

## **Colossians 1:9-14 (1984 NIV)**

### ***Faithfulness 101: What Have You Become?***

<sup>9</sup> For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, <sup>10</sup> so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, <sup>12</sup> and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. <sup>13</sup> For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, <sup>14</sup> in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

## **Introduction**

When I was a much younger man, I was the popular guy in the crowd. People felt comfortable with me and many wanted to be my friends.

I was having my coffee one morning in Bishan one day. Then I saw this lady walking towards me. I looked at her and soon recognized her as one of my former colleagues whom I had not met for at least 25 years.

I didn't want to call out her name. But I stood up as she was about to pass by me, thinking that she too would recognize me. And you know what? She walked towards me and then turned left to continue on her way without even taking a second look at me! It dawned on me that she did not recognize me at all.

I stood there and suddenly sadness came upon me. The popular guy in the crowd had become totally forgotten history. I found myself asking, "John Yuen, what have you become that people who once knew you could no longer recognize you now?"

And the Lord reminded me that when I see Him face to face one day, the most searching question He will ask me is not "What have you done while you are on earth?" But the most searching question He will ask me is "What have you become while you are on earth?"

In doing all the good Christian things on earth, are we becoming that person whom God wants us to be? If not, we may hear this shocking commentary of the Lord on us, "You may have done good works on earth, but your hearts are so far from me. I really don't recognize you as one who has been moulded and shaped in my will."

And I believe that the searching question in faithfulness 101 is not “what have you been doing?” but “what have you become resulting from what you have been doing?”

And as we enter the new year, I like us to consider this searching question in faithfulness 101—“What have you become resulting from what you have been doing?”

I like to use Paul’s prayer in Col. 1:9-14 to help us answer this searching question today.

## **I. The Request in Paul’s Prayer (v. 9)**

Paul has only one basic request in mind. You can find it in v. 9. He is “asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will”. That is the heart and soul of this prayer. Paul is praying that the Colossians will know the will of God for their lives. He is asking God to give them wisdom and spiritual insight so that they will know God’s will.

That’s a very practical prayer. Almost every Christian thinks about the will of God at one time or another. We tend to relate this to the major decisions of life:

- Which school/university?
- What course to study?
- What job?
- Who to marry?
- Which church to attend?
- How to invest money?
- When to start family?

These are all legitimate situations to seek the will of God. But Paul seems to have something bigger, deeper, and broader in mind. I believe the key is the word “fill” in v. 9. In its basic form, the word means to be filled to overflowing. It can also mean “engulfed” or “overwhelmed” by something. It has the idea of “fully possess” or “control” or “become the dominating influence”. If a person is frightened, we say he is “filled with fear”. If he speaks harshly, we say he is “filled with anger”. If he is generous to people, he is “filled with kindness”.

So what does “to fill” mean in this verse? Simply put, if you are filled with the knowledge of God’s will, you will want what God wants for your life.

Oftentimes we pray “Your will be done” without ever considering what those words really mean. Too often we mean something like this—“O Lord, show me your will so I can carefully consider it to see if it fits into my plans.” But that’s a prayer God will never answer because He does not offer His will for

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you to consider it, as if it is an invitation to have lunch if you happen to be free. To truly say “Your will be done in my life” means something like this:

- “Lord, let your will be done in me whatever it costs, whatever it takes, wherever it leads.”
- “Let your will be done even if it means that my will is not done.”
- “Let your plans go forward even if it means changing my plans.”

Only one will can be done at a time. “Thy will be done”—it’s hard to pray that prayer because it means giving up control of your life. But that doesn’t mean your life will go out of control. It just means that your life is surrendered to God’s control.

This leads to some very practical questions:

- Do I want to know God’s will so that I can consider it or do I want to know God’s will so that I can do it?
- Will I take the daily small steps that are before me while waiting for the big steps to be revealed?
- Do I understand that the will of God is first about who I am on the inside before what I do on the outside? (i.e. what you are becoming first before what you are doing)
- Am I ready for my life to change if that’s what needs to happen?

This is the key request in the prayer of Paul here—that we might be filled to overflowing with the knowledge of God’s will so that we want what God wants for us.

