

Title: Inseparably Connected

Text: Colossians 1:9-12

Good morning everyone. Thank you for joining us today. If you missed last week, you should know that we began a new series called “sufficient” in the book of Colossians. We covered verses 1-8 of chapter 1, and today we will cover verses 9-12.

Last week we saw Paul expressing his thankfulness to God that this church in Colossae had received the gospel and was displaying faith, love, and hope. This week he is still continuing his written prayer, but he moves from thanksgiving - to *requests* of God. Last week he was thanking God for the good report, this week he is *asking* God to bring about blessings in this church. So Paul’s request of God for the church at Colossae is what we will study today.

I want to start with an exercise -

I want you to think about two things in life that are typically connected. Things that, when you mention one, you always mention the other. They are inseparable...

You’re probably thinking “peanut butter and jelly,” or “Hamburger and fries.” Those are ok answers especially if you’re hungry. But you might have peanut butter without jelly, or you may eat fries for a snack, with no burger. They still have purpose apart from one another, but complement one another. I’m wanting to think about things that really suffer when they are separated from their counterpart.

For example, you have a lock and a key. They are certainly connected, and *without* one another, their function suffers. The value of a key with no lock is pretty low.

Or how about a hammer and a nail? The value of a nail drastically suffers without a hammer to drive it into a piece of wood.

Or, for my military & police people, what about a firearm and ammunition? There’s not much use in carrying around a ziplock baggie of bullets on the battlefield and throwing them at the enemy. Bullets were made for a firearm. They are inseparably connected.

Today I want to talk about two things that Paul mentions that I believe are inseparably connected, in the Christian life. These two things are essential to the growth of every Christian.

And the truth is that most of the trouble we run into in our Christian journey, and in the life of the church, is related to the friction of trying to separate these two things or pit them against each other.

You would never try to pit a hammer against a nail, a bow against an arrow, or a lock against a key. And yet, one of the great frictions as a Christian tries to figure out how to grow - is achieving the balance of knowledge and actions.

Probably, at some point in your life, you've struggled with whether it was more important to gain knowledge about God, or to just live by His commands. Maybe you've heard someone say that we study the Bible too much and need to put it into practice. OR - Maybe you've heard someone say that trying to live according to God's Word without spending devotional time with Him is just legalism, works-based Christianity.

I've seen this struggle in my own life - when I was told by someone that studying the deeper truths of Scripture and theology would make the people in the church get comfortable with "just filling themselves with head knowledge" - and that this would have an adverse effect on the outreach and mission of the church. I was effectively told that you can't study theology while being on mission. But is that true?

And so we have these two themes that Paul will present in the text - The knowledge of God's will AND Living in a way that honors God

And I would present to you today this idea - that your best growth as a Christian will occur when you conclude that these are two inseparably connected themes. They are not enemies, they are best friends. We need to know and do the will of God in our lives.

Knowing the will of God leads to walking worthy of Him. And every Christian should want to do that.

And I would challenge you to resist the temptation, throughout your life, to separate knowledge about God and actions for God. No church and no Christian can ever claim to simply study God's Word without "doing the Word." And likewise no church and no Christian can build a healthy ministry and outreach apart from a dependence on the knowledge of God, revealed in his Word. **What we know about God should affect how we live and worship. Commit to seek God's will while walking worthy of Him, and you grow in maturity.**

(pray)

Let's begin by looking at our text for the day, starting in Colossians 1:9-10. Remember that this is the Apostle Paul writing to a church, and he is expressing thanks to God for them. Now he asks of God on their behalf...

⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ 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;

Paul is telling this church, "ever since I heard that you had received the gospel, and that you exhibited faith in Christ, love for one another, and hope in heaven - I always mention you in my prayers. You always make it onto my prayer list and I always remember you. And here's what I ask..."

Now, we have already established that this is a good church (not perfect, but good). They have the gospel and a base level of health. Wouldn't you imagine that the next thing Paul asks for (in prayer) is an important first step in Christian growth and maturity?

So what does Paul pray that they attain? Knowledge of the will of God.

And so no shockers, that's number one today - If you want to experience growth - the first major component is.....

1. KNOWING THE WILL OF GOD.

Look back at v9 - *"we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding."*

In many ways, our culture has similarities to some of these ancient cities that Paul visited. Greek Philosophy and Roman Mystery Religions had made their impression upon the people, and their claim was that "higher knowledge" was the key to religious thought.

