

What's the greatest action our church? Or what ought to be the greatest action of Cornerstone Bible Church? Write your idea down. Maybe you think of a ministry: teaching, children's, or outreach. Or maybe you think of our regular activity of a Sunday morning: gathering to sing, or getting together in fellowship. I think all of those are significant, but the greatest need and the greatest action the church can take, is to pray.

We must to place prayer an absolute priority. Without question, prayer is the most pressing need amongst churches today. And there are a lot needs within the church; evangelism, leadership, sexual purity, Biblical knowledge, relational unity, generosity... We could talk on and on about the needs within the church, but if there's no dependency on God, and you're trying to move forward with your own strength and your own wisdom, you're in trouble. *That's like going sailing on a lake without a sail. You may get the boat to move along through the water; but not in the way that it's intended to.* Spiritual, persistent, biblically minded prayer is foundational to a church and to a group of people who are seeking to follow after Jesus Christ.

Today we're going to listen in on one of Paul's prayer, his prayer for the Colossian church that is found in Colossians 1:9-14. What you will find Paul doing throughout many of his letters in the New Testament is him praying for a particular church. He tells them he's praying for them, but then he'll go on and actually records for the church what he's praying about.

To say that Paul was an active individual for the Lord, is describing it very mildly. It seemed like Paul was always on the move and that he was consistently seeking to have impact in people's lives for the Kingdom of God. But his life wasn't just filled with *activity* for the Lord, it was without question that Paul was a man that was driven in prayer and was deeply dependent on His Lord for help, for guidance, for strength. He knew that if any type of life-change was going to take place amongst the people he was ministering to, it was going to come from God. Paul didn't try to carry on an effective ministry through clever teaching, or through new techniques, or creative programs (those things aren't bad). But Paul was convinced that if God did not empower his ministry to these churches, the ministry would fall flat.

So you will find Paul pouring his heart out to God in prayer, and within those prayers you will find him casting a vision for the particular church that he's writing to; and that's what he does for the church here in Colossae. He is displaying his dependence on the Holy Spirit to move within these people, but he's also saying what he hopes God will accomplish in their lives as this individual church grows in maturity.

So let's go ahead and read Paul's prayer to the Colossian church.

**Read Colossians 1:9-14**

Paul lays out for them in his prayer, three Essentials for the Christian Life. Let me give you an idea of what we're going to be looking at today. First, he prays that they would have "A Growing Knowledge of God's Will." Paul is then prayerful that they're knowledge would lead to "A Walk (or a life) that Pleases the Lord." Then the prayer is concluded with "A Thankfulness for God the Father." Obviously this was Paul's prayer for the Colossian church, but it is such an appropriate prayer for Cornerstone Bible Church too, right? I hope we walk out this building within the next hour going, "Yes, this is what I want for my church." "This is what I want for my life, and for my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ!" "I'm going to start praying (if you're not already) that God would enable us as a church to live out what's described here in Colossians 1.

So now you have a picture of where we're going, let's dive in and look at that first Essential of the Christian Life, which is found in verses 9.

### **Read Colossians 1:9**

Paul's prayer for the church is that we would have **A Growing Knowledge of God's Will**. And the knowledge of God's will, is more than just an insight into how God wants us to live and behave. Sometimes, I think that we can too simply break God's will down into a list of do's and don'ts. Oh, this is what God wants me to do with my life or this isn't what I'm supposed to be doing. And we look at God's will or God's desires as a road map for how we're to conduct ourselves while we raise our kids, or how we're supposed to perform while we're at work, or making a big decision in life.

Yes, God's will includes those things. But God's will is bigger than those things, and God's will is deeper than those things. God is concerned with how you behave (and we'll talk about that in little while); but being filled with the knowledge of God's will is coming to an understanding of God's whole saving purpose in Christ.

We live in a culture that is wandering aimlessly through life seeking to discover why they're here on this earth. They don't know what their purpose is, they don't have a clear picture of appropriate goals to set, and to boil it down, they're lost. So without a good understanding of what they're life was created for, they're life becomes fill with trivial activities. Things that are fun, things that bring a temporary satisfaction or happiness; but nothing that lives towards a greater purpose of what God has created us for.

Now, I'm not saying that you can't have fun. Christians should have fun!! There are so many enjoyable things in life to do that God, through his grace, has freely given to us. But fun activities are not the point of life. Those things are more like a small flavoring; but they're not the main point. For instance, I like to put salt on my French fries or on my scrambled eggs. And some of us really like salt, I knew of a person that carried salt around in their purse so that it was always available to them.

