

Filled with the Knowledge of God's Will

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[0 : 00] We greet you in the name of the Lord. It's not an easy time for any of us. For yourselves most definitely.

Certainly for dear John and the family as well.! Circumstances.

I want to thank you as a congregation in Jesus' name for the way that you have treated John and the family and the way you have stood with them and are standing with them.

You've been exemplary and I thank God for you all. And I thank God for you, John, for your example of sorrowing but not sorrowing as the world sorrows, but knowing that we have hope.

And I thank you and I'm honored by your friendship. I would like to think with you together about a portion from God's word, Paul's letter to the Colossians, chapter 1, commencing reading at verse 9.

[1 : 28] Hopefully you will follow me in your own Bibles, but I will be reading a version with which you are not familiar. I'll be reading you from the authorized Maoz version.

My effort at translation in this case is to try to ignore the differences between Greek and English and to convey something a little more of the terseness and maybe a little more of the exactitude of Paul's terminology.

So I'll be taking some liberties and I hope you will see that they are supported by God's word. Paul to the Colossians, chapter 1, beginning at verse 9.

Having spoken of the Colossians' all-inclusive love, he says, Because of that, because we've heard of this love, we too, from the day that we heard of it, do not stop praying for you and asking that you might be filled with a thorough knowledge of his will, with every kind of spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to behave in a way that is worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him in every good deed, bearing fruit and growing in the thorough knowledge of God, being strengthened with every kind of strength in proportion to the power of his glory to endless endurance and fortitude with joy, giving thanks to the Father who made you fit for a portion in the inheritance of the consecrated ones in light, who rescued us from the authority of the darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of his love, in whom we have the redemption, the forgiveness of sins, who is the visible expression of the invisible God, firstborn in relation to all creation, because by him was created everything that exists in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, kings or powers or rulers or authorities.

everything was created through him and for him. And he is prior to everything, and everything holds together by him.

[4 : 00] And he is the head of the body of the church, the firstborn from the dead, so that in everything he might have the prior place, because in him the fullness of deity was pleased to reside, and through him to reconcile everything to himself, establishing peace through the blood of his cross, through him, be it things on the earth or things in the heavens.

And you then were alienated and enemies in the mind by your wicked deeds. But he has reconciled you through his fleshly body and through his death, so as to present you before him holy, unblameable, and free from rebuke.

If, in fact you continue steadfast in the faith, after having been firmly established, not subject to being moved away from the hope of the gospel of which you have heard, and which is declared in all creation under heaven, of which declaration, I, Paul, became a servant.

May God be pleased to glorify himself through his word. Paul, looking at the Colossians, whom he had never actually met, but had heard of, and being enthralled by the kind of embracing, inclusive love which they displayed, says, from the day we heard of it, that is, from the day that we heard of your love, we do not stop praying for you.

You might recall that at that time Paul was in Rome, awaiting imperial decision as to whether he should live or die.

[6 : 02] But he prays for the Colossians. And what does he ask for them? He asks that they might be filled with a thorough knowledge of his will, with every kind of spiritual wisdom and understanding.

First, please note the passive here, that you might be fulfilled or filled. Spiritual advancement is the product of God's blessing on human effort.

in and of itself, human effort can neither achieve God's blessing nor achieve anything else apart from God's blessing.

It all depends on God. And so, we should not expect spiritual growth in our lives unless we exert ourselves to that end.

But, we should never be so foolish as to think that anything of value in our spiritual life could be obtained simply by that effort.

[7 : 12] We can't force God's hand. He's God and we're not. We can't force God to satisfy our desires even if they are what we believe to be spiritual desires.

We are in His gracious hands for the joy and satisfaction of His gracious desires, not ours. And so, spiritual filling is something that God does for us, not something that we do for ourselves.

And, well, His resources are far more than plenteous. Paul asks that they might, and again, I quote, be filled with a thorough knowledge of His will with every kind of spiritual wisdom and understanding.

Now, Paul is not referring here to some kind of special personal plan that God has for each one of us, whom we should marry, where we should live, what kind of schooling or employment we should pursue, or what car we should buy.

