

**“Kingdom Mindset and Manners”**  
**Colossians 1:9-14**

**January 19, 2014**

**SI:** We’re studying Paul’s letter to the Colossians this winter.

Paul did not plant the church in Colossae and he had never visited it.

But he wrote them this letter because the man who did start the church, Epaphras, had come to visit Paul and seek his advice about some teaching that was troubling the church.

In these verses, Paul tells them that even though he’s never met them, he prays for them. He’s been praying for them ever since he heard about them. Notice what the things Paul asks God to give them tells us about the Christian life.

**INTRO:** Last summer Adrienne went to Scotland for a couple weeks. She went with her roommate who had lived there for eight years.

They had a wonderful trip. It was quite an adventure.

Lauren Johnson was living in Scotland at the time, so it was great fun to connect with a Cullmanite and crash in her apartment in Edinburgh.

Adrienne's roommate had some old Scottish friends, and they drove all over, to Loch Ness, the Isle of Skye.

When she got home and was telling us all about it we finally asked—

Was there anything you didn't like about Scotland?

And she said, Yes—there was something that I didn't like.

It really bothered me. It's the way everybody is so passive.

They're not lazy, but even the people our age have no big plans or dreams.

They don't think they can change things, they just accept things the way they are.

Even if they wanted to do something, let themselves be carried by circumstances.

She said, I never realized how much of an American I am.

and how I believe that if you want to achieve something you plan it and go for it.

If I tried to live in Scotland, that passive approach to life would drive me crazy.

We had that conversation early in the summer.

Then, later in the summer, I was in Greenville, SC for the General Assembly,

and as I was walking to a meeting, I fell in step with a young minister

in his early 30s who happened to be from Scotland.

He had been in America for a couple years pastoring a church in Georgia.

So I asked him, What do you not like about America?

At first he wouldn't say anything, I could tell he was being polite.

But I said, No, I'm curious, tell me. What really bothers you about America?

He said: You want to know what drives me crazy?

American's can-do optimism.

You Americans think you can do anything, you say to follow your dreams.

That's unrealistic. There are insurmountable obstacles in life.

And if you don't face that fact, you will be forever discontent.

I told him Adrienne's observation and he said: We're not passive, we're realists.

There is such a thing as national character.

Your thinking, your way of approaching life, your mindset and manners

are indelibly shaped by the nation of which you are a part.

And sometimes it takes going to another country to really see that character in you.

Now what does that have to do with these verses?

One of the things Paul tries to do in this letter over and over and over,  
is give the Colossian believers a grand view of the Christian life.

He wants them to see how extraordinary it is to be a Christian.

He's pushing back against these ideas going around the Colossian church  
that if we are going to have the fullness, we need something new and different.  
We need something more than just the gospel and Jesus Christ.

He says in these verses that being a Christian is like  
being a foreigner living in another country.

As a Christian, it becomes more and more clear to you that the way you think,  
and the way you act is radically different from the people around you.

And that's because you have been transformed into a citizen of a different nation.

Or, if we are going to use Paul's terminology here—  
you have become the subject of a different kingdom.

Paul says in verses 12 and 13

God has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. He has  
rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.

That's Exodus language. That's Old Testament salvation language.

The inheritance of the saints is a way of talking about the Promised Land.

The dominion of darkness points to slavery in Egypt.

God brought them out and made them into a new people, a new nation.

He gave them a new identity, new laws, new values, new holidays.

That's exactly what happens when you become a Christian.

You are still living among people who are under the dominion of darkness.

They don't see they are enslaved, but you do. Because you were once there.

You were once a subject of the kingdom of darkness. You once lived in sin.

You see and understand the power of it. You feel it tugging you back.

An old part of you wants to go back.

But as a citizen of the kingdom of light, you have a new national character,  
you have a new way of thinking and acting.

Paul says: I'm praying you grow into that new national character in two ways:

That your thinking and your actions will continue to change.

That the way you look at yourself and the world will more and more reflect the  
mindset of the kingdom of light, and that your manners would be more and more  
consistent with that kingdom as well. Look at both and apply to ourselves.

## **MP#1 When you come into kingdom of the Son, your thinking is changed.**

Paul prays that this of thinking will continue and mature. Vs. 9.

Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. It's a prayer about our intellect. It's a prayer for the life of the mind—for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding.

This prayer challenges two notions that many American evangelical Christians have about the connection between our intellect and our faith. The first notion is that deep down many Christians feel there is a tension between the life of the mind and the life of faith.

For some Christians, being unlearned is considered a credential.

The less a person knows, the more honest and real his spiritual life is likely to be. Someone says: I'm no Bible scholar, I don't have much book learning, I'm just a simple Bible reader, but what this seems to say to me is . . . Which is really saying: You can trust what I say more because I haven't studied. In other settings, those words would sound ridiculous. Imagine a doctor or a financial planner saying something similar.

