

# COLOSSIANS BIBLE STUDY

Colossians 1:1-10

Lesson #1

## **FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL**

*1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,*

*2 To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.*

*3 We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints; 5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven, of which you previously heard in the word of truth, the gospel 6 which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing, even as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard of it and understood the grace of God in truth; 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf, 8 and he also informed us of your love in the Spirit.*

Col 1:1-8 (NASB)

### **Introduction:**

This is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a church that he had never visited. It was started by one of Paul's associates named Epaphras, whom he calls a fellow bond-slave and a faithful minister of Christ.

As this letter unfolds we'll begin to see just what it is that Paul wants to convey in it. As with all his letters, there's various situations that are in need of clarification, and this epistle is going to identify those issues and give clear answers to them. Since he intends to do this, that is to assert divine authority, it's necessary for him to start his letter with the declaration that he is a legitimate Apostle of Christ, because they've never seen him before, though they've almost certainly heard about him. Among the issues that he's going to discuss with them are (1) various legalistic teachings of the Jews, (2) the emerging gnostic teachings of a higher knowledge, and (3) the desire by some to include various pagan ideas and practices into the church. We'll see what he says about all of these as the epistle unfolds.

### **Verses 1-8:**

He introduces himself as Paul, and immediately declares that he is an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. So, everything that he says after this is intended to be understood as carrying the full weight and authority of Jesus Christ and God the Father himself. He then addresses them as saints and faithful brethren in Christ. This immediately establishes the personal connection that he wants them to feel between him and themselves. Again, since he's never seen them he needs to lay the groundwork as to both his authority to give them instruction, and his relationship to them as a fellow brother in Christ, whereby he may offer them both instruction and encouragement. So, he's addressing them not only as an Apostle, which establishes the authority, but also as fellow saints and brethren in Christ, which links them all together as one family. He goes on to say that he prays continually for them since he heard from Epaphras about their faith and love for all the saints.

Paul knows that the Colossians have only that knowledge and information that's been faithfully conveyed to them by Epaphras when he presented to them the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ, and they recognized the truth of this message. Now Paul, as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, is heartily confirming the verity of that gospel, and reaffirming the truth of what they had heard from Epaphras. He was assuring them that the hope that they had heard and embraced was true, and that same gospel message was being preached, and believed, all over the world. Furthermore, it was bearing the fruits of righteous repentance and sanctification and love of God in all those who believed, everywhere that it went, just as it was also doing among the Colossians.

There are common and inevitable fruits of genuine belief, and perhaps most immediately recognizable among them is (1) a visible repentance of sin, accompanied with a heartfelt pursuit of the righteousness of God; and (2) an almost unexplainable loving affection for all those others who also believe this same gospel. These are some of the universal authenticators of genuine saving faith that are never missing from the heart of the truly converted. *(Recount the effects on the believers immediately following Pentecost - Repentance, Assembly, Prayer, Unselfish Giving of goods to other believers in need)*

## Verses 9-10:

## (Main Teaching Texts)

*9 For this reason also, since the day we heard [of it,] we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

Col 1:9-10 (NASB)

In verse 9 Paul tells the Colossians that he and his fellow brethren have continually prayed for them since learning of their new faith and belief in the gospel. Specifically, that they would be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding. To the end result that they would walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects. This is called bearing fruit, which is the good works produced by this knowledge of God's will through those righteous acts that issue from it. And it is this alone that man has as an offering to please God, joyful, willing obedience. It is pleasing to God when His children know His will and choose to do it joyfully because they know this pleases Him.

