

Colossians 1:9-14 CC 9&10.30 17<sup>th</sup> April 2016

I understand that the world of education is heading towards exams. Over the next weeks youngsters will sit their SATs, or GCSEs or A levels or degree exams. Aren't you glad that such things are in the past or perhaps they aren't for you? But actually we continue in a world where there are tests and examinations. If you have a car then most probably you have to take it in annually to have its MOT and see if it is roadworthy. You might have to have regular eyesight tests or blood tests. Here at church we have PAT tests, that is on the portable electrical appliances. All these tests are to see if things are fit for purpose. You can probably see where I'm going with this can't you?

At the heart of the passage from Colossians we look at today are these words "live a life worthy of the Lord" (Col 1:10).

So let me give you one test question this morning if you are a follower of Jesus, is your life being lived in way that honours God?

Good now we have all agreed that it isn't let's look and see what God has to say to us to help us so that our lives may be more and more lived in a way that is worthy of God.

Just a reminder from last week that what's going on is that these Christians in Colossae are met, probably in Philemon's house, to listen to a letter from Paul, who is Jesus' representative speaking with all his authority, brought to them by Tychicus. Paul was writing because Epaphras, who had been instrumental in these Christians coming to faith (v7), had brought Paul news of the church and Paul wanted to assure them that they were on the right track and above all to encourage them to "continue to live in him" (2:6) that is in Jesus.

In these verses Paul tells these Christians what he is praying for them and at the heart of the prayer is what we have just mentioned

### **1. live a life worthy of the Lord v10a**

Look at v9-10a with me if you would, "For this reason, 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. And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way:"

Now I hope at least the structure of what Paul was saying is clear. He had heard about them from Epaphras and since then had been praying for them but to what end? The goal of his prayer was, "that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way".

As God looks at your life, at my life, is it worthy of him? That is does it honour and glorify him, does it please him?

I remember once coming home from Teacher Training College for a holiday. As far as I can remember I was dressed in an old RAF jacket, a tee shirt with only a few holes, a pair of faded jeans

and flip flops. I had hair and it was long. Anyway I arrived at the railway station and decided that there was a good chance my father would be at home and as my cases were heavy I rang him and asked for a lift. A few minutes later I saw his car come down the road circle round outside the station and drive off. He did come back some minutes later but only really to deliver a lecture on what I looked like. I was a 20 year old prospective teacher but to him I was his son and the way I looked was not fitting and I was not pleasing my father in very way – or anyway!

The way you are at work is it honouring to God? Does the way you respond to your spouse, your children or grandchildren honour God? Does what you watch on TV or look at on the internet honour and please God? What about at church is the way to relate to other Christians honouring to God?

Of course in all these areas we will get it wrong. In all these areas we will fall short. In all these areas we will sin. However, that does not remove the goal God has for us and which we should be working towards with him that day by day at home, at work, in our leisure in public and in private our lives should pass the test of being lived in such a way that they are worthy of God, they bring honour to him and as such they are pleasing to him.

## **2. how will this happen? v9**

Paul was clear that those Christians in Colossae would not do this by their own efforts. They would not be able to lick themselves into shape and do all the necessary to make themselves pleasing to God and neither can we.

I have in my mind the picture of the boy who has been fighting in the playground and is now waiting outside the headmaster's door and is trying to make himself presentable spitting on his handkerchief to rub some of the dirt off his face and hands, rubbing each shoe in turn against the back of the other leg to remove the dust and put a bit of shine on them. It is futile. It is similarly futile to imagine that we can make ourselves presentable to God, that we can by our own efforts live a life that is worthy of God and that is pleasing to him.

So how can this goal be achieved?

Well, as we were seeing last week, for these Christians part of the goal has been achieved. If we look back to v6 we see that they had heard and understood God's grace in all its truth. They had heard and believed the gospel and the result of that as I hope we will see next week is that God has "reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight without blemish and free from accusation." (Col 1:22) They were worthy of God and they were pleasing to him. That had been done for them by God through Jesus and his death on the cross.

So that was their starting point and it is also the starting point for anyone of us. God wants us to live a life worthy and he has acted in Jesus to make us acceptable to him. He has started us off on the

right path if we accept Jesus death on our behalf. The emphasis now and is there in the letter is to continue. Can you see it there in 1:23 and 2:6. However this also will only happen by God's grace and power.

Paul, in his prayer, was, v9, "asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding". He wanted them to fully know God's will that is how God would have them live their lives where to know is not just to know but to obey. How did he see that happening? Well through all the wisdom and understanding that the Holy Spirit would give them. The life of the Christian is a spirit filled and Spirit led life. I understand God's will in any situation through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and as he teaches me through the word of God but I am able to put that will into practice only through the power of the Holy Spirit at work in my life.

