

We are taking a careful look at Paul and Timothy's prayer for the church at Colossae. The reason that we are going so slowly is that there are so many important ideas in these verses and I want us to have the time to spend a little time with all of them. You can summarize this whole paragraph by saying that Paul and Timothy were praying that the Colossians would continue to grow in lives of obedience to God, but the language that Paul uses here is full of ideas that give us a much richer understanding of the kind of life that God is calling us to live. So we will go through this text, phrase by phrase as an encouragement for us to grow in living the life that God's salvation is intended to produce.

Let me first remind you of the connection to the preceding verse. Paul is making the point that growth in living according to God's will involves growth in knowing what God's will is. Paul tells the Colossians that he and Timothy were praying, "that [they might] be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and 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." We saw last week that growing in the knowledge of God's will is a big subject because God's will includes all of life including how we live together in the world and it includes living with wisdom and understanding which has to do with discerning how apply what we know about God's will to the specific situations that we face. But all of that is intended to lead to putting God's will into practice in our lives and that is what Paul is focusing on in the verse we are going to examine in this sermon.

So Paul and Timothy were praying that the Colossians might be filled with the knowledge of God's will, "so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord..." By just hearing those words, we know generally what they mean, but we want to explore the richness of what Paul is saying here. First of all Paul refers to the Christian life as a walk. This is a way that the Bible often refers to our way of life. God calls us to walk in a certain way. This way of referring to life is rooted in the OT. In Exodus 18:20, Jethro, Moses father-in-law tells Moses, "[Y]ou shall warn them [that is the people of Israel] about the statutes and the laws, and make them know the way in which they must walk and what they must do." So the idea is that of walking along a certain way – along a certain path.

Psalm 32:8 has a helpful instance of this idea. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go...." That verse brings together the idea of knowing the will of God and living according to the will of God. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go." Jesus uses this imagery as well when he says in Matthew 7:13-14, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

Our lives can be compared to a journey. And how we live determines whether we are on the road that leads to life or on the road that leads to destruction. Walking suggests ongoing and purposeful action. It is movement towards a goal. It can be aimless or futile like walking around in circles, but the kind of walking that we are

encouraged to do as Christians is walking with purpose and towards a certain goal – the goal of glorifying God – the goal of the receiving the inheritance that is stored up for us in heaven.

The idea of life as a walk also suggests progress. When you are walking you are not standing still. You are making progress toward whatever your goal is. And so it is in the life that God in the gospel is calling us to live. The progress may be slow. But if we are walking we are making progress. And we should pray for that as Paul and Timothy are praying for the Colossians. Paul is thankful for the faith, love and hope that the Colossians are showing in their lives, but there is always the need for us to make progress. And that progress involves both our own effort and the grace that flows to us from Christ. In chapter 2:6, Paul expresses that by saying, “Therefore as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him...”

What Paul goes on to say in our text refers to the purpose of our walk. He is praying that the Colossians will, “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord...” The Lord here is Jesus. Paul is speaking about living in a manner that is worthy of the Lord. Now again, we know what this means in general, but it is encouraging to consider exactly what Paul is saying here. What exactly does it mean to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord?”

This idea of living in a manner that is worthy of the Lord or worthy of God or worthy of the gospel is quite common in the NT. It is an interesting word to use of people because the basic teaching about worthiness in the Bible is that God is worthy of our praise and service and people are not worthy of anything but condemnation. John the Baptist said that he was not worthy to untie Jesus’ sandals. The prodigal son said that he was not worthy to be called the son of his father.

Jesus uses the word “worthy” in a way that is similar to the way that Paul is using it in our text. He says in Matthew 10:37-38, “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” The idea here is that whoever loves his family members more than Jesus and is not willing to take his cross is not fit to be a follower of Jesus. We are never worthy in the sense of deserving to be Jesus’ followers, but it is possible by grace to live in such a way that is appropriate for a follower of Jesus. The word “worthy” used in this way means a manner of life that is in accord with the nature of the relationship with Jesus.

And that is what Paul is getting at in our text. He is praying that the Colossians will live in a way that is fitting for followers of Jesus or that is in accord with belonging to Jesus. We are never worthy in the sense of deserving, but we can, by grace, live in a way that is appropriate or fitting as followers of Jesus. This is wonderful grace. It is possible by the grace given to us through the gospel to live in a way that is fitting or appropriate or worthy of Jesus. The word “worthy” used in this way does not convey the idea of deserving, but it does convey the idea of worth. It is possible for Christians to live a life that is of great value – of great worth.

And that is a great encouragement to pray this prayer for ourselves and for the church and thus also to expend the effort to live lives of love and obedience and service to Jesus. We are not worthy but, by the empowerment that comes from Jesus, we can live lives that are worthy of the Lord. We can live lives that are fitting as followers of Jesus. We can live lives that have worth. We can live lives that reflect well on our Lord. What an encouragement that is! And what a strong motivation it is to avoid living in a way that is not worthy of Jesus!

