

Living to please the Lord Jesus

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Now, can you turn with me in your Bibles back to the book of Colossians, Paul's letter to the Colossians, and we're going to read his prayer, verse 9 to verse 14, as we think together about living to please the Lord.

So Colossians chapter 1 and at verse 9. For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and 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, and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light.

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

So if you have your Bible, keep it open there as we continue to think through Colossians chapter 1. Let me begin with an observation, and it's this, how we think about Jesus shapes how we live for Jesus.

[1 : 40] I want to begin with a letter I read this week, written by a chap at the age of 66, and he wrote this, as he spoke about the work of God in his life.

Did he not redeem and deliver me from being a slave in Africa? Take me up from the dunghill of sin and misery? Put me among the princes, even his own children?

Tame the fierce tiger in my heart, and give me a name, a place, and service in his house. The author of that letter, the author of many hundreds of wonderful gospel-rich letters, was John Newton, the author of the famous hymn Amazing Grace, which we'll sing at the end.

John Newton, the former slave owner, who actually himself became a slave in Africa before being converted, becoming a pastor, working to end slavery in the UK.

And what I find so lovely about this letter, written by him in those days, the late 1700s, fairly elderly man, he still had that sense of joy in knowing Jesus.

[2 : 52] That song of amazing grace was one that he still sung in his heart. He was somebody who was joyfully serving Jesus decades later. It's always a wonderful thing to see.

We know in our own church the wonderful privilege of seeing older, mature Christians who have walked with Jesus for many years and continue to do so joyfully. In many ways, I think he matches, John Newton matches, the sentiments of Paul, the apostle.

Paul, who would talk about himself as the chief of sinners, described himself as a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man. And yet God showed him grace and mercy so that he would say, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

How we think about Jesus shapes how we live for Jesus. And that takes us to Paul's prayer here. Because what we'll see is that Paul is praying that the believers here would know God's will so that they would do God's will.

And God's will is here expressed as walking worthy of Jesus and living to please Jesus and to do that because of God's saving grace. So let's see this together.

[4 : 06] Let's think, first of all, about living to please Jesus. Verses 9 to 12, we focus on Paul's prayer. But before we do that, almost as a by-the-by, let's just think for a minute about training in language.

So think about parents perhaps training their children in a language or you're perhaps trying to encourage someone to learn another language.

How does that process happen? Well, there is a listening in and there's attempts at repeating, copying words and phrases and then adapting them for their own use.

And I think that process of language learning is helpful whenever we come to the prayers that we find in the Bible because I guess as Christians, if we're Christians, many of us will have found ourselves thinking, asking, saying, I wish I had a better prayer life.

I wish I had a way to pray for myself and for others and the church. I don't feel particularly good at prayer. I'm sure we can probably all resonate with that at some point in our lives.

[5 : 19] Jesus' disciples, of course, turned to Jesus recognizing his unique relationship with the Father and they said, Lord, teach us to pray. And perhaps it's always been the case that in the church there's that desire to want to grow in prayer and for centuries what the church has done is we have learned from the language of prayer that we find in the Bible.

That's why Jesus gave the Lord's Prayer. Christians down through the centuries have used the Psalms to form their own prayer language.

And then we have the models of prayer that we find in the Bible. For example, Paul's one here. So even as we're thinking about what he prays, perhaps we can also be conscious of here is a way that I can learn to develop in my own prayers.

One of the things that we recognize, verse 9, if you look at the way Paul begins there, he says, For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you.

And again, it's significant. Paul is praying for a church that he's never met. He knows Epaphras, but he doesn't know the church. And so here's a connection for us.

[6 : 32] You know, we have the privilege, I'm saying this to someone this week, and in Beclu, we have the privilege of welcoming for different times people involved in ministry and mission all over the world.

And we may not know their congregations or their ministries, but we know the leaders so we can pray for those that they serve. So this can help us as we think about mission and connecting it to our prayer.

But we also see that he says, We have not stopped praying for you. There's a consistency. These things that are important to Paul are things that he's going to commit to praying for regularly.

Here are some principles that he wants to see established in God's people, so he's going to bring them to God regularly. So even there, before we even get to what Paul's praying for, there are lessons for us in how we ourselves pray for others.

And again, just before we get into how Paul prays, let's just frame this in the context of another form of training. So we train people in language, but we were those who were trained in politeness, and as parents, again, we train our children towards politeness, don't we?

[7 : 43] From a very early age, we want our children to appreciate if someone does something for you, if somebody gives something, the polite response is to say, thank you. Now, apply that to what we have here, and we can say that when we understand that God has given his one and only son for us to qualify us for an eternal inheritance, when he has rescued and redeemed us at the cost of his son Jesus, then our lives as the people of God ought to become one big thank you.