## **II. The Purpose in Paul’s Prayer (v. 10a)**

Paul has only one purpose in mind. This purpose is the necessary result of being filled with the knowledge of God’s will. And this purpose is not possible without coming to the place where we say, “Your will be done—nothing more, nothing less.” We find it expressed this way in v. 10—“And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way.”

Note the word “worthy”. It comes from a root that means “heaviness” or “weightiness”. Sometimes in evaluating certain people who don’t measure up to our expectations, we call them “lightweights”. A “lightweight” person is someone whose contribution in life doesn’t amount to much. All of us, if we are honest, think about our own value and our own worth from time to time. Since we aren’t going to live forever, we want to know that our time on earth has mattered, that we have not squandered our opportunities, that we have made a difference to someone, somewhere, somehow.

When one of older daughter was 10 months old, we signed her up for a baby contest. Many babies were there and they were all first screened

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to check their weight and other physical features. After this preliminary screening, 10 finalists were shortlisted. Our girl was one of them. But because it was such a long day, she became bored and listless. And when the judges finally came to assess her in the final round, she was already half asleep. So, our girl was unplaced in the final round. I remember telling my wife, "If they have judged her earlier, they will surely see her sweet and lively side. But they came so late and she's already bored and sleepy. But I think in her sleepiness, she still looks like sleeping beauty!"

Isn't it true that parents have a certain family pride in their children in spite of their flaws and foibles? In the same way, God the Father has a certain family pride in us because we are His children in Jesus Christ in spite of our human flaws and foibles.

There is a kind of family pride that comes when a child, through dedication and devotion, accomplishes some great goal and brings honour to the family name. That's what Paul has in mind here. It means to live with such dedication and devotion that God our Father is pleased with us as His children.

When we want what God wants, when we surrender our will, and when His purposes become our purposes, then our lives will be dramatically changed. When that happens, our lives become visibly different and eternally significant. And God is pleased with us.

So, the purpose that Paul has of us in his prayer is that we may live a worthy life that is pleasing to God.

### **III. The Results in Paul's Prayer (vv. 10b-14)**

The remainder of the prayer involves four results of growth in Christlikeness:

- First, we will have a life that bears fruit of every good work (v. 10b).
- Second, we will have a life that grows in the knowledge of God (v. 10c).
- Third, we will have a life that endures in hard times (v. 11).
- Fourth, we will have a life that gives thanks continually (vv. 12-14).

This is what a life worthy of the Lord looks like. A life filled with good works, an ever-growing knowledge of God, the ability to endure hard times with joy, and a thankful spirit for all that God has done for us. In Jesus Christ, God has given us spiritual inheritance, spiritual light, spiritual citizenship, and forgiveness of sins.

So Paul prays that we might be filled up to overflowing with the knowledge of God's will. That means yielding our agenda to His control so that His purposes become our purposes. When that happens, our lives are radically changed from the inside out. We set out to please the Lord in everything. Life

now has purpose and meaning. We are linked with God in His Kingdom work on earth.

What then is required of each of us as we seek to live worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way?

The answer is this: Each of us is required to adjust our lives accordingly.

Many of us want God to lead us in His will. We want the excitement of God working through us, but we tend to dislike making major adjustments in order to obey His will. The Bible reveals that every time God speaks to people about something He wants them to do, they have to realign their lives in some way. When God's people are willing to take the necessary actions, God accomplishes His purposes through those He calls.

If we choose to make the necessary adjustments, we can go on to obedience. If we refuse, we could miss what God has in store for our life. Obedience begins in the heart as a willingness to do whatever God says. Obedience is expressed through action, by words and deeds.

When God speaks, revealing what He is about to do, that revelation is our invitation to adjust our life according to His way and will. As we adjust our heart and mind to Him, His purposes, and His ways, we are in a position to obey. We can't continue business as usual or stay where we are and go with God at the same time. This truth is clearly evident in the Scriptures.

- Abram could not stay in Ur or Haran and father a nation in Canaan at the same time (Gen. 12: 1-8).
- Moses could not stay in the desert shepherding sheep and stand before Pharaoh at the same time (Exod. 3).
- David had to leave his sheep to become king (1 Sam. 16:1-13).
- Peter, Andrew, James, and John could not remain to do the work of mere fishermen if they were to obey Christ to be fishers of men (Matt. 4:18-22).
- Matthew had to leave his lucrative tax collecting job to follow Jesus (Matt. 9:9).
- Saul had to completely change direction in order for God to use him to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-19).

