

Sunday, September 12, 2021

Back to Basics

(Message 2; Series: *Extreme Discipleship: Living into our Mission*)

(Colossians 1:9-14)

Scripture:

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, ¹⁰so 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, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹²and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Message:

Sometimes it is important to return to the basics.

Vince Lombardi was the coach of the Green Bay Packers. (My apology for the sport's analogy). During his tenure, the Packers won three consecutive championships and the first two Super Bowls. Combined with his record of 106 wins, 34 losses and 6 ties, he is arguably the greatest coach in the history of professional football. It's no surprise that the Super Bowl trophy is named in his honor.

While usually unbeatable, the Packers got overconfident on one occasion, lost their focus and lost what should have been an easy game against the Chicago Bears at Soldier Field (Chicago). Lombardi was livid.

When they finally arrived back at Lambeau Field after a plane and bus ride, he told them to put on their still-sweaty gear from the game for a lengthy practice session.

He started the session by holding up a football and saying, "*Gentlemen, this is a football.*"

Every now and then, it is important to return to the **basics - to go back to the fundamentals, lest we get off track and lose sight of what's really important.** It's true in the sports world so teams don't lose their competitive

edge; it's true in the business world so companies don't lose sight of their niche, focus, vision and strategy.

It's also true for churches and believers. Losing sight of what's important - the essence of the Gospel and our mission - is done at our own peril. Losing our focus on the Gospel or our mission leads to mediocrity and results in being comfortable, apathetic, and passionless. Duty, obligation, and apathy are more evident than gratitude, dedication, and spiritual passion. Sadly, that seems to increasingly describe the North American church. The world is literally going to hell, and the Church doesn't seem to really care.

No one plans for this to happen; it just does; and it was happening in the Colossae Church. And in many places, it is still happening today.

So here in these verses, Paul holds up the proverbial football and says, "Church, followers of Jesus, **This is the Gospel**; this is your identity; this is Your **Mission**." Don't forget. Don't get sidetracked.

There's a lot packed into these six verses we're talking about together this morning. We'll learn some big words and review some important concepts this morning, so let's get started.

FIRST, NOTE THE MYSTERY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (1:9)

Paul writes in Colossians 1:9 - "For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you..."

For what reason? Because of your reception of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Or as Paul notes in **1:26-27**, because of "*the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations and is now disclosed to the saints. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*"

The essence of the Christian faith is not reading the Bible from cover to cover, being present at worship on Sunday morning, loving and caring for each other - especially in life's crises, or in evangelizing our neighbor. All those things are very important, but if you don't have a personal relationship with the man from Galilee, with Jesus of Nazareth, it is all a waste of your time. The essence of the Christian faith is a **relationship** with **Jesus** Christ.

It is not enough to know **about** him; you need to know **him** (as Augustine said, "*not only with your head, but with your heart.*") and love him (*with all your heart, soul, mind and strength*). Anything less and you are just going through some motions.

Leonardo DaVinci was commissioned by the Duke of Milan to paint the Last Supper. When he finished, he allowed the duke to see it before it was unveiled. The duke was amazed, "*It's beautiful. Look at the detail on the chalice. It's*

beautiful.” DaVinci took his brush and brushed the chalice out: “Anything that distracts from Jesus should not be in this painting.”

That is why prayer is so important and so transforming in people’s lives. The church runs on the *gasoline* of prayer. People think it runs on money or preaching, or programs, or people. It runs on prayer – because prayer is the glue in our relationship with Jesus.

Basic #1 – The Christian Life begins with and is all about having a love **relationship with **Jesus**.**

SECONDLY, NOTE THE MATRICULATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (1:9)

Paul continues to write, (1:9) “...asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.”

The Christian faith begins with “Jesus loves me, this I know” and loving him back, but it can’t stop there we need to “enlist” or “enroll” in life long learning.

The Greek word Paul uses here for “knowledge” isn’t just general knowledge or even a good liberal arts education, this is the “knowledge” that comes from knowing the Truth (I.e., we must love him with all our heart and all our mind).

We’re not only talking about simply knowing right and wrong; we’re talking about the depths of the Christian faith. Too often there is a shallowness about the Christian faith; a “whatever is loving,” a “let’s just praise the Lord,” or “let’s just be nice to each other.”

The knowledge Paul is talking about here is only available through **relational revelation**; that is, through a relationship with Jesus.

If you picked a random name from a phone book and asked, “What does Bob Smith think about marriage or giving or abortion or the lottery, I wouldn’t know - because I don’t know him.

But if you asked me, what does Marilyn Kamstra think about those things, I wouldn’t have to call her. And while I may not know exactly, I have a pretty good idea what she thinks. We have a personal relationship.

In his reference to praying here, Paul isn’t (primarily) praying for personal healings, safety as he travels, unity in the Church, believers love for one another, or even a rich (spiritual) harvest. Again, those are all important.