As one writer puts it "there is no conceivable way for anyone to reach v10 except through v9. So all the Christians without exception will need all God's wisdom without diminution."

Left to our own devices we are not able to live a life worthy of God. Indeed left to our own devices we have no desire to do so. When God breaks in and shows us the true reality of our lives and our need of him he also gives us the knowledge of his will to enable us to live a life that honours him and pleases him.

We know that it is part of God's will that Christians should live in unity and peace and our aim this term is that we would work with God as "you too like living stones are being built into a spiritual house."(1 Peter 2:4-5) How will that happen? How will we grow together well as we pray for each other "asking God to fill us with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding."

But also as we pray that for ourselves.

I believe that God has been blessing us as a church and that has come about as we have given ourselves more and more to prayer. Now if we would see ourselves growing together being built into a spiritual house it will be as we pray.

I would encourage you to come to the prayer meetings on Mondays or Sundays but if not then pledge yourself to pray for this. Pray for our church for all the things we are doing and might do.

Pray that God would unite and build us together. It will not happen by our own efforts but we have seen in so many ways it will happen if we commit to prayer.

Paul was praying that these people would live a life worthy of God. His prayer was that God would do this though filling them with the knowledge of his will and

**3 what would that look like v10b-14**

What are the marks of a life that is worthy? So here in a sense is your test your MOT to see if your life is honouring and pleasing to God, though of course the four marks set down by Paul here are not the total of Christian discipleship!

Firstly **bearing fruit** in every good work. Their understanding of the will of God would result in changes in their lives whereby they were more and more doing that will. In that way they would be “bearing fruit in every good work”. Knowing God and knowing his will must affect the fabric of our lives and result in “good work” that is actions which are honouring to God and pleasing to him. Is this fruit of the gospel being shown in your life so that “they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5:16)?

Secondly **growing in the knowledge of God**. Now that is not knowledge about God and we are not going to have written exams. It is about growing in a relationship with God so that they and we understand more of God his mind, purpose and will so that our lives reflect his mind and will. How do we grow, through his word, through prayer, through seeking to live his way. The phrase bearing fruit and this knowing belong together because it is as we more and more grow in our knowledge of God that we will be able to bear fruit but the very phrase speaks of slow progress doesn't it because fruit doesn't grow overnight.

Thirdly **being strengthened** with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience”. It is about perspective? Where are we looking for the resources to grow in our knowledge of God and to bear fruit in good works? How can we live a life worthy of God? Only in his strength and that comes through prayer and faithful trust in God. The words “so that you may have great endurance and patience” might seem a bit of an anti-climax but this is reality. If we are to live for Christ in this world we do need his power for we know it is not easy. We need to be strengthened if we are to continue and persevere despite the suffering, opposition, shocks and disappointments that come our way and not just to persevere but to do so with joy. Through prayer, as we lean on God, so he strengthens us, encourages us and helps us on and yes at some points he even carries us. It is by the grace and power of God that we can come through even the toughest of trials. I know that is the testimony of many here but what about you? As you look at your path for this week, as you seek to live a life worthy of the Lord where will you look for the strength to persevere?

The Christian life is often described as a race and in many races it is illegal to get help from others. Dorando Pietri was an Italian long distance runner who came first in the marathon in the London Olympics of 1908 but was disqualified because he was so exhausted that he fell over five times in the stadium and was picked up by the umpires. It is easy to view life as a marathon and to feel we have to do it on our own with no help. Paul's prayer for these Christians and for us is that we would know

our need of help and so know God that we look for him to help and then receive his strength to carry on.

Fourthly **giving thanks v12**.... Thanks for the wonder of our salvation. I hope you note the very striking language Paul used here. Giving thanks because they had been “qualified” to share in the inheritance of the saints. This is the bottom line they had come to faith in Jesus Christ and through him and his death they had become part of the people of God with all the privileges and blessings of that people and all the future inheritance. More they had been “rescued” from darkness and all that that entails. This was what God had done for them and has done for many of us!

I hope we daily give thanks for the fact that we have been rescued, we have been qualified. Surely this is a mark of being a follower of Jesus and a huge part of living a life worthy of the Lord that we wake up each day and give God thanks that we wake up as his child and ready to do his will.

So as we draw to a close let me run this by you again and see if your life is fit for purpose. Are you daily being filled with the knowledge of God through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives? Are you living a life which is worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ and which pleases him? Are you bearing fruit, growing in knowledge, being strengthened and giving thanks?

It is a tall order but this is God’s desire and goal for us.