

Gospel Growth

Good morning. If you have your Bible, I invite you to open it to Colossians 1. If you are new or have not been around in a while, we started a new series through the book of Colossians a few weeks ago. Pastor Nathan gave us an overview of the whole letter and last week we focused on verses 3-8, looking at Paul's gratitude and the gospel going forth, bearing fruit and increasing around the world. Today, we will spend our time looking at verses 9-14.

If you've read any of Paul's letters, you know he likes to start a thought and then kind of runs off on a tangent, but then he circles back to his first thought. We sort of see that in our passage. Paul begins the letter by saying how he has just received word of the Colossians' faith in Christ and gives thanks. Then, he kind of breaks away into a tangent about how that faith came to them and what the gospel is doing in the world, and now he comes back to his initial thought about his response to hearing of their faith.

Would anyone here be bold enough to say, "I have arrived in my faith!"? Show of hands? Anyone done growing? Anyone the spitting image of Christ himself? No? No takers? I'm glad no one raised their hand. We are at least honest with everyone around us. But are we honest with ourselves? I think sometimes we live like we have arrived, don't we? We might tell ourselves, "We are fine. I don't need to grow; I'm doing pretty good." We may say, we don't need to go to an Equip Class, or we don't need to be a part of a Grow Group, or we don't need to have a daily quiet time with the Lord. Or we compare ourselves to others and say, "Well at least I'm doing better than them."

Of course, maybe you take the opposite approach. Rather than passivity toward growth, you are pursuing growth in the wrong things or the wrong way. What is so prevalent in our culture today are self-help books. “Five ways to become a better you.” “Three steps to owning your truth.” You may tell yourself that if you can just check off all the boxes (going to church, saying a prayer, reading your bible, serving, attending a group, giving), then you will grow more like Christ. The question becomes, how do we grow? And what is the gospel’s role in that growth?

I think our passage this morning will help us understand how to grow in Christlikeness and the gospel’s role in that growth.

READ Colossians 1:9-14

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; being 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.

- Colossians 1:9-14

Would you pray with me?...

INTRODUCTION

If I were to ask you this morning, “What is the will of God for your life?”, would you have an answer? Do you know what God’s will for your life is? This question

often seems to be one that plagues many of us at different points in our life. When you are young, the question becomes what school do I attend after high school? Or, what job should I take? Where should I live? Who should I marry? How many kids should we have? And on and on, we want to know what God's will is for our lives.

What if I told you that you can know God's will for your life? And you can know that will before you leave today. You would probably want to know that wouldn't you? Who knows, maybe you'd sit up a little straighter. Maybe you would decide not to sleep through that message. Well, that's exactly what we are going to look at today. However, it's not going to be the "minute-by-minute roadmap of every decision you could possibly make in a day" will of God, but rather, the will of God for every believer.

We are going to spend the rest of our time this morning looking at Paul's prayer for the Colossians. In his prayer, we are going to see that he prayed for them To Be Filled, To Be Strengthened, and To Be Thankful.

TO BE FILLED

The first thing Paul prays for is for the Colossians **To Be Filled** with the knowledge of God's Will.

Verse 9 says:

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...

- **Colossians 1:9**

Let me first pause and make note of something here. What was Paul initial response to hearing of the Colossians' faith? Prayer. As he said in verse 3,

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...

- Colossians 1:3-4

This was not just a passing thought or a quick “Hail Mary.” He consistently and fervently prayed for the growth of these new believers. He says, “we have not ceased to pray for you.”

If I’m being honest, prayer is not my strongest discipline. I struggle to pray consistently. When was the last time you or I have consistently and fervently prayed for something? And what was it for? If we were in Paul’s shoes, we would probably be constantly praying about being released from the awful conditions of prison. Or we would pray for our own health or well-being. But what we see Paul doing is praying for other churches, praying for other believers and their growth in Christ.

Have we ever been passionate and faithful to pray for other believers? When we see new people come to know Christ and are baptized in the church, do we continually pray for their growth in Christ? This seemed to be Paul’s top priority in hearing of their faith. He thanks God for their faith in Christ, but he knows it’s not over at that point. They need to be continually growing in their faith.

Paul begins his prayer in verse 9,

asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding...