Paul is saying that both the emerging, and progressive work, of every believer is to become more and more knowledgeable of God's will, to the end result that it might begin inducing conformity to it in their own lives, and thus prove pleasing to God. They have been set on a path of spiritual maturity that yields the fruits of sanctification and Christlikeness in every true believer. This is the will of God for all His children, their sanctification and transformation, and is intended by Him to become their primary passion and pursuit. (Rom 6:22, 8:29; Eph 4:11-13; Phi 2:12-15; 1Th 4:3)

We often hear people say that they're seeking to find God's will for their life. This is good, we should want to know His will for our life, but I guess it must be really well hidden, because it's surprising how few ever say that they've actually found it. Some seem to think that they have to figure out every minute detail of life, from the color of their clothes, to what they're supposed to have for breakfast, or they aren't really doing God's will. Some seem to believe that the whole purpose of our salvation is to make us evangelists, so that we can then in turn save others. But most just don't seem to know either what it is or how and where to find it. *But is it really such a deep mystery? I wonder; what do we actually mean, and what do we expect to find, when we say that we're seeking to know God's will for our lives?*

I wonder if Moses got up one morning and said to himself, "I've finally got it! I've just figured out God's will for my life. Today I'm going to murder an Egyptian slave master and run away to Midian, where I'll live for 40 years, and then be called audibly by God out of a burning bush to lead the Jews out of Egypt through the red sea, which God will part for us, and then through the desert for 40 more years, in which time I'll write the first 5 books of the bible, and then I'll die and some guy named Joshua will lead the rest of them into the promised land. Boy what a job I have to do, now that I know I guess I better get started right away." *(Is this our idea of knowing God's will for our life?)*

Now all of this was in fact the will of God for Moses' life wasn't it? But Moses never knew all this until it actually happened. God didn't choose to tell him all this in advance, and there's obviously no possible way that he could have figured it out on his own. Yes, God certainly does have a purpose for our lives, and He sovereignly and providentially works out His purposes with every creature that He's ever made, but rare and few are those whom He tells specific details in advance. God has chosen to reveal some things, and to conceal other things, all at His own discretion. Our part is to learn and know those things that He has revealed, and trust that He does, and He will, providentially work out all those things that He hasn't chosen to reveal.

## IMPORTANT

**God has chosen to reveal three things that every believer should know, and if we do, then we know all that God has chosen to reveal to us about how we are to know and pursue His will during our lifetime:**

**1. Salvation.** God desires that we be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, which includes, who actually does it, how it's done, and eventually as we mature, everything that's involved in it. (1 Tim 2:4)

The first step for every one of God's chosen is that day when they are born again through the gift of saving faith as concerning Jesus Christ as the Son of God and His substitutionary atonement for our sins. This is the starting point for every believer, and nothing happens of spiritual value before this. There may be many noteworthy things that happen that help contribute to this through the providence of God, but this itself is a Christian's starting line in the discovery of God's will for our lives.

**2. Sanctification.** (1Th 4:3) Immediately upon conversion there is the commencement of a lifelong process which is called sanctification, and this is exactly what Paul is saying in verse 10 of this chapter that we're studying. Everywhere that the gospel is presented in the scriptures, there is an immediate following of behavioral expectations upon those whom that gospel has been presented and believed. The spiritual wisdom and understanding for which Paul prayed for the Colossians was intended to be a spiritual causation, and the effect of that cause is that they would *"walk in a manner that is worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects"* The scriptures never suggest that we're supposed to be able to read the future, or entirely figure out every detail of this life that we've been granted, but simply that we are to learn, and then faithfully obey, the things that God has told us plainly. What is God's will for us? Well, that we would walk in a manner that is worthy of Him is certainly a vital part of it.

Sanctification is a participation sport. By that I mean that one is either a direct player in the game, or one has no involvement at all. We cannot sit on the sideline and watch sanctification play itself out before our eyes like one watches a ball game. You're either in or you out, and it's a daily activity. For example: No matter how many Sunday afternoon football games you watch on TV, and how much you learn about the game, you'll never become a pro football player sitting on your couch watching it on TV. No one will enter the kingdom of heaven but those who have traveled the treacherous road of sanctification. (Mat 5:20, 7:21; Rom 2:13, 6:22; Act 14:22)

**3. Transformation.** (Rom 8:29, 12:1-2) First, let me make a clarification. For the sake of this teaching I'm making a distinction between sanctification and transformation in this manner. By in large, sanctification is thought of, and spoken of, as dealing mostly, though admittedly not exclusively, with actions and behaviors. Whereas transformation is spoken of mostly as something that happens in the mind, and deals with attitudes, affections, desires, and motivations. And it is in this way that the distinction is intended for the purpose of this specific teaching.