Worship as thankfulness, obedience as thankfulness. Now, having said all that, let's look at what Paul prays, and let's think about what it looks like when Paul says to aim to walk worthy of Jesus as Lord because of what he's done for us in the gospel.

So, what does Paul pray? Verse 9, we find his request. The second sentence there, or the beginning of sentence 2, we continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

What's he praying? He's praying for believers to know God's will, to have that wisdom that comes from God, the Holy Spirit, so that they might, as it were, think God's thoughts after him.

Now, it may be the case when we hear that phrase, you know, God's will, what's God's will for my life, we might think of something that's very personal, we might think of choices that we have to make, it might be about our future, career, relationship, that can be where our mind goes, but the emphasis typically in God's word is that we would know God's word, that's God's will, that we would know him in his word, and that we would have the wisdom to apply God's word to our lives, that the Holy Spirit would help us to know how to live wisely, applying God's word in everyday life.

[10 : 01] Three things we can say about the Spirit, the Spirit inspired the writing of God's word, and that same Spirit then in the life of a believer illuminates God's word, lights it up for us, so we can see it come alive, and we can understand how it applies to us, and the Spirit also instructs us in

wisdom so that we can in very practical ways show love and obedience to God in our day-to-day life.

So that's what Paul is praying for. We need to ask the question, why does he pray that? Why does that matter? Well, look with me at verse 10.

He explains it. We've not stopped praying for you so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way.

To know God's will so that believers in the Lord Jesus would then do God's will. Specifically, that we would walk worthy of the Lord Jesus.

That we would live to please him always. praise. Perhaps we can think of it this way. Think about the setting of a family.

[11:16] Christians are called into the family of God. God is our Father, Jesus, our Savior, our elder brother. Paul is praying that we wouldn't, as Christians, drag the name of Jesus through the mud, but positively we would bring glory to him.

That we wouldn't bring shame on our God and Father, but rather we would honor him in our everyday lives. Paul prays for Christians to know and do what pleases Jesus in every way, in all of life.

So, not just the religious part, how do I live for Jesus on Sunday? Disconnect that from Monday to Friday. Not just how do I please Jesus when it's convenient and comfortable.

How do I please Jesus in every way, in every setting? It made me think of that famous phrase from the Dutch theologian Kuiper. I don't think that's how you say it, but anyway, that's how I'm going for it.

He said, there is no square inch over all of creation in which Jesus does not say, mine. The lordship of Jesus is absolute.

[12:22] And if that's the case, then we can say, and Paul, in effect, is saying to us, remember that there is no square inch of our lives over which Jesus does not say, mine.

And so wisdom looks like, how do I live to please Jesus in this particular situation, in this relationship? Paul's prayer, in a sense, is that as Christians and as a church, there would be this guiding principle.

What would please Jesus? Perhaps we remember those wristbands. What would Jesus do? What would please Jesus as guiding principle?

What does walking worthy of Jesus look like here, in my workplace, in my family situation, as I face this experience?

So, we pray, and we ask the Spirit to lead us, in a sense, to ask that question in the first place, because if we're honest, there are times when living to please Jesus falls down our priority list.

[13:28] So, we ask for the Spirit to remind us, that's our calling, and then we ask for the Spirit to help us to have the wisdom to answer the question well, so that we might represent Jesus well in the world.

And to think about what that looks like, Paul draws attention to four particular aspects. So, continuing in verse 10, we see four elements mentioned about what it looks like to live worthy of a Lord and please Him in every way.

The first of those, in verse 10, is bearing fruit in every good work. That if we are wanting to live to please Jesus, we will want to do good to bless others.

Really, to follow the pattern of Jesus. Perhaps it's helpful here to think about the image that Jesus uses in John 15, I am the vine and you are the branches that we will bear fruit when we are abiding in Christ by the Spirit.

That's a prayer point for this church in Colossae. That's a prayer point for our church also. That we as Christians, we as a church, may bear the fruit of good work.

[14:45] So that's one way that we can live to please Jesus. Then he goes on to say, at the end of verse 10, to pray that they would be growing in the knowledge of God.

Growing in knowledge. It's a reminder that our Christian faith is not about a static relationship. I came to faith at this point and I know God to this extent and that's me done.

Rather, because God is infinite and eternal, there's always more to know and he invites us to know more and to delight in that knowledge and to grow in that knowledge of him.