- Colossians 1:9

As mentioned in the overview of Colossians, Paul’s goal in this letter is to show Jesus Christ’s supremacy and sufficiency. He warns the church, these new believers in Christ, against empty philosophies and the rituals or practices of the

day, against worldly knowledge. What he wants them to know is the knowledge of God's will. Where do we discern the will of God? In the Word of God.

God has made known to us what his will is for believers in his inspired Word. Paul tells the Thessalonians in his first letter to them:

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Or, to state it even more concise, he says:

For this is the will of God, your sanctification...

- 1 Thessalonians 4:3

Paul says that God's will for your life is to be made holy. To be more like Christ. This is God's goal for your whole life. As Paul writes in Romans 8:

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son...

- Romans 8:29

If you are questioning this morning what God's will for your life is, then here it is. God's will for your life is for you to be holy. To be more like Christ today than you were yesterday. How does this happen? It starts by doing what Paul does and praying for God to fill us with the knowledge of his will.

More than just the knowledge of God's will, Paul prays for this knowledge to be in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. Knowledge of God's will can only come from God. He gives us this through His Spirit to help discern the truth of His Word (understanding) and to know what to do with the truth (wisdom). Understanding

and wisdom are not the same thing. Understanding is the ability or capacity to know information, and wisdom is knowing how to correctly use that information.

[ILLUSTRATION]

I remember before Hannah and I had kids. We thought we had pretty good understanding of how to raise them. My brother is 4 years older than me and had two kids. I remember watching his daughter or his son when they were in their toddler years just blow up. You know, toddler meltdowns. There was one particular time they were visiting for a week and their daughter, being three at the time, just blew up in anger. I don't remember why, but you know she was three so it could have been anything. She blew up, so much so that she screamed until she threw up on our floor. I would think to myself, or even tell Hannah, "That's not how I would handle that situation. If it was my kid, I would just do this and fix that. They just need to discipline her more."

Even as we found out we were pregnant and began trying to prepare for parenting by reading books or watching videos about raising kids, I thought to myself, "Oh yeah, we just do this trick, and we can solve the issue. What's so hard?"

And now, here we are with a three-year-old daughter of our own. Let me tell you. I didn't know what I was talking about. In fact, no amount of information (books or videos or podcasts) could prepare me for my kid to throw a toddler-meltdown. And it's not that the information we received was bad or wrong, but there is a difference in having information and knowing how to apply that information to the situation at hand.

As Paul addresses these Colossian believers, he wants them to be filled with the knowledge of God's will, but he knows for them to have understanding of God's will and wisdom to know what to do with that knowledge as they face these false teachers and the pressures of the world around them, they need the Spirit. They need the Spirit's work in their lives.

And what is the purpose Paul prays for them to be filled?

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

- Colossians 1:10

Again, the goal of knowing God's will is not to just have more information, but to be changed and transformed by it. To live out our faith. To grow in our relationship with him. To be conformed to the image of His Son.

Paul is saying that the more we know and understand God's will, it will lead to us living lives in a manner worthy of the Lord. What does it look like to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord? This kind of living will be evident by believers bearing fruit and increasing in the knowledge of God. Just as the gospel bears fruit and increases in the world, Paul prays for the gospel to bear fruit and increase in the lives of these believers. And what kind of fruit will we bear? He says in Galatians 5:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

- Galatians 5:22-23

There seems to be a **cycle here**: the more we know God's will → the more we grow in our faith → the more we live out our faith → which draws us back to knowing more of God and his will.

This should be the cycle we all find ourselves in. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, we seek to understand God's will as he has revealed it in his Word. We apply those truths to our lives and walk in wisdom, bearing good fruit, and we increase in our knowledge of God and his will.

John Frame has stated it this way:

Theology is the application of the Word by persons to the world and all areas of human life.

- John Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*

What Frame is saying here is that true theology, or this knowledge of God, will lead to application in all areas of our life. He's saying that it's not really theology if it doesn't lead to application.

Take a look at your spiritual life today. Do you find yourself in this cycle of growth? Are you gaining more knowledge but not applying the truths? Do you come on Sunday mornings and hear the Word preach but never apply the truth of God's Word to your life to walk in wisdom?

