

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians The Primacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1-23) The Prayer for the Gospel - Colossians 1:9-12

9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light.

There is nothing more satisfying, nothing more encouraging, nothing more that builds confidence in knowing that you are doing something right; that in the task before you, you are doing it well, according to plan and for the proper accomplishment of its purpose. There is nothing more satisfying and encouraging than knowing you are doing something right. This applies to our marriage relationships – knowing that you are being a “good” husband or a “good” wife. This applies to parenting – am I parenting my children correctly. This applies to honoring our parents – am I obey my parents as God desires and tells me in His word. There is nothing that builds more confidence and satisfaction than knowing you are understanding and communicating correctly the truths of God’s Word. Such a principle applies to our work – to know that we are doing our jobs well is encouraging. It does not matter whether we are speaking of our hobbies, or if we are playing golf or a video game, there is nothing quite like knowing you are doing such things well.

And of course, the reverse is also true. There is nothing more dissatisfying, more discouraging; nothing that robs you of any confidence more than doubting whether you are doing something right. I remember one of my first experiences having to rebuild a hard drive on a computer. I had to install the operating system and then in proper order install key pieces of software for my computer to work again. I studied to know that I would do this right as I didn’t want to mess anything up. It took me several hours to install the software and all along I was wondering if I had done everything in the right order. Then the moment of truth came as I was to install an important piece of software. I had invested about eight hours to get to this point and I doubted that I had done things correctly. Then my fears were realized when I received the error messages informing me that this software would not work correctly because of how I had installed everything else. That was a dissatisfying moment. That was a discouraging moment to realize that I had lost eight hours of my time because I had not loaded the software correctly. The upside of it was that while it took me another eight hours to get things set up, the second time I did know and had confidence in what I was doing. There is nothing more satisfying than knowing that you are doing something right and there is nothing more discouraging than wondering or doubting whether if you are doing something wrong.

And friends, this principle is truth in our Christian lives. There is nothing more encouraging and more satisfying than knowing that you are living for the Lord in a right way, or as Paul expresses in our text, “in a manner worthy of the Lord.” And conversely, there is nothing more

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discouraging and dissatisfying than doubting or wondering if we are living before the Lord in such a manner.

This brings us to the prayer of Paul in Colossians 1:9-12. We already looked at the first couple of verses of this prayer a couple of weeks ago now, so let me recap where we have been so we can consider this morning how we might know that we are walking in a manner worthy of the Lord.

In verses 1-8, Paul had already expressed the idea of the power of the Gospel, the message of Jesus Christ that He came to save sinners. We have learned that this message transformed the lives of Paul and Timothy. It is the gospel message as delivered by the Lord Jesus and His apostles that had transformed and changed the lives of these believers in Colosse. In verse 4 Paul said that the gospel message resulted a testimony of them being a people who had faith in Christ Jesus, who had a deep love for the brethren, and who had as their hope heaven. These were a people whose lives were being changed as they heard the word of God preached.

And now, in verse 9, Paul says, “For this reason...” – or “in light of the fact that the gospel has been doing its work in you...” – “for this reason” – and here we find the REQUEST – here is the main action of verses 9-14 – as Paul does not cease to pray and to ask that the gospel might continue its work. The request is this, that they might “be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” Notice the emphasis of this verse. He is praying for the gospel to continue its work. Just because the gospel has begun its work does not mean we can cease to pray for the gospel to continue its work in us. Beloved, the gospel is not just about seeing the lost saved and the dead brought to life. That is the starting point. But the gospel is also about seeing the redeemed more and more conformed to Christ, that they might become more and more like Jesus in every thought, every word and every action. This request of Paul ought to be the request of each one of us in the church, that God would continue to fill us with the knowledge of His will and that knowing His we would live more and more in light of it.

But why, what is the reason why Paul prays this for the Colossians and why then ought we to pray that we might be filled with the knowledge of God’s will? In verse 10 we see the second point we considered, the REASON – **“so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects...”** The only way to conduct your life, to live in a way that pleases the Lord is to live it according to the will of God. It is impossible to divorce knowing the will of God from living in a manner that pleases the Lord. The “believer” who has or shows little interest in knowing the will of God can never please the Lord with what he or she does. But for those who desire to know the will of God, who hunger and thirst after righteousness, this one will walk in a manner that pleases the Lord in all things.

But this then brings us to our main point for this morning, the third point of our text, for we have seen the REQUEST, and the REASON, and now, beginning in the second half of verse 10, we find the RESULTS of being filled with the knowledge of God’s will. In other words, how can we know if we are living the Christian life correctly? How can we know if we are walking in a manner worthy of the Lord? How can we know we are doing all this right? For the Christian who knows he or she is walking with the Lord in a worthy manner, there is no greater joy or satisfaction, but for the person who is unsure, who is doubting what God wants for his or her life, there is frustration and dissatisfaction.

