



Sermon – September 6, 2020
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 1:9

1 Thessalonians 4:3

Colossians 2:2 – 3

1 Corinthians 11:27 - 28

Let me invite you to open your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1 this morning. We're going to be in verse 9 today as we continue our series through Colossians. If you're a first time guest with us, welcome home. We're glad you're here. Now I just want us to remember as we come to the text this morning, why we gather each week on Sunday. The Scripture calls us to not give up meeting together so that we might be spurred on by the Spirit to keep pressing on in the faith. And what we do at Central is come to the text each week knowing that God will meet us in His word and use it to make us more like Jesus.

So here we are on Labor Day. This holiday weekend that celebrates the gift of work. And we see work happening in Colossians. Last week we saw the way that the gospel is the word of truth that's at work in the world. And now we're going to find this morning the way that that same gospel is at work in each one of our hearts by revealing God's will for our life. So let's see what Paul has to tell us this morning beginning in verse 9. Here's what he says.

⁹And 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.

Now I imagine one of the most common questions that Christians wrestle with on a consistent basis is, what is God's will for my life? How do I know what God would have me do next? Maybe you're at an inflection point in your life. You're trying to think about a new job opportunity or moving into a new house or should you ask that girl out or should you keep dating him or any number of issues. We're constantly, if we're seeking the Lord, coming to the question, how do I know God's will for my life? What should we do next? What we're going to find this morning as we come to this text is Paul is going to give us a model for what it looks like to pursue God's will for our life through prayer.

So think about what's happening here. He's just finished his greeting to the Colossian church and now he turns his attention to prayer. And for the next several weeks as we work our way through Colossians 1, he's going to highlight several different aspects of what he's praying for the Colossians and for us. And what we're going to notice this morning in Colossians 1:9 is that Paul calls us to pray that we would seek God's will through wisdom. Notice how he begins the text here. He starts off and what we want to see is that before we think about what Paul prays, we want to notice how he was praying. So look at how he begins there. He says, "And so." In other words, picking up on what he's already said, he is now building upon it. He says, since we have heard of these things. He's reminding them of the fact that even though he's never met them, that he's encountered the Colossians faith, and he is lifting them up in prayer. And what type of prayer is it? Do you see it right there at the beginning of verse 9? It tells us that he has not ceased to pray. He is praying without ceasing. There is a sense of relentless prayer that's here. The type of prayer that is relentless. It's unwavering. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's continuous every second, but it cannot be stopped. It's a bit like that rain that came down yesterday. It ebbed and flowed all day, but it was a consistent presence with us. Or maybe it'll hit closer to home in a couple months at Thanksgiving when you feel like you're eating and snacking all day. It comes and goes in waves but it's always there with you. Or as we get closer to the election season. The political coverage will pick up. It will be unceasing in how it feels. It will be relentless in how much it is around us. When Paul speaks here of having unceasing prayer for the Colossians, that's the picture that he's giving us. Not that prayer fills every moment of our day, but perhaps that prayer fills every movement of our day. That each time we step into a new aspect of what God is doing throughout our day, we are turning our hearts to him in prayer. And when Paul does that, one of the things he is praying is for the Colossians. It's fitting that we're coming to this prayer just a week after our staff has returned from its staff retreat. Because when we gather together for a time of prayer and planning and preparation, one of the main things that we discussed in our retreat time was our desire to continue to foster a heart for prayer in the life of Central. That prayer would be a central facet of who we are as a church. And that's one of the reasons why, as we start the next three weeks journeying through this prayer of Paul, I'd like to issue a prayer challenge to each one of you. I want to know if you'll join me in committing to 21 days of prayer together as a church. Here's the idea. It's not complicated. I just want to keep it simple for us. Coming out of Paul's call to be unceasing in prayer, I want to challenge us to be unceasing in our prayer over these next 21 days. And here's all I'm asking of you. Would you make a commitment along with me that for the next 21 days you will seek to write down one specific prayer request every day? One request every day for the next 21 days. But not just any kind of request. A specific request. One that you can see the way that God shows up. Not God would you bless my day today. Or not God would you help this meeting that I'm about to have go well. But something with specificity. Something that at the end of the season you can look back on and see the Lord at work. That's what I would love to see us do as a church. Is to follow Paul's model of unceasing prayer collectively. To commit for the next three weeks, culminating on the last Sunday in September a 21 day or prayer emphasis where what we do is we pray for provision, for direction, for decisions. That we pray both our plans and our problems and do it with specificity. Are you up for that? I hope you are. Because what Paul is showing us here is that he is modelling a call to unceasing prayer. But it's not just a generic prayer for the Colossians. Look back at the text because in verse 9, now that we see how Paul prays, let's examine what it is that he prays for them. Do you see what he prays? The middle of verse 9 he says,

asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will,

So how does Paul describe the nature of his prayer? It's one of asking. In the original language, it's more intense than this. It's that of a deep request, a begging, a longing, a pleading on behalf of something. There's a sense of desire and desperation like a beggar pleading for coins. There is this longing that's there. And what is he specifically asking for? Not the types of things we so often pray for. Whether that's success or provision or ease. No, what does he pray for? He's praying that they would be filled with the knowledge of God's will. What does it mean to be filled? I mean when you think about the way somebody's described, you say, they were filled with joy after their newborn baby came. Or they were filled with rage after they got slighted. What we're talking about is that that characteristic is what defines them. That's the essence of who they are at the moment. And when Paul speaks here of being filled with the knowledge of His will, he's saying, "That should be at the essence of what we are seeking." It's the character that we are seeking to capture in our own lives. He speaks there of knowledge. That's the same word, if you were to look back in verse 6 coming from the same word as when he talks about how we understood the grace of God in truth. And it's not just an informational knowledge, but a relational knowledge. It's the kind of knowledge that after a long time of marriage, when you step into the restaurant, you know what your spouse wants to drink and you order for them while they're in the restroom. Or it's the kind of relational knowledge that you know how many days your roommate's going to leave his dishes in the sink before he actually cleans them. Or it's the type of knowledge that your Aggie football junkie friend can tell you every stat in recruiting history of every player on the 85-man roster. That's the type of knowledge that he has in mind here. It's deep, abiding, relational in connection. He wants them to have a full knowledge of God's design for their life.

I want you to hold your spot here with me and flip over a few books to the right to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. Because if Paul's prayer is that we would have a knowledge of God's will, then we need to ask ourselves the question, "What is God's will for our life?" And he's going to give us the answer in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 just to set it up. Paul is giving us a call in this passage to holiness. Specifically, in this passage, towards sexual purity. But his, his message to the Thessalonians starts off with the most clear description in the New Testament of what God's will is for the life of every Christian and I want you to see it beginning in verse 3. Simple and straightforward.

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

Do you see it there?

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

That's what Paul is speaking of. He says, if you want to know God's will for your life, the question is not, where should you go, but how should you grow? How can you grow to become more like Christ? That's what sanctification is always about. It's becoming more like the Savior who has rescued us from sin. And so God's primary will for you and for me is that we become more like Jesus. And that we would filter every decision that we make in life through that lens. There's a sense in which we can know God's will every time. We don't have to wonder what He has designed for us. He's going to lead you in the way that will make you most like Christ. And

so what that means is when you're in that dating situation, what if the primary thing that he is focused on is not about finding the right person, but becoming the right person. Or maybe with that job, it's a situation where it's not primarily about finding the right type of work, but becoming the right type of worker. That's the picture that Paul is giving in 1 Thessalonians 4:3. This idea that the will of God for our lives is to grow us up to be more like Jesus. And what that means for us is that God is less interested in answering the question, what should I do, than in addressing the question, who should I become? It's less about where am I going, but how am I growing in Christ? And so if that's true, if God's will for our lives is our sanctification, to become more like Jesus. When Paul speaks, if you look back in Colossians 1, about how he is praying that they would have the knowledge of God's will. He is praying for them to know what it looks like to grow to be more like Jesus. And so we should be asking ourselves, how do we know God's will for our life? If His will is for us to grow, and if that's going to shape where we go, then how do we know when those circumstances come?