But when it comes to Christian life, those words don't sound strange to us because we imagine the two options are bare, dry doctrine or vibrant, genuine faith. Now there is a danger of intellectualism. I'll come back to it in a moment. But we should push back against the notion that intellect and faith are somehow at odds with each other, or that studying and learning is not as genuine and real as intuitively sensing or feeling.

When Paul prays for them to be filled with a knowledge of his will, that is synonymous with praying for a knowledge of Scripture. Because it is in the Bible that God's will is revealed.

Christianity is the religion of the Book—and it's not an easy book.

Even this prayer of Paul is not easy.

You have to read it over and over to understand Paul's train of thought. Remember Peter himself said some things in Paul's letters are hard to understand. And it's not just Paul. Many parts of the Bible are hard to understand.

Everything that is necessary for salvation is plain.

Even a child can understand Bible stories in a way that leads to simple faith.

But there are passages that great Bible scholars have wrestled with for centuries and still there is no consensus on the correct interpretation.

Pope Gregory the Great said:

Scripture is like a river broad and deep, shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim.

It's a hard book, so you have to develop your intellect to understand it.

There are many good books written to help us understand the Bible.

That's why we have Sunday School and Adult Bible classes, so we can study the Book and other books together.

And so we can help each other in rearing children, developing their minds.

We have excellent teachers who study hard and take teaching seriously.

I live with one. Every morning, Allison is reading for her devotions a commentary on the book of Bible teaching in women's Sunday school class.

And that's how you avoid bare intellectualism—you study and pray.

You open your books and get on your knees.

When you become a Christian, your way of thinking is changed.

You start to see the world and your life through the lens of Scripture.

You are filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding as you learn from the Book. That doesn't happen automatically.

You have to make some commitments. Take advantage of teaching at Christ Cov.

We have excellent teachers for adults and children. You should be in class.

So that's the first notion this prayer of Paul's challenges—

that intellect and study are somehow at odd with faith and feeling.

The second notion many American evangelical Christians have that Paul's prayer challenges concerns the will of God. It's the notion that God's will is a mystery.

Paul says: I'm asking God to fill you with a knowledge of his will.

Many Christians think that when it come to decision-making—

God has a particular path he wants you to take, one pathway to his perfect will, but he hasn't told you. He hasn't told you to take this or that job, school, move.

And so you have to somehow discern God's perfect will.

You wrestle with it and pray about it until you have a feeling of peace.

And then you say: I feel at peace about this, so I know this is God's will.

But where is that idea of finding God's will in Scripture?

That there is one perfect path for every decision but God hasn't told you, so you struggle with it until you feel a sense of peace, and that's God's will?

The Bible doesn't say anything at all like that.

It teaches us that when it comes to decision-making and the will of God, he had given us two guidelines—his moral law and wisdom.

God's moral law very clearly tells us—Do this, don't do that.

This is the way that pleases me, walk in it.

And God's wisdom guides us in all other decisions.

His wisdom tells us things like—seek the counsel of the wise, examine your motives, bathe your decisions in prayer, use your talents, seek first his kingdom.

And then, with God's moral law guiding you on one side,

and biblical wisdom on the other—you make your own decisions.

You might feel peace about your decisions, and that's nice—

but feeling a sense of peace is just that, a feeling.

Its presence or absence is not a reliable guide for knowing God's will.

His will is found by following his law and by applying biblical wisdom.

Howard Hendricks said that 90% of the will of God found from the neck up.

Think about it, our heavenly Father treats us the way we treat our own children.

There are things you tell your children that are non-negotiable.

Rights and wrongs that you impress upon them all their growing up years.

We've told our children, over and over, that they must marry believers.

That it would be spiritually disastrous to flaunt God's will in this area.

We've warned them and impressed on them the need to obey the Lord.

But in a great many other areas of life, like the question of their life's work and calling, you guide them in wisdom. We've talked to our children about their interests, talents. We've talked about where they can be useful in God's kingdom.

We've discussed practical things like budgeting, getting a marketable degree.

And having talked through all that and prayed together and given our blessing—we want them to move out in life and make decisions.

We want them to do things that interest them, make them happy, and glorify God.

Some decisions might not be the wisest. But that's ok, wisdom can grow.

That's what Paul is praying for here. That's what we pray for.

The Christian life is a thinking life. It's a life of deliberately, consistently conforming our thinking to the will of God by the study of his book, and of making our decisions according to his law and wisdom.

The more you do that, the more you will feel like a stranger in a strange land.

You'll be like an American in Scotland, or a Scot in America—  
only much more profound. You'll say, I don't fit here.  
That's because you don't. You've been delivered from the dominion of darkness,  
and brought into the kingdom of Christ, so you see things differently  
from people who are still under that dark dominion.

**MP#2 When you come into the kingdom of the Son, your actions are changed.**

Because you think differently, you act differently.

That's why foreigners sometimes do things that seem strange to us.  
I was once driving through the neighborhood down the road, Five Points,  
and there was a large Mexican man chasing a goat.  
And I said to myself, that's strange.