Maybe you have been growing in your knowledge of God's will and applying those truths to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, but you begin to become prideful or self-assured. You decide you don't need God; things are going okay right now. You say, "I've got this!" This causes you to not increase in the knowledge of God and therefore breaks the cycle.

All of us are prone to wander. All of us will break the cycle and fall short. This is why the first thing Paul did was to pray this over the believers in Colossae. Praying continually for the Spirit to work. May this be our own prayer for our lives.

((SLOW DOWN!))

TO BE STRENGTHENED

This leads us to the second thing Paul prays for the Colossians: for them **To Be Strengthened.**

Paul is praying for this growth cycle in the lives of these Colossian believers, and after taking a quick inventory of our own lives, we quickly realize how unable we are to cause or maintain that growth. This is why Paul prays for them to be strengthened. But he does not pray that they would muster up the strength required. He prays for supernatural strength. The only way for this kind of living to be accomplished, a life that is worthy of the Lord, is through God's work and power.

He says in verse 11:

being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might...

- Colossians 1:11

As one commentator mentioned: "Paul reminds us that God gives what he demands." God tells us, "Be holy for I am holy" but he knows we cannot do that in our own strength. Paul knows this, and he prays for the power of God to work in their lives because God has all power. Paul goes into even greater detail about this power of God in Ephesians 1, praying that they would know:

what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places...

- Ephesians 1:19-20

God supplies believers with his immeasurably great, glorious might. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, he gives to us! And what is the purpose of this strengthening and supplying of power that Paul prays for? For the believer to have endurance and patience with joy.

I think it's easy for us to want to assume God's power in our lives is to make life easier, to accomplish our own goals. But that's not what Paul is getting at. He is saying the strength God supplies is not for personal comfort or making life easier,

but to patiently endure the trials of this life. Who better understood this than Paul? As he says in Philippians 4:

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

- Philippians 4:13

That's the verse we like to have cross-stitched on a pillow, right? Or hanging up in our house. We may quote it to that we can ace a test we crammed for the night before. Or so that we could kill the presentation at work and earn a promotion. Maybe you use it to refrain from eating the chocolate cake staring at him in the fridge late at night. But what we don't want to hang in our house are the verses before that. What Paul meant by doing all things through him.

He says in verses 11-12:

...for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹²I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

- Philippians 4:11-13

It was to be content in all things. It was to patiently endure the trials of life. Paul practiced what he is praying for the Colossians. But more than just enduring life by baring our teeth and getting by or wallowing in self-pity until the stormy trial passes, Paul prays that this would be done *with joy*.

I have to be completely honest with you. That seems to be the hardest part for me. I may think: Okay, I'll pray for God's power. I'll seek to patiently endure this. But I'm not going to be joyful about it. I'm going to complain the whole way through. I'm going to wallow in my self-pity and let everyone know how unpleasant these trials are. That is my temptation. That is what I struggle with. As I'm facing the difficult years of toddlerhood in my home, days and nights are long

and hard. It seems hard to find moments of joy, and I can resort to just baring it, wishing the time away, being angry or frustrated.

Let's not forget what James tells us about trials in James 1:

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

- James 1:2-4

Paul reminds us that God supplies his glorious power to believers to patiently endure the trials of life with joy. And James tells us these trials help sanctify us, to become more like Christ, which we know is the will of God!

Are you struggling to find joy in your life? What circumstances and trials are you walking through? Are you resting in your own strength or praying for God's power during those times to patiently endure with joy? The only way to find joy through the trials, to continue growing in your faith in all circumstances, is through this supernatural work and power of God.

((SLOW DOWN!))

TO BE THANKFUL

And this leads Paul to the last portion of his prayer: **To Be Thankful**.

Look at the last few verses again:

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.

- Colossians 1:12-14

If the task of growing in Christ seems difficult, and the patient endurance through life's trials seems wearisome, Paul reminds these Colossian believers (and us today) that we have so much to be thankful for. The first thing Paul says they should be thankful for is that they have been qualified by God to "share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

[ILLUSTRATION]

Think back to when you have been looking for a job. Do you remember scrolling through job postings and reading the job description and responsibilities? And then you come to the qualifications for the job: 5 years experiences with this, skills in this, a degree in that. I remember that was the most discouraging and often fearful part of applying for jobs. Even if the job sounded fun or exciting, you can easily become discouraged by seeing the qualifications required for the job. Maybe you still apply for the job and the people ask you about those qualifications. And because you don't meet those requirements, they decline to hire you.

