

September 27, 2020  
Sunday Evening Service  
Communion  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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## **GODLY GOALS FOR THE CHURCH** **Colossians 1:9-12**

I like Paul's letters to local congregations. They are easy to read and generally easy to translate and interpret. They are chocked full of very important, succinctly stated principles and rules for individuals to incorporate in their lives if they would be mirrors, reflectors of God's character for God's glory. Colossians is that kind of letter.

The city of Colossae was a somewhat typical pagan Roman city with a strong Jewish contingency. Out of that milieu Christ raised up a local expression of His Body the Church. We know that Paul was not instrumental in establishing that church in that he acknowledged that he had never met the people in that church or the church at Laodicia (2:1). Nevertheless, Paul loved the people and prayed diligently for them because, according to news brought to him by Pastor Epaphras, the assembly was about to undergo trial by fire as it faced heresy.

Because of the strong influence of worldliness and paganism in that city, the Christians were loosening their moorings and were in danger of drifting. That is why this short letter contains such a plethora of short, direct, powerful commands. We see several of them in the few verses that make up our text. But many modern professors of following Christ do not prefer these direct, "preachy" kinds of letters or the study of them. Many church-going folk in our day prefer a kind of "moralistic therapy" from the pulpit and from the books they read. Rapid fire, direct commands flying off the pages of the Bible seem to make them uncomfortable.

Actually, the commands are essential for keeping us moored to the dock of God's safety. He is most glorified when we stay close to

His side. To be challenged to stay close to God is necessary because we are so prone to drift.

We are like a six-year-old boy who is visiting Grandma and Grandpa at their house on the lake (like Lake Erie or Michigan). Without being noticed, he wanders down to the dock where a little row boat is tied up. He knows he is not supposed to be there alone, but independence is so appealing. He gets into the boat, also knowing he is stepping out of bounds. The boat is tied to the dock, but the boy decides to let a little rope out so he can drift just a couple feet from the dock. Then, because he is human, he lets out more and more rope. It's fun. Finally, the rope comes disconnected from the dock. The boy knows that is not good, but floating independently is exhilarating. He enjoys his freedom for a bit and then turning around realizes he has drifted a hundred yards out into the lake. Part of him is fearful and yet part of him is excited about this forbidden freedom. The boy drifts farther and farther until the shore is a great distance away. Then the worst happens. A storm develops. The sky grows dark, the wind blows, the rain begins to beat down accompanied by thunder and lightning and towering waves. The boy is terrified. Sometimes boys like that are rescued. Sometimes they are not.

Our text teaches us how to keep the ropes securely fastened to our Heavenly Father. Drifting can have such devastating results. The Founder and Builder of the Church does not desire for His people to become casualties. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Church, and the individual believer's responsibility, to challenge, admonish, encourage each other to keep the ropes tight.

### **Be Filled With the Knowledge of God's Will.**

Our text begins with worthy prayer from the Apostle Paul as he expressed thanks for Christians in Colossae. *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you (v.9a)*. Obvious from the opening words is the fact that Paul had learned good news about these people. In fact, the details about how Paul had learned is found in the previous verses. *We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the*

*word of the truth, the gospel, which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing – as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit (Colossians 1:3-8).*

Surely Paul agreed with Solomon who concluded, *Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country (Proverbs 25:25)*. To learn about anyone becoming settled in faith in Christ Jesus is good news. To hear good news from fellow workers in God's field is always refreshing and encouraging. This is the ministry of our Rope Holders ministry. We love to hear how God is using our missionaries in far away places. We rejoice to learn that God is bringing people to faith and that Christians are growing into the headship of Christ. We love to hear about answered prayers, and that stimulates us to pray more.

And so Paul prayed for these people telling them, *we have not ceased to pray for you (v.9a)*. That sounds pretty noble, but can a person really pray without ceasing? What does unceasing prayer look like as Paul described it (*1 Thessalonians 5:17*)? Obviously, not ceasing to pray cannot mean we pray every moment of every day. God does not expect us to do that. But we do need to be in an attitude of prayer, which means that we are able to speak to God at any moment because we sense our close fellowship with Him. Praying without ceasing means we pray off and on throughout the day and that we are in the attitude of prayer moment by moment. That attitude alone will help us keep the ropes tight.

