith produces perseverance.

We thank you, Lord, that in all things you work for the good of those who love you, conforming us to the likeness of your Son. And so we thank you very especially for this fellowship which we share on a Wednesday.

We thank you for the gospel which has borne fruit in our lives to make us people of faith, to make us people of love, and those who have a wonderful hope.

And this, Lord, is all of your grace. We thank you for your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is supreme over every authority, and who is sufficient both to save us and to bring us on in our faith and to perfect us.

[1 : 14] So we pray, Lord, that as we gather in his name, you will help us to focus upon him, to be established in him, to be built up in him, and to be grateful for all that he has done for us, and all that we have to look forward to through him.

So we pray, Lord, the prayer Paul makes for the Colossians. We ask that as we gather, and as you meet with us, that you will fill us with the knowledge of your will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

We pray that you will empower us to live lives worthy of the calling we have received, that we might be fully pleasing to you, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge we have of you.

We pray that you will strengthen us, Lord, with all power according to your glorious might, and help us to be grateful, giving thanks to you for all that you have done, and all that you will do in our lives and in our midst.

So we ask now as we meet, that you will meet with us, speak to us, and cause us, Lord, to grow and to bear fruit for your glory. And we ask this in Christ's name.

[2 : 22] Amen. If you have your church Bible, we're reading today, our third study in Colossians, on page 983, Colossians chapter 1, verse 1 down to verse 14.

And we will be paying particular attention to verses 9 and 10. Paul writes to the church, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother.

To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae, grace to you, and peace from God our Father. We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, as it also does among you, since the day you heard it, and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. 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, 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.

[4 : 07] May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

And we thank God for his word. One of the most helpful books I read before I got married, was this pair of books I found in a bookshop in London.

It's called Don'ts for Husbands and Don'ts for Wives, that are of equal thickness, which is perhaps unexpected. I don't think we're yet stocking in the book room. Maybe it'll be a book of the month.

But it's full of very useful advice. You could barely tell it was written in 1913. For example, page one. Don't throw cigar wrens into the bowl of water your wife keeps in front of the gas fire.

[5 : 05] Now, I don't smoke cigars, and I don't think we keep water in front of our fire, but a tremendous piece of advice. Don't sharpen pencils all over the house as you walk about. Again, very useful.

And this is my favourite. Don't refuse to play tennis or croquet or billiards with your wife, because it is not worthwhile to play games with a woman. If she plays badly, show her how to improve.

Tremendous. I won't read this afternoon from the companion volume, but I suppose that the author, who was called Blanche Ebert, her concern was for men and women to realise there are differences, and there are something women like, and something men like, and to tell people these differences before they got married, so they would know how to please their spouse.

What they like, and what they are to do in order to please them. And I suppose Paul's prayer in verse 9 and 10 is really asking the same thing. Paul prays that the Colossian believers will know what is pleasing to God, and they will therefore put that into practice, so as to live lives worthy of him, and pleasing to him.

And so we want to look at that today, asking the question, how can we live lives that are worthy of God, and how can we please him? Before we do that, we need just to recap on our series of studies on Colossians, now in our third week.

[6 : 29] And we learned in the first week that the church in Colossae was one Paul had not visited. He had not seen them face to face. And Epaphras, who was his beloved fellow servant, had got himself converted, and he'd gone back to his hometown and begun to share the gospel hope with others.

And very soon a church had grown up. A church characterized, verse 3, by faith in Christ Jesus, love for one another, and verse 5, hope laid up for them in heaven.

And with all the difficulties of daily life, they had a tremendous hope. And so Epaphras had come to tell Paul of this church which had grown up. And in verses 3 to 8, Paul gives thanks for them.

He thanks God for the signs of real Christian discipleship among them. And he thanks God for the evidence of his grace at work through Epaphras in Colossae. And having thanked God for his grace, he then reminds them, as we saw last week, about the gospel, which he calls the word of truth, the word of God's grace.

This was the gospel Paul claimed to have received by revelation. He had been made a steward of the mystery of Christ. And Epaphras had preached that same gospel. He preached the true gospel to them.

[7 : 42] And it had borne fruit and grown among them. He reminds them that Epaphras is a true teacher of the true gospel. And that was very important because quite soon there had come teachers into the church who were preaching a little bit extra.

They said maybe you need a little bit more. You need a bit more fullness. Fullness of something in your Christian lives. Perhaps you need some rationalism. They were preaching a kind of philosophy.

Or maybe you'd like some legalism. They were teaching observance of particular rules and days. Maybe you might want to add some mysticism to your Christian faith.

Perhaps the worship of angels. Or maybe you might want to begin some asceticism. Harsh practices depriving the body. Whatever it was these things shared a common problem in that they had exchanged the revelation of God the word of truth the gospel for the traditions of men.

And at their very root they had lost sight of the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of him. That he was above every rule and authority. And that he had done all things which were necessary for their salvation and subsequent growth as Christians.

[8 : 57] Paul gives thanks to God for his grace and for the gospel which is at work among the Colossian church. And in verse 9 he changes from a prayer of thanksgiving to a prayer of intercession.