Many of you may not know that before I came to serve as Worship Pastor at Cornerstone, I did HVAC work in Atlanta. I know that's probably shocking to many of you. I remember I was desperate for a job because I had a ring and wanted to propose to Hannah. But, I was not confident enough nor willing to ask for her hand in marriage or the blessing from her dad without having a job in place. I met with a guy in our old church who said he might have a job for me. He was looking to hire control technicians for commercial HVAC. He asked me what my experience was in that. None. He asked how comfortable I was with using tools. I knew what they were, have used one before.

Let's just say I was green as a gourd with no experience and training. But he was willing to hire me and allow me to learn those skills on the job. You'll be happy to know that I picked up on it pretty quick and did that job for a year before moving here.

But here in our passage, God doesn't just wave or look past the requirements or qualifications. Paul says, God himself has qualified you to share in the inheritance, being numbered in the people of God. This was nothing you could do on your own. There is no amount of education, work, or experience that could grant you the ability to share in this inheritance. Instead, God has done the work for you through Jesus Christ. He has approved you, given you all the qualifications you need, to share in that inheritance.

In the Old Testament, the inheritance of God was only given to Israel, those who trusted in God's promise. And it was an earthly inheritance, an inheritance of the Promise Land. But in the New Testament, the profound mystery of the gospel is that the Gentiles have been included to share in the inheritance. An inheritance that is not of this world. We often take it for granted that the gospel has come to us. But remember that this was a new concept for these Gentiles. Paul is telling these Gentile converts that God has approved them to share in the inheritance. Later, we will see Paul tell them not to believe empty philosophies or rituals and customs that people tell them must be kept, emphasizing this point, that God has qualified them. They do not need the approval of men, because God has given his approval.

This inheritance is "in light," meaning it is in the heavenly realm. It is untouched by this world. 1 Peter 1 says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

- 1 Peter 1:3-5

This is contrasted with the “domain of darkness” that Paul says Christ rescued us from. This is the second thing Paul says they should be thankful for. Before salvation in Christ, we live in this domain of darkness. But Paul is saying that we no longer live in that domain. Jesus Christ himself entered into that domain, broke the chains of bondage, and rescued us, transferring us into his kingdom. We can have confidence in the power of God because of how he has demonstrated that power in the resurrection of Jesus.

He explains this in even more depth in the next chapter of Colossians saying:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh (living in the domain of darkness), God made alive together with him (transferring us to the kingdom of his Son), having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

- Colossians 2:13-15

We have been freed. We have been forgiven. We have been qualified. We have been saved. This is the gospel, the good news. This should bring about thankfulness in our hearts. The gospel should ground our joy and our thankfulness.

Maybe you are here this morning and you have not been brought out of the domain of darkness. You have not trusted in Christ’s saving and atoning work on the cross to forgive your sins. If that is you today, God has done all the work necessary for your salvation. Please find me or one of the pastors, we would love to meet with you to talk through that or answer any questions. You can be brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen this morning, Paul prays for this continued growth of the Colossian believers. This growth is founded upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. He had done all the work necessary for them to be saved and to grow into his image. He supplies us with his power to patiently endure life with joy, as we walk in a manner worthy of him, by being filled with the knowledge of God.

For the believers in the room, are you growing in Christ? Do you pray for the Spirit to work in bringing understanding and wisdom in God's will? Where are you needing God's power to help you patiently endure the trials of life with joy? Maybe, for many of us, we just need to pause and be thankful for the inheritance we have been given, for the salvation that we have received.

May we be a people who grow in Christlikeness through the work of the Spirit and God's power in our lives, to patiently endure the trials before us with all joy.

Would you pray with me?...

Last week, we ended service praying for the gospel to continue to bear fruit and increase in the world through mission efforts. Today, we would like to practice praying what Paul prayed for today over our students. As our students have started back at school, they are going to be faced with all kinds of trials, temptations, persecution, and empty philosophies. We want to follow Paul's example and pray for them to grow in Christ through the knowledge of his will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, being strengthened to face these trials with joy. I'm going to invite Pastor Josh and the students to come as we move into this time of prayer.