Conformity to Christlikeness, in our thinking, our feeling, our loving, and our passionate desire for righteousness and holiness is the mandate for every disciple, and the driving force for the sanctification of behaviors. But even more than that, this combination of transformation and sanctification is that which forms this one new man, changed inside and outside as it were, and by the judicious use of these means we may visibly demonstrate our gratitude for so great a salvation. And furthermore, this is the preparation process by which the bride **makes herself ready** for that glorious wedding day proclaimed in Revelation 19, where Jesus takes His bride, the matured church, and returns to earth with her to take His place as King of kings, and Lord of lords. Amen, Hallelujah!

That's pretty much it. Now we know that we could spend weeks and weeks on each one of these three topics individually, but that's not my intention right now. For now, I just want to make it clear to everyone that God's will for us can be pretty accurately summed up in just these three areas. If we know that God's desire for us, at least as much as He's determined to reveal, is that we are saved, we are sanctified, and we are being transformed to Christlikeness, then we have something definable to pursue, and we won't go off looking for something ethereal or mystical. *(For instance)*

He doesn't expect us to know, or figure out, every detail of forthcoming events in our entire earthly lives. He doesn't have a predestined shirt color that He wants us to figure out for every day of the week. Let me use an example. We had a woman in our church for awhile who actually thought this. She told us that she would stand in her closet every morning and wait for "a word from the Lord" as to what color blouse she should wear that day. In further conversations it became apparent that she was a lonely single woman who was seeking attention. She wanted others to see her as a spiritual "superwoman" who had a "special connection" with God, so that she would be popular and people would notice her. We were sad for her, and tried to make her welcome, but eventually we had to, as gently as possible, tell her that what she was practicing wasn't biblical Christianity but traditional pagan mysticism. Sadly, she wasn't willing to receive this, and we never saw her again afterwards.

You see, in our conversations with her, she had indicated that she believed in a woman's right to have an abortion, and she saw nothing wrong with homosexuality, and she felt that women should be allowed to hold leadership positions in the church. When discussing the biblical positions on these things she had no knowledge whatever, nor did she want to hear or discuss what the scriptures said. To her, Christianity was, and consisted in, this mystical connection to God that she believed she had developed in her mind, and if she lost that then she lost her claim to Christianity.

We knew the risk before we spoke to her, because not everyone wants to hear the truth. Now this lady wasn't an actual church member but she had become a regular visitor, but nevertheless if the church isn't willing to speak the truth to correct errors, for fear of losing someone, then what's the point of having anybody there? In fact, a church that intentionally avoids confronting error for the sake of numeric growth or member retention has become part of the problem, not part of the solution. Paul called the church the pillar and foundation of the truth. Remove, or compromise divine truth, and there's nothing left but a meaningless monument, no matter how many members it may have in it. And we already have an abundance of these in our city, one can see little need for another.

But, concerning God's purpose for our life and our liberty of choices, the Lord has given His children an immense degree of latitude to do and pursue whatever we desire in our lives. Only that we do it in a godly manner. If what we desire to do violates the principles of righteousness, or integrity, then by all means we must abstain, but otherwise we may do whatever we wish to do, if it's a righteous and godly action. Paul said that all things were legal for him, but he had to be very careful with this liberty, because he understood that not all things, even the legal ones, were profitable for him. Now obviously, he didn't mean he could sin legally, he means that we have been granted immense freedom of choice in our daily lives and activities, but at the same time, we are responsible to use that freedom sensibly, profitably, and always to the glory of God.

It is my desire for us to know that nothing less than this: salvation, sanctification, and transformation is fulfilling God's desire for our lives, but at the same time nothing more is required either. *(Explain what I mean)*

If we wish to know and do God's will in our lives, out of a heartfelt loving affection and appreciation, then we need to know what are His revealed means by which we are to accomplish that. God has given us both the scriptures and His Spirit to make us aware of His will for our lives, and to make us suitable family members and eternal worshippers.

