

The Fruit-Full Life

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to turn now to God's Word. So if you don't have a Bible with you, we have plenty of visitor Bibles, just at the side here or at the back. Do please grab a Bible if you don't have one with you. And Andrew is continuing his series in the letter of Colossians. So page 983, if you have one of the visitor Bibles, 983 and Colossians chapter 1.

Now Andrew is going to be preaching on verses 9 to 14 this morning, but we're going to read the first half of the chapter from verse 1.

So Colossians chapter 1 and reading from verse 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers and 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 words of the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, as it is also doing 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.

[1 : 4 0] 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.

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.

Well, amen. May God bless his word to us this morning. Well, it's often at the end of someone's life, perhaps at a funeral or somewhere else, that we reflect on how they lived a full life.

He lived life to the full. He loved to travel. He would regularly go exploring new countries. He was a keen sportsman. He achieved great success in his career as an engineer and had a real influence on many people.

[3 : 1 8] Or she truly lived a full life. So many academic qualifications. She was a wonderful mother to her children, involved in the heart of the community, nurturing many deep friendships.

We all long to say that we've lived a full life, don't we? Well, Paul, in these verses, is concerned that the Colossian believers and us will live the full Christian life.

And he is praying to that end. In Colossae, some people appear to be claiming that is all about having some insider knowledge.

Perhaps seeing God's power in dramatic ways. Performing remarkable acts of self-denial in order to please God. They're doing so in such a way that seems to lead them to look down at other Christians.

That is in danger of taking them away from their faith in Christ, from the gospel they first received. If you were here last week, you'll remember that Paul emphatically made clear to them that if they've come to Jesus in repentance and faith, even though that might look and feel rather ordinary, then they are the real deal.

[4 : 38] They're true believers who've received the true gospel. They've seen it at work in their lives through faith and love that comes from the hope that is laid before them.

You aren't missing out on anything in the Christian life, Paul says. That's what we saw in those first eight verses. There are so many good things about these believers.

Yet notice, Paul is not merely thankful. He prays on for them. He prays that they might keep growing. He's clear that, yes, they've made a good start, but they need to keep going.

They need to keep bearing fruit. Yes, they have all that they need, but that doesn't mean they've made it. They can't get the deck chair out and chill. There's nothing left to do.

No, Paul says you're on the right track, but you must keep going. So Paul in this passage is praying that the Colossians will grow more and more to live and to experience the full Christian life.

[5 : 42] One, yes, that is marked out by knowledge and by power and by strength and, yes, by pleasing God. Yet not quite in the way some in Colossae seem to have been saying.

And perhaps that might not be the way we might expect the full Christian life to look for us today. Look with me at verse 9. This section begins, And so, Paul's prayer arises and flows from what we saw last week.

He's acknowledged their faith, their hope, and their love. But yet he's praying for more. He's not saying step one is complete. Now you're on to something totally different. But rather keep on with what got you here in the first place.

It's the gospel of Jesus that has saved you. And it's that which will see you grow and mature. Paul is clear that is the key to a full life. And notice for these believers who started well, he's not ceased to pray.

He's kept going. He's persistent. He's prioritizing praying for them. Even though they are going well, there's much to commend. And that's a challenge to me.

[6 : 56] How often am I? How often are we caught up in prayer for those who are going well with the Lord? Usually, I feel most determined, most spurred, most inspired to pray in a time of particular crisis.

The prayer meeting tends to be most packed out in a time of great difficulty. We tend to pray most urgently for our children, perhaps when they're succumbing to the negative influence of others.

We cry out to God most when we as a church are facing some great challenge or opposition. Of course, it's good. It's right.

It's important that we look to the Lord in the midst of these difficult times, that we rely on him, that we call out to him. But these verses remind us to keep coming to the Lord in prayer, to keep prioritizing, asking for his blessing when things are positive, when things are encouraging, when people are being converted and growing.

We must keep relying on him, keep asking for his blessing, keep trusting him to work in the lives of those who are going well. When our children are growing and maturing in the Lord, when we do see fruit, we must not presume on God's grace.

[8 : 12] We must not presume on people's perseverance. Paul's teaching us to keep asking the Lord, keep trusting him that they would continue to grow and mature. For these things don't happen automatically.

Paul's longing is not that these believers just plateau at a low level of maturity, but rather he's toiling and struggling, as we see later in the letter, that he might present everyone mature in Christ.

Paul is encouraging us to make maturity our goal, not just maintenance of the status quo, not just relying on what's come in the past, but to keep going and keep growing.