There is further encouragement in the next phrase. Paul and Timothy are praying that God will enable to Colossians to live in a way that is “fully pleasing to [Jesus].” “Walking in a manner worthy of the Lord” is fully pleasing to him.”

Now the desire to please God is rooted in the fact that God created us. Because of the fall the desire to please God is either absent or distorted. Some unsaved people seem to have no desire to please God, but it is also quite common for unsaved people to have some kind of a desire to please God. I say this because there are many people who are not saved who think that they are pleasing to God because they are outwardly moral and there are unsaved people who are trying to please God through their works. We see examples of both of these things in the Bible. We also see the same thing in the sacrifices of pagan religions. It seems to be part of our makeup as creatures made in the image of God that we understand that peace and wellbeing are associated with pleasing God. Not everyone is conscious of this, but that is explained by the characteristic of unbelievers to suppress the truth. People suppress the truth in different ways.

But it is part of our makeup as creatures made by God in his image that we sense that we can never be at peace or satisfied in our hearts or in a good place unless we are pleasing to God. That is why the gospel has any attraction at all to unsaved people. The innate desire to be right with God is a point of contact for the gospel. But when we are saved, it becomes even more clear that one of the deepest longings of our hearts is for God to be pleased with us.

This is one of the glories of the gospel. If we are united to Christ by faith God is pleased with us because he is pleased with Jesus. God the Father, a number of times, said that he was pleased with his Son. “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” But that is also true of us if we are trusting in Christ because Christ’s perfect obedience is placed on our account with God. This is one of the most wonderful truths imaginable. God is pleased with us for Jesus sake.

And part of this is that God can be pleased with how we live our lives. Our lives are never without sin, but through our relationship to Jesus, God is pleased when we seek to live our lives in a way that is pleasing to him. And that is what Paul is praying for, for the Colossians. He and Timothy are praying that the Colossian Christians will live lives that are fully pleasing to him.

This is a tremendously powerful motivation for us seek to grow in zeal and love and service to God and man. We are already pleasing to God because of our relationship with Jesus, but God is pleased with our efforts when we seek to honor him with our lives. This is one of the deepest sources of joy and satisfaction that we can know because it is tied to the very purpose of our existence and so also to the needs and longings that God has built into us. What a joy it is to be active in worship and service to God! – to seek to live our lives to God’s glory and know that how we are living is actually pleasing to God!

Hebrews 11:6 says that “without faith it is impossible to please him.” The implication is that with faith it is possible to please him. And so Hebrews 13:16 says, “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” There is no satisfaction more profound than to know that what we do in the service of God actually pleases him and there is no motivation more encouraging than to know that God is pleased with our efforts. And we can have that joy and satisfaction even though our efforts are actually stained with sin and that we fall short in all kinds of ways because God accepts us and our efforts for Jesus’s sake.

Now notice that this phrase ends with a full colon. What that means is that what follows the colon is an elaboration of what we have covered so far in this sermon. Paul and Timothy are praying that the Colossians will “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:[full colon]” What follows here are four phrases that elaborate on what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.” 1) “bearing fruit in every good work...” 2) “increasing in the knowledge of God...” 3) “being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy;” and 4) “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” These four phrases are coordinate with one another and together they give more detail about what it means to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.” We will just look at the first two in this sermon because the last two are so full of ideas that it will take a sermon to even attempt to do them justice. And what all of this does is give us direction about what to pray for and it also gives us a number of encouraging perspectives on the Christian life.

So one of the things that it means to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him” is “bearing fruit in every good work...” One of the things that pleases God is if we bear fruit.

This idea of bearing fruit goes all the way back to the creation. The first words recorded in Genesis that God speaks to man are the commands to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Now no doubt the fruitfulness here is having babies in the first place, but if we look at all that God tells man to do at the time of creation it is clear that God’s will for us is to be fruitful in other ways as well. In Genesis 1 and 2 human beings are told to subdue the earth, have dominion over the animals and work and keep the garden.

The point is that we are created to be productive – to work – and so to be fruitful. There clearly is a place for rest and enjoyment of the bounty of the creation, but the rest is rest from work and the enjoyment of the

bounty of the creation is also related to work. We are created to be fruitful. We are created to accomplish things that are pleasing to God. It is not God's purpose that we just sit around and do nothing. It is not God's purpose that we passively enjoy the pleasures that God has built into his creation. There is a role for rest and leisure, but from the very beginning God intended for us to live fruitful lives – to accomplish things – to develop the gifts and abilities he has given us – to live worthwhile lives.