The topic of our prayers for others is going to necessarily be manifold. But, in this text, Paul's prayer was quite focused on the need for spiritual wisdom and understanding. His prayer was *asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (v.9b)*. What does it mean to be filled with the knowledge of God's will? This is the expression of desire we each should have for each other. We desire that each of us will be filled up. The verb speaks of achieving this fullness at a point. It means to be filled completely, satisfied, or even gorged. The filling up is not the result of our own efforts, but the result of God filling us.

But with what are we filled? We desired to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. We need fullness, an over abundance of the experience of God's will. This is not speaking about more and more academic knowledge. Rather we are taught that we need perception, discernment, the ability to comprehend God's will. The idea of God's will seems self-evident. However, in Scripture two aspects of God's will are described. On one hand, God's will is what He desires (*theleima*) which is a bit different from what God decrees or purposes (*bouleima*).

It was not God's desire for the Christians in Colossae to be characterized by their pagan world. That also seems self-evident. But how do I learn what God desires for me and others? God clearly articulates His desires in His Word. Therefore, we need to be familiar with His will and then learn from experience how to apply these truths in life. This is what Paul was praying for. This is what we need to pray for each other.

It looks like this: *To be filled in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (v.9b)*. As we know from past studies, wisdom is skill in knowing how to make things work. In this case, skill in knowing how God's will functions in and impacts life. That idea is coupled here with *understanding*, which is comprehension, knowing how to bring things together, being able to connect the dots. When we are filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding, we, through experience, have learned how to make the Bible work in real life.

One word for encompassing all of this would be "spiritual discernment," a concept that seems to be becoming more rare. By all means, older Christians should have this, having been trained for many years in making the Bible work. That might be why older Christians kind of shake their heads in disbelief at the decisions younger Christians make and the directions or roads they take. We who have been around awhile already know from experience where the road leads, and we know that people who love Jesus will be sorely disappointed on that road.

Speaking of roads, we need to challenge each other to walk the right road.

## Walk in a Worthy Manner.

We need to be filled up with spiritual understanding *so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God (v.10)*. Make the connection. A worthy walk flows from spiritual wisdom. That is what “so as” means.

We should have a good general understanding of the worthy walk. In that picture the Christian’s walk is the sum total of his or her lifestyle. Lifestyle might be a good synonym for it. It is what we do, how we are known, because of the choices we make. It gets very practical as a description of what we do, what we say, what we wear, who we hang out with, and where we go.

Our lifestyle will be reflective of our understanding of how God has blessed us. It is good to recall the opening argument of Paul’s letter to the Christians in Ephesus. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:3-6)*. Which important truth leads to the only acceptable conclusion: *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called (Ephesians 4:1)*.

Those two words, “so as” appeals to spiritual wisdom and understanding. Knowing God’s desires through experience with His Word applied to life we are able to “connect the dots” regarding God’s will. That being true, we really ought to live lives that demonstrate the worth, the comparable value of God’s work in our hearts. Of what value is the ongoing sanctifying work of God to you? Do you wish God would quit (like Job)?

This is an important issue because a worthy walk pleases the Lord according to the first part of verse ten. We should *walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him*. The price or value of the walk is defined in that the worthy walk is worthy of the Lord.

That means that our chosen lifestyles ought to declare the comparative worth *of our Lord*. How we live speaks volumes about what or who we consider to be valuable.

The problem Paul was trying to head off in Colossae is that some Christians were putting great value on the passing things of paganism. That truly sounds like modern Christianity. What you deem valuable is actually declared by your choices in life, your testimony. Sometimes I just want to say to shallow Christians, “Why do you try to serve such a cheap and tawdry God?” My father grew up in abject poverty. That affected the way he lived and the choices he made. Even as child I remember being frustrated because when Dad made choices about buying something, cheap was always better. Cheap is not necessarily better. “Do the best you can with what you have” is better. What do your spiritual choices say about how you value your Master?

Demonstrating the Lord’s worth pleases Him. We need to make choices that exalt God and demonstrate that we think God is of greatest value – far above the junk of this world! We should always have a restless dissatisfaction with stuff. And we should always find deep, fulfilling satisfaction in our relationship with our Savior. When those two contrasts are true in our hearts, they will also be obvious in our lives.