But I'm sure it wouldn't be strange to other Mexicans, because that's  
what they think you have to have for a great party, fresh grilled cabrito.  
No wonder that goat was running.

As a Christian, you act like a citizen of the kingdom of light.

But it's not just a matter of superficial behavior, it's relational.  
Paul says in verse 10, I pray that you Colossians believers  
may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.  
That means you are inspired by your relationship with him.  
How do act when you are inspired by someone? You want to please him.  
You want to do your very best because of the great honor of being  
connected to this person.

Several years ago I heard Johnny Musso speak at a fundraiser for a Christian  
ministry. He gave his testimony, but then he finally got to the part everybody  
wanted to hear—about his years playing for Bear Bryant.  
When he started telling those stories, Coach Bryant said this, Coach Bryant did that,  
and how inspiring it was to play for him, I looked around the room and could spot  
the Alabama fans by awe on faces. Yes, they were saying, how inspiring.

Jesus Christ is the first born from among the dead.

He is the sovereign king over all things visible and invisible.

He's the Seed of the Woman who has crushed the serpent's head.

He's the Great High Priest who has been tempted in every way as we are,  
yet without sin.

He's the Rider on the White horse who is conquering the nations  
with the sword of his mouth, which is the Gospel of his salvation.

And we are citizens in his kingdom, ministers in his government,  
soldiers in his army—we serve at his pleasure.  
Paul says: Live in such a way that you are inspired by his greatness.

Then he says: “Bearing fruit in every good work.”

And here again is that relational note.

Paul is echoing Christ’s words when he said I am the vine, you branches.

It is in that living connection with me that you bear much fruit.

That’s not behavioral talk, that’s relational talk.

You are connected to Christ, and out of that living connection,  
you are enabled the good things that please him

What do those good things look like?

Paul says: “Strengthened with all power according to his glorious might  
so that you may have great endurance and patience.”

Great endurance is how Christians face bad situations.

Patience is how Christians deal with tedious and difficult people.

We experience bad things because live in fallen world.

But we respond to them in a way that is completely different from people  
who are still living under the dominion of darkness.

Because we have been strengthened with all power according to his glorious might,  
we face bad things with great endurance.

Yesterday Allison watched a live webcast of the funeral in Kentucky.

It was the funeral of this young man, Sean Gauley that many of you prayed for.  
Allison went to high school with his father, Jim.

Sean was coming home from college for Christmas, and had a terrible  
wreck on the interstate. He was in a coma at UAB for three weeks.

But on Monday, there was nothing more to do, and when they turned off  
the ventilator, he passed away in 30 minutes.

How did his parents, his two brothers and his sister, and all of his Christian  
friends at their church in Kentucky face his death? With great endurance.

With tears and confident assertions of the sovereign grace of God.

That’s a life inspired by Christ. That’s fruit that pleases him.

And Paul says, patience, patience with tedious and difficult people.

That’s not very grand is it? Doesn’t sound like moving mountains.

I'm sure whatever this new teaching was going around the Colossian church, it had to sound more exciting and fulfilling than being patient with tedious people. But Paul says, No—this too is the distinctive manner of the Christian life.

Dealing with people, year in and year out who try your patience, but you are patient anyway because they are made in the image of God and because they have eternal souls.

And you are able to be patient, because of the power of God.

That can sound very grim—great endurance and patience.

It sounds very stoical. But it's not. Because Paul adds:

“Joyfully giving thanks to the Father.”

Joy is that deep current that runs under the Christian life.

It's that deep happiness in Christ. That deep pleasure. That deep confidence.

A life characterized by joy and thanksgiving.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Father.

You think it and you say it, and that manner sets you apart as a citizen of the kingdom of light.

Paul doesn't just give the Colossians this grand sweep of the Christian life and then say—now go do it. He unpacks it in the rest of the letter.

He starts unpacking next by delving into the majesty of Jesus Christ—who is this one who inspires us to serve him?

And then Paul gets into the nitty-gritty.

When you are trying to think like a citizen of Christ's kingdom, and when you are trying to act like a citizen of Christ's kingdom—what does that look like in marriage, in family, in work.

How does a subject of the kingdom of light approach sexuality, and the use of our language, and money.

And as he works those things out for us, we see how we've been brought into a kingdom where these things make sense, how they can be used and enjoyed as they were intended for our good.

That's where Paul is going.

But before he gets there, he wants to inspire the Colossians and us with this vision, of the Christian life. You don't need some novelty, some new practices or mystical experiences. You need recognize who you are, and be that.

We are God's people, the chosen of the Lord,  
Born of His Spirit, established by His Word;  
Our cornerstone is Christ alone,  
And strong in Him we stand:  
O let us live transparently  
And walk heart to heart and hand in hand.

We are God's loved ones, the Bride of Christ our Lord,  
For we have known it, the love of God outpoured;  
Now let us learn how to return  
The gift of love once given:  
O let us share each joy and care,  
And live with a zeal that pleases Heaven.