Salvation is of the Lord; and it's not he who wills or he who runs, but God who has mercy; and it's God working in us, both to will and to act for His good pleasure. You recognize these verses don't you, but do you also recognize that although we fully attest to God's absolute sovereignty in every aspect of our salvation, and even the will and empowerment to act upon His directions, nevertheless the deployment of that sovereignty is such that it acts upon the will of man to enjoin him to joyful and willing participation with God in these processes of salvation, sanctification, and transformation; by which we are ultimately to be made mirror images of Christ Jesus Himself, by the power which He has to subject all things to Himself. (Phi 3:21) *(Discuss this - Man is commanded to diligently seek to know and do God's will by positive actions)*

We must know for certain that to be living a life that is fulfilling God's will for us includes all three of these elements. First, we must be saved by faith. Then, we must be actively practicing sanctification through the pursuit of righteousness. And finally, it is essential that the direction of our lives is a transforming toward Christlikeness, or we are not doing God's will in our lives. A salvation that doesn't include ongoing sanctification and ongoing transformation is at best far short of God's will, and at worst not really a true salvation at all. It is the presence of all three, and the love of them, that provides us with the blessed assurance of our salvation, and is the means by which we demonstrate our love of the Lord. (Jn 14:15; Rom 2:13-15) As we said earlier, knowing God's will and walking in a manner worthy of Him is a cause and effect process. The one is for the express purpose of inducing the other. God shows us His will so that we will then come to both desire it and do it. (v.10)

I hope we clearly see and understand this with certainty, because ever since the beginning of the church the gospel has been under various forms of assault. If I may now apply this briefly to a contemporary matter. There is presently a trend to divest salvation from sanctification, and this isn't by any means new. Much of evangelical Christianity has simply striped down the gospel to anything that will illicit a response. It doesn't even have to be about Christ, and sin, and repentance. And anything that induces someone to come forward at the end of a sermon is deemed acceptable material, and the respondent a bonafide believer. Consequently, what has happened is that now we have reduced the church to a self-perpetuating machine, that sees its purpose as solely to multiply and expand itself. It doesn't seem to understand what it actually is, or why it exists.

For example, we evangelicals have taken to the practice of applying a non-biblical term to the true biblical directive to preach the gospel throughout the earth, and to teach what Jesus taught to everyone who has an ear to hear it. We've termed this mandate "The Great Commission." And a great and noble commission it is indeed. But I have said before,

and still insist, that if there is a biblical mandate that merits such a term, it would more aptly be our mandate to be conformed to the image of Christ, so that He would be the first born of many brethren. Now, among all those marvelous and glorious mandates taught to us believers in the scriptures, that's truly one that may be rightly labeled "The Great Commission" of a believer, according to the consistent and properly prioritized teachings of the holy scriptures. "Be holy as I am holy" (1Pe 1:15), "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mat 5:48) Now I ask you, where in the bible is mankind commissioned with greater and nobler charges than these, show it to me please if you can? Are these not also words of holy scripture, and if so, then why don't we hear these verses preached with equal fervency?

What began as the expression of the glorious body of Christ for the glory of God, has been reduced to a perpetual motion machine that can't seem to see beyond its next convert. It's as if it no longer remembers, or even cares, who makes them, how they're made, or what's their purpose. Just keep em coming and we're doing our jobs. This attitude is totally centered on the perceived needs of man alone, with no regard whatever to the glory of God in the matter.

Listen, what glorifies God is that sinners repent of their sins. Yes, it is glorious that God forgives, but it's the resultant transformation, born of regeneration by the Spirit of God, for which He truly receives glory. Any criminal can receive a pardon, but when a hardened criminal is transformed into a model citizen, then something really noteworthy has happened, and recognition is in order. God's forgiveness rightly induces our thankful appreciation, because it keeps us from His terrible judgement. But, God's regeneration and transformation of our hearts and minds, that rightly induces passionate affection, and heartfelt worship, which qualifies us for entry into His eternal kingdom. That's what God wants from our salvation. There's a whole lot more going on in God's cosmic master plan than just keeping some people out of hell; though sadly, most of professing Christianity either can't, or won't, look past this single issue alone.