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And so we find that the Holy Spirit has left us the indicators of a life that is filled with the knowledge of God’s will and of the markers that reveal whether or not we are indeed walking in a manner worthy of the Lord. In verses 10-12 there are four such indicators, three of which we will consider this morning. The fourth begins in verse 12 and goes through verse 14, a passage rich in scope so we will look at it separately. Let us now consider then the first three indicators of a life that is being lived in a manner worthy of the Lord, of a life that reveals it has been filled with the knowledge of God’s will. The life that is worthy of the Lord is...

I. Bearing fruit in every good work (10b)

The first indicator of a worthy life, of a life that is lived rightly before the Lord is that it is **bearing fruit in every good work**. Let me remind you that it appears Paul is appealing to the very creation account by using the two phrases, “bearing fruit” and “increasing”. In Genesis 1:28, before sin had entered the world through Adam’s disobedience, the Lord God commanded Adam and Eve saying, **“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it...”** We know that with the earth empty that a key element of this command was that Adam and Eve would have children and that their children would have children, hence, being fruitful and multiplying and filling the earth physically. And while this is absolutely true, it is not the complete force of the command. For not only were Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply physically, there was to be a spiritual fruitfulness and multiplication. For not only were Adam, Eve and their descendents to physically fill the earth, but they were also to spiritually fill the earth with the knowledge of God and with obedience to His Word.

Of course, the fall of man in Genesis 3, the moment when Adam chose to disobey God’s command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; at that moment everything changed. To be sure, Adam, Eve and their descendents did begin to fulfill the physical side of Genesis 1:28, but because of sin, the spiritual side of filling all the earth the knowledge of God was greatly diminished and hampered.

That is until the Second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth. We know that Jesus came to save sinners, that is to restore those who believe in His work for them on the cross to a place where Genesis 1:28, to be fruitful and multiply, could once again be lived out spiritually. And it is here in Colossians 1:10 that we see Paul alluding to this idea as he says in effect that those who are living rightly before God, in a manner worthy of the Lord, they know they are pleasing Him as they are, because of their union with Jesus, bearing fruit and increasing.

But just what are believers suppose to be bearing fruit in? Notice that the emphasis here is not on having children, but rather **“bearing fruit in every good work,”** or literally, “in every kind of good work, bearing fruit.” Let me make one more appeal to the Genesis account, in Genesis 1:11-12 we read,

11 Then God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit after their kind with seed in them;” and it was so. 12 The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed after their kind, and trees bearing fruit with seed in them, after their kind; and God saw that it was good.

God had created the vegetation and trees to bear fruit “after” or according to their kind. Apple trees were to actually bear apples; grapevines, grapes and tomato plants, tomatoes.

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Borrowing from that idea Paul writes, “bearing [producing; yielding] fruit in every kind of good work.” The believer in Jesus Christ is not just to know the will of God; he is not just to be filled with the knowledge of God’s will, but he must also be producing fruit in keeping with who he is in Christ. If you are in Christ, you have been adopted as a son or daughter of the living God; therefore you are to be bearing fruit that is according to the kind of the sons of God. If you are a believer, you have been called to be holy even as the Lord God Himself is holy; therefore you are to be bearing fruit according to the kind of God – that is every kind of good thing.

But I am afraid I am being too vague or too general. Just what is this fruit we are to be bearing? What is the fruit of every kind of good work? Let me take just a moment to remind you what the Scripture says about the fruit of good works. Let us remember that even as Paul has stated, that those who are walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, are those who are constantly (present tense) bearing fruit, Jesus said this very thing in John 15:8

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.

What is the fruit of every kind of good work? First, evangelism [that is telling people what the Bible says about sin, salvation and Jesus Christ] - evangelism that leads to the conversion of souls is fruit. In 1 Corinthians 16:15 Paul referred to those who were saved in the household of Stephanas as the “first fruits of Achaia.” Second, the very worship, praise and adoration we bring to God is defined as fruit in Hebrews 13:15,

Through Him [Jesus] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

In Romans 15:26-28 we see that generosity, our giving of both substance and funds is called a fruit:

26 For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem. 27 Yes, they were pleased to do so, and they are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are indebted to minister to them also in material things. 28 Therefore, when I have finished this, and have put my seal on this fruit of theirs, I will go on by way of you to Spain.

Not to be humorous on one hand or to inappropriately pressure anyone on the other hand, but that offering box in the back of the room – do you know what that is? It is a fruit basket and we are to be bearing fruit and contributing such fruit to the cause of the ministry.