And it is clear that our role in the new creation is also for us to be fruitful. The new creation is what God is working toward in his great plan of salvation, but it began when Jesus rose from the dead and we become part of it when we are reborn into it. Paul mentions this connection in 2 Corinthians 5:17. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come." And so there is a parallel between the original creation and the new creation in that God has put us in it to be fruitful.

And so the need for us fruitful as Christians is a significant theme in the NT teaching about salvation. Jesus speaks of this in John 15 where he compares himself to a vine and his disciples to the branches. He makes the point that through our union to him we will produce fruit. And then he says in verse 8 of John 15, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples."

Now in John 15 the fruit that Jesus is speaking about is obedience to his commandments because that is what he goes on to speak about in that passage. In verse 12 he says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

In our text the fruit that Paul is talking about are good works. Paul and Timothy are praying that the Colossians will bear "fruit in every good work." Paul also speaks of fruit in terms of attitudes in Galatians 5:22-23 where he says that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...." But the emphasis in our text on fruit being good works makes it clear that these attitudes called the fruit of the Spirit will lead to actions that can be called good works.

Good works are actions. Specific acts that are expressions of love to God and to man. There are lots of things that qualify as good works. We can serve other people through doing a good job in our daily work. It is an important biblical principle that all of life is significant in the service of God and man. Bringing up our children in the fear of the Lord is a good work. So is the giving of financial gifts to support the work of the kingdom and to help the poor. And serving one another in the life of the church ... witnessing to a non-believer ... hospitality ... encouraging someone – and many other things. Galatians 6:10 is a great summary of what it means to do good works, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."

Again the idea of fruitfulness is very encouraging. God created and saved us to be fruitful – to live lives that are productive. This means that our lives are meaningful – that they matter – that we make significant

contributions to others lives. It is a great blessing that we are created and saved to live productive lives to the glory of God. It is another way of thinking about the fullness of life that is the fruit of salvation.

Finally for this sermon, Paul and Timothy were praying that the Colossians would “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him” and that also meant “increasing in the knowledge of God.” It is pleasing to God if we are increasing in the knowledge of God. A way of life that is worthy of the Lord is a life in which there is an appetite to know God better. This flows out of love. The first and greatest and most important command is that we love God. And if we love God we cannot be indifferent to seeking to know him better. There are two parts to this knowledge of God. There is knowing about God. And there is knowing him personally – the knowledge that comes from being engaged in a relationship. The two are inter-related but they are both important. A relationship cannot flourish if we are uninterested in knowing about the other person.

So growing in the knowledge of God begins with being interested to learn more about God. We learn about God both from the creation and from the Bible. Psalm 19:1 says “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.” The creation, which includes us of course, reveals all kinds of things about God. The immensity of the universe gives us a sense of the immensity of God. There are all kinds of ways that the creation leaves us amazed – its intricacy – its beauty – its variety. These things give us a sense of the wisdom – the intelligence – the creativity of God. This is an exhilarating idea because it means any form of learning can be seen as teaching us about God. If God knows everything there is to know, our learning is discovering more about the knowledge of God. The right way to study, which is something that only Christians can do, is to see all knowing as related to the knowledge of God.

But there is also the Bible. One of the great purposes of the Bible is to tell us what God is like. Since the Bible is revelation from God, it is God telling us what he is like. He tells us that he is the creator. He tells us that he is the King over all the earth. He tells us that he is just, but also merciful. The whole plan of salvation teaches us about the love and the grace of God as well as his justice. God reveals what he is like in the history of his dealings with Israel. He tells us by many direct statements. We have wonderful verses like Psalm 145:8-9 which say, “The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all and his mercy is over all that he has made.”

The pinnacle of God’s self-revelation in his word is Jesus who is also called the Word. 2 Corinthians 4:6 tells us that we get “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” John says in John 1:18, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

But all of this knowledge about God is intended to contribute to our knowledge of God. God is a personal God and we relate to him as believers in personal relationship. Jesus is our Lord, our Saviour, our Shepherd, our bridegroom. God is our Father, our King, our Creator. The Holy Spirit is our Helper, our guide and our teacher. And so we can know God in a personal relationship.

Knowing God is one of the ways that the Bible describes salvation. Jesus in John 17:3 says “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

This is only a little of what Paul and Timothy are praying for when they pray that the Colossians would walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him ... by growing in the knowledge of God.

It pleases God when we grow in our knowledge of him. This is what we are created and saved to do. And it is a wonderful thing. This is the ultimate joy and satisfaction that we can know. It is an amazing truth about what God requires of us that it always both honors him and blesses us. The WSC begins by saying that the chief end of man is to glory God and enjoy him forever. Glorifying God and enjoying him go together. And at the heart of that is the knowledge of God. That knowledge is at the heart of what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord fully pleasing to him and that knowledge is the great motivation to do everything else that is involved in living a life that is pleasing to God.