Religion had to be hard. It had to be confusing and difficult to grasp. It had to separate the sharp from the dull. It kept the people at the base of the mountain while the monks had their real meetings at the top of the mountain. It took place in the office of scholars, filled with leather-bound books and blazers with elbow patches while fine cigar-smoke wafted through the air.

And though the people had their ancient gods - the appearance of knowledge became their god. You know the type even today - stringing together big words and confusing sentence structures in the hopes that someone will think they're deep - debating things that have no answer and answering questions with more questions - secretly hoping never to arrive at the answer, but be considered smart.

This was the context of the pagan city in Paul's day. And Paul comes in and says, "I pray that you be filled with knowledge." Now at a quick read, you may think, "I thought you just said they had knowledge coming out of their ears and they ate that stuff up. Isn't Paul just doing more of the same?" Not at all. There are two reasons why not.

First, Paul's uses a word that will actually be a theme in Colossians - the word is "filled." May you be *filled* with knowledge...

We hear the word "filled" and think of a cup. When Paul used the word filled, he was thinking more of a glove. In our mind - someone filled with knowledge is just a fat headed philosopher or a scholar sitting in the ivory tower. The cup of their brain is full, thus they are smart.

But in Paul's mind, there is a connection between the word "filled" and "controlled." Water in a glass doesn't control the glass, thus the glass is filled but not controlled. However, in a glove, it's a different story. If you put your hand into a glove it is both filled and controlled by your hand. This is Paul's understanding of "filling."

This is why the language of "filled with the Spirit" gives people so much trouble. When Paul says that we are filled with the spirit of God, He means that we should be *controlled by* the Spirit of God. That's the hand controlling the actions of the glove. This is a very important distinction.

And the second reason why this isn't just more of the same - Paul is not pointing the church toward a general knowledge - but rather specifically the knowledge of God's will.

Paul is not pointing to the Greek mindset of general knowledge and philosophy. He prays that the Colossian Church would be filled specifically with the knowledge of God's will.

Remember that I told you last week that there is a mild corrective tone in Colossians and I believe that this is perhaps the first expression of it in the letter. Basically Paul is saying, “you want to be filled with knowledge? be filled with the knowledge of God and His will. That’s what you need.”

Let’s talk for a moment about God’s will and how to know it, because that’s what Paul prays for the church.

This is perhaps one of the most asked questions, and one of the most misunderstood questions I hear. Usually younger people in that age between 17-25 are wracking their brain about what they are supposed to do with the direction of their life and they say, “I just want to know God’s will for my life!” Or even adults at a major crossroads (a change in career for example) or maybe a mid-life crisis (or a quarter-life crisis) will say the same thing - “I just wish God would tell me His will so I could know what to do.”

Anybody ever been there? Just wanting to do God’s will but feeling like you don’t know it? I’m guessing everyone has been there. So this passage should be meaningful to you. Surely Christians, of all people, should know God’s will for their lives, but we seem to be the most distressed by the issue.

I think that we may overcomplicate the question. I’ve come up with a way that I believe is biblical (and helpful) to know the will of God - based on Scripture. Do you want to see it? Are you sure, because this will tell you exactly in 4 easy steps how to know exactly the will of God in your life?!? OK...

To know the will of God...

1. You need to know God. (Who is He? What has He done? What is He like? How does He operate?)

This may seem basic but it’s actually not. You’d be surprised at how often people want to know God’s will for their life, but only because they see it as beneficial. They don’t actually know God or want to know God - they just want His will because they assume He can see the future, or something like that.

But the best way to know somebody’s will is to know them personally.

There are some of you here that were members of Calvary Hills Baptist Church throughout the entire ministry of the former pastor, Randy Houston, almost 2 decades.

I'm guessing that after serving with him and observing him for that length of time, you would know what he might want to do in a certain scenario. Say a question in the church came up, or a decision needed to be made, most of you that knew him could probably wager a good answer to what Pastor Randy would do in any given scenario - because you knew him. You know what you could do to make him happy, and what would get under his skin, because you know him.

But with me, the new pastor, you're still learning me. You're trying to figure me out. How I might act or respond to a certain situation, or how I would answer a specific question, or how I will lead - it's *becoming* clear to you - but it's not as much of a known as with a pastor that was here for many years. Now, in time you will know me and you will learn how I operate and think, but you're just going to have to get to know me first.

In a simplistic way, that's what it's like with God. And so don't expect to know how God operates or what He wants if you don't know Him personally and you don't spend time with Him. You need to know God to know His will.