And these are words that we too can pray with Paul for ourselves and for one another, for the full life, the full Christian life, what it's all about.

So we'll look at this section in four sections this morning. Firstly, the full Christian life is a life that is filled with knowledge of God and his word.

[9 : 16] A life filled with knowledge of God and his word. It seems that this idea of fullness was right at the center of what those who were unsettling the Colossian believers were teaching.

As if fullness was to be found somewhere beyond trusting in Christ. And at first glance, perhaps we might wonder if that is what Paul is advocating here. Notice, he's seeking knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

When we hear these things, we probably tend to think of it in quite self-centered terms. God's will, well, that must be all about what God wants for me and my life.

We can easily cry out to God to seek guidance from him for each and every single decision we make in life. What job to take, where to live, who we marry.

We might think, as Paul is suggesting, some special, some deeper understanding of God's will for me on a personal level. But that's not what Paul has in view here.

[10:19] Rather, as we'll see, it's all about what God wants from us all in everyday life, in the Christian life, as we see revealed through his commands and in his word and through his son.

For while these false teachers are promoting an exclusive knowledge for a few insiders, knowledge which led to them becoming puffed up and looking down on others, knowledge which led them ultimately away from and not towards Christ.

Well, that couldn't be further from what Paul means here. For this knowledge is for all believers. It's not hidden and obscure, but can be found in the very one who has brought them to where they are now.

That is the person of the Lord Jesus. In chapter 2, verse 3, we learn that it is in him are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, those same words again.

These things can be ours as we meet the Lord Jesus through his word. They are spiritual, yes, not because they're attained by some mysterious or mystical means, but rather because they're produced by his Holy Spirit at work in us.

[11:35] Often when we hear about gaining knowledge, we might think of that as being something rather dry and dusty. Perhaps conjures up the thought of academics that leads to either a big head or gives us a headache.

But Paul here is teaching that this supernatural knowledge of God's will, this spiritual wisdom, is profoundly personal. It's all about knowing the Lord himself.

Knowing the Lord Jesus as his spirit is at work in us. Paul is saying he is the key to the full Christian life.

Receiving his gospel is how we start. And keeping receiving his gospel, keeping being filled by it through his word, is what we need in order to grow and mature and keep going.

Think of a marriage, how crazy it would be for a married couple to get to their second or third anniversary and say, we've become pretty familiar with one another now. We'll just cut back on the time we spend together.

[12:38] We'll not really chat unless there's something important to deal with. We'll just rely on all we've picked up over these past few years. We've made it. That's it. Well, of course, that's crazy.

In no time, such a marriage will wither. It will die. The two people will quickly drift apart. But Paul here is making clear. It would be just as crazy for a Christian to think we've made it just because we've attained a good base knowledge of the Bible.

I teach Sunday school. I lead a growth group. I preach. I don't need to be filled with his knowledge anymore. Well, Paul says, no, we need to keep being filled with the knowledge of the Lord as we do that through his word.

We enter the Christian life by hearing and receiving the gospel, and we keep going. We're nourished. We mature as we continue to receive it.

Of course, it's not merely about having a head that are filled with facts and knowledge for knowledge's sake. No, it's all about holding fast to the one who is our head, Christ himself.

[13:44] Paul writes of that in chapter 2, verse 19. Knowing Jesus is the one from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.

He is the source of this knowledge, the source of this wisdom, the source of all we need to keep growing, to keep maturing, to keep thriving as Christians as we know the full Christian life.

Paul says, knowing Jesus through his word is all we could ever need. Sometimes we hear people speaking as if knowledge and the spiritual realm are totally different.

Well, your church, they only look at the Bible. It's so intellectual. The spirit can't be moving there because you spend so much time just reading God's word and preaching it. There's no freedom.

Well, Paul here, notice, says that knowledge and spiritual wisdom and understanding belong together. You can't separate these two things.

[14:46] You don't need to move somewhere else to the grown-up stuff once you've got the gospel basics nailed down. No. Knowledge of God's will, his grace and his truth, is precisely what produces all that we need.

The faith, the love, and the hope that we thought about last week. And this knowledge is central to our becoming more like Jesus, what it's all about.

For later on, Paul speaks of how we're to be renewed in knowledge after the image of our creator. Knowledge through God's word is right at the heart of what it means to be a true Christian, to live the true and the full Christian life.

This is what God uses in us by his spirit, so we grow more and more like Jesus. This knowledge, this wisdom, is inherently practical.