Not for knowledge's sake, that we'd know him better so we'd know how to please him. When we think about, I guess, any friendship or a family relationship where we know someone or we're

getting to know somebody well, we will find ourselves instinctively studying. Studying to know what pleases the other person. Likes, dislikes, what pleases another person, what makes them happy.

[15 : 53] We grow in the knowledge of God and his word so that we might know how to live to please him. So there's another prayer point that Paul has that we can wisely introduce to our own prayers that our church might grow to know and love God more.

The third way in which as Christians we can live to please Jesus we find in verse 11. Being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience.

Living with endurance and patience. Faith to stand in the face of opposition or persecution. A faith that continues to hope in Jesus through the trials that come into our lives.

A faith that clings to our solid future hope when we suffer. faith that trusts our good shepherd to care for us to provide for us to walk with us.

And so Paul prays that the church would be strengthened with God's power and grace so that they might continue to run the race with patience recognizing that faith is a marathon and not a sprint.

[17 : 25] That as they begun the race of faith that they would finish it with the help that God provides. And again what a wonderful prayer for ourselves to pray for one another in our church that we would stand firm in faith that we'd be strengthened by the grace of God to endure to hold on and not to fold.

The fourth way that Paul gives or Paul prays for as he seeks for God's people to live worthy of Jesus. Verse 12 giving joyful thanks to the Father.

A heart that's full of love and gratitude and thankfulness worship and deep joy rooted in their relationship with God.

A life lived out of God's love for them in and through the Lord Jesus leading to thankfulness and joy. Should be a mark of God's people. Should be a mark of a church that we have a joy that runs deeper than happiness rooted in circumstance. A joy because we know that we know our God and he knows us and that our future is secure and that we have the love of God and we have peace with God.

[18 : 52] And so again we can pray for our church to be a place of gospel driven joy and thankfulness. Living to please Jesus is something that clearly mattered to Paul and it matters to God and so he prays.

And now let's notice how he frames it. he asks that they would live to please Jesus in light of the gospel. That's where he shifts in verses 12 to 14.

Why would we live to please Jesus in every way? Why make the effort? Why commit for the long haul? Why have loyalty and love to Jesus? Paul says because of the gospel.

Because of what God has done for us in Jesus. Because specifically here verse 12 God has qualified us to share in his eternal inheritance through Jesus.

Verse 13 because he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness. And verse 14 because in Jesus we have redemption. So let's think about these.

[20 : 07] Recognizing that they transform life in the present and life in the future. Verse 12 the Father through Jesus has qualified us.

He has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. Qualified for that inheritance as part of God's family, his holy people.

There is a treasure stored up for us in heaven who ultimately is Jesus himself. that inheritance of living in the kingdom of light looking forward to that future kingdom, God's kingdom, life with him and with his son Jesus forever.

That's our inheritance. And he's going to make clear that that comes to us because of what God has done for us in Jesus in rescuing us. But he reminds the church that the gospel speaks good news and says to us in the Lord Jesus Christ we are children of God.

There is a treasure in heaven stored up for us and the basis for that inheritance claim has nothing to do with us and everything to do with Jesus and his saving work that we have applied to us by faith.

[21 : 28] It's a remarkable truth when we stop and think about it. We think about our God who is our God. God is holy. God is sinless. He is perfect. He cannot bear sin.

We think about our own lives and we know that we are sinful by nature. We are disqualified by nature. We have no claim to this eternal inheritance. So how does it come to us?

And that's where he goes next. He reminds us that God has rescued us. Verse 13. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

Rescued from dominion, rescued from being in the grip of a hostile power, brought into the kingdom of light, the kingdom of the Son he loves.

There's been a transfer of kingdoms that takes place in the gospel. perhaps we might think of a prisoner of war camp, a soldier who becomes a prisoner or a slave in another country with no way of escape, locked in darkness until the forces of liberation come.

[22 : 46] The Bible would say that by nature we are prisoners of war. We live in the kingdom of darkness, ruled by the devil, slaves to sin.

Not just the things we do, but our sin nature. Because of that, by nature we are enemies of God, we are opposed to God and his rule and his word, and because of that we find ourselves under the just judgment of God and heading for death and eternal separation from God.

The dominion of darkness is real and it's serious. But then we have the good news of God's action.

What has God done? Verse 13, he's rescued us through his son Jesus.

We've been delivered by faith out of the prison camp into a kingdom of perfect freedom. God's kingdom of light and love.

How does this rescue happen? Verse 14 tells us. In whom, in the son, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[24 : 00] The Bible speaks a fair bit about redemption and we still speak about it today. The price paid to buy something back, the price paid to buy someone back, thinking about the Old Testament.

A person could find themselves falling into hard times when he had to sell their land, but they or someone else could save up money and pay the redemption price to buy the land back.