Paul is referring to something far more important. Believe me, there are matters far more important than those personal issues. Paul is referring to the ultimate will of God.

[8 : 29] He made reference to it earlier, if you want to turn back in your Bibles to verse 5, when he talked about the hope stored up for you in the heavens of which hope you heard earlier through the truthful word of the gospel.

And then he lays it out in verse 27 when he talks about the mystery of God's will. Christ among the nations. Now this was a stark contradiction of Jewish expectation.

Messiah? Our Messiah? In Bremen, Indiana? No way. But this was the mystery of God's will.

God's will. That the Messiah would be shared by all nations because he would rule over all nations. He would show his grace to members of all nations.

And Paul wants the Colossian Christians to understand these divine intentions and he wants them to relate to them in a wise and a spiritual manner so that they will be able to conduct their own lives in a way that would be compatible with those intentions.

[9 : 50] He wants the Colossians to intend what God intends, to love what God loves and to lead lives that are driven by God's desires rather than their own.

In other words, knowledge is in order to holiness. holiness. When the real drive of our heart, when the real goal of our lives is what God wants, our joys and sorrows are transformed and our attitude to the things of this world changes.

You remember the old song, don't you? Turn your eyes upon Jesus. And what happens to the things of this world? They grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

The Christian faith is not empty intellectualism, however exact, any more than it is only emotionalism, however sincere. Christianity encourages thought no less than it cultivates healthy emotions.

It creates intellectual curiosity that does lead to intellectual development, but that all leads ultimately to a specific kind of living.

[11 : 26] And that's the purpose of it all. The Colossians were not expected to be dependent on a priest or a rabbi or even a preacher to tell them what to do.

You know, the old demand, preach to us something practical, tell me what I should do. No, no, Paul wants them, each one of them, to be filled with every kind of spiritual wisdom and understanding for a very specific and practical purpose, so as to behave in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him in every good deed.

need. So he wanted them to know, but so that their lives would be in tune with what they knew. And to that end, they needed not just wisdom and understanding, but spiritual wisdom and understanding.

So that when they face a situation, they don't run to the rabbi, the pope, or the preacher to tell them what to do, but they stand before God and they make responsible holy decisions themselves.

Think about it for a moment. This is really rather astounding. Paul actually believed that human beings, that's you and I, we can behave in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, even to please him in all good deeds.

[12:56] Now, surely you will agree with me, that is grace. Not only so, but Paul also believed that such behavior was a human duty.

In fact, he assumed that it was the natural aspiration of at least the Colossian Christians, and there's room for us to ask, is it yours? Is it mine? Are we grateful for this, really stupendously high calling to behave in a manner that is worthy of the Lord?

Do we realize, young folk and older folk, that there's more to life than eating and drinking, enjoying and suffering, having and losing, and that we should choose to live so long as God would allow us to live for something or rather for someone greater than ourselves?

else? We should choose to live to the glory of God, fully pleasing him in every good deed, every good deed.

And when we live like that, we will discover, as would the Colossians, that we would, again, I quote, be bearing fruit. And the fruit we will bear is the holiness of our lives, the appropriateness of our life to the gospel, the acts of kindness that issue out of the gospel, the patience and the generosity and the self-denial and the sacrifice that issue out of our understanding the gospel.

[14:36] And in consequence, Paul says, we will grow in the thorough knowledge of God. Life experiences, walking with God and serving him in the conduct of our lives will provide an ever increasing personal acquaintance with him.

And as a result, we will be increasingly transformed into his image, or as Paul puts it here, strengthened with every kind of strength. So, God does not leave us to cope on our own.

He watches over us. And he lifts us up when we fall. And he strengthens and comforts and forgives and restores us when we fail.

And he provides us with every kind of strength that is needed for every kind of task that he lays upon us. Do you need fortitude to cope with difficulties?

He will provide. Do you need a thicker skin to bear the aspirations and unkind actions of others? He will provide.

[15:50] Do you need to be able to concentrate as you prepare a Sunday school lesson while the children are raising a ruckus? He will provide. Do you need more self-restraint as you seek to respond to provocations in a Christ-like manner?

