



+ This Week at Magdalen Road Church we continued our series in Paul's letter to the Colossians. In this first section (1:1-12) he will give thanks for the faith hope and love that he sees in the Colossian church.

We noted that in our culture there are 'sacred western secular values' that we don't really notice. Almost as if we are wearing glasses but not aware that we are wearing them. We talked about three on Sunday, though there are many many more:

- + 1. Look after number one. - Our society tells us that we have a responsibility to look after ourselves, we owe it to ourselves to put ourselves first.
- + 2. Cram in all you can. - If this life is limited then we need to make the most of the time we have and so do as much as we can. And so we have bucket lists and to do lists and we find it hard to slow down and rest.
- + 3. It's your truth that matters. - People might disagree with you and what you do. Haters are always going to hate - but in a world of relative truth don't listen to them.

Thus, it's striking that as Paul writes to this church in Colossae he's thankful because having believed the gospel, their world is been turned upside down. They have been transformed and now live countercultural lives because of God's grace to them (v6). Paul also highlights in this verse that it is the gospel that is growing all around the world - this matters because, as we saw last week, the Colossians were looking for growth, but they were looking for growth in the wrong things.

Then from v9 onwards Paul prays for the church. Strikingly just because he sees God at work in them (v1-8), he still prays for them. Paul is not simply looking for converts rather mature disciples who are growing in Christ-likeness.

What does Paul pray for them? Well broadly he prays that they would be a people shaped by (1) gospel thinking and (2) gospel living. Notice that this prayer broadly reflects the shape of the letter ch1-2: (Gospel thinking) as he corrects and broadens their perspective on Jesus, chs 3-4: (gospel living) as he applies this into the practicalities of everyday life.

**'Gospel thinking'**

We saw last week that one of the themes running through the letter is the idea of wisdom, knowledge and understanding. Thus as Paul prays for them, He foundationally begins by praying that God might give them a right knowledge of His will 'with all wisdom and understanding'. We noted that when we think about 'Gods will' often we can be muddled and concerned with

narrow specifics to do with every-day life. What Paul seems to be thinking of here though, is a broader sense focusing on who Jesus is and how we should live in the light of his identity. How you live in the light of who he is.

It's interesting to note Paul deals with 'gospel thinking' first, as he is aware that what we think affects how we live. If we struggle in areas of daily gospel living and lifestyle, maybe that's because we're not thinking correctly about the gospel of grace?

**'Gospel living'**

Paul then prays that they would live a life worthy of the Lord. He gives at least four threads that feed into this idea...

- + *Firstly* that they might they might **bear fruit in every good work**. A practical outworking of believing the gospel of grace is living it out in the every day. Not so that we earn his love but rather because he loves us already, because of who we now are in Him.
- + *Secondly* he prays that the Colossians would **know God better**. Next time at the end of chapter 1 he will describe how amazing Jesus is. But he's not doing this so we can pass the exam. But rather as we know him better, we would love him more.
- + *Thirdly* Paul talks about and **endurance and patience** from the Lord that we might persevere as disciples. Perseverance is not usually natural for a people living in a world where we are taught to look after number one. So he prays that God's people would be a people who endure and plod on despite the difficulties of life.
- + The danger at this point is that we might end up with an idea of dry stoicism. So Paul *fourthly* finishes his prayer longing that they would be **joyful and thankful** as they seek to live a life worthy of the Lord.

At about this point as we see Paul praying for the Colossian church we might end up feeling discouraged or frustrated because we see that we cannot do these things. And so we need to remember again v6 - it is all of God's grace as he grows and mature us.

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**Here are some questions for your group as always feel free to tweak and adapt for your context ☺**

What do you remember about the situation in Colossae from last week? Brainstorm all you can recall...

Do you agree with the three sacred western secular values outlined? Where do you see them in your world? Where do you see them in your heart? Are there others that exist?

Why is Paul so thankful as he writes to the Colossians? What does he give thanks for in them? What do you think he would give thanks for as he looked at Magdalen Road church?

How can he tell they have been changed by the grace of God? How does he describe the grace of God?

What sort of things does Paul pray for them from v9 onwards?

How does he pray that they would think correctly? Why is this so important for that context?

What aspects of living in the light of the gospel does Paul highlight? What do you think it means to live a life worthy of the Lord?

What one thing has particularly struck you from the study? Share and pray about it now.