

Colossians Series: Know and Do

Col. 1:1-14

7/4/21

We're beginning a four-part series in the book of Colossians this morning. So, I'm issuing the "Colossians Challenge" today. Read this 4-chapter book as often as you can during the month of July. That's the challenge! Most people can read it in 10-15 minutes. Make note of any ideas or questions you have as you read. If I don't cover your questions in my sermons, send me an email or call me and we'll talk about them! And, there will be a prize for the youth that reads it the most times! So, read Colossians this month on your own. Let's get started with verse 1.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, ²*To the saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ in*

Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. (Col. 1:1,2) This is a pretty standard opening greeting that we find in all of Paul's letters.

Paul is the primary author, identifying himself as an apostle. Apostles were commissioned by Jesus Christ to share the good news with others, planting churches as they went. Timothy was his protégé and a co-worker with Paul, and a pastor of several churches. They write to the "saints and faithful brothers and sisters in Christ." The word "saints" here refers to all those who put their faith in Jesus Christ, not just those who are especially holy. In Paul's language, if you are a follower of Jesus, you are a saint!

That means that ___ is a saint. ___ is a saint. ___ is a saint. Even I am a

saint! These particular saints lived in Colossae, a small city in present-day Turkey of no particular importance in the ancient world. Paul wishes them grace and peace, which is his standard greeting.

Before reading the next section, I would like to pose a question: Do you have trouble getting your prayers answered? Many people do! Reading the prayers of people like Paul can give us insights as to how to pray more effectively! And these next verses are the beginning of a prayer from Paul. ³*In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,* ⁴*for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,* ⁵*because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel* ⁶*that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.* ⁷*This you learned from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf,* ⁸*and he has made known to us your love in the Spirit.* (Col. 1:3-8)

Paul's model for prayer begins with giving thanks to God. It's a great place for us to begin our prayers, too. Now Paul had never met these new Christians in Colossae, and since there was no phone, email, texts, Facebook, or Instagram, he had to rely on much slower means of

communication to learn how they were doing. In this case he had just received an in-person report about them from his co-worker, Epaphras, and he found much to be thankful for in that report. He gives thanks that they are growing in their faith, “bearing fruit,” as he puts it. Specifically, they are demonstrating the three primary Christian virtues of faith, hope, and love.

“Love” is the most easily misunderstood of these three, as we use the word in so many different ways today. It can express preference (“I love pizza more than hamburgers!”), or passion (“I love my wife!”), or affection (“I love my fellow church members!”) among other meanings. When Paul uses the word, it is more in line with the Italian phrase, “Ti voglio bene,” which can be translated as “I love you,” but it literally means “I wish good for you,” or “I want what is good for you.” Love, as Paul uses the word, is not so much about our feelings as it is about our desire for the good of another person, and then acting to make that happen when we can. Paul is grateful that the Colossian Christians are demonstrating this kind of love for each other, as well as for their faith and hope. Those are the marks of authentic Christian commitment. But his prayer doesn’t end there.

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as

you grow in the knowledge of God. ¹¹May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:9-14)

Having thanked God for the Colossians, Paul now makes his requests known to God. First, he wants them to grow in the knowledge of God's will. We Presbyterians have always made growing in knowledge a priority with our strong emphasis on education. Here at GPC we offer regular classes and groups for children, youth, and adults. We want everyone to grow in the knowledge of what God has done on our behalf, which we learn primarily through the scriptures. And we want to learn what God is up to in the world now. Growing in knowledge is an important part of Christian growth. Without that knowledge we can easily get lost in our thinking and wind up with an inaccurate picture of what God is like and what God expects from us. And if we're not careful, we end up valuing the wrong things! So Paul asks God to help the Colossian Christians to learn what is important for them to know.

How are you doing in this area? Are you reading the Bible on your own? Maybe the Colossians Challenge would be a good way to get started! Are you part of a Sunday School class or small group or youth group to help you learn God's will for your life? How are you growing in the knowledge of God's will? It's just as important for us as it was for those ancient Colossians!

But Paul doesn't stop there, does he? In a "Pearls before Swine" comic strip, Goat calls Rat, saying, "Hey Rat! It's me, Goat. My car broke down and I'm stranded in the middle of nowhere. Can you help me?" Rat responds, "Sure. I'm sending you thoughts and prayers," and then he hangs up. In the final frame, Rat adds, "It's so much easier than getting up!" Just knowing the right thing to do isn't enough! Paul prays that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of God's will *so that they may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as they bear fruit in every good work*. Just knowing a lot of stuff about God and the Bible isn't enough. Knowledge is a means to the end of living lives worthy of the Lord! That's why Jesus was so hard on the Pharisees. They knew God's will better than anyone, having diligently studied and analyzed the scriptures. But they consistently lost sight of the main points about love and compassion, believing they could please God just by knowing and observing every letter of the law. Jesus understood that we can never live

well enough to impress God. Rather, we accept his grace and live grateful lives of service to him and our neighbors.

So, what specifically does Paul mean by “*leading lives worthy of the Lord and bearing fruit in every good work?*” Well, that’s going to be the focus of the fourth sermon, so I don’t want to give away too much now! But, if we focus on the two great commandments- loving God with everything we’ve got, and loving our neighbor as ourselves- we are headed in the right direction. And, remember two things about that. First, anyone that we encounter is our neighbor- people who live near us, service workers, immigrants, people of color, young people, older people, professionals, etc. And, second, remember that loving our neighbor means wishing the best for them and acting in a way that helps them experience God’s best for them. Again, we’ll get more specific about that in chapter 3, but this should get you started!

Some of you know that I enjoy biking. I try to get out a couple times each week and ride on some of our country roads. Most of us are aware that for a bike to work, you need both wheels! (I know that some people ride unicycles, but not many of us!) Both wheels are equally important. That’s an illustration of what Paul is saying here. We need both the knowledge of God’s will, and the commitment to living out that will in our

daily lives. Know and do. It's that simple. And, it's that difficult! Which wheel needs attention in your life?