This week I was out on Tuesday night with my boys at the Trail Life gathering. If you haven't heard us talk about it, it's basically Christian discipleship through outdoor education. Where we invest in young boys to help them learn outdoor skills and to encounter Jesus at the same time. So I was out with our 5-year-old Hudson and all the kindergartners. And Cliff Parks was out there leading the session on orienteering. And this is where you try to teach them how to use maps and compasses. It's the first time in like 20 years I've seen a physical atlas. He had one buried somewhere and brought it out. And these kids are looking at this thing saying, "What is this? Can I pinch to zoom it in?" They're trying to figure out how this thing works. But he walked them through the way that a map can guide you on a path. And then after that, he brought out a compass and showed how a compass can guide you in the way that you're going. And the question that we need to wrestle with this morning is this. Is the way to know God's will more like a map or a compass? See a map starts with you and it ends with your preferred destination. And the entire time that you are using that map, it is centered around you and where you desire to go. That doesn't sound like the way God would lead us, right? Instead, what does a compass do? Instead of being centered on you, a compass is centered on something outside of you. That true North, that guiding principle that orients the compass. And when you align the North on your compass with True North, then in relation to that thing that's outside of yourself and more significant than you, then you can travel on the path that you are being led on. That's the picture of knowing God's will that we find in the Scripture. And that that True North for us as Christians is Jesus Christ. He is the one that we are to be seeking trusting that when we orient our lives around Him, He will grant us wisdom in the way to walk in His will. Just think about it. If you look at the Scripture. So often God's people are guided, not by maps, but by compasses. God leads Abraham away from his homeland and into a far country. God brings Moses out of Egypt. He, they sojourn in the wilderness now knowing where they were going but following a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. God meets Paul on the Damascus road. He opens blind eyes. He turns someone who is bent on persecution to someone who is now focused on proclamation. But he doesn't lay out the steps of the rest of his life. He doesn't tell him, "You're going to go on this missionary journey and you're going to reach these people and then you're going to be in prison for this period of time." Instead, what does he do? He guides him into growth in Christ and shows him how to walk faithfully. See, when Paul speaks here of praying for the Colossians, that they would have a knowledge of God's will, the only way we can find that is if we seek in the way that God has designed us to seek it. And the problem that we can so often find ourselves in is that if we're seeking God's will by the compass

model, there are many ways that we can be brought off course. For instance, we can choose a different True North than Jesus. Maybe it's success, power, significance, comfort. That becomes the guiding principle that drives our life and it leads us into directions that God doesn't design. Or maybe we struggle at times with a lack of faith. Where we want to walk by sight rather than by faith. We don't just want to know God's will, we want to be God Himself. We see beyond that tendency to fear. That we know what God is calling us to. We can sense where He is leading but we're afraid to take that step. To walk in commitment to what He has called us to. Or maybe it's an impatience. Where want not just to know God's will, but we want to know it on our own timetable. And with our own outcomes. Or maybe for some of you it's distraction. Perhaps, if we're being honest, our biggest problem isn't that we seek God's will for our life too much, but actually that we seek it far too little. When the big moments come, when life is difficult, when there's major decisions that have to be made, we can cry out to God longing to know what He desires for our life. That's the kind of knowledge of His will that we want. But what about in the small things? What about in the quiet moments? What about when no one's looking? If you remember a few weeks ago we had a man named David Eubank here that spoke to the men of our church and the community. He leads this humanitarian organization called Free Burma Rangers. And I got to spend a number of hours with them throughout that week in various settings. You know one of the things that stood out to me most? I saw this call to unceasing prayer for the knowledge of God's will playing out over and over again in his life. He would be faced with a decision point, something that me in my flesh would just say, "Well, I've got a couple of options here. Let me see what makes the most sense to me and I'm going to choose it." Instead, in those moments, you know what he would do? He would pause to pray. He would gather the circle of us that were with him and say, "Let's pray about this for a minute. Lord, we can do this, we can do this, we're not sure what to do, but we know that You know what's best. Would You guide us in this?" And that momentary pause for prayer in the small things, is part of what Paul is seeking to cultivate in our own lives. Because if we don't seek Him even in the small moments, you know what the biggest danger for each one of us is? That the pull in our life will not be towards Christ, but instead, towards comfort. So let me put it to you like this. What if right now the one thing that you are praying that God takes out of your life is actually what He is using most to make you more like Jesus? And He has that there, He is giving you a knowledge of His will as Paul speaks of because He is committed to conform you to Christ, to help you grow up in the faith. Now remember what Paul is doing here. He is praying that we would understand God's will. And that's one of the reasons why, as we begin this journey through the next several weeks in Paul's prayer, I want to invite us into this 21-day prayer challenge. That each day we are writing out prayers with specificity praying our plans, praying our problems, trusting that God will reveal His providence and meet His people in the prayers at the same time.

And I want you to notice the way that this passage finishes. Because when we look at verse 9, Paul prays in a very particular way for them about what it looks like to know God's will. He prays that they would be filled with the knowledge of His will. Now look back at the end of verse 9 where he says this:

[in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,](#)

So how do we seek God's will for our lives? He says, through spiritual wisdom and understanding. Think about the type of wisdom he speaks of there. It's not a worldly wisdom,

but what does he say? A spiritual wisdom. Remember, from the very beginning, the people of God have sought out wisdom apart from God's design for their life. That's what happened with Eve. When she's confronted by the serpent in the garden, and he offers her the fruit, one of the things that entices her about it is that she recognizes it would be desirable to make one wise. She was seeking after a worldly wisdom. But Paul warns us here that instead, we should be called to a different way. To go after spiritual wisdom and understanding. So then we need to be asking ourselves the question, how do we seek that? How do we grow in spiritual wisdom and understanding? And if you're looking in Colossians, look one chapter over to Colossians 2, verses 2 and 3. Because we're going to find here where it is that we can find this spiritual wisdom and understanding for our lives as we're seeking God's will. Here's what it says. He says:

²that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,

Now catch this.