He will provide. He will strengthen you with every kind of strength. But note, this is not a blank check.

It is meant for those who seek to behave in a manner that is worthy of the Lord. And for that we definitely need more than every kind of strength.

We need a good deal of it. But, sweet friends, that too is promised. God is generous toward us beyond our wildest dreams, beyond any expectation.

Paul tells us that when they exert themselves to that end, God will provide them with strengths in proportion to the power of His glory.

[17:01] Now, that's quite a proportion. Think of the biblical descriptions of God's appearance. Think of how the very earth shook when God appeared at Sinai.

The people trembled and were afraid even to hear the voice. Let Moses speak to us and not God. Or, think of how Ezekiel describes the revelation of the likeness of the glory of God that caused him to fall as dead on his face.

Or, think of how Nahum describes the coming of the Lord. His way is in the whirlwind and the storm and the clouds and the dust of his feet.

He rebukes the sea and makes it dry. He dries up all the rivers. Bashan and Carmel wither, the bloom of Lebanon withers. The mountains quake before him, the hills melt, the earth heaves before him, the world and all who dwell in it.

Who can stand before his indignation? Who can endure the heat of his anger? His wrath is poured out like fire and the rocks are broken in pieces by him.

[18 : 20] That is just a small inkling of the measure of the proportion of the power of God's glory and that is the proportion of the strength that he will provide us to live to his glory.

Every kind of strength in that proportion. And then comes a rather unexpected goal.

We sometimes think that we should be relieved of all difficulties, of all sorrows, of all pains. We shall one day.

God will wipe every single tear from our eyes. But at the moment, here is the goal to which God provides us with this every kind of strength according to the proportion of the power of his glory, to endless endurance force, and fortitude with joy.

It's not for the ability to work miracles, to change reality, for our comfort, to free ourselves from hardship, or to transform life into an eternal garden of joys.

[19 : 48] Nor is it for the ability to escape pain, sorrow, and loss. as we said, those pleasures are yet to be. But for now, we are to live in this ruined world as it is, and we are to behave in a manner that is worthy of the Lord in spite of the moral, spiritual, and physical environment in which we find ourselves, in which we often find in our own hearts, difficulties from within and from without.

And we are strengthened to endure these with a combination of fortitude and joy. Again, I want to say we are to endure, not escape.

And we are to endure with that kind of positive attitude to life that the gospel provides, so that our endurance is characterized by joy rather than by self-pity, or bitterness, or some other unworthy response.

We suffer with joy because we do not focus on our fears or our pains or our losses, but on Christ, on his will, and on his glory, and on the inheritance which he has purchased for us by his blood.

That, sisters and brothers, is how the world is overcome. That is how we demonstrate the reality of a faith that believes that this world must change is about to change, and that its values are mistaken, and that our fellow humans are worthy of being loved and sacrificially served, regardless of anything else.

[21 : 33] So Paul goes on to spell the source of that joy, giving thanks to the Father, who made you fit for a proportion in the inheritance of the consecrated ones in light.

God made us fit for a proportion in the inheritance of the consecrated ones in light.

In other words, the Colossians' joy and ours should be the product of their and our understanding of the gospel. They, as we, were unfit, unworthy of God's goodness, but they were made fit, and if you are in Christ, you too have been made fit.

God did for them, for us, what they could not, what we cannot do for ourselves, which incidentally is why they could consider their inheritance secure.

it was not gained by their suitability, and it could not be lost by their unsuitability. Salvation is of the Lord, all of it, from the very beginning to the very end.

[22 : 57] In other words, the Colossians' understanding of the truth, which is really just another word for the gospel, was to be the source of their joy. They knew that their inheritance was not to be obtained through spiritual enlightenment or mystical experience or theological exactitude or abstinence or indulgence in ceremonial acts, even if this somehow related to Jewish custom.

The Colossians' inheritance had been purchased for them by the blood of Christ, by his sufferings, and secured by his resurrection. Incidentally, theology, that's the value of theology.