Or they might find themselves falling into debt so great that they had to sell themselves into slavery to work for another person. Well, again, they could, or a family member could pay a redemption price to be set free.

And what Paul does is he takes this idea of redemption and he makes clear that the debt we owe is the debt of our sin. Jesus said the great commandment is love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.

And our failure to do that is that debt that we pile up. Jesus said the second great commandment is to love our neighbor as ourselves. With the same amount of energy and effort that we apply to caring for ourselves, we are to care for our neighbor.

[25 : 09] And our failure to do that, again, is building up a debt of sin. And that's a debt that we could never repay ourselves. The gospel says there is a redemption price that has been paid, and it's been paid in and through the blood of Jesus on the cross.

In chapter 2 of Colossians, Paul takes us there in picture language. If you look with me, chapter 2, halfway through verse 13, we find there, God made you alive with Christ.

He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness. So there's the gospel, forgiveness, and a debt canceled, that debt which stood against us and condemned us.

So there's that honesty. Because of our sin, we stand justly condemned because of that debt. But what has God done? He has taken it away, nailing it to the cross.

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. Sometimes when in the Roman Empire, when they were executing a prisoner on the cross, they would nail above that person's head the charges.

[26 : 33] This is the reason why this person is being condemned to death. A warning, don't find yourself doing likewise. Well, what does Paul do?

To help us understand the gospel, he says, at the cross, that record of debt that should be over our heads is pinned over the head of Jesus, the sinless one, the perfect one.

He takes that record of debt. He dies in our place for our sins so that God can justly write paid in fool when our faith is in Jesus.

The just anger of God falls on Jesus and not on those who trust in him. With the result of the power of sin is broken, the power of darkness is broken, we're made alive with Christ, we enjoy victory with him.

And what Paul says in this prayer is that in light of how wonderful the gospel is, in light of that transformation that God in Jesus has worked for us, we should live to please Jesus.

[27 : 52] We should live to walk worthy of him in light of the gospel. Just as we close some random visitor stats, and a question, what is it that makes 35,000 people a year climb Mount Everest?

What is it that draws 650,000 people a year to visit the Isle of Sky? What is it that draws 30 million people to stand at the edge of Niagara Falls?

doesn't it speak to the fact that as people we are looking for a sense of awe and wonder, something bigger than ourselves, that we are drawn to it, we long for that sense of awe and wonder, and when we find it, you might do yourself at the top of a mountain range, you might imagine yourself in a really dark night looking up at the stars, what does it do for us?

Doesn't it fix our perspective so often? Doesn't it helpfully cut us down to size and help us to remember our God who is infinitely bigger?

Paul in his prayer speaks to our hearts and our minds. He says to us, remember the gospel is powerful, the gospel is beautiful, as we long for awe and wonder, we're invited to find it in the gospel.

[29 : 28] And as we reflect on that, that it sorts our perspective, as we understand that God in Christ has done everything for us, then that should motivate us to live for him.

Because how we think about Jesus shapes how we live for Jesus. So let's pray for ourselves, for our church, for our churches, that we would be transformed by the gospel constantly, so that we would want to live to please Jesus.

Let's do that this night. Lord, our God, we thank you for how wonderful the gospel is. Thank you for the many pictures that we find through your word that speak of the life-transforming power of power of the work of Jesus for us in his perfect life, death, and resurrection.

Thank you that by faith in Jesus, we are qualified for that eternal inheritance that is laid up for us, that treasure in heaven that can never be lost or taken from us.

We thank you that you have rescued us, taken us from darkness into your wonderful light, that you have set us free from slavery, giving us true freedom in Jesus.

[30 : 56] We thank you that he came to pay that redemption price to forgive our sins, to bring us peace with you, our God. Lord, we pray that you would help our hearts to be drawn to the gospel, our minds to be drawn to the wonderful truth of the gospel, so that it would change how we live, that it would influence how we approach each day and each situation.

Lord, may you give to us as a church and as families and as individuals that guiding principle that we would want to live to please Jesus, who lived and died and rose for us.

We pray that you would give the spirit to us, so that we would have wisdom to know what that looks like in our lives and in our situations. We know that we're all different and our lives are different.

The opportunities and challenges we face will differ from person to person, but Lord, you know us and your spirit can help us and equip us. And so we pray that he would do just that, that he would cause us to be asking ourselves, how can we walk worthy of the Lord today?

And that by the spirit you would help us so that we would give glory to you, our great God and Saviour. Amen. Now we will close our time singing the great hymn from John Newton, Amazing Grace, and we'll stand together to sing.