³in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

You see it? Where do we find wisdom? Where do we find knowledge? Where do we find understanding? Colossians 2:3 tells us that spiritual wisdom and understanding are found in Jesus Himself. It's not in some worldly wisdom on the basis of secular principles. Instead, it is the God of the universe who has sent His one and only Son for us to die the death that we deserved, be raised from the dead, paying our penalty for our sins so that we might receive His grace. And in that gospel, God has given wisdom to us in His Son. The Scripture tells us it is a treasure to be sought. So if you want to seek God's will, you need to seek His wisdom. And if you want to seek His wisdom, you need to seek His Son. That's why 1 Thessalonians 4:3 was telling us earlier in the message that the will of God is our sanctification. That as we grow in Christ, we grow in wisdom. That God helps us to understand His design for the world and how it is that we should live in it. That's what wisdom is. And then when he speaks there in Colossians 1:9 of understanding, it's taking that framework of wisdom and applying it to the specific decisions that we have to make in our life. And what we know from our New Testament is that the Spirit of God is at work to bring that about in our lives through illumination. And to make God's design, His will known to us. And the question that we need to be wrestling with this morning is, have you experienced the treasure of Christ's wisdom? Have you reached that end point in yourself? Where you sought to make your own way. To find your own deliverance. To save yourself from the problems that you've had. Are you ready to start doubting your own wisdom and trusting in Christ? Are you ready to embrace Him as the treasure of your life to be sought above all else? That is the call of the gospel that we see here in Colossians 1:9.

I was reminded of the way that God is at work revealing and bringing about His will in our life when I met with some Legacy Adults in our church this week. This is family that has been a part of Central for almost as long as I've been alive. And there was a period of their time in their life where the husband lost his job. It seemed like there was no future for them here in College Station. They had reached a decision in their family that they were going to pursue work wherever they could find it. He was offered a job in Dallas and they had just determined to put a For Sale sign in their front yard when they did that and then headed to church at Central. And

through the message that day, as God met them through His word and His Spirit, they had a total change of heart. They recognized that God's will for their life was not to leave this community for the comfort of Dallas, but to stay rooted in this community even though they didn't know how it was going to work. For the next nearly year and a half, they struggled, they labored, there was financial hardship, I'm sure there was family difficulties that went along with that. But the Lord met them in their need. He provided a way for them when they followed in His will and as they reflected back on these last 30 years, you could see that this was a turning point in their life. Where when they followed God's will, He met them on the way and it changed everything for them. So as we gather here this morning, there may be some of you that are sure that God is leading you to do something, but you're scared to do something about it. And there's others of you who are confident that you think you know what's next for you, but you may be confronted with the reality that God has a different plan in mind. And the call to each one of us is that as we look to Colossians 1, that we should be committed to the type of prayer that Paul models for us here. That at the heart of what we are longing for is the knowledge of God's will so that we might become more like Jesus Christ.

And isn't it fitting that as we come to this Texas morning that we are about to, in just a moment, gather around the Lord's table to receive the bread and the cup. Because in this act of taking the cup, what we are doing is reorienting ourselves to the True North of the gospel. Think about what the purpose of the Lord's Supper is. That we're not just hearing the gospel proclaimed, but we're tasting of the gospel through partaking of Christ's broken body and His spilled blood. And that's why we gather monthly to do this. And we invite each one of you during the response time to prepare your hearts to partake of this Lord's Supper. If you know Christ, if you're following Him as a baptized believer, we want to invite you, after I pray, and we're singing the response song, if you haven't already, to rise to your feet and make your way to one of the tables that's around the room. And we have these individually packaged Lord's Supper cup. And you can grab those for yourself, for your family, and make your way back to your seat. And we will practice the Lord's Supper after this. As we prepare ourselves for that, I want us to read a word about preparing our hearts for the Lord's Supper from 1 Corinthians 11 in verse 27 and then we'll pray. Paul says,

²⁷Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment we are coming here, ready to prepare our hearts, ready to partake of this bread which signifies Your broken body. And I pray that You would orient us to You, Lord, and to Your gospel. May we examine ourselves. Lord, I'm asking that You would enable us to reject evil and to walk in the way of holiness. May we be the type of people who are running after your will in our lives to a spiritual wisdom and understanding. And may we be a church that stands united in Christ, empowered by Your Holy Spirit so that our hearts may remain fixed on You. We ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.