It's not just about knowing God's will. It's all about doing it. It's what the Colossian believers then needed in order to live faithful and fruitful lives in their pagan society, where they were under so much pressure to conform to the world around them, to compromise on the exclusivity of Christ.

[16:03] And isn't that what we need in our world today with all the same pressures? We need to have our minds shaped more and more by Christ and his word so that we can act rightly, faithfully, pleasingly to him.

And that brings us to our second point, which is the result of being filled with this knowledge of his will. And that is a life that is filled with fruitful obedience. A life filled with fruitful obedience from verse 10.

Notice again, these verses are connected. This is so as you walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Paul says verse 10 is only possible through verse 9.

We can only please the Lord in our lives when we have an ever deepening knowledge of him. And it is a mind-blowing thing, isn't it, to think that God himself can look at us as individuals, can look at us as a church and be pleased with how we're walking.

Paul is clear that this is attainable. This is possible for Christian believers. Some in Colossae are saying you need to reject certain foods. You need to refuse marriage.

[17:14] You need to do all different additional things in an effort to please God, to know the full Christian life. But Paul is very clear that is not what is pleasing to God.

Paul says a life pleasing to God is a life of fruitful obedience. When I think of bearing fruit, my mind jumps to the apple tree that we have in our garden.

As the year goes on, it starts producing lovely blossom, which you've been seeing in the past few weeks. And as the year will progress, hopefully we'll see lots of fruit grow and begin to ripen.

The branches bend under the weight of these beautiful, juicy red apples. Most years, the tree produces far more fruit than we know what to do with. Lots of crumbles and cakes and all sort.

And it does so year after year after year. And it is that fruitfulness that Paul is praying the Colossian believers will know in their lives.

[18:12] Paul wants an abundant harvest that keeps on growing, producing great fruit for God and for his kingdom. For this is all about a life that has been changed and transformed by knowing God's grace.

If you were here last week, we saw that idea back in verse 6, bearing fruit and increasing all over the world, which is an echo of what we see in Genesis chapter 1 verse 28.

Paul says this is what we were created for. This is the beginning of the new creation that was ushered in by Christ's resurrection, which we'll be thinking a little more about next week. Paul says to be truly human is to live in this way, to bear fruit in every good work, to increase in the knowledge of God.

Paul unpacks a little bit of what that looks like later in the letter. He says it's through being a faithful husband or wife, through honoring God in the workplace, and showing love to our brothers and sisters, and in how we relate to those who aren't Christians in all manner of other things.

It's these often simple, often rather ordinary acts of obeying the Lord that we see fruit in our lives as Christians, in our lives as a church.

[19:32] And notice there's a connection here between bearing fruit and that idea once more of increasing in the knowledge of God. It's as if it's a circle. We've established already we need to be filled with God's knowledge so that we can obey Him.

We can be faithful. We need to know Him. We need to know what He's like. We need to know what is pleasing to Him. Yet there's also a sense here that it is as we obey and as we bear fruit, we continue to increase in knowledge.

That might seem a strange thought, but I think it is true in our Christian experience, isn't it? It's one thing to be told that Jesus says it's more blessed to give than to receive.

But if we begin to put that into practice, perhaps as we're more generous in our time or with our money, if we devote time to serving perhaps in a particular ministry, well, how often as we labor alongside our brothers and sisters, as we invest time in God's kingdom, are we not often so richly blessed and encouraged through developing new relationships, through seeing God at work, through our efforts?

It is so encouraging. It's so rewarding. And we do gain a deeper understanding, a deeper knowledge of what that verse means. Or perhaps as we bear with one another, as we forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us.

[20 : 57] It's deeply costly. It's hard when you've been wronged by a brother or sister to forgive them, to bear with them. But as we do that, we often do gain a deeper understanding of the costliness of what Christ has done in forgiving us on a far, far greater scale.

Paul says, when we put God's word into practice and obedience, we do grow more and more in knowledge of Him. It becomes a virtuous circle. Paul says, true knowledge is not found by cutting yourself off from others in intense personal Bible study or amongst theology books.

Good though these things can be. Paul says it's as we put God's word into practice with others that we really do grow in our knowledge of Him. That's something that's challenging to me as a relatively new dad with all the pressures and busyness that come with that.

It's tempting just to knuckle down, focus on family, cut yourself off from church. Or perhaps you've just taken on a new job or other life circumstances are on the horizon, perhaps retirement.

There's so many other things competing for your time, new opportunities, other things that we might tend to go towards. It's easy in these circumstances to rest on our morals, to rely on all that we've already learned and discovered about the Lord, as if that's all that we need.