That's the point of thinking and understanding the truths of the gospel. And that's how we think deep roots into the soil of the word of God and secure for us this sincere confidence and secure ourselves from a sincere but questionable emotionalism that opens us to non-biblical influences.

Light, the inheritance of the saints in light, light was a term that was used by the false teachers in Colossae. Those who accepted their teachings were said to have entered the light.

they saw what others could not see. They were the enlightened ones. But Paul refers the light to Jesus and to his accomplishments on behalf of the Colossian Christians, not to human merit.

[24 : 46] The Father made you fit for a portion in the inheritance of the consecrated ones in light. And how did God do this? He rescued us from the authority of the darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His life.

If you are not in Christ now, you are under the authority of the darkness. You may not know it. You may not feel it. You may not believe it.

It won't change the fact. There are shackles on your souls. You are slaves. You are in bondage. God can rescue you just as he rescued the Colossians and many of us seated here this morning from the authority of the darkness.

The authority of the darkness is where Satan and sin rule. And as servants of darkness, we can only fundamentally do what the darkness commanded, enjoying only those liberties which the darkness would permit us.

And we could not and cannot save ourselves. But the Father can. And he transferred us or as the King James version puts it and being a translator, I love it.

[26 : 08] He translated us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the Son of His love. Our chains are broken. Our hearts are free.

We do not have to sin any longer. We do not have to obey the lusts of our body. We can lead holy and godly and spiritually orientated lives.

We can tend to the cultivation of our walk with God and we can grow in our knowledge of Him.

These are made possible because we have been brought into the kingdom of the Son of God's love.

Therefore, in a very real sense the kingdom of God has come. And those who are in Christ belong to that kingdom. They have been brought into it. And Jesus reigns over them to sanctify and to protect and to guide and to secure.

Yes, sometimes to rebuke, often to comfort, always to restore. But everything we have now is based on everything that is in Christ.

[27 : 18] And nothing we will have in the future is anything but we already have in Christ. In other words, eschatology and times is nothing less than our salvation completed.

Or if you wish, Christology, our understanding of Christ in full bloom. That is our inheritance. inheritance. When Christ who is our life appears, we shall appear with him in glory. And glory, incidentally, is not a geographical location.

And until then, until then, sweet friends, our lives are hid with Christ in God. God. Now, Paul began describing Jesus in an earlier reference that I purposely omitted because it makes sense to speak of it now separately.

He described Jesus as the son that is of the father's love. Now, Paul is not speaking here, I think, of the natural love of a father to the son.

[28 : 30] The context here has to do with the saving work of Christ the son. And Paul is therefore, I believe, speaking of Jesus as the object of the father's love in his capacity as the Messiah, as the Christ, the one who took on flesh and dwelt among us and lived as one of us yet without sin and died on the cross bearing the sin of the world to bring us to his father.

It is in this sense, for example, that Matthew attributes to Christ the title, the son of God, when he describes God as saying of Christ, this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased.

And it is also in this capacity that Jesus is the visible expression of the invisible God. By taking on humanity, by assuming a human body, Christ became the visible expression of an invisible God. John told us that, did he not? The word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen its glory as the glory of the only son from the father full of grace and truth.

God. No one has ever seen God. The only God who is at the father's side, he has made him known. Paul then goes on to point to Jesus' unique position.

[30 : 12] Firstborn in relation to all creation because by him were created everything that exists in the heavens and on the earth, visible and invisible, kings or powers or rulers or authorities.

So Christ enjoys the position of the firstborn in relation to all creation. He created it all. And there was a real important reason for Paul's insistence on this matter.

The Colossians were being challenged by a religious theory that viewed the material world as the lowest level of existence, inherently evil, created by a demigod.

a not quite God, who was in fact the lowest in a series of emanations, the top of which was the ultimately spiritual God, the true God.

And spirituality had to do with climbing up this ladder of emanations up to the highest level. And Paul is telling us that the incarnated Christ, who walked here on earth, in a human body, who ate and slept, perspired and laughed and wept and taught and was crucified and died, is no other but that glorious supreme being at the top of the ladder.