But no one would think of placing salt as the main course. That's disgusting. That has missed the point.

And if you want to come discover what the point of life is about, you must come to an understanding of God's will. Paul didn't want these Christians in the Colossian church to run their life in vain, or to waste their life, so he was passionately praying that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's "will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

Spiritual Wisdom is the ability to grow up in every way. Without spiritual wisdom, you will not mature in your Christian life. You will sit there like a car spinning it's wheels attempting to move forward, but not moving anywhere at all. Spiritual wisdom awakens intellectual understanding to degree where you're able to think coherently and practically about God and His purposes. By the grace of God, you are awakened to the fact that life is not centered on you, and you are saved to fulfill the purposes that God is orchestrating.

So this drives the believer to come to a greater understanding of God and His will. Life isn't about me, but it's about God. Life isn't about fulfilling my dreams and my desires (I've died to those things), it's about pursuing God's desires. If I'm going to live out the purposes that God has revealed, I'm going to have to keep learning, I'm going to have to be filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding. All the while knowing that I'm never going to reach a point that I am completely filled. I'm not going to come to a point in my life where I will completely know everything there is to know about God and His desires. There's always more to learn! There's always going to be a deeper understanding of my Creator that I will be able to gain for the rest of my life; even on into eternity. I believe that the Christian will spend eternity gaining more and more knowledge of who God is. He is inexhaustible and everlasting.

There ought to be hunger to know, to genuinely know, the living God. But can I say something that's sad? From my observation many believers in the United States who believe that they've learned all they need to know about God in children's church. They've got the basic principles down and that's all that's really needed. They may have the basic principles down, but if that's our philosophy, we're only scratching the surface. There should be a desire within us to come to know doctrine and theology.

C.S. Lewis recorded in his *Mere Christianity* this paragraph:

*Everyone has warned me not to tell you what I am going to tell you in this last book. They all say 'the ordinary reader does not want Theology; give him plain practical religion'. I have rejected their advice. I do not think the ordinary reader is such a fool. Theology means 'the science of God,' and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most*

*accurate ideas about Him which are available. You are not children: why should you be treated like children?*

All of you are theologians. You think about God, you have conversations about God. But the question is, are you a good theologian? Do you know God and do you have an accurate understanding of our God?

This is Paul's prayer for the believer, that they would have A Growing Knowledge of God's Will. I want you to know God. But that knowledge is not something that's stagnant; something that fills your mind with a bunch of facts and a bunch of information that leaves you motionless. The knowledge of God's will leads you further into God's sovereign plan. Paul was praying that they would gain knowledge, so that the way they lived their life would change.

Let's look at what Colossians 1:10-11 have to say:

### **Read Colossians 1:10-11**

A growing knowledge of God's will *leads* to **"A Walk that Pleases the Lord."** That is the second essential part of the Christian life that Paul prays for. *I am praying that you are filled with knowledge so as, or so that, you will walk and you will live in a way that is worthy of the Lord.* One of the basic goals of a Christian's life is to please God: to live in such a way that your knowledge of God transforms the way that you approach life and live life.

Jesus said that,

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. –Luke 9:23-24

Your coming to knowledge of Jesus Christ, and placing your faith in Him, alters every aspect of your life. Where you're life goal used to be to please yourself; to look out for your own interests and satisfy your own desires. Once you've come to Christ that changes. Your aim is now set on pleasing the Lord. And Paul prays that would do that by "bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God."

I'm no farmer but I understand what a good fruit tree looks like. Good fruit trees produce/bear good fruit. And throughout the entire New Testament you will find that your life is illustrated as a fruit tree. And the actions of your life are a determining factor of your spiritual condition.

Let's look at what Jesus had to say about bearing fruit in your life,

Every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good

fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits. –Matthew 7:17-20

It's not enough that you just *know* the right things about God (that is truly important!); but that knowledge must create movement. And unfortunately, many Christians don't always put the truth they believe into practice. I think there are several reasons for this, but let me highlight one that I discovered in my studying this past week, because I found this quote rather intriguing.