2. You need to act on what you already know.

Parents, imagine you've told your kids (for example) that at 9:00 p.m. every night - they are to go brush their teeth, turn the lights off in their room, and go to bed. You've said it and enforced it everyday. You've even written it on a whiteboard in the kitchen.

Now one night at 8:58 p.m. you walk into their room and you see them on their knees at the foot of the bed, hands folded, eyes closed, deep in prayer. They cry out to the Lord, "Oh Lord. I don't know what to do. It's almost 9:00. Please reveal to me your will. Would you have me to brush my teeth and go to bed, or should I stay up and play another hour of video games? I just want to do your will oh God! Make it clear."

Now, why is that funny? Because the parents had *already revealed* their will, clearly.

Do you know, that's what we do a lot to God. And the point is not avoid asking God. The point is that we have God's revealed will in the Scriptures, right now, and this is to be the primary way that we know the will of God.

Don't neglect the Scriptures as the primary way we know God's will.

What's God will for your life? Well I know a few potential answers to that -

- Make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28)
- Be holy as I am holy (1 Peter)
- Love one another as I have loved you (John 13)
- Be anxious for nothing, pray without ceasing, forgive others as you have been forgiven, Children obey your parents, parents do not provoke your children to anger, be sober minded and await The Lord's return, take the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth.

See - when you put together the words of Scripture, you begin to get a picture of God's will for a person's life. This is to be the *starting point* for knowing God's will, not the afterthought, after rubbing the magic 8 ball and visiting Ms. Cleo for your free reading, or looking at horoscopes, or messing with a Ouija board.... starting with Scripture will take care fo the majority of concerns you have in life.

And so you might say, well what if I'm following God and I am close to Him, and I've studied the Scriptures and I'm not sinning with either decision. Say I'm choosing between two good colleges, or two good jobs, and there's no biblical mandate for or against either - it's just a decision between two good options. What now?

3. Consider the Christian effectiveness of your decision.

What I mean here is this - Sometimes a decision can be biblically neutral, but have unforeseen consequences. For example, you are offered a promotion at work... do you take it? There's nothing unethical about the work. You will get a raise - you can be more generous with money toward your church and you can provide for your family in ways you struggled with before. But, you know that the job will require travel, and you will not see your family as much. You may have to miss Sundays on occasion.

You may conclude that though the job is not unbiblical, the potential outcome could distance you from your family and from your church, causing a spiritual drift to occur, so you don't take it.

It's always good to ask the question - will this decision make me more effective, or less effective as a disciple maker and a follower of Christ?

4. Do what you like to do.

This always seems to catch people off guard but it's true. If you've done your best to discern God's will and you are walking closely with Him, and you've put your decision through the filter of Scripture, and you've weighed the outcomes and your effectiveness in the Kingdom - and there's still uncertainty..... I believe there is freedom to ask the question - "What is the desire of my heart?"

Here's where I get that - Psalm 37:4 says - "Delight yourself in The Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart." In other words, if you have done steps 1-3, there's a good chance that your will and God's will are closely aligned. If you're following the Lord, delighting in Him, then your desires have changed to His desires. That's why this is the final step, but it's important that you know there is freedom in this.

— —

This is what Paul means when he asks that we be filled with the knowledge of God's will in wisdom and understanding. That your thought processes are rewired to consider, in every situation, what God would want from you.

And the order is very important. You can't just jump straight into behavior modification apart from the knowledge of who God is. Knowledge of God and His will should inform us of how we are to live, because we are to be imitators of Him.

Last week when we discussed faith in Christ, love for each other, and hope in heaven - that was basically Rung #1 of the ladder that is Christian growth. It's the first step. This week moves up to Rung #2 - operating and functioning our lives consistent with God's will.

And so I do think it's fair to say that you can't jump right to Rung 2 without first experiencing Rung 1. If you don't have faith in Christ - you can't know God's will. If you don't love the saints, the body, you're still in boot camp - not ready to move on. If you don't have hope in heaven - do not pass go or collect \$200 - you can't move forward.

But if you do have those things - you are ready to know God and His will. That's the first step up from Rung 1.

And why do we know God and His will? What's the purpose? Verse 10 tells us, and gives us our second point. Look at v10.

10 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

First we need to know the will of God, and secondly, the essence of Christian growth is...

2. LIVING CONSISTENTLY WITH WHAT WE KNOW.

If we look at v10, you see that the extension of knowing God's will is to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit in every good work. The implication is that you can not walk in what you do not know.

What is walking worthy? That word "worthy" in the Greek is *axios*, meaning, to walk in alignment with, or befitting, or comparable to.... In other words... the way that we live practically should fit (or match) what we know about God and what He wants.

