Freedom from Religion
11/15/26
Colossians 1:9-12
Sunday AM

I have a confession. For years, when I read the Bible and came upon text like today, I'd brush over them as if they were irrelevant to my life – after all, *what does a prayer prayed for someone else have to do w/ me*?

Then one day, I was asked to teach an expository class on Colossians that required me to dig deep into the Greek – and BAM! God blew me away. Opening my eyes to truths that have framed my entire ministry.

What I've come to realize is that the prayers in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians are essential to they teach us what's essential to following Jesus. So, as we jump into Paul's prayer in Colossians 1, I need to take a moment to set the stage for this message.

DYK – there are only (2) types of people in the world? The lost and the found | the unsaved and the saved – and the difference is the cross. When a person places their faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross, a spiritual transaction occurs that moves us from *lost* to *found* and from *orphaned* to *adopted*.

Now – based on the story of the Prodigal Son – there are (2) types of lost people – the *rebellious* and the *religious*. One bro wished his father dead so he could live how he wanted while the other bro (Pharisees) stayed close to the Father but was far from the truth.

There's also (2) types of found people: those who try to live the Christian life in their ability/ingenuity in their flesh – and those who offer themselves to God as a living sacrifice by living the Christian life in God's power/ability thru the H.S. thru in an abiding life.

The challenge is that most of us have only been taught how to live the Christian life in our ability w/out surrender – only it doesn't work. We've been taught to be good. Go to church. Be religious, and maintain control over our ambitions, appetites, attitudes, and actions. Only this isn't how the Christian life works.

Here's the challenge – we can look like we're following Jesus on the outside while depending on ourselves on the inside. We can be doing all the right religious things and yet missing the very thing that makes the Christian life possible – dependence on the H.S.

Here's the million-dollar question – *in which column are you living*? Are you lost/lost, religious lost, religious saved but impotent, or saved and abiding in the power of God? I assure you – **you're in a column**.

This brings us to Paul's prayer Colossians 1:9-12:

For this reason, since the day we heard of you, we haven't stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you w/ the knowledge of His will thru all wisdom and understanding the Spirit gives, that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened w/ all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of His holy people in the kingdom of light. Colossians 1:9-12

Question – if we were to go into a local restaurant to poll people about what is a good Christian – what kind of answered would we hear?

I promise, we'd hear answers like – *Christians go to church. Read their Bibles. Pray. Are good/moral* – and if exceptional – they bring a cakes/casseroles to the pastor's house when He's under the weather (cough).

Yet – how many of these things can we do in our own ability w/out depending on God? ALL of them w/out ever surrendering to the H.S. This is religion – doing good in God's name w/out depending on God.

Listen – the difference isn't necessarily in WHAT we're doing, but WHO we're depending on. We can do all the right religious things in our own strength, but we can't manufacture genuine spiritual transformation.

We can be moving in the right direction while depending on the wrong power.

Think about it – just b/c we're doing the right things doesn't necessarily mean we're depending on the right source. This is what makes Paul's prayer so essential.

I The **SOURCE** of a Worthy Walk

Before Paul tells us what a worthy walk looks like, he tells us where it comes from. B/c the Christian life isn't something we produce by human effort. It's something God produces as we live in dependence on Him.

We continually ask God to fill you w/ the knowledge of His will thru all wisdom/understanding the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way…

To *live a life worthy of the Lord to please Him in every way* – means to live in such a worthy manner under the influence of the H.S. that it puts a smile on God's face.

Notice – Paul says the key ingredient isn't trying harder to know God's will but allowing the H.S. to fill us w/ what we need to know and live God's will.

filled (*plēroō*) – passive verb. Subject receives the action – filled to capacity and brimming over.

IOW – a worthy walk isn't about figuring out how to please God, but depending on God to reveal His will and empower us to live it. Our job is to put ourselves in a position for God to move in our lives.

Imagine – a rowboat and sailboat. One has a set of oars; the other has a sail. To move the rowboat requires great effort to put the oars in the water and row – yet eventually, one can only go so far before the body gives out. To sail, while it requires some effort to raise and trim the sails – the objective is to catch the wind, and allow a power greater than us to carry us forward. Both can be headed in the same destination, yet there's a fundamental difference – the rowboat is dependent on the effort of the rower, while the sailboat is dependent on a power beyond our ability.

Point – Abiding isn't about rowing harder, but raising our sails to catch the wind of the H.S. So, why are we exhausting ourselves rowing when God has already provided the wind of His Spirit?

The H.S. wasn't given to help us become better at living independently of God. He was given so we might live in continual dependence on God.

This is why Jesus said – *Come unto me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*

DYK – in Jesus' day, a rabbi's *yoke* referred to his teachings and interpretation of the Law/Prophets. Jewish tradition identified 613 commandments these rabbis were telling the people they had to keep – and the people were exhausted trying.

When Jesus said, *Take My yoke upon you...* He was inviting us to follow Him rather than being weighed down by burdensome religion.

IOW – He was saying – stop trying to row your way into God's favor and start trusting the One who provides the power to follow Him and you'll find rest.

