



COLOSSIANS SERIES  
**THE ONE THING YOU NEED TO KNOW**  
Colossians 1:9-14  
October 26, 2009  
Dr. Todd Wilson, *Senior Pastor*

### Introduction – An Unusual Change of Plans

I had an unusual change of plans in preaching this week. I happen to be a planner by nature I think, and I happen to be a planner of sermons in preaching. You may be pleased to know that one of the first things I did when I started about five weeks ago is I laid out preaching plan for next year. That seems like a sensible thing to do. And here it is: its my three-page preaching plan that runs every single weekend from now through September 6, 2009 where it says, “Begin new fall series.” So we’ve got covered every Sunday, I’ve mapped out who is going to preach if it’s not me, and what text its gonna be on, and what series its going to be. Well I had my preaching plan and one of the other things I have been doing is, on Wednesday mornings I’ve coming into the sanctuary. It’s a wonderful thing to come in here on a weekday and its quiet. The sun’s coming in pouring through and none of the lights are on. It’s a wonderful sort of glow to the place. I’ll sit right up on the front with my Bible. I brought with me recently “Preaching and Preachers” by Martin Lloyd Jones, one of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century English preachers. I’ll read my bible and pray for the upcoming services and then I’ll read a little bit of “Preaching and Preachers” to remind myself of what the preacher’s task is, what the responsibility is, and what the shape of the sermon ought to be—just as encouragement along the way of preparation for the week. Well, I came across this interesting paragraph and have this in mind, my year-long preaching plan, as you hear this paragraph from Martin Lloyd Jones, one of the great 20<sup>th</sup> century preachers, talking about preaching and planning of preaching. It says,

“We must not be control of this matter (this matter of the planning and preaching). We must not decide in cold blood, as it were, what we are going to do and map out a program and so on.”

I like Martin Lloyd Jones. So I’m sort of sucking my thumb at this point reading this. He says,

I’m sure that that is wrong. I’ve known men who have done that. I’ve known men who at the beginning of a season after vacation, who would actually hand out a list of their text for many months ahead, and would indicate what was going to be preached every particular Sunday during that period of time.

Then this next line,

I reprobate that entirely and completely. But speaking generally, I feel that to plan and publish such a program is surely to put certain limits upon the sovereignty and leading of the Spirit in this matter. Indeed a series should always be broken into if you feel a particular pressure on your spirit urging you to do so.

Well, friends, I felt a particular pressure urging on my spirit this week. I think I was prepared by this good rebuke by Martin Lloyd Jones on Wednesday morning. And then I go into

the study to begin to prepare and take a look at Colossians chapter one. If you've got your Bible, turn there. I've got Martin Lloyd Jones in the back of my mind and a nice solid rebuke to me. And then I begin preparing on verses 9-14. One of the things I do by way of preparation is, I get my Greek Bible out and I diagram all the Greek sentences that I'm going to be preaching from; every adverb, every participle, every conjunction is put in its place and arranged grammatically and syntactically because that's where the theology is. But the problem is you start seeing masses upon masses of stuff and you start doing that. And I start thinking to myself, "I can't just fly through 9-14 in one sermon. That would be like going through the Louvre Museum in Paris in an hour!" Has anybody been to the Louvre? My wife and I went to the Louvre and we spent a day there and we got through one section, where the Mona Lisa was. We spent three hours just staring at the Mona Lisa. There is like a half a dozen Mona Lisas in this passage this morning. So we are not going to fly through it. We are going to linger for a couple of weeks on this passage. While we are at it, I encourage you to memorize this passage. Let me say this. Next Sunday morning, I'm going to ask one of you to stand and recite this passage from memory. Okay? So the challenge is on and the challenge is out. This is a prayer, verses 9-14. So, let me also encourage you more importantly to begin praying it every day for you, for your children, for your church, for your family. So we couldn't fly through the richness of it, of even this first verse,

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. (Colossians 1:9, NIV)

We catch Paul here in prayer, and when you catch somebody in prayer like Paul you get an insight into what is the most important thing, don't you? When you hear someone talking you can hear who-knows-what, but when you hear them praying, you get a sense about what is most important. We see here in verse 9 what Paul takes to be most important.

### ***In the Midst of Information Explosion***

Let me invite you to open up your Calvary Family News and we are going to do a little editorial work here. "Fully Pleasing," Colossians 1:9-14. Cross out "Fully Pleasing, verses 10-12". This week it's "The One Thing You Need to Know," found in verse 9. This verse is not only incredibly rich but incredibly relevant: the one thing we need to know. Why is it so relevant?—because we live in an information age. Social commentators talk about this being the information explosion happening right now, in the last decade or so. Not just an information explosion but one increasing in an exponential ways! Endless amounts of information being generated and produced, rapidly increasing. There is a new study out of the University of Berkeley entitled: *The Expanding Digital Universe, a Forecast of Worldwide Information Growth through 2010*. Listen to some of the things they point out in this study about the information explosion, this endless multiplication of information. U-Tube, this videos online start-up company about three years ago where some folks got together to put videos online. This company did not exist a few years ago but now hosts 100 million video streams per day! Experts say that more than a billion songs a day are being shared over the internet in mp3 format. A hundred million video streams, over a billion songs! In 2006, the study goes on to point out, the amount of digital information created, captured and replicated was 1288x1018 bits. It's a big, big, big number—that's the amount of information produced in 1006. In computer parlance, its 161 exabytes, for all you computer people, or, its 161 billion gigabytes—161 billion gigabytes! Now the equivalent of all this—we'll all get this one—that is, it's about 3

million times the information in all the books ever written! This is just in 2006! Information explosion! Last statistic: between 2006 and 2010 they forecast, the information added annually to the digital universe will increase more than six-fold—20 million times more information than all the books that have ever been written. We live in an information explosion. The other interesting thing is we live in an age—not just an explosion of information—but in an instant and easy accessibility almost universal accessibility of information. And so Thomas Freedman in his book, *The World is Flat*, the New York Times editorial writer says this,

“Never before in the history of the planet have so many people have the ability to find so much information about so many things about so many people.”