But the text and the Greek tell us that Paul is praying for the knowledge of God’s will, i.e., for **discernment**; the knowledge and understanding of what God wants us to know. God knows, if we’re not earnestly seeking to know him and his will, then we’re not really thinking about obediently do it.

Paul is praying about gleaning this from the Scripture, from prayer, and from our growing relationship with Christ through His Spirit. Paul says knowing these two things are essential to living the Christian life:

First, we need to have “*all spiritual wisdom...*” That is, we need to know the **basic principles** necessary for godly and right living.

And then, second, we need to have “*understanding...*” Understanding here is the ability to **apply** those principles to our daily **living**, to do the right thing.

In **1 Corinthians 2:11**, Paul reminds us that if we have a deep, personal relationship with Jesus, we have received the Spirit, and no one knows the things of God and reveals them to us except Christ through His Spirit. We need to ask for spiritual wisdom and seek to understand God’s will for our lives.

Basic #2 – Living the Christian Life requires knowing God and learning his will.

THIRD, NOTE THE MANIFESTATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (1:10)

Paul writes in **Colossians 1:10** – “*We pray [you may have] this [knowledge] in order that [flowing from that knowledge] you may live a life [of obedience] worthy of the Lord...*”

Sadly, “Christians” often get it backwards. And if we get this backwards, we’ll get everything backwards and we’ll never understand how “*Christ in you is the hope of glory.*”

Whether it is our (personal) theology or practice, we try to be obedient, pure, loving, kind, and committed, hoping that God will notice, want a relationship with me, and **love** me. This approach puts an incredible amount of pressure on us to get it right...because if we mess up; we’ll be messed up for eternity.

Thankfully, that’s **backwards**. Our obedience, love, and serving are the **result**, i.e., the manifestation, of Jesus’ love for us, for his forgiving us and for his redeemed us – that is giving his life for us on the cross (cf. **1:14**). Our obedience, love and service are not reason why he loves us (We will never deserve his love).

It is interesting in the English language that we have separate words for “**believing**” and “**doing**.” In many other cultures, it is the same word. In our culture you can *believe* something and not *do* anything about it; in other cultures, the assumption is if you believe you are doing it (or, if you’re not doing it, you really don’t believe it).

We can *believe* in the power of prayer, but still not pray. We can *believe* the Great Commission, but still never share our faith. We can *believe* God gives us spiritual gifts, but never feel compelled to use them. We can *believe* God

commands us to tithe, and yet never really give to the church. We can, and many do, separate what we believe into this box and live a different life.

Biblical language doesn't allow us to do that. If *Christ is in You*, your relationship with him – your faith – will manifest itself through your growing knowledge of his will in a life that is pleasing to God.

Basic #3 – Living the Christian Life means Christ will **manifest (show) through your life.**

FOURTH, NOTE THE MOTIVATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (1:11)

Colossians 1:11 reads “...being strengthened through all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience...”

For many people who get into trouble, the problem is not that they don't know what is right, the problem is they don't do it. Truth is, we more than we do. So how do we bring what we know and what we do together? The only way is through Christ's power! Note four things about Christ's power.

Notice the origin of the (motivational) power in the Christian Life:

As Christians, we're not *strengthened* by motivational sermons, by meditation techniques, by peer pressure, or by a word of encouragement. Paul says we are strengthened *by His glorious might*.

That is, the power (strength) we have is not an **inside** job (it's not the result of inner determination or fortitude), it's an **outside** job. You or I can't do anything unless the prime mover (God) moves you, i.e., the Christian faith is supernatural! We don't pull ourselves up by our bootstraps or buckle down and get it done. There's someone behind everything we do that honors God.

The Mover who moves the universe moves the universe to move you and me. And then, the Mover who moves the universe moves the universe to move you and me to move other people (closer to Jesus). And again, we say, it is all about Jesus. He is Lord.

What does that mean? It means **prayer** is more important than **action**; our relationship is more important than our activity; it means we don't honor Christ in our life by hustling or hard work; we honor God by **asking** for his will, his intervention, his strength and his power.

Having trouble with temptation, ask him about it. Having a marriage or family issue, ask him. Don't say – even to yourself, “I got this; I can handle it!” No, simply get on your knees.

Jesus trained his disciples to continue His mission; then he promised to send his Spirit so he could be “in them” and do it through them.

Also notice the **quality** of the (motivational) power of the Christian Life:

Paul defines the quality of his might as glorious. (1:11 – “...according to his glorious might”). Glorious in this context means: **radiant**, lofty, and majestic. Paul is saying, when Christ empowers you, he is giving you and me a part of his own **glory**.

Two weeks ago, we mentioned that God loves to do big things in little places; God also loves to do big things in “little” people – so his glory shines!

We used to joke that people working in nuclear power plants glowed in the dark. The idea was the power, i.e., the uranium, would rub off. But that’s exactly what Paul is saying happens with Christ’s power. When Christ is in us, it radiates from within (i.e., people should be able to tell Christ in you). His glory is to **radiate** his majesty through us. People must see **Christ** in us!