In addition to converts, our praise and our giving, godly living is also said to be a fruit as Hebrews 12:11 reminds us that God disciplines us, leads us in the path of godly living in order to produce in us ***“the peaceful fruit of righteousness.”*** And if this were not enough, let us not forget that the attributes of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are all said to be what according to Galatians 5:22-23? They are all called the ***“fruit of the Spirit.”***

This is some of the fruit we are to be bearing. And note that it says, “bearing fruit.” I have no doubt that each one of us here knows we are to be talking to others about Jesus. We are

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aware that the songs we sing on the screen are filled with statements about the glory, majesty and sovereignty of God. We are informed that we are giving to church via the bulletin and we certainly can recite what are the attributes of the fruit of the Spirit. But we are not called to simply “know” these things. Rather the question is, “Am I bearing fruit in these things?” Am I seeing peoples lives changed as I share the gospel? Is my worship and praise of God a true experience of the presence of God that leaves me humbled and in awe of Him? Is my giving with the heart and prayer that it will further the ministry? Is my life manifesting the tell-tail evidence of godliness? That, beloved, is the pursuit of constantly bearing fruit of every kind of good work.

And does not our Lord Jesus bear fruit in every good work? Is He not our good Shepherd who guides us, watches over us, preserves us, restores us, tends to us and feeds us? And is He not also the very one who laid down His life for us? If we are called to be like Jesus, then let us first pray for one another and then pursue in our lives being filled with the knowledge of God’s will, so that we might walk in a manner worthy of the Lord by bearing fruit in every good work just like our Savior.

II. Increasing in the knowledge of God (10c)

The second indicator of walking in a manner worthy of the Lord given to us by the Spirit of God is that such a one is “increasing in the knowledge of God.”

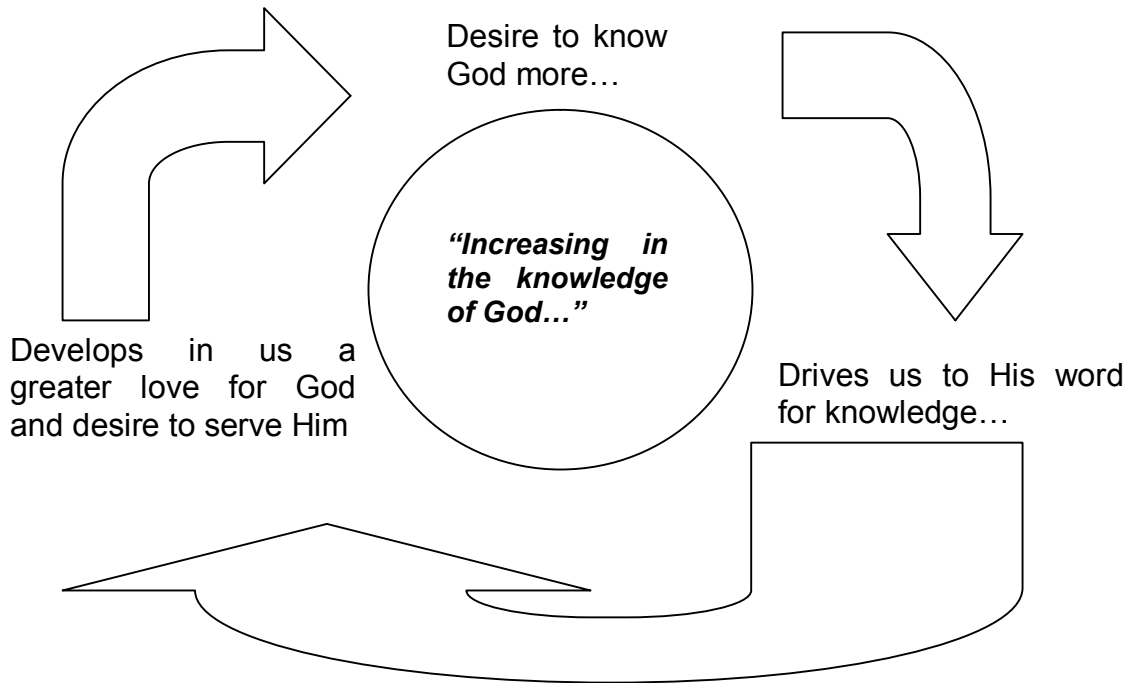
“Increasing in the knowledge of God” speaks of our continual growth in understanding the revelation of God. The only way in which we can rightly grow as believers is by the knowledge of God. In the simplest of terms, to be increasing in the knowledge of God means that you are knowing Him more and more intimately as time moves on. Like the phrase, “bearing fruit” – this word “increasing” is in the present tense, meaning a continual action. We are reminded that we should never be content with what we know about God, but ought always to want to know Him more.