Now remember how we started today - the theme of inseparably connected. When growth falls apart is when you detach knowledge from action. That's when your Christian life will begin to suffer and struggle.

How many times do you hear from others, or maybe yourself, "I know all the right things to do - I just don't act on it." Or "I'm a Christian but I just don't live like it." Or "I believe in God but I'm not practicing right now." We've even heard pastors try to accommodate this by coining and using terms like "the carnal Christian," meaning that you've professed faith but your life doesn't display any fruit whatsoever.

I need to say this so you know where I am on this - There is no such thing as a carnal Christian. There is no such thing as a fruitless Christian. There is no such thing as a branch living apart from the vine. If you believe that, you have to at least be honest and say that you have created a new category of Christian that the Bible does not know.

The Bible is clear that there are two categories of people - dead sinners in need of grace, children of Adam, slaves to sin.... and then there are new creations, children of God, slaves to Christ. There is no middle ground of "Christian but not acting like it."

We are to walk worthy of The Lord, with our lives.

Now, If you understand the gospel, and you know about what Jesus went through for us, and the type of life He lived - you're probably having an honest moment with this text right now thinking - "how could anyone actually walk worthy of The Lord? John the Baptist said he wasn't even worthy to untie Jesus' sandal, and Jesus called him the greatest man to ever live. What chance do I have to walk worthy of the Lord?"

There's an illustration I think of at this point from the movie "Saving Private Ryan." The entire movie revolves around a family who lost several of their sons in combat, and Matt Damon's character is the only son left alive. So the military practice of calling the lone survivor of the family home is enacted, so as not to extinguish a family line.

Tom Hanks' character is Captain Miller, leading a crew through extremely hostile territory at great risk - just to locate Private Ryan so he can be sent home. Along the way, many men die on this mission to sent Ryan home. They endure horrible conditions just so someone can go home from war and go back to his family while the battle rages on.

At the end, as Captain Miller meets Private Ryan and delivers the news, he is fatally wounded in the end battle scene. As he is slowly dying, and the reality of what was done just for one man to go home and have a regular life sets in. He pulls Private Ryan close, and as he's dying, he struggles to say the words "earn this." Earn this.

In other words he was saying, "don't walk away from this sacrifice and waste the life you've been given. Walk worthy of the life you've been given, and that I died to give you."

I think the movie watcher sees that scene and thinks the obvious - which is - there's no way that anyone could earn it, or live a life commensurate with the sacrifice. It's just not possible. And even in the end of the movie, you see an older Private Ryan struggling to feel like he lived up to that statement.

Likewise, I don't want you to read this verse and think that you must somehow earn what Jesus has done for you. That kind of thinking is what Jesus came to die for - the fact that we can't approach God by our own efforts and we can't earn salvation through merit and works. That's why He lived a perfect life free from sin, because we couldn't.

But I don't say that to diminish the call to walk worthy of The Lord. Paul prays that the church would walk worthy. If it doesn't mean sinless perfection, what does it mean? Well, read the verses and it is explained...

bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

It's bearing fruit. It's increasing in the knowledge of God. It's strength to endure. It's patience. It's joyful thanksgiving. It sounds a lot like being spirit filled. And we know that filled really means, *controlled*.

But that's not really a stretch, is it?

Listen to 1 Corinthians 2:10-12

For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God

The Spirit of God, given to every believer - knows the mind of God and discloses His will to you as you read Scripture (authored by the Spirit) and pray. This filling with knowledge of God will cause you to walk worthy of God - displaying fruits of the Spirit who filled you to begin with, Who will increase your knowledge of God, so that you can increasingly walk more and more worthy of God. It's sanctification. It's Christian growth.

The moment you break this chain and drive a wedge between knowledge and actions - you stunt your Christian growth. Never ever do that. Never convince yourself that you can know God while not walking worthy of Him. You cannot have one without the other.

What we know about God should affect how we live and how we worship.

If you say you follow Christ - you need to act like it in public and in private. If you say you want to hear God's will for you life, you need to desire God more than you desire getting answers from the magic 8 ball. If you try to live a moral life, but it doesn't derive its power from the Spirit, you're just a Pharisee, and you're missing out on connecting with God and the freedom of grace.

Know God. Walk Worthy. Bear fruit. Repeat. That's the essence of the Christian life.

That's my challenge to you today. Let what you know about God affect your life. Don't break the chain between what you know, and what you do. They are inseparably connected.

(pray)