

## ***Walking Worthy***

*Colossians 1: 9-12*

**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

**August 19, AD 2018  
Gerrit Scott Dawson**

---

The more I read Colossians, the more in awe I am of the depth contained in this tiny letter. Last week, we looked at Paul's greeting. Paul had heard a report from the man whom he sent to plant the church in the city of Colossae. The news Paul heard made him give thanks for their faith in Christ, their love for each other and their eternal hope. Next, in our passage today, Paul moves into the main body of the letter. He lets them know how he prays for them:

We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you might 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.

Paul prays regularly that the church would be filled with knowledge, wisdom and understanding. He yearns for the Colossians to know Christ truly and deeply. But not just for the sake of knowing a lot. For a purpose: so they might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. Everything in our passage today revolves around this central idea: *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord* who has saved you and called you to himself.

Some moments in high school get burned forever into memory. Some burn brightly with fun times. More sear your memory with the sheer awkwardness of it all. So the good news was this beautiful girl that I liked was talking to me. Her blue eyes flashed and she grinned at me as she spoke. The bad news was what came out. She said a bit bluntly, "You walk like a duck." You walk like a duck. What does a guy do with a statement like that? I don't actually remember my reply, only the embarrassment of the comment. I probably said something astute like, "No I don't!" or "So what!" or maybe just tried to laugh it off. I've thought about it for years. If I'd been quicker, and bolder, I might have said, "I walk like a duck? Maybe so. But you know what, you walk on your toes. And so you bounce a little bit when you walk. And it's super cute." Or if I'd been really quick and really bold, I might have foretold the future. I wish I had said to her that afternoon, "So you think I walk like a duck? Tell you what, Rhonda Daniel, one day I'm gonna marry you and we're gonna have four little ducklings!"

Your *walk* is literally the way you carry yourself. But your walk also means the whole way you conduct your life. How you go about your business. How you handle yourself. What your habits are. The way you are with people. What you do. Paul says, I pray that you may *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord* who has called you to himself so that you can please him. I'm praying that you would see that the joy of your life is found in pleasing the Lord who loves you and saved you. We don't walk in a worthy manner to earn God's favor. We strive to walk worthily because Christ Jesus has already given us his grace, his unmerited favor. In gratitude for such love, we respond by living to please him.

So what does it mean to walk worthily? In our passage, Paul gives four phrases that explain. He identifies four activities. These four things *characterize* what it means to walk in a worthy manner. They also *create* a walk of life that please the Lord. They *express* and they *engineer* a worthy walk. And we're going to "walk" through each of the four phrases this morning.

**1) Bearing fruit in every good work.** The first picture Paul gives is agricultural. He wants us to visualize trees bearing fruit in their seasons. Trees bring forth their fruit by the good work of being healthy in the constant activity of just being trees. They draw up nourishment from the soil by roots. They reach sunward for light by their leaves and branches. They allow the seasonal process of flowering and then fruiting to occur. So each of us has good work to do that is natural. It fits our stage in life. It suits our age and ability. It is as natural as doing what is before us.

George MacDonald was a Presbyterian pastor and novelist who had a great influence on people such as C.S. Lewis. He once wrote in a children's novel that there are a great many more good things to do in the world than bad. It may seem like the world is overwrought with evil. But that's not yet quite so. In fact, even though we are sinful, most of what we do in a day partakes of good, not wrong. It is a good thing to sleep. It's a good thing to eat, to wash, to breathe, and to think. It's a good thing to do constructive, honest work. Most of our lives will be spent in such ordinary maintenance and the daily requirements of getting our living. That's really good. The virtues of hard work, honesty, personal responsibility, kindness, integrity, good attitudes and persistent effort do yield a fruitful life. They cause us to bless others and glorify God. These qualities make for a pleasing walk of life, whatever we may specifically be doing. I find it incredibly encouraging that it is good and pleasing just to do the next right thing with a thankful attitude. That's most of life!

Of course, as we grow in Christ, we see that we can be even more intentional in how we do what is given to us to do. In how we treat others with whom we work. And how we can open our eyes to see ways to reach beyond the minimum requirements to try and meet needs, to make a difference, to be a force for love in our work and in our community. Never underestimate the fruitfulness of a life characterized by basic goodness.

**2) Increasing in the knowledge of God.** We have been invited to engage personally with the Creator of the universe. We who are in Christ have heard news that has changed us. Some people look up at the stars and see the blind indifference of a cold cosmos. They look at the world sadly, seeing only emptiness, with death as a welcome, but final, despairing conclusion. They see history as only cyclical, with the world going nowhere except endlessly around the sun. But we who know Jesus know different. God exists. God is love. God came into the world to restore us to a living, personal relationship with himself. He has acted to forgive our sins and establish the grounds for reconciliation with himself and with other people. He has acted in a way that gives us hope he will set all things right. This is news. This is the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ is God come to save us. God who came to die so that we might live. When we know this, it changes everything.

Now the word Paul uses for knowledge here is more than academic information. It means knowledge that connects the mind and heart. Experiential knowledge. This kind of knowledge is what happens when we sing. We vocalize words that describe who God is and what he has done in Jesus Christ. But we do tunefully, in a way that touches, forms and expresses our hearts. Let's take for example a verse from the song "In Christ Alone." The writer of the lyrics, Stuart Townend, first gives information about events in Jesus' life:

There in the ground His body lay,  
Light of the world by darkness slain;  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day,  
Up from the grave He rose again

Christ's body lay in the ground but then he rose. That happened in the real world. But then he also takes us to the spiritual meaning in those historical events. The guy in the ground was the Light of the world, slain by darkness. Things got bad. But then the light shined in the darkness and a new Day for the world began.