We are familiar with how this is said in 1 Peter 2:2, **“Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.”** Do you want to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord? How can you know if you do? Do you long to know God more today than you did yesterday? What new mercies has God revealed to you this day for which you can say, “Thank You Lord for increasing my knowledge of You?”

There is an interesting truth for us to know and apply from this idea of increasing of expanding in our knowledge of God and it is this - *the more we know about God, the more we will want to know. And the more we come to know about God, the more we will desire to love and serve the Him. And the more we love and serve Him, the more we will then be consumed with the passion of knowing Him even more.*

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How do we know if we are “increasing in the knowledge of God”? Let us consider quickly what God’s word says are some of the signs of such an increasing.

First, as you increase in the knowledge of God, you will grow in your love for God’s Word. Psalm 119:97 declares, **“Oh how I love Your law! It is my mediation all the day!”** This is the knowledge of God’s will; this is how you know you are walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, when you see your love for God by means of mediating on His word increase.

Second, as you increase in the knowledge of God, you will see your life lived in more and more obedience to God. In 1 John 2:3-5 we read;

3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, “I have come to know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected.

The one increasing in the knowledge of God is the one who is increasingly obedient to the will of God he has been filled with and by this then he knows he is rightly walking in a manner worthy of the Lord.

Another indicator that you are increasing in the knowledge of God is when you see your love for the saints also increasing. In Philippians 1:9 we read this prayer,

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment...

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And so the question is this, how much are you increasing in your love for the Word of God, in your pursuit of obedience and in your love for God and the saints? By such things as these we come to know that we are rightly walking in a manner worthy of the Lord and that we have been filled with the knowledge of His will.

III. Strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might...(11)

The final indicator that I would have you consider today is found in verse 11, that the one who walks in a manner worthy of the Lord is the one who is **“strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience...”**

From this statement we are presented with the very “how” by which we may live to please the Lord. The call to please the Lord in every kind of good work is overwhelming. Just how can we ever do this? Praise God that it is not according to our power, but rather according to His power. *Beloved, know this, God always gives to us what He also demands of us.* To be strengthened speaks of being supplied, or armed for the task. God is the one who equips us to know and then live according to His will. The idea here is that to be *strengthened with all power* is to be empowered by God with the greatest strength imaginable.

Paul does something interesting here in this verse as he makes a play on words. The word for strengthened and for power is actually from the same Greek work, *dunamis*. We might translate this to say, “that you might be empowered [by God] with all power.” This “power” is founded in the inherent, sovereign strength of God's glory. It is called here in our text **“His glorious might.”** What we are to see is that God Himself, by His own unlimited power, is going to strengthen us so that we might persevere in and through anything that comes our way. We are to know that we are empowered with the greatest power; that we are fueled as it were with the highest octane of gas for the greatest performance. Beloved, when we are filled with the knowledge of His will (v. 9), then there is nothing lacking in us. For with the same power by which the eyes of our Lord never slumber, and His hands never rest, and His heart never ceases to beat with the deepest of love toward us, and His shoulders never weary of carrying our burdens; beloved, this is the same power by which we are strengthened to walk in a manner worthy of Him. Let us not walk in the strength of our might, but in the strength of His.

And how can we know if we are walking in this strength? Let us note the results of being strengthened by His glorious might at the end of verse 11 reading, **“for the attaining of all steadfastness (circumstances) and patience (people)...”** Beloved, being filled with the knowledge of God's will and being strengthened with power means your live will be marked by perseverance. Are you easily shaken in your faith? How often do you doubt the promises of God? Do you run to anyone or any thing before you run to God? These would indicate that you are trying to live in your own strength rather than in God's strength. Here then is a prayer we need to pray – Lord, by your power, according to your glorious power, help us to keep pressing on regardless of the circumstances, regardless of what comes along to challenge the truth of the gospel no matter how well sounding or beautifully packaged it might be. Enable us, Lord, to demonstrate a life that pleases to you in every respect by empowering us to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. For as we grow in the knowledge of the will of God, we will grow in our faithfulness to God and to live for God and in all this we will also find the very strength to persevere.

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This is what it means to live right before the Lord. As we pray for and see these indicators of “bearing fruit in every good work”, of “increasing in the knowledge of God” and of being “strengthened with all power...” then we can know that we are walking, living, behaving in a manner worthy of the Lord because it is being lived as a result of being filled with the knowledge of His will.

Do you want to know that you are doing the right things in your Christian life? Then let us pray for and be devoted to the pursuit of these truths for one another and for ourselves to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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