[31 : 45] and everything in between. He's telling us that there's not an iota, not an inkling of godhood anywhere to be found that is not in him.

He's telling us therefore that God is not to be sought anywhere but in Christ and that he cannot be known anywhere but through Christ and that all pretensions of knowledge beyond the knowledge that he provides are false pretensions.

And we should remember that Paul here is presenting a glorious, an amazingly glorious view of Christ a very short while after Christ was crucified.

It's actually a fact of history that the first doubts with regard to Christ had not to do with his deity but rather with his humanity because his deity was so obvious that even his very brother James could describe him as the very presence of God, the glory.

So Paul is telling us that Jesus made God visible by way of a human body and a life conducted in that body. That God is made visible by a death and a resurrection and that therefore the only way that we can truly come to know God is through him.

[33 : 15] And then Paul goes on to tell us why Jesus is the first born in relationship to all creation because everything was created by him, everything in heaven and on earth.

And Jesus' creative act was as inclusive as the Colossians' love in ours should be. Nothing exists apart from Jesus. And therefore no one should be excluded from the sphere of our love.

Paul makes the point of clarifying it's everything, visible and invisible, kings, rulers, powers, or authorities. But not only so, not only was everything made by him, but everything was made for him. We are given breath for Jesus' sake. Our hearts are allowed to pump blood into our body for Jesus' sake.

The sun rises in the morning for Jesus' sake. should we live for anything else? Even the changing realities of life have their ultimate goal and culminate in him.

[34 : 45] So that everything about life finds its purpose in him. And everything is out of sync unless it's in sync with him.

And that immediately puts everything into perspective. Places it in its proper proportion. And it suddenly transforms what we're doing.

If it's history or art or repairing a car or changing a tire or changing diapers. It's all for the glory of God. It's all in sync with him.

Everything happens for his purpose and that's why he is prior to everything. It must be prior in our considerations. In fact, he is the one who holds things together.

Yes, he holds things together, all these things, the good and the bad, he holds them. He rules them. And he holds them together. I love Lightfoot's remark on this.

[35 : 51] He says, it is Jesus that makes the universe a cosmos rather than a chaos. he is the one who keeps the world from falling apart and he is the head of the church which is his body.

He is the first born from the dead. The point here is not chronology. The point here is that it is by virtue of Jesus' resurrection that all those who are in Christ, the dead and the living, will rise.

as the father raises the dead and gives them life, so the son gives life to whom he wills.

The resurrected are all creatures with no source of life in themselves apart from what Jesus grants them. And Jesus raises the dead so that in everything he might have the prior place.

Jesus. So Paul could not imagine life beyond Jesus. He could not imagine life apart from Jesus.

And he cannot accept a Christian life except focused on Jesus.

[37 : 09] And any other focus, however biblical it may be, is inappropriate. Any other focus, is over a lower level.

It doesn't matter if it has to do with holiness or dedication, with missionary work or church growth or spiritual gifts or yes, even reform doctrines.

The focus of our lives and of our church life, the focus of everything we must do, must be Christ.

Because he is prior to all things.

and in him, the fullness of deity was pleased to dwell, not part. As we said before, there's not the slightest inkling of godhood to be found that is not to be found in Christ.

And so, we should have a very positive view of creation. we should have a very positive view of life.

[38 : 21] Because, and this is hard to say, particularly perhaps this week, everything has been reconciled by him and through him.

yes, friends, everything. Because he rules over all things.

And in ways that we cannot understand, they all work for those good and wise and righteous and holy and loving purposes, which he purposed in himself before the world began. And how were they reconciled to him? Remember the price. Through the death of his cross. Through his blood. Through his suffering. Jesus owned it all by virtue of creation. He owns it all the more now.

[39 : 32] He lays a claim upon every moment of joy and tear we have. Every hope and aspiration, every effort, every waking and sleeping moment, second of our lives.

He claims it all afresh by virtue of his sacrifice. He died to be its Lord, to be our Lord, our Savior, our King.

and he rose to that end. And you then, says Paul to the Colossians, in the past you were alienated and enemies by your wicked deeds.