LWF – *we can be a Christian and not abide, but we cannot live the Christian life w/out abiding* – no matter how much we want it or how hard we try. The Christian life is a life that's saved and surrendered.

II The **EVIDENCE** of a Worthy Walk

So, what does a saved and surrendered life look like? In vv. 10–12, Paul identifies (5) characteristics that reveal the transforming work of the H.S. in our lives.

A Bear **FRUIT** in Every Good Work

According to John 15, can we bear genuine spiritual fruit independently of the H.S.? No, we can't. We can do good things in our own ability, but genuine spiritual fruit is the result of Jesus living in/thru us.

B **GROWING** in Experiential Knowledge

This is far more than knowing information about God, it's knowing Him so intimately that we can almost experience Him empirically thru our (5) senses.

Spiritual maturity isn't measured by how much Scripture we know, but by how much our lives are being transformed by the God we know.

Don't misunderstand. Knowing Scripture is essential. But the purpose of knowing God's Word isn't just to accumulate more information. It's to know the God of the Bible so intimately that His truth transforms how we think, live, and respond to life.

As I've shared before – *who cares if you can win a game of Bible Trivial Pursuit if you're losing at life.*

C **STRENGTHENED** w/ Endurance and Patience

endurance refers to remaining steadfast in trying circumstances b/c God is using them to bring us into right alignment under His rule.

patience refers to how we respond to people who test us as God continues to shape our character. In fact, patience here involves *treating other people the way Jesus treats us, even when other people treat us the way they treated Jesus.*

YET – too often, we're asking God to change our circumstances when in actuality He's working thru them to change us to bring us into right alignment w/ Him. While at other times, we're asking God to change the people around us when He is wanting to change the way we respond to those people.

Endurance says – *Lord, strengthen me to remain faithful when life is difficult.* **Patience** says – *Lord, help me respond like Jesus when people are difficult.* LBH – sometimes the most difficult people God is using to help us to become like Him are sitting in the car w/ us on the way home from church!

Point – God doesn't always remove difficult people or circumstances from our lives b/c He's using both to develop Christlike character w/in us that we could never manufacture on our own.

D Joyfully **GIVING** Thanks

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit while gratitude is one of the great markers of an abiding life. This is important b/c joyful gratitude isn't simply thanking God when life is going our way, it's the ability to see His goodness and remain thankful even when life isn't going as planned.

So, what's the difference b/w these (2) lists?

The 1st list – going to church, reading our Bibles, praying, and doing good things – contains things we can all do in our own ability. The 2nd list – genuine spiritual fruit, growing intimacy w/ God, supernatural endurance, Christlike patience, and joyful gratitude – describe the transforming work of the H.S. in us.

Point – God isn't looking for a better version of our flesh. He's calling us to a life surrendered to the H.S.

III The **RESPONSE** of a Worthy Walk

So, if the source of a worthy walk is God's power, and the proof of a worthy walk is the transforming work of His Spirit, what's our responsibility? **Answer**: We are to engage, surrender, trust, and obey.

Imagine hiking thru unfamiliar mountains when a thick fog rolls in. You can barely see the trail ahead, but you're w/ an experienced guide who knows every turn, obstacle – and exactly where you're going. You've got (3) options. [1]You can run ahead, assuming you know where you're going. [2]You can refuse to move until the guide carries you. OR – [3]you can stay close, listen to his instructions, and follow him step-by-step. And that's how the abiding life works.

Surrender means allowing God to lead instead of insisting on our own way. **Trust** means depending on God's wisdom rather than our understanding. And **obedience** means taking the next step that He reveals, even when we can't see the entire path.

Remember – surrender isn't the absence of effort. It's the abandonment of self-reliance.

Meaning – we're not sitting around waiting for God to do everything while we do nothing. We're actively following His leadership, trusting His wisdom, and obeying His Word thru the power He provides.

This can be especially important when life gets challenging. Maybe you're facing an issue in your marriage, struggling w/ a child, dealing w/ a difficult person at work, or carrying a burden in ministry. Our natural response is to take control, figure it out, and try harder. But what if instead of asking God to bless what we've already decided to do, we began by asking Him to show us what He wants us to do? B/c the goal of the Christian life isn't to get God to follow our plans. It's to surrender our lives to follow His.

Bring it home. Are you trying to live for Jesus or are you depending on Jesus? B/c we can be moving in the right direction while depending on the wrong power.

Honestly – some of us are trusting our goodness or religion to save us. Others know Jesus but are exhausted trying to live the Christian life in our own strength. We've been rowing when God has already provided the wind.

Abiding isn't doing nothing; it's doing everything in continual dependence on Jesus. We surrender our will, depend on His Spirit, and obey what He reveals.

Challenge – if you're lost, come to Jesus and be saved. If you're saved but striving, surrender to Jesus and begin abiding. Put down the oars. Raise the sail – b/c the Christian life isn't about what you can accomplish for Jesus, but what Jesus can accomplish in/thru a life surrendered to Him.