

**February 24, 2008**

*Colossians 1:9*

Alright good morning. Welcome back. Grab your Bibles and let's turn back to Colossians chapter 1. We finished Paul's opening to the letter – his normal process of telling his audience that he is thankful for them and why. And today we'll see the next step in what he normally writes; Paul tells the Colossians what he is praying for them. And in just this first verse of that prayer explanation, we see some incredible truth for you and me. So let's take a look. **Colossians chapter 1 verse 9.**

“For this reason, since the day we first heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

He says **for this reason**. For what reason? Well for all we've looked at the past two weeks. **Because of everything Paul says about the Colossians in VERSES 3-8.** Because he's heard about their faith in Christ Jesus. Because he's heard about their love for all the saints. Because he knows of their hope in the gospel. Because of the fruit that gospel is bearing in them. Because of how God is using them to spread that gospel. Because of all of that, Paul says **we have not stopped praying for you.**

Now think about that for a minute. Doesn't that seem a little off? Isn't that a little opposite of how we go about this? Basically Paul is saying since I heard you are doing so well, I haven't stopped praying for you. Now you'd think that Paul might say, since I heard you're doing so well, I'm spending my time praying for someone else. You know I've got the Galatians over here and they are in all kinds of trouble and turmoil, so I'm praying for them instead of you now. And as I look at my own prayer life, I'm like so many people around me; we spend our time trying to find out who is in trouble so we'll know who to pray for. Listen to our prayer requests – Mr. so and so is sick. And Mrs. so and so lost her job. And my cousin's uncle's boss is getting divorced and there's been a disaster down in whereversville. And the people who get prayed for are the ones who seem to be in trouble. And there may be a couple of problems with that. First of all – maybe God wants them there and is doing something through all that and so our prayers are in a sense out of His will. But really the point is God may want us praying for those in trouble, but not to the exclusion of those who are doing well – who are growing in Christ. And yet **the greatest resistance of the enemy is going to come against those who are most successful for the Kingdom of God and they ought to be held up in PRAYER.** So Paul says, since the day I heard about how well you are doing in Christ, I haven't stopped praying for you. Interesting.

But he goes on and tells them what he is praying for them. He says I'm asking that **God would fill you with the knowledge of His will.** Not that you might just know His will, but that you might be filled with the knowledge of His will. That word **filled in Greek is the word pleroo and it simply means to fill something to completeness. But in doing so, it signifies the ABSENCE of anything else.**

Let me give you an example. If I take this glass and I fill it with water to the top that means I fill it up – nothing else can be added to it without water spilling out. It is dominated by the water. But if I take this similar glass that has a few rocks in it and I fill it with water to the top, this cup is full – but it has not been filled with water. And what Paul is praying here signifies something total and complete – that **the imperfections and the inadequacies of our knowledge of God's will would be more and more REPLACED and that the lies and deceptions we have believed would be erased and that we would be totally DOMINATED by our knowledge of His will.**

That word **knowledge is the word epignosis.** It is not simply knowing but indicates **completeness, thoroughness; it would be a FULL knowledge.** Which is important for a couple of

reasons. First, we can't do what we don't know. We'll come back to this later, but **we can't choose to purposefully do God's will if we do not KNOW God's will.** Ignorance is not bliss. But secondly, Paul prays for knowledge. Not emotion. Not subjective perception. We've got to understand that yes **feelings are often a part of faith – they are often a result or side effect of our faith, but faith is not a FEELING. Faith is based on truth.** In fact there will come a time in your life when you don't feel like doing what you know is right – what you know is truth – what you know is God's will. And it is in that moment that your faith based on your knowledge of God's will enables you to overcome your feelings and to do what your emotions don't want you to do.

So being filled with that knowledge is crucial for us but it is not just general knowledge. Paul specifically prays that they would be filled with the knowledge of **His will. God's will is simply what GOD WANTS.** Paul prays that they might constantly know and be controlled by what God wants. That's the keynote of the Christian's life. What did Jesus make the center of His life? He said "I have come to do the Father's will." What did He pray in the garden? He said, "Not my will, but yours be done." How did He pray and how did He teach his disciples to pray? "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The apostle John said, "They man who does the will of God will live forever."