[22 : 20] Well, I can coast for a few years now in this new phase of life. Well, I was a keen Christian. I was very involved as a student around my 30s or 40s or 50s.

But now, well, I'll just pull back a bit from my involvement in church. I've done the hard work. I've played my part. Well, why don't I just let someone else do it? Paul is clear.

Paul says we must keep being filled with knowledge of the Lord and His will. And we do that as we receive His Word, as we put it into practice alongside our brothers and sisters.

So when we neglect that at our peril, we must keep growing in our knowledge of the Lord. We must keep prioritizing, gathering with His people, keep studying His Word with others, encouraging and sharpening each other, and keep living it out together.

That might look different in different phases of life, but we're not to pull away and stop. Don Carson, commenting on these verses, helpfully puts it, as you get busy in the business of obedience, you get to know God better.

[23 : 24] And you'll keep bearing fruit and increasing in the knowledge of God as you do. The third part of a full Christian life that Paul is praying for here is seen in verse 11.

And that's a life that is filled with steadfast perseverance. A life filled with steadfast perseverance. Paul here is praying that they would be strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might.

As we read these words, I wonder what comes to mind. As we hear of God's power, we might expect some spectacular, miraculous, dramatic demonstration of it.

Perhaps remarkable healings. Maybe we'll be able to walk on water. Maybe we can speak in tongues. We jump to impressive and spectacular things. But notice how Paul finishes that sentence.

It's for all endurance and patience. I don't know about you, but for me, that's not what instantly springs to my mind when I think of power and might.

[24 : 33] Endurance and patience. Paul says the way that God's strengthening power is seen in a full Christian life is through steadfast perseverance, through keeping going in the Christian life, even when that's hard.

It sounds remarkably low-key. It sounds rather unimpressive. But that is no less supernatural. It truly is remarkable and supremely important. For Paul knew from firsthand experience how tough, how difficult the Christian life can be.

So often it is marked by struggle and suffering, by opposition and persecution, by ongoing struggle with our sin, and yes, even bearing with other Christians that can be hard in so many different ways.

We can so easily become discouraged. We can doubt. We can want to pack it in. This is exactly what we need. This is exactly how we need to see God's power in our lives.

We need to be equipped and enabled to keep going. These two words, endurance and patience, seem to have slightly different meanings. Endurance is more of a military term that speaks of being able to hold your line against the enemy's attack, not conceding ground.

[25 : 51] It's about persevering through challenging times and struggle. Patience, on the other hand, is a much more relational word. It's about dealing with people who we find difficult, keeping living the Christian life even when we're surrounded by people who are hard work.

One commentator says Paul's praying for endurance in impossible situations and patience with impossible people. And how often is that what we need in the Christian life?

This is how we keep bearing fruit year after year after year, just like that apple tree in our garden. It's how we keep going even when we're persecuted, even when we're insulted, even as we face great struggle with illness or grief.

It's all about being steadfast, keeping going, persevering until the end. That is how we see God's power in the full Christian life.

It's just like the man of Psalm 1, like a tree planted by streams of water yielding its fruit in season and its leaf does not wither. And of course, that too comes from knowing God's will through delighting in His word.

[27 : 05] That is the life of true blessing, keeping going, even when it's hard. For as we're strengthened and we're sustained for steadfast perseverance, notice at the end of verse 11, Paul speaks of doing so with joy.

That seems to connect this petition, the endurance and patience with joy, to what comes after. And I think it's how we can keep being joyful in the midst of these struggles.

And we see that in the last three verses, Paul says, a life that is filled with thanksgiving for God's rescue is part of the full Christian life. How are we sustained and keep going by God's power in the midst of the struggles and challenges of life?

Well, it's being thankful. This is flowing from all that has gone before. As we come to know God more through His word, as we obey Him and put it into practice, as we keep going side by side together, Paul says our hearts will abound in thanksgiving, even through these challenges and difficulties.

As we understand and as we see God at work in us and in the lives of others. The first thing Paul points to in being thankful for is giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light, in verse 12.

[28 : 28] That's predominantly a future hope. And then in verse 13 and 14, Paul points to what God has done already for us so that that future hope is secure.

All these things are gifts of His grace. Notice they're all things He has done. He has qualified us. He has saved us.

He has forgiven us. He has redeemed us. He has transferred us from one kingdom to another. The life pleasing to the Lord, Paul is clear, is not done to earn His favor.

But rather it's all done in thankful response to all that He has done for us. This totally unmerited gift of grace. So let's briefly look at what Paul is pointing to to give thanks for here.