But he has reconciled you through his fleshly body and through his death. Once again, Jesus did it all. you do not need to do anything in order to be accepted by God.

You need to cast yourself upon God because there is nothing you can do. You can't even cast yourself upon God unless he will work in your heart to that end. He did it all.

[40 : 44] And this is something that must sucker us today, must sucker us constantly, if. And there is an if. It's in the scripture.

We can't avoid it, although we might want to. If, in fact, you continue steadfast in the faith. In these days when there's kind of a hankering after something new, this if is very, very relevant.

Every two or three years, someone in the church stumbles over some new discovery, if it was only more contemporary, more seeker-friendly, more evangelistic, more friendly orientated, more this or that or the other, everything would be fine.

And today's church is running after its tail, spinning endlessly and getting nowhere, losing the confidence of the world and not deserving any more confidence that it is getting.

the church has to a large extent lost sight of the gospel. It no longer believes that the message itself in and of itself is the power of God unto salvation.

[42 : 02] It gives the impression as if God is altogether out of the equation. In fact, the church has become so much like the world that there's precious! reason for the world to be attracted to it.

But we should continue steadfast in the faith. Continue means that we don't need to invent something new.

Give me that old time religion. Give me that old time religion. It's good enough for me. We sang it. is that our heart throb today.

We are to continue steadfast in spite of the winds that blow, in spite of the struggles, in spite of the temptations from within. Because this is the gospel which is proclaimed, says Paul, in all creation under heaven of which I, Paul, became a servant.

Now, I need to remind you that this is actually a prayer. This is Paul praying for the Colossians, describing what he seeks God for them.

[43 : 25] And what a prayer this is. What an act of worship this prayer is. I wonder how much worship there is in our private prayers.

are we more preoccupied with Aunt Susie's backache? Paul is not asked for the Colossians' health, or their wealth, or the physical comfort, or the resolution of their problems.

He's not asked for their protection. He's more concerned for their godliness, more for their godliness than for their spiritual progress, rather than for their careers.

And to the extent that we might agree that Paul's priorities are the right ones, are we condemned by them?

Paul, as he prayed, couldn't help but be drawn to worship, drawing near to God, engaging his mind with the glories of Messiah.

[44 : 39] He couldn't help but adore as he thought of the wonders that he was describing. Could it be otherwise? otherwise? Can we respond otherwise to such a magnificent description of Christ and of the gospel?

Let me summarize. Spiritual filling is a gift from God, not the fruit nor the reward of human effort, not even effort in fasting and prayer.

true spiritual wisdom leads to a knowledge that in turn leads to holiness. Holiness is walking with God through life and his fruit, oh so sweet, is an increasing acquaintance with God.

God gloriously empowers for joyful endurance rather than escape from hardships. If we are in Christ, we are in the kingdom where Jesus is supreme, our king, and we are already enjoying the first fruits of an inheritance which is yet to come, sure to come, in its fullness.

Jesus is supreme in all creation. He made it, it subsists by his power and grace, and it exists for him. God would have Jesus be granted preeminence in the church and in our private lives.

[46 : 29] The Son is God who became wonderfully, amazingly man and shed his blood to secure salvation. The measure of our salvation is the measure of his glory.

glory, or should I not rather say the measure of his glory is the measure of our salvation. We are called upon to continue firm in the faith.

And our prayers and our longings should be fundamentally taken up with heavenly spiritual realities rather than the things of the earth.

Let's pray. amazing glorious God. We're breathless as we contemplate the wonders of your Son, our Savior.

And as we think of what he has done and that he has done that for us, we're amazed by his humanity, we're amazed by his sacrifice, and we're amazed by the power and the fullness of the salvation that he's secured.

[48 : 00] Lord, we want Jesus to be preeminent in all that we do, in everything that we are. We want to seek above those things which have to do with our walk with you.

Lord, forgive us our paltry views of your Son, our Savior. Teach us to love and worship him more fully in the everyday course of our lives and as we function as a congregation.

Be exalted in us, O Lord. This we ask in the glorious name of our Savior who died, that all that might be, in fact, reality.

Jesus. Amen.