Our tendency is to want God to adjust to us and our plans. We want to obey God but only on our terms. But the only way to follow Him is to align our thinking and our actions with His ways. Before we can follow Jesus, we must be willing to make whatever adjustment is necessary.

What kind of adjustments does God require concerning ...

- Our circumstances?
- Our relationships?

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- Our thinking?
- Our commitments?
- Our actions?
- Our beliefs?

A major adjustment will come at the point of acting on our faith. Our intellectual decision may be the easy part. The hard part is adjusting our life to God and acting in a manner that demonstrates our faith. We may be called upon to attempt things only God can do, whereas formerly we might have done only that which we knew we could accomplish according to our strength and ability.

Being able to identify an adjustment is not as important as making it. Once we understand what change God wants us to make, He will help us know how to do it. Our part is to obey.

God frequently requires adjustments in areas we have never considered before. Peter couldn't have dreamed God would ask him to enter the home of a Gentile, but that was exactly what the Lord did.

Making adjustment may well be God calling and challenging us to come out of our comfort zone so that we learn to trust more in Him and less in ourselves.

## **Conclusion**

Here's a true story from the pages of early church history. Polycarp was the pastor of the church in Smyrna. He was a disciple of the Apostle John.

Persecution broke out in Smyrna and many Christians were fed to the wild beasts in the arena. The godless and bloodthirsty crowd called for the death of the leader—Polycarp.

The authorities sent a search party to find him. He had been taken into hiding by some Christians but the Romans tortured two young believers until they finally disclosed his location. Polycarp had time to escape but he refused to go saying, "God's will be done."

In one of the most touching instances of Christian grace imaginable, Polycarp welcomed his captors as if they were friends. He talked with them and insisted they ate with him. He made only one request before being taken away—he asked for one hour to pray. The Roman soldiers listened to his prayer. Their hearts melted and they gave him two hours to pray instead. They even asked one another why they were sent to arrest him.

The Proconsul tried to find a way to release him too. "Curse God and I will let you go!" he pleaded.

Polycarp's reply was, "For 86 years I have served him. He has never done me wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King?"

The Proconsul again looked for a way out. "Just swear by the spirit of the emperor and that will be sufficient."

Polycarp's reply was, "If you imagine for a moment that I would do that, then I think you pretend that you don't know who I am. Hear it plainly. I am a Christian."

The proconsul threatened with the wild beasts.

Polycarp's reply was, "Bring them forth. I would change my mind if it meant going from worst to best, but not to change from right to wrong."

The Proconsul threatened, "I will burn you alive!"

Polycarp's reply was, "You threaten with fire that burns for an hour and is over but the judgment on the ungodly is forever."

The fires engulfed him. The witnesses noticed his faith and joy. He was finished off with a dagger. He died committed to the cause of Christ on 22 February 155 A.D.

In our world today, we hardly hear of such stories because we live in a culture of convenience rather than commitment. But committed we must be if we are to be faithful to the Lord's will. At the same time, we thank God that it is rarely a commitment to die, but largely a commitment to live for Him in faith and with faithfulness. After all, the most sacrificial thing had already been done by the Lord for us—He died for us on the Cross. Thus, the least that we can do for Him is to live for Him in faith and with faithfulness.

(<https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/polycarp>;  
<https://www.christianity.com/church/church-history/timeline/1-300/polycarp-11629601.html>)

Let me leave you with two challenges as we enter into a new year:

- First, be committed to boldly speak a word for Jesus. Many times it is not because people are not open to hear us speaking for Jesus. But we are not bold enough to speak for Him. God may have already prepared them to hear us testify. So, be committed to be a bold witness this year for the Lord. Touch them and tell them of God's love in Jesus Christ.
- Second, be committed to grow in Christlikeness because that's the will of God for every believer. That means each of us will need to adjust.

Today, there are so many good things to which we are already giving our time and energy. But to make adjustment is not just to cut down some of these good things, but to cut away some of these things so that godly growth can take place in this season of our lives. And when we so obey, we will see and experience God working in and through us.

I pray that the Lord will help us so live in faith and with faithfulness so that we can grow to be what He has called and desired us to be in the coming days. Amen!