He begins to ask things of God for this church. And I want to look at this verse 9 to 14 over the next two weeks and really ask the question what are we to pray for each other?

What do you pray for your friends when you say I'll pray for you? What do you pray for the young person or the old person who's come to faith in Christ as they seek to be established in their Christian lives?

What do you pray for the church you hear about in the missionary letter growing up in a foreign and a hostile land? Well today we look at verses 9 and 10 and Paul prays certain things.

He says we have not ceased to pray for you asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will that is God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding 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.

[10 : 10] Paul prays that they will be filled with the knowledge of God's will in order that they might live lives which are pleasing to him and this will be evident by their bearing fruit in every good work and a growth in their knowledge of God.

So we'll look at these three things in order and the first thing to notice is in verse 9 that familiar combination of knowledge and wisdom and understanding just as faith, hope and love are the characteristics of true Christian discipleship we often find these three ideas held together in the scriptures so for example in Proverbs we're told chapter 2 the Lord gives wisdom from his mouth come knowledge and understanding they are gifts of God and they are precious gifts of more value than gold and silver more precious than jewels are these knowledge and wisdom and understanding and it's quite likely of course that the false teachers were claiming that they could give their true wisdom and their true knowledge of God might not have been the case in Colossae but it very soon became a problem for the Christian church and the Gnostics as they were known promised a special knowledge to those who were making progress in the faith but Paul says no the knowledge and wisdom and understanding

God's gifts are firstly gifts of God and they are practical gifts they are given not simply so we can have abstract ideas about wisdom but in verse 10 so that our lives will be changed so we will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord fully pleasing to him bearing fruit in every good work perhaps you've listened to the radio station Truth for Life it's a very good radio station it's available online it's the ministry of Alstair Begg and his church but that's a lovely title isn't it Truth for Life not truth for general interest truth to while away half an hour in the morning but truth for life truth that needs to be lived that's what Paul is saying here that was the case in the Old Testament David's charge to Solomon as he was dying he said may the Lord grant you discretion and understanding that when he gives you charge over Israel you may keep the law of the Lord may God give you wisdom in order that you will obey him and live a life that is worthy and pleasing to him and the Colossians needed to know that because they were under new management at one time of course they had served themselves in point of fact they'd been serving

Satan but they had served themselves their own ambitions their own appetites their own desires they'd done whatever they wanted and Paul says to them in verse 13 that God had delivered them from the domain of darkness of selfish idolatry and he had transferred them to the kingdom of his beloved son their citizenship had changed and they lived in the kingdom of Christ and therefore he was their king and if you live in somebody's kingdom then you have to do what the king says they had as chapter 4 tells us a new master in heaven a master and a very dear friend so they were under new management they were not simply serving themselves now they were serving the living Christ and Paul says well you need to know how to please him it's very important we have that attitude I remember hearing of a joiner at once who I think was Irish and he was a very good worker he'd become a Christian and he was very meticulous in his work and one day he got hauled up in front of the boss and he said you're a good worker but you're very slow and what you need to do is cut more corners

I think behind the scenes behind the walls he'd been making sure everything was just right and the manager said to him who sees behind the walls and this young man he said very plainly my lord does you see his point he wasn't working for the company he wasn't working for the prospective owner of the house his concern was that the lord was pleased with his work and he went that extra mile so the Colossians needed to learn that they had a new master and a new lord and so Paul asked that they will be given a very specific knowledge of his will that they will know what God wants them to do it doesn't mean in this situation the precise will about what to have for breakfast or what car to buy or where to spend their holidays the general will that they will live lives of holiness and a knowledge of that will as Calvin tells us comes only from the scriptures from the revealed word of God but more than that verse 9 they will be given spiritual wisdom and understanding that is not only will they know the will but they will have the wisdom to apply it to all the varied and difficult circumstances of their earthly lives day to day that's a hard thing to do we often find in our ministry with people who come from

[15 : 16] Islam who are converts from a Muslim background often ask the question well can I do this can I do that and I suppose in Islam that's because there is the concept of halal that which is permitted and haram that which is forbidden and there is I think five grades in between and the way you decide if something is right is you ask the imam is it halal or haram if he says it's haram that's it you don't do it pork, alcohol that kind of thing but if it's halal you can do it as much as you like but Paul says no as a Christian we need to know God's will we need to know what he has revealed in scripture and we need to have the wisdom to ask the question what will be most pleasing to God as I make this decision not what can I get away with not how far can I go but what will most please the Lord and most glorify him and life isn't easy is it we face that kind of judgment every day so for example you meet somebody at work and you're getting on very well and there's the prospect of a relationship developing maybe if you're young and starting a new job and we have to say well will this relationship will it please the Lord or perhaps you're offered some work maybe you run your own business and things are tight and somebody offers you some work a contract a commission but there's a question about the legality of it you've got a few suspicions about the company you're working with will that decision please the Lord to enter into a partnership like that or maybe you're sick maybe you have some difficult long term illness and somebody says well I've got this wonderful new treatment but perhaps there's something about it that speaks to you maybe of their cult or something a little bit suspicious and scripture might not say specifically about that issue but you have to ask will this please the Lord if I get involved in this will this be worthy of him my master and my friend so Paul says you must