Finally, he connects what happened to Jesus to our personal experience of that knowledge:

And as He stands in victory,  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;  
For I am His and He is mine,  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.<sup>1</sup>

As *Jesus* stands in victory, *I* am freed from sin's grip. That's mystical. Jesus died and rose. But 2000 years later, it affects me! Why? Because of our mystical union with Christ. Townend says it simply, "For I am his and He is mine." Now in the moment we sing "In Christ Alone," we may not consciously note all those dimensions. But the mysterious affect occurs. In no small part because of Keith Getty's exquisite tune. People from around the globe in many languages sing "In Christ Alone" and as they sing, they feel the power of Christ's dying and rising for us. They feel our union with him. So they feel refreshed. Encouraged. Hopeful. Renewed. The power is multiplied as we sing such hymns together. We grow in knowledge as we get where Christ is proclaimed and worshipped in fullness and truth.

**3) Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might.** Here is an image from athletics: getting stronger by training. An athlete feels power as he puts forth effort to strengthen muscles and increase agility. But there's an interesting twist in the way Paul doesn't actually describe a normal work out. He does not say, "Strengthening yourself, increasing your power through spiritual CrossFit." He uses the passive voice. *Being* strengthened. The power comes from some place other than ourselves. It comes from God's glorious might.

Once again, we have a mystical dimension to our faith. Self-help says "Look within yourself to access greater power for living." Christian faith says "Look beyond yourself for strength that comes only from Christ." It's the secret to 12 step groups: we were helpless in ourselves before the power of alcohol or whatever else addicted us. We had to humble ourselves to ask for a Higher Power. We Christians who are increasing in knowledge know what the founders of AA knew: that Higher Power is Jesus Christ.

I cannot fully explain to you how this works. But I can tell you it is true. It makes all the difference in a day whether I ask for Christ's strength or not. When I begin by praying that there is more required of me than I have resource to give, things go a whole lot differently than when I do not ask and simply think, "I got

this.” And it is amazing, stunning to me, how God shows up in unexpected ways when I cry out to him my weakness.

The author Stephen Lawhead has a series of novels in which his characters speak of God as the Swift, Sure Hand. God’s hand is largely invisible. You don’t see it until you realize afterwards that his hand has moved through your life. He is the Swift, Sure Hand invisibly working to uphold us.

Paul tells us that this strengthening, while it is given day by day, is not just for one moment. It’s for the long haul. He prays they would be strengthened with power for all endurance and patience with joy. It’s a long, long road through life. Seeking to do good, bear fruit, and grow in the knowledge and service of Christ is no light matter. There is day to day wear and tear of life. There is acute suffering physically. There are the blows from the betrayals and the anger of others. There is emotional exhaustion and there are dark nights of the soul. There are attacks of the devil and flat out persecution. We need God’s upholding power and the wise Christian asks for it daily so to walk worthy of the Lord.

**4) Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you** to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. This fourth activity is a picture from the legal and financial world. The Father has done something for us. He has qualified us to be heirs of all that belongs to his natural Son Jesus. He has adopted as brothers and sisters of Jesus. Legally, we have been written into the will. We will share in all Christ Jesus has. Financially speaking, this is like getting prequalified by the bank. Because, to follow the picture, Jesus has guaranteed our loan. He has staked his own resources on us. We could never earn enough by our goodness, our knowledge or even our patient suffering to qualify for God’s Kingdom. But Jesus qualifies us. He lived the life of perfect righteousness and faithfulness to his Father. He lived full hearted love for his Father and for all whom he met. And he gives to us his record. He credits us with his credit score. In this world, we encounter financial identity thieves. They want our credit, our resources, and our stuff. Jesus also tampers with our identity. But he does not steal, he gives. He gives us his identity as the beloved Son.

Once again, we see the mystical dimension of being joined to Jesus. Somehow, some way, all that he has gets credited to us. The Spirit joins us to Jesus so that we can say with the hymn, “For I am his and he is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ.”

For this reason, Paul prays that the Colossians would constantly be giving thanks. Gratitude is a miraculous activity. For something becomes more ours when we give thanks for it. When we thoughtfully give gratitude to God, the reality of what we have grows within us. It's a great paradox. The more I insist on my life being my own, the less of a grip I have on my life, the more I worry about what I could lose, the less secure I am. The more I realize all I have, even what I worked for, is a gift, the more I enjoy it. The more I realize my dependence, the freer I am. For thanksgiving is about trust. Finding that the One we trust is worthy, we find joy.

Paul prays for a life of growthful joy for his beloved church. He knows there will be trials to endure and enemies to face, resistance to overcome and a long journey to undergo. But none of those obstacles need prevent growthful joy, daily strengthening and increasing knowledge. What he prays, he also prescribes. Beloved, pray these four pictures for each other. Ask God specifically that we might bear fruit in every good work, increase in the knowledge of God, be strengthened with his might and live in joyful thanksgiving for the inheritance he has secured for us. Pray it for each other, and let's live it daily.

---

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Townend and Keith Getty, "In Christ Alone," (Thankyou Music, 2002).