"By all means keep me out of hell, but please don't give me orders, or saddle me with responsibilities." That's been the predominant attitude of evangelical Christianity at least since Spurgeon started preaching the downgrade principal in the 1800's. But this is a pitifully deficient comprehension of the glorious will of God for His elect children.

The purpose of God for His elect is that after their being saved by the gift of faith that He freely bestows upon them, that they would then begin a lifelong journey down an admittedly narrow, difficult, and even sometimes perilous path that leads His elect to eternal life, as a child of God, and a suitable mate to Christ.

He doesn't mandate what city you live in, what car you drive, what you eat or don't eat, or what you choose to do for a living. We are free to pursue whatever we desire in regards to such issues as these, as long as we do it in a godly manner and with godly motives. We have a freedom that sinners don't enjoy, because we're no longer enslaved to sin, to only do its desires continually, but we have been freed from its tyranny and power over us by the substitutionary death of Christ and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. (Rom 6:17-18)

Nevertheless, even us true believers are often guilty of misusing this freedom and making choices that are legal perhaps, but not altogether profitable for our long term spiritual progress. And so we must grow and mature, gaining wisdom from our experiences, and ever seeking more and deeper knowledge of His will through the study of His scriptures, as He has provided none other way by which we are to learn and mature in this knowledge of Him than these very scriptures alone. To neglect them is to neglect the Lord. To be apathetic toward the scriptures is to be apathetic toward the Lord Himself, because He and His word are one and the same. (Jn 1:1) Make no mistake, an aversion to the scriptures is an aversion to God.

We may have heard it said by various people that they really do love God, but they just don't much care for the bible. As if it were possible to split the two apart. That's like saying I love humanity, I just don't like people. We recognize this last phrase as a humorous contradiction, and we chuckle when we hear it, but there are multitudes who actually believe the former phrase about God and His word is possible. But the former is just as impossible as the latter. Just as humanity is the sum of all people, likewise God is the sum of all that He says and reveals to us through the scriptures.

If you think you love God, but you don't also love the scriptures, then what you love is a god that you've invented yourself in your own mind, built with your own emotions, and custom tailored to your own specifications, not the majestic, holy, and sovereign God of the bible.

Many are those who do in fact love this god that they've manufactured in their minds, because he's just exactly what they want him to be, and he makes no judgements and he issues no demands on their lives. When they die he'll faithfully whisk them off to heaven, no questions asked. This is an easy god to sell, and multitudes upon multitudes have bought in on him. In fact, I'll freely concede that this god holds a significant numerical advantage, in sheer volume of followers, than does the true and living God, in the majority of professing evangelical churches of today.

Does this sound like the god that you worship? I surely hope not, because this customized and manmade god is destined to tragically and hopelessly disappoint all of his followers on that day when they stand before the real and true God, who will judge every person ever conceived.

One does not come to truly know God, and His ultimate will for us, in any other way but by the understanding that he receives from the Spirit's enlightenment of the holy scriptures. Knowing God's will for our lives will only come as we make ourselves familiar with His scriptures, and begin diligently implementing them into our daily lives. God's will for us is not intuitive to man in its nature, it is divinely revelatory. And, as Paul seeks to teach, causes a resultant reaction in both the behaviors and also the attitudes and motives of those who hear and believe it. The ever growing knowledge of God's will produces the inward desire to do those things that are pleasing to Him in all respects, through a corresponding pattern of actions and behaviors that are a fitting and appropriate demonstration of righteousness among those who have come to know and love the Lord.

May we ever seek to grow and mature in this spiritual wisdom and understanding, to the end that we are indeed pleasing to God in every respect, and bearing appropriate fruits of righteousness - to His eternal glory. Amen.

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