It is absolutely crucial that a Christian know the will of God.

And question just right quick. Where do we find that? Do you find God's will by listening to the voice inside? Do you realize that not one time in God's Word when talking about knowing the will of God are we told to "listen to the little voice you hear inside."

Do you know it by following your gut – going with what really feels right? Again not according to the Word. In fact God warns us against these things when He tells us in **Isaiah 55:8-9**

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD.

"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

And twice in **Proverbs** he tells us that "There is way that seems right to a man, but in the end, it leads to death."

Folks the fundamental foundation for a biblically Christian world view is based on first of all that God is but secondly that God has revealed Himself to us through His Word. **We know God's will as He reveals it to us through HIS WORD by the Holy Spirit.** There's no way around it. And we see that in the last phrase of this verse. Paul prays that God would fill us with the knowledge of His will **through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.**

Now some people see those two words wisdom and understanding has being the same thing. But John Macarthur explains a subtle difference that is appropriate for us to grasp today. **Spiritual wisdom is the Greek word *sophia*.** It is a broad term talking about apprehension. In this context as Paul prays for all spiritual wisdom, this would be **the ability to hear or read Scripture and to formulate PRINCIPLES that are God's revealed truths.** So that His Word is not just a whole conglomeration of fact, but it begins to form principles in my mind and I apprehend them. Which leads to the next word – and understanding or tied back to the adjective, **spiritual understanding. That's the word *sunesis* which basically is the ability to take those apprehended principles and APPLY them.** The principles of God's Word are the unchangeable, timeless truths. Sometimes they describe a cause & effect relationship or they might explain the outcome of a specific action. You and I can disobey a command, but we can't disobey a principle.

So the more familiar we become with the principles of God's Word, the easier it is for us to discern – to know God's will. Which is good because every decision we make is going to cross with one of the principles in God's Word. So **the wisest thing we can do in terms of putting ourselves in a position where God can fill us with the knowledge of His will is for us to IMMERSE ourselves in God's Word.**

Less than a month ago we spent two weeks looking at the evidence both external and internal for the uniqueness of the Word of God and at the tools we need to be able to study it. But surveys tell us that 9 out of 10 Americans own a Bible, but most rarely read it and consequently know practically nothing about it. One commentator put it like this,

“They fail to read it for themselves and when they do, they do not read it systematically or have a context for understanding it. They may flip through the pages in hopes to find something meaningful, as if the Bible were some kind of Ouija board. The result is a woeful degree of biblical ignorance that has grave consequences.”

We as believers must be willing to study God’s Word if we are going to grow and filled with the knowledge of the will of our God.

Let’s step back again. Look at the verse with me. “For this reason, since the day we first heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you asking God to fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

One of the larger **implications** we need to understand here is that **your MIND matters. In Romans 10:2** Paul says of the people of Israel that they have a zeal but it is not according to knowledge. In other words, they’re very religious; they just don’t know what they’re doing. They get all worked up about religion but they have no content. John Stott in his book called Your Mind Matters points out a couple of consequences of that in you and me. **When you set aside real knowledge of God’s will, you find a substitute for it – especially in historic churches but also in people – and that substitute is RITUAL.** What we do becomes a mere performance of ceremony that is a mindless substitute for intelligent worship. Folks God doesn’t want mindless worship. What did Jesus say the greatest command was? Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and what? All your mind. We need zeal according to knowledge.

But a second consequence may be even more dangerous. **In the absence of being filled with the knowledge of God’s will, EXPERIENCE becomes the criterion of truth.** What is true is what I feel – what is true is what I experience – and subjective experience is exalted above revealed truth. Folks that’s where our culture – the world we live in – the people you do life around – that’s where they live.