Firstly, in verse 12, the future hope of being qualified to share in this glorious inheritance. The term used here is predominantly from the Old Testament.

[29 : 27] It would have been associated with the Jewish people picking up an Old Testament language referring to an inheritance in the promised land. But of course, it's much more than that.

It's a future hope of the ultimate land God has promised, the new Jerusalem. And Paul says, you, Colossian Gentiles, are now going to inherit all that God promised to His people all those years back.

There is not a division between Greek and Jew. Christ is in all, as Paul says later in the letter. You're united together through Him. You share in His inheritance together.

Paul says God's promises and God's power are for all who come to Christ in repentance and faith, regardless of background. This is not a two-tier system. You're all united together in Jesus.

For ultimately, He is our inheritance. Secondly, looking at verse 13 and 14, Paul points us back to what we've been saved from and forward to what we've been saved to.

[30 : 34] It paints a bleak picture of our old life in the domain of darkness. This is speaking, pointing to a tyrannical ruler, to being under the control of powers of evil and darkness.

Paul says this is the grim reality of life without Christ. If you don't know Jesus, this is where you are, and it's grim, and it's hopeless.

But Paul is clear. If you're a Christian, God has snatched us from the clutches of these dark powers. We go from captives to being released.

But we gladly submit to a great and glorious King, to the kingdom of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus. We're under His rule now. We're under His Lordship.

That is why we want to live lives that are pleasing to Him, that are worthy of Him. The very one who has brought us out of this awful darkness and bondage is the one we gladly submit to.

[31 : 34] Paul knew the experience of going from darkness to light very clearly, very starkly, in his own life. He was given the task by Jesus on the road to Damascus of preaching to call people from darkness to light, to turn them from the power of Satan to God so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

And here, in the letter of Colossians, we're seeing some of the fruit of Paul's message. People who have gone from great darkness, Gentiles, being brought to receive forgiveness of sins, by being turned from the power of Satan to know the power of God.

They too are sanctified alongside their brothers and sisters. And when we grasp something of the darkness and the hopelessness that we've been saved from, when we come to recognize the glorious reality of life under Christ's loving rule, well, we ought to overflow with thanksgiving. Whether that's been stark, whether we've been saved from a life of rebellious defiance to God, or perhaps it's less dramatic, less obvious. Maybe we've always had a life of religious duty, but we've come to know what pleasing the Lord really looks like.

Well, Paul says the reality is without Christ's gracious intervention in our lives, we are all lost in the darkness. We need His redemption.

[33 : 04] We need to be brought back from this slavery, this bondage, by having our sins forgiven. But these verses flesh out, we're not merely forgiven and have our slate wiped clean, that the penalty of sin is gone.

Paul's clear, Jesus' death has achieved a great victory over the power of sin. He's disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.

Paul says we're no longer bound by sin. It's no longer inevitable that we will give in to temptation. It is possible to live a fruitful life of obedience to God because that great power of sin and darkness over us has been broken.

We can keep going with endurance even as the ongoing battle with its presence in our life lingers. It is hard, it is a struggle, sin is still there, but we know the final blow has been dealt.

We look forward with hope to when we will share fully in that great and glorious inheritance. Paul's clear, this is all of God's grace. It's He who has qualified us.

[34 : 18] He has delivered us. He has redeemed us. He has forgiven us. Paul here is reassuring us we don't need to worry about those who seek to look down their noses at us, people who would seek to disqualify us for not having the full Christian life.

Paul says if God has done all this for us, who can say we need more than that? Paul says you have the full Christian life as you keep going and keep growing in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, bearing great fruit in obedience to Him and growing in thankfulness for all that He has done for us.

That is what it looks like to live the full Christian life. Paul says this is a life that is worthy of and pleasing to the Lord Jesus. Let's make it our prayer that we as individuals, we as His church would live in this way, giving glory and honor to Him in our lives as we know the full Christian life.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do cry out to you this morning as those who need your help.

We need your grace we need your equipping to live in the way you've called us to here. Our hearts are filled with thankfulness for all that you have done for us through your Son, the Lord Jesus.

[35 : 45] And we do ask, Lord, that you would be filling us as your people more and more with the knowledge of your will. That you would be enabling and equipping us to live lives that are pleasing to you.

That we would be producing abundant fruit as we grow more and more in our knowledge of you.

Continue, Lord, to strengthen us with your great power, enabling us to endure until the day Christ returns.

We ask this in Jesus Christ's precious name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.