

March 9, 2008

Colossians 1:10-11

Alright good morning. Let's go back to the book of Colossians together. As we said last week, we are walking through these few verses in chapter 1 slowly together so God has a chance to really open our eyes to what He has for us. Paul has told the Colossians that he is praying for them. Then he tells them what he's praying for them – that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will. Then we saw last week why Paul prays that – that they might live lives worthy of the Lord and might please God in every way. And of course the issue there is that God never gives us knowledge of His will as an end unto itself. God shows us what He wants so that we can do it. **Knowledge must be connected to ACTION when it comes to who we are in Christ.**

But Paul not only tells them that the goal of this prayer is a life that pleases God, he then give them – and us – a glimpse at what that life will be like – the life that pleases God – the life that is worthy of our Lord. Now I don't know about you, but if someone is going to lay out the life that God wants – if someone is going to show me how I can know if I am pleasing the God who saved me – that's something I want to know about. So let's look today – we'll go back to verse 9 to start.

“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience...”

Let's break this down together. First he says this life that pleases God is a life in which we are **bearing fruit in ever good work**. Now I know we hammered this home in our study of the book of James, but after talking last week about what we do in our lives and now this week about good works, I just want to get out there again that **these good works are not done to EARN salvation or to keep it or even to earn God's favor but BECAUSE our salvation is real and because we have God's favor.**

Paul makes it clear in **Ephesians 2** that “it is by grace you are saved through faith and this is not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”

James builds on that truth when he asks in **James chapter 2**, what good is faith without works? Can such a faith save anyone? And he answers – no – faith by itself – if it isn't accompanied by works is dead. So Paul says we are saved by faith not by works of the law and James completes that thought when he says that if you are saved by faith then it will show up in your life through the works of the Spirit of God.

Martin Luther put it all together when he simply said, “People talk about being saved by faith plus good works. This is not true. Good works are the necessary consequence of our salvation. They are not necessary to be saved; they are the necessary result of our salvation and the evidence that we truly have faith.”

Which makes sense then that when Paul is describing the life that pleases God, it will be a life where we are bearing fruit in every good work. What does that tell us? That **God EXPECTS us to bear fruit**. Jesus himself makes that clear in **John 15** when he says (John 15:5, 8)

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing... This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.”

Now this idea of fruit we already saw back in verse 6 when Paul said that the gospel is bearing fruit all over the world. And we talked about how that idea of bearing fruit had an inner concept to it. The same is true here. **Fruit in our lives is the result of the HOLY SPIRIT in us.** **Galatians chapter 5** puts a face to this idea when it says in verse 22 that the “*fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,*

patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Those are the very things that we cannot create consistently on our own. Without the Holy Spirit of God in our lives, Paul explains in the verses before that one in Galatians 5, we default to our sinful natures which desire exactly the opposite of what the Spirit of God produces.

And how does the Spirit of God produce those fruits in us? We see it in what Paul says here in Colossians. “Bearing fruit in every good work.”

Fruit is BORN through good works in our lives. What that means is that these things, these traits, these expressions of the Spirit do not happen passively in our lives. Just like James told us back in **James chapter 1** that it is the testing of our faith that develops perseverance. It is through resistance – through use – through good works out here that we bear fruit in here. Take patience as an example. Anybody every prayed for patience? Anybody prayed for patience today? Yeah most of us. But if you think about it that’s really a scary prayer, isn’t it? The only way for patience to grow is if you are in a situation that demands patience – so you’re pretty much asking for a reason to need patience in order for God to develop patience in you. Fruit is born through good works in our lives.

But let’s go one step further. For Paul to say he wants them – and us – to be bearing fruit in every good work implies that **it is possible to do good works and NOT bear fruit.** In **Matthew 6** Jesus is clear about this – he says don’t do your acts of righteousness to be seen by men – don’t give in order to be seen by men – don’t pray in order to be honored by men – when you do, then you have your reward – it produces nothing from the Father in you. And in **Matthew 15** he explains (15:8-9) “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”

See **what pleases God is a life not just of good works** – through we know from Ephesians 2:10 that God wants us to do good works – **it is a life of good works MOTIVATED by the Holy Spirit in us through which God is glorified** through us just like Jesus said in John 15. And the result of that habit or reality in our lives is not only that we bear fruit, but Paul’s next description here - we grow in the knowledge of God – **growing in the knowledge of God.**

E.D. Martin explained this real simply. He said “to receive the gospel is to come to know God. To know God is to do His will. To do His will is to know more and more of God.” And the reason for that which we need to understand and look for is that **God’s will – what God wants – God’s commands are a reflection of His NATURE – of who He is.** For example, why is lying wrong? Why did God say “do not lie” – I mean it made it into the big 10 right? Is it because lying isn’t practical, that it causes more problems than it solves – you know Shakespeare - “what a tangled web we weave when once we practice to deceive” – is that why lying is wrong? No.

Lying is wrong and God tells us not to lie because it is the complete opposite of his character. God does not – cannot lie – because God is truth – and the source of all truth. So the more we know of God’s will, the more we can grow in the knowledge of God.

Now a warning is necessary here as well. And we’ve talked about this before too. J.I. Packer warns that “to be preoccupied with getting (knowledge of God) as an end in itself, to approach Bible study with no higher motive than a desire to know all the answers, is the direct route to a state of self-satisfied self-deception.” He says, “interest in theology and knowledge about God is not at all the same thing as knowing Him.” And clearly **what pleases God – what Paul is talking about is a life in which we know HIM and not just about Him.**

Paul make that his own purpose remember in **Philippians 3** he said, “*What is more I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ and be found in Him.*” And then in verse 10 he simply says, “*I want to know Christ...*” Which again, is the very thing that pleases God. Listen to **Jeremiah 9:23-24**

“This is what the LORD says: “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that

he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD."