Part of this is taken from a book entitled "Amusing Ourselves to Death," mixed in with the commentators thoughts. It argues,

"that television has habituated its watchers to a low information-action ratio, that people are accustomed to 'learning' good ideas (even from sermons) and then doing nothing about them." We learn enough to talk about it intelligently but never follow through on action. Sometimes preachers feel they have done their job merely presenting the information or the need. Paul does not praise the Colossians simply because they have learned the truth from Epaphras (Colossians 1:7) but because their faith has led to concrete results. The test of faith is whether it makes any difference in the way we live and treat others.<sup>1</sup>

I think this resonates with me because we have so much information that is available to us today. If you've never stepped into my office, [I don't have an enormous library compared to some, but I have a decent collection of books that are helpful to gaining more information and deepening my understanding of God.](#) And I stress this, books are a tremendous resource, and gaining knowledge is crucial! And Paul is praying that these people would be filled with the knowledge of God, and that they would be increasing in the knowledge of God. Knowledge is crucial! But the problem is that I don't always see that translating into action. There are times that we *know* exactly what we're supposed to do or not to do, and we're given an opportunity to bear fruit in our actions... but in our pride, or in our laziness, or in our sinful self-centeredness we refuse. We refuse to trust in the promises of God and instead we trust in ourselves.

Hear me on this; I am not trying to bash you over the head with this. I am not attempting to shame into changing. Because this problem is not just something that you wrestle; you can look at your neighbor, you can look at the person that's sitting behind you, and you can look up here... this is a problem that is common to all of us.

The Apostle Paul says on this matter in Romans 7,

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<sup>1</sup> NIV Commentary

<sup>15</sup>For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. <sup>17</sup>So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. <sup>18</sup>For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. <sup>19</sup>For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. <sup>20</sup>Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

We are going to be in an all out fight against our own indwelling sin until the day we die. That is a fact.

But that doesn't mean we can't have victory over our sin. It is possible for you to live a life that pleases the Lord. We talked about for a couple of months last Fall about following after the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit has been given to indwell believers of Jesus Christ, and to empower them to triumph over sin. You don't have to have to be stuck in sin's vicious cycle. There's power available to you, and in fact this is included in Paul's prayer.

### **Colossians 1:11**

And what is remarkable is that the power for which Paul prays is frequently tied to the power of the resurrection of Jesus. You, in an attempt to walk through life in a way that pleases the Lord, is not done and cannot be done in your own strength. And that ought to drive us to our knees, seeking to be dependent on God. That should motivate us to turn off the T.V., or step away from whatever it is that distracting us, and create space in our lives where we're crying out to God for help, for direction, for His strength.

He's the one with the glorious might; and only through His power will we be able to endure with any level of determination and have patience that doesn't wear thin. That's not happening by myself. So I will seek to strive ahead with all of His energy that He powerfully works within me.

I pray that our church would be hungry to grow in the knowledge of God that leads us to walk through life in a way that pleases the Lord, and that is only done through being strengthened by God. And that leads us to the conclusion of Paul's prayer.

### **Read Colossians 1:12-14**

There's a cycle that you can see within this prayer: <sup>1</sup>The Colossians had come to salvation, being rescued from their sin due to what God had done for them. <sup>2</sup>So Paul prays that they would continue to grow in their knowledge of God. <sup>3</sup>He prays that they would live in such a way that pleases Lord. <sup>4</sup>Then, he concludes by reminding them what God has done for them through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ.

This ought to lead us to **“Worship God.”** This is the essential activity of our life. God is after worship. He is not after begrudging submission, but rather, the commands of God are leading us to life and joy and how He designed the universe to be so that we worship Him, love Him and love the commandments that He has established.

Look what God has done for you. <sup>1</sup>He qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints. Because of God, we’ve been freely given access to God and we will spend eternity with God. How amazing is that?! Paul goes on to describe the alternative to tell us what we’ve been rescued from. <sup>2</sup>God delivered us from the domain of darkness. We used to be dead in our sins, following the course of this world... Held captive by darkness, by slavery to sin, by condemnation, and by the power of Satan... But God delivered us and <sup>3</sup>transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.

We’ve been liberated. Like a group of slaves being set free from captivity, that is what God did for us through His Son. And all of this came at a great cost! Redemption, the forgiveness of our sins, was provided to us through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

God knew what our deepest need was; it wasn’t a stronger economy, it wasn’t a better political system, it wasn’t finding entertainment in life, it wasn’t our health. But God knew our greatest need involved our sin, our separation and rebellion from him; and he sent us a Savior.

And through Christ, God sets us free to be obedient, that then sets us free to worship Him, to give thanks to Him and to love the commands that He has established.

This is a prayer that Paul gives for the Colossian church, but it’s a prayer that worth praying for Cornerstone Bible Church as well. I pray that you too would have a growing knowledge of God’s will that leads you to live a life worthy of the Lord that culminates in worship of our God!

Let’s pray.