Notice the **quantity** of the (motivational) power of the Christian Life:

Colossians 1:11 reads, “...being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might.” How much power is there? All power! More than we’ll ever need. Enough power for the moment; enough power for the long haul...

John Lightfoot writes, “The power communicated to the faithful corresponds and is a function of the divine might from which it comes so whatever you’ve got to do, you can do.”

The prophet **Isaiah (40:31)** says, “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not faint.”

And finally, notice the **results** of the (motivational) power of the Christian Life.

Colossians 1:11-12a reads, “...so that you may have great endurance and patience and joyfully giving thanks to the Father...”

There are three amazing qualities Christ’s power brings noted here: endurance, patience, and joy.

Endurance isn’t just hanging on and doing your best, it is the ability to weather the storm and persevere victorious (Paul’s focus here is on our relationships with others)

Patience isn’t just tolerating bad things in our life; its being patient and tolerant with “turkeys” (i.e., people who have wronged us, irritate us, and get under our skin). This also focuses on relationships.

Joy isn’t just smiling in tough times; joy is seeing the big picture; recognizing who is sitting on the throne of the universe and knowing it’s okay so we can hold on a little less tight. “For in him we live and move and have our being” (**Acts 17:28**).

Basic #4 – Living the Christian Life means tapping into God’s **unlimited power.**

AND FIFTH, NOTE THE MATURATION OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE (1:12-14)

The Goal of the Christian life is (Spiritual) **maturity.** The author of **Hebrews** says (6:1) – *“Let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.”*

In **I Corinthians 14:20**, Paul writes, *“Brothers, stop thinking like children.”*

In **Ephesians 4:13**, Paul says, *“Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.”*

Peter says (**1 Peter 2:2**), *“Like newborn babes, crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”*

God is working in our lives to make us more like Jesus – sometimes the easy way, sometimes the hard way, but always working in our life. So how are we doing?

There are five characteristics or marks of Christian maturity Paul notes here:

First, the Mature Christian Life is marked by ***giving thanks*** to the Father (**1:12**).

John uses these very same words in **Revelation 11:17** – *“We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is, and who was because you have taken your great power and begun to reign.”*

As Paul pens his magnificent teaching in his Epistles, he often stops to “sing” the praises of God: *“Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God...”* (**Rom. 11:33**). Paul, whose life and ministry were saturated with hardship, rejection, and pain, had an attitude of gratitude. John and Paul assume that all those who have experienced God’s grace and power will be thankful. In those who are mature in Christ, the joy bubbles up into worship and praise of God.

Second, the Mature Christian Life is marked by ***sharing*** in the ***inheritance*** of the saints (**1:12**).

Mature believers know the difference between petition and praise; that is, between what we need to continually ask for and what is already done and is praiseworthy.

For example, we continue to pray for wisdom and understanding, but our salvation is already assured in Jesus. We can praise God. We continue to pray for strength, but we can bask in his love and acceptance and praise God for it.

Third, the Mature Christian Life is marked by *our **rescue** from the dominion of **darkness**...*

Mature believers live into the freedom they have in Christ: *"If you hold to my teaching, you are truly my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. If the Son sets you free, you are free indeed."* (**John 8:31-32, 36**). In living into the freedom we have in Christ, we affirm our rescue from darkness.

By contrast, for example, legalism is deadly. Mature Christians don't measure other Christians by whether they live up to an arbitrary measurement they've thought up. Mature Christians allow other believers the same freedom they've been given in Christ.

The Christian faith provides a freedom - responsible and biblical - to bask in the acceptance and love of the God of the universe that brings forth natural fruit and growth.

Fourth, the Mature Christian Life is marked by ***redemption**, the forgiveness of sins (1:14)*. Forgiveness is at the center of the Christian faith; and yet, Christians often feel so guilty. Truth is, it is blasphemy to feel guilty when you've been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, when you have been forgiven of all your sin and guilt, when we've been given new life because of his resurrection.

Not living into that forgiveness says we don't really believe Jesus paid it all...for us. The mature believer understands they've been cleaned and refreshed by Jesus and allow Jesus to reflect in their cleanness.

Finally, the Mature Christian Life is marked by *the **kingdom** of the Son he loves (1:13)*.

Immature Christians say, *You and me, God! Right?!;* maturing Christians say, *You and Me, God, and those others who say you and me, God. Right?!* Mature Christians say, *my brothers and sisters and I are children of the King.*

Paul says we are his **ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20)**. That means we represent our country (kingdom) in another country (kingdom). When we enter our embassy, we are in a little part of our own country. And as ambassadors, we know someday we will return and live in our own land.

Paul writes, *At the name of Jesus every knee will bow in heaven and on earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (King) (Philippians 2:10-11)*. If you are a part of his kingdom, you already know that.

The final basic (#5) of living the Christian Life means becoming **more and more like **Jesus**. All of this we have been talking about this morning, is his work. We need to get serious about getting **back to basics**.**

LET'S STAND FOR CLOSING PRAYER.

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