Dan DeHaan in his book The God You Can Know talks about how easy it is for us as Christians to find ourselves living for the Lord out of duty and not out of devotion. To start thinking, "If I just do right, then I will be right." The Bible makes it clear that it is not what you do that counts with God, it is what you "be" that is important. It is character over conduct. But the connection that we see here in Colossians is that as we get to know God, His character rubs off on us and our conduct becomes purely an extension of what we know. Which is why God says in **Hosea 6:6** "*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*"

You know what all this means for us? It means **you can know God MORE than you do right now**. I don't care how old you are or aren't – I don't care how long or short you've been a believer. Our God is infinite and you can spend your whole life getting to know Him and barely scratch the surface. You can know God better than you do right now – and here's the other thing all this means. God wants you to. **God WANTS you to know Him more and more and more**. Paul says it pleases God when we grow in our knowledge of Him. And we should know that. How many times have we seen it in God's Word?

Jeremiah 33:3 "*Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and mighty things you do not know.*"

Jeremiah 29:13 "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*"

James 4:8 "*Come near to God and he will come near to you.*"

2 Chronicles 7:14 "*if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*"

God wants us to know Him. It pleases God for us to know Him more.

And then the last phrase we'll look at today is verse 11 – Paul has said, bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, and now verse 11 "***being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience...***"

"strengthened" there speaks of CONTINUOUS empowerment. It is actually the same root word of Philippians 4:13 that says "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength." God is not like a booster rocket on the space ship that give us a big blast when we first get saved and then leaves us to coast and fly on our own. This is a continuous sustaining power and strength.

And Paul qualifies that strength and power when he says "***according to His glorious might.***" This is awesome. That means our "being strengthened" is **not just in proportion to our need but in proportion to God's ABUNDANT supply**. It's what Paul is talking about in **Eph 3:20** When he says "*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us...*" It's not that God gives us just enough to get us by but keep us wheezing – it is strength beyond measure because it is according to His glorious might.

And that phrase actually is really interesting. A more literal translation would be "**according to the might of His GLORY.**" Now God's glory is **God's manifested nature – it is the sum total of his divine perfection** – of all that He is.

So look at this incredible circle here. Knowing God – his glory - his manifested nature – is what builds in us the strength to do and be what God wants – what God's will is. These three phrases are linked together in an incredible process that creates in us a life worthy of our Lord. Let me give you a picture of it through a simple illustration. Watch this video.

"Through a Child's Eyes" video from The Truth Project

Did you see it? This kid knows his mom. And it is the fact that he knows his mom that gives him the strength to do what she is telling him to do – to jump – even when everything in him says “I can’t.” And then when he does – they both rejoice – and he knows even more the trustworthiness of his mom and the fruit in his life is increased trust, confidence and even faith. That is exactly what Paul is describing as the life he prays for in the Colossians because that is the life that is worthy of our Lord and pleases Him in every way.

Well – the last phrase in verse 11 links back to the fruit he talked about in verse 10. He says “being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.”

Endurance here is the opposite of COWARDICE & despondency. So you could define it as the capacity to see things through. In this context, the word endurance would be exercised toward circumstances. Here’s what I mean – that when our faith in Christ fails to deliver ease or greater earthly rewards but instead brings persecution and suffering, those who endure do not abandon their faith for something that looks less demanding & more promising. Endurance refers to hanging on during tough times. It is what enables us to deal with temptation and persecution.

Patience is the opposite of wrath or a spirit of REVENGE. You could define it as the attitude that in spite of injury or insult does not retaliate. Patience differs from endurance in that it is exercised toward people. The best explanation I think probably comes from Augustine who said, “The one who shows patience prefers to endure evil so as not to commit it, rather than to commit evil so as not to endure it.”

And we see these things played out in **2 Corinthians 4** (8-10, 16) where Paul writes:

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body...Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”

“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience...”

What an incredible passage. The last thing I want you to see in verses 10 and 11 is that all three of these things that Paul defines as the life that pleases God – the life that is worthy of our Lord are expressed in present participles. What does that mean – why does that matter?

It means these things are things that happen once or twice and you’re done. These are ongoing present truths.

Bearing fruit, Growing in knowledge, Being strengthened

It is a LIFE that is worthy of the Lord. Which is why the prayer we are praying through Colossians says just that – **Jesus show me your glory and help it change my LIFE today.**

Let me give you just a few questions to go home with today to see where your life is what Paul is praying for in the Colossians.

1) Is the knowledge of God’s will RESULTING in good works in your life?

That’s the starting point – like we saw last week – is there a connection between what you know and what you do or is your faith and Christianity and church and God segmented from the rest of your life?

2) Are the good works in your life done out of duty or are they bearing FRUIT in you that glorifies God?

Remember, we can do the right thing for the wrong reason and it does us no good. Is the fruit of the spirit showing up more and more in your character or are you hiding behind – “that’s just the way I am”?

3) Do you know God BETTER today than you did last year? Last month? Last week?

Because you can. And God wants you to. The God of the universe wants you to know Him.

4) Does what you know of God enable you to ENDURE?

When choices get hard, do you really believe what you say you know – do you really believe that what you believe is really real? Does what you know of God enable you to endure?

As we are able to answer yes to each of these questions then we can know that our lives are pleasing God and are becoming lives worthy of our Lord.

Jesus show me your glory, and help it change my life today!