I pray that you will know God's will revealed in scripture that he will fill you with wisdom and understanding that you will have the attitude of saying how can I please him and the wisdom to make decisions for his glory and for our own good and he spells out two particular areas in which that will be visible in fact he spells out four but we won't look at them all this week the four are that they will bear fruit in every good work they will grow in their knowledge of God they will be strengthened in power and they will be grateful they will be giving thanks verse 12 we will look at the first two this week so you perhaps remember the parable of the sower which Jesus told when he was teaching his disciples about evangelism he said you will meet four responses some people that will bounce off the gospel won't have any root other people will begin for a little while but as things get difficult they will give up their faith other people will start off as Christians soon their hearts will be captured by someone or someone else and they will turn their back on

Jesus but the Lord encouraged them he said well there is good soil and he promised them that when they sow into the good soil the seed that is the word of the gospel would grow up and increase and yield a harvest thirty sixty a hundred fold and when asked to explain what he meant he told them that as they preached the word of God as Epaphras had preached the word of God it will fall sometimes on good soil people will hear the word they will accept it they will bear fruit and they will grow and the Colossians we saw are good soil verse five they heard the word of God in verse six it was bearing fruit and growing among them but what does it mean to bear fruit for God what does it mean to grow and Paul identifies two particular areas of concern firstly verse 10 bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God before their conversion the Colossians were known not for their good works but precisely the opposite for their evil deeds verse 21 you who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds and yet when they become Christians his concern was that those energies and their talents and their times might be redistributed to doing good works and it's wonderful to see isn't it when that happens we had in this building just two weeks ago a man from a country in eastern Europe a war-torn country and I asked him what he did during the war and he left the country and he worked in a casino and I said what did you do in this casino and he said he was a gangster and I didn't ask him any more questions

I think I poured him a coffee and had a friendly conversation but that man was converted while working in that casino and this day he now pastors the church he now preaches the gospel of Christ and he cares for families in need wonderful to see people turning their back on evil deeds and pursuing good works and Paul says that is his concern that the Colossian believers bear fruit in every good work that their lives be characterized by a selfless love for others and a practical concern to help them in small ways and in big ways bearing fruit in every good work and secondly that they increase in the knowledge of God I heard of a minister who was invited to Balmoral to preach and he preached and the next day he was at lunch with various members of the royal family and a senior member asked him to repeat the sermon that he just delivered and a lot of the minor royals hadn't been there so he went through it again and once he finished his short exposition the senior member of the royal family said to him tell me reverend how did you come to know the

Lord I was very encouraged when I heard that story I thought how wonderful that a senior member of the royal family knows the Lord but as I reflected on it I thought well how wonderful that any of us can know the Lord that God can be known that he has revealed himself to us in the person of his son and in the pages of scripture and he has done more than that he has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light that now we know dimly as through a glass darkly but then we shall be known and we shall know as we are known we will have a true knowledge of God and Paul's concern for these Christians is that they will grow in that knowledge he wants them to be filled with the knowledge of his will in order that they will live lives that are pleasing to him and through that they will continue to increase in their knowledge of God it's a sort of positive feedback Don Carson puts it something like this to learn something of God's will and to use such knowledge to live a life worthy of our master and utterly pleasing to him is to engage in the business of obedience but as you get busy in the business of obedience you get to know God better that in turn impels you to more obedience which in turn opens up new vistas in the knowledge of

[22 : 36] God and his will of course as you grow in the knowledge of God and his will improves you are driven to greater obedience and on and on and on as we learn of God's will we put it into practice as we put it into practice we grow in the knowledge of God through obeying his will Paul is concerned that they don't sit still that they don't go backwards in their faith but they are always pressing on to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord and to grow and increase day by day week by week year by year until the Lord returns so how do we pray for one another how do we pray for the new believer or the new church well says Paul we need to pray for them verse 9 without ceasing and ask that God will fill them with knowledge of his will with wisdom and with understanding that their lives might be pleasing to him that they might bear fruit in every good work they might turn from evil deeds to serving the Lord wholeheartedly with everything they are and have and pray that they may increase in the knowledge of God until that final day when they know as they are known that is

Paul's prayer for the church in Colossae and I'm sure his prayer for the church in Glasgow let's pray together Father we do thank you that you want us to grow in our knowledge of you Lord that you adopt us into your family you pour your love into our hearts through your spirit and then you desire Lord that we grow becoming fruitful bearing fruit for your glory and growing day by day month by month year by year more and more into the likeness of Christ Father we do pray for ourselves we pray for our Christian brothers and sisters known to us that each day you will fill us with the knowledge of your will you will help us to study the scriptures to meditate upon them and having learned Lord from your living word to put it into practice that our lives might be fully pleasing to you and that we might bear fruit in all the good works which you have prepared in advance for us so we thank you for your wonderful compassion and your mercy and I think you will go with us now as we go our separate ways in Jesus name

Amen