It is only logical that a worthy walk *bears fruit in good works (v.10b)*. This statement should make us stop to consider the nature of fruit bearing. Every person bears fruit. We are like trees or plants. God created us to bear spiritual fruit that exemplifies His character. Sin changed all that. Now we naturally produce fruit that looks like sin, Satan, and self. According to the way God designed us, we cannot NOT produce fruit. We will either bear good fruit or sinful fruit. The important principle is that the fruit we produce clearly identifies the “root” or vine to which we are attached.

Notice that the fruit we bear through a worthy walk is identified as *good works*. God chose us to be redeemed, to be blessed, to be His people in eternity. That choosing naturally brings with it the creative process giving us the desire and ability to produce good works. Remember again Paul’s words through the Ephesian letter. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may*

*boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:8-10). We do not do good works in order to create saving faith. We produce good works because God has given us saving faith.*

What do those good works look like? They look like we are attached to the Vine the Holy Spirit. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:22-24).* That kind of fruit stands in vivid contrast to and conflict with the works generated by fleshly desire. *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21).*

A worthy walk *increases in the knowledge of God (v.10d).* First we remember that the worthy walk flows out of knowledge of God. But then, as we live out the worthy walk, it increases that spiritual discernment. It is like playing an instrument: the more you do it the better you become at it. It is so sad to meet a person in his sixties who claims to have been a Christian since he was five, but is still only able to play spiritual chopsticks. *Bearing fruit and increasing in knowledge* are present tense verbs which describe the character of our lives.

### **Be strengthened with power.**

A further desire that we should have for each other is that you *May be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy (v.11).* It is a prayer for power that we *may be strengthened with all power.* The request is for strengthening. We desire for each of us to be continually strengthened. It is a prayer that God would continue to give us power.

Therefore, it is logical that the prayer is for strengthening with power. It is interesting in that the same word appears back to back in the Greek text. It actually reads, *“In all power being empowered.”*

The Greek word used here gives us the English “Dynamite” or “Dynamo.” Dynamite is for destroying things, or in our lives to tear down and destroy sin that so easily besets us. A dynamo is productive for making electricity or in our lives to give us power to live for Christ’s glory – loving our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Notice that the source of power by which we are strengthened is *His glorious might.* We are being strengthened with God’s power according to God. First, God desires for His people to have power. Second, God is the source of the power. If we try to walk worthy according to our own self-discipline or determination, we might develop good habits but we will not be able to do works for God’s glory.

*According to God’s glorious might* means that God gives us power that causes us to reflect His glory. This is why we must be wary of any ministry that exalts a man. God-given dynamos reflect a right and valuable assessment of God.

We must receive the power that God gives because we all need *all endurance and patience with joy.* Endurance is to be able to put up with or to persevere. This is the attitude Christ demonstrated to us as He lived in a very imperfect world. He set His face like flint and pressed on to the cross. Patience is very similar. It literally means long in temper. Often this word describes our response when dealing with difficult people.

We need God’s power so that we can have endurance and patience. But we also need God’s power so that we can have joy. Joy, in this case, is a state of settled gladness. It may appear to be like happiness. But unlike happiness, joy is a response to God not a response to circumstances. Circumstances can make us happy or unhappy. Resting in God we have joy even when it is deep within while we face adverse circumstances.

### **Giving Thanks.**

It is fitting that this short section that unpacks the deep desires we should have for each other (as Paul had for the Colossian believers) would end in thanksgiving. We read that we should be *giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (v.12).* In thanksgiving, our thanks

is rightly directed to the Father. The issue here is not just an occasional expression of thanks but an enduring thankful attitude. As expected then, “giving thanks” is a present tense verb. If we truly have joy that is rooted in confidence in God, we should also have thankful spirits.

We are thankful for each other. But more than that, we are thankful for the Father’s work. We know that God is in control of all things in our lives. Therefore, when we are truly thankful we can express thanks even for trials and tests that increase our faith.

We are thankful specifically according to this text because the Father *has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light*. That we are qualified by the Father points back to the reason we are joyful and thankful. We understand what God has done for us. In that we are qualified means that God has *made us enough*. He made us all we need to be in order to “share.” We are joyful and thankful because we know that we get to share all the manifold blessings of salvation with the rest of the saints because of God’s work. We are not going to heaven because of our wisdom, discipline, or works. Eternity looks very bright (and the world looks very dingy) because God qualifies us to enter the Celestial City.