I want you to watch a clip of RC Sproul – one of the greatest apologists and theologians of our time – as he explains a little about what has happened.

**CLIP** from the Truth Project Session 2

See how dangerous that has become? Where what is good is determined by majority rule.

How do I know what to do in my marriage if I don’t know what the real standards are? How do I know what to do in my job if I don’t know what the Bible teaches about it? How do I know what to do in worshipping God if I don’t understand what God expects in worship? How do I know how to be saved if I don’t follow the absolutes in Scripture? How do I know what to do about anything if I don’t understand God’s patterns, God’s standards, God’s principles, God’s will?

See what Paul prays for the Colossians here is absolutely huge and his heart for them ought to be our heart for ourselves. That we would be filled with the knowledge of what God wants.

But listen – the world tells us just the opposite. **The world tells you not to seek what God wants, but to do what YOU want. It’s all about you.** Life mantras and TV slogans make it clear.

If it feels good do it.

Obey your thirst.

Your way right away at Burger King now.

You asked for it, you got it.  
Reality or life is what you make it.

Abraham Maslow back in the 1940s developed what he called the “hierarchy of needs” that has been taught in every school and every college since he made it up tells us that the greatest need of a human being – the highest achievement of man is self-actualization – to truly live by and do what you want. To get in touch with you. It really is all about you.

And though Maslow may have codified that lie, he didn’t come up with it. This is the pernicious lie that started back in the Garden when the serpent asked “what was it that God said? Psh – don’t worry about what God said. You can be like God. You can know – you can decide what is good and what is evil.” Get in touch with you – let your inner self guide your life – make your own truth - and you will be healthy, fruitful, and happy. And we’ve been buying it and being destroyed by it ever since.

But Christianity – Jesus Christ – tells us there is a transcendent truth – a truth that is bigger than you and me – bigger than the cosmos we live in and that in fact is independent of and outside of all we can see. We get a glimpse of it back in **verses 16 & 17**. Look at that with me.

“For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Folks it’s not about me. It’s not about you. **Life is about Jesus Christ and HIS WILL for you and for me.** We have got to get our glasses filled with that. Because if we don’t, we will unknowingly allow the values and practices of our culture to dilute our faith beyond recognition. And we end up with mushy sentimentality or even worse a bunch of conflicting and bizarre beliefs that are simply reinforced by a herd mentality.

Well the last thing that I want us to see from verse 9 is that Paul’s request here reminds us that **conversion – becoming a Christian – being saved – is not the end. It’s the BEGINNING.**

Our relationship with Jesus Christ is to have a radical life-changing affect on how we think and live, what we desire and pursue in life. We spent the last two weeks looking at how Paul described in verses 3-8 the amazing conversion of the Colossian believers. The gospel we looked at last week had come with power and was bearing fruit and growing and Paul thanked God for that.

But he didn’t stop there. The fact that they had been converted and transformed prompted Paul to pray for the Colossians as he never had before. He didn’t get the good news from Epaphras about what was happening in them and then say – well that job’s done. No he thanked God for what had happened and began to pray for what would happen. And what does he pray for? Spiritual growth. That God would fill these Colossian believers with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

What we see here is that **spiritual growth is not OPTIONAL. Growth is a sign of life. Christians may not all grow at the same pace, but all Christians GROW.** Which means if any of us are here today and we think we are saved but have little real concern about growing in our knowledge of what God wants, then we ought to see Paul’s prayer as warning – a reminder of what we saw last week – that the gospel is not just about a home in heaven when you die. It is about now – it is about life – it is about knowing what God wants more than anything else.

Does that describe you? Is that your prayer? Does that define how you view and use the Word of God? It can and it will as you make Paul’s prayer your own.

God fill me with the knowledge of your will through all spiritual wisdom & understanding.

OR as we've been praying through our study:

**Jesus, show me YOUR glory, and help it change my life today.**

Because I get it – I know it's not about me – that it is about you. So show me YOUR glory and help it change my life today.

Let's pray.