Instant information—whether you are in Cambodia in an internet café or downtown Chicago, driving around in rural Iowa with your I-phone—instant access to seemingly unlimited information. So there is this explosion of information and it’s instantly accessible.

### ***Constant Temptation for More***

Here is the third thing: there is a constant temptation for all of us to want more and more information. It’s a constant temptation. This may explain why Google is now running—take a guess, how many searches on a daily basis? A billion searches a day! Imagine people pulling up to their computer and a billion times a day. There is a constant temptation to access more and more information as the information explodes and become more and more accessible. Why is that? The temptation to know is a primordial temptation, isn’t it? Its an ancient temptation. Remember the temptation that caused someone to sin, and it was over the issue of accessing knowledge? It’s a primordial temptation in our day and age. Why is it that accessing knowledge such a temptation?—because it enables us to do God-like things. That’s what modern technology, particularly information technology enables us to do—things gods do.

So let me illustrate. It was after Christmas last year; we were driving back from Indianapolis up I-65 north, coming back to Chicago. My dear brother-in-law had given me the consummate piece of modern technology for Christmas: an I-phone. So I’m driving up I-65, its two in the afternoon and the kids and Katie are in the car, and I was starting to get drowsy. So I said I’ve got to pull over and get a cup of coffee but not just any cup of coffee. I’m going to see if I can find a Starbucks off of I-65 coming north. And I thought, “Ah, I’ve got a god-like device in my pocket.” So I pull it out, turn it on, I hit GOOGLE while I’m 60 miles an hour on the highway, and I type in with my thumb on the touch pad so I can keep driving: STARBUCKS—I-65—SEARCH. A second later, it’s got a list of Starbucks off of I-65 as I’m going north. Then I touch LATER, it shows up on a Starbucks page—it’s got the telephone number hyper-texted. I hit it and three seconds later I’m talking to someone at Starbucks while I’m flying on I-65—“How far are you off the exit?”

Think about that—information technology enables us to do god-like things. Only gods can be at one location and scan all of northern Indiana for another location. Only gods do that. Or I remember sitting in my father-in-law’s living room with the kids when we’ve gotten back from England and I found out about this thing called “Google Earth.” So, we’re getting nostalgic about our place in England and you get on Google Earth and we type in the address for our place in England, and we’re sitting in Indianapolis in the northern suburbs, and the fires going in the living room. The next thing we know, we’re looking in the back yard of our house in England!

It's a picture of the backyard, and there is the neighbor's yard. Looks like the bike's out front. Information technologies—that's only what gods do—omniscience!

You see, friends, the constant temptation that will only grow for us to want to be absorbed in information technologies because it enables us to do god-like things. It's a constant and chronic temptation along those lines. And that makes us not that dissimilar to the Christians in Colossi for this reason—the Christians in Colossi were tempted to access special knowledge as well. For them it wasn't the use of modern information technologies. It was the ancient equivalent. What is the ancient equivalent of information technologies?—religious technique: fasting, certain sort of special prayers, certain ascetic practices, technique, religious techniques that accesses knowledge. Yes, we've got Jesus Christ but we want more and more knowledge. How do we access it? We access it by certain religious technique.

So in the ancient world and for the early church, it was a challenge and temptation of Gnosticism or proto-Gnosticism—the temptation to access more knowledge, to depart from the gospel to find more knowledge and to access it through religious trances, through special ascetic practices or fasting, the observance of certain days or whatever. For us it's the temptation of *cyber* gnosticism.

### **Paul's Prayer**

So Paul's little prayer in verse 9 is massively relevant for all of us because in an age of information explosion he reminds us of the one thing we need to know. And what is the one thing we need to know from this passage?—the will of God. You see this prayer is a purposeful prayer for this reason. It says, "Since the day we heard about you..." He's heard about their starting faith. He is concerned about their continuing in faith and so for this reason, he's got a purpose to this prayer. It's an earnest prayer—"since the day we heard about you, we've not stopped praying for you." It's a focused prayer. What is the one thing he prays for them, the one thing they need to know? It's that God would fill them with the knowledge of his will. That's the one thing we need to know—the one thing we need to know is the will of God.

### **God's Will**

Now the will of God is an elusive thing, isn't it? I have here a quote from J. I. Packer which I think he captures it quite well. He says, "No other concern commands more interest or arouses more anxiety among Christians nowadays than discovering the will of God." Nothing is more important and yet nothing is seemingly more elusive. But I think we've probably made it a little bit too complicated in finding the will of God. What is the will of God, this one thing that we need to know? I think the will of God, most simply put, is the one thing God is up to in the world. That's the will of God. And what is this one thing that God is up to in the world? I think we see it in verse 18. We going to see it unfolded when we get to this passage in chapter 1:15 and following. We see this laid out in all sorts of grandeur and glory. Look at verse 18 where God is talking about what he is up to in the world. Paul is talking about what God is up to in the world.

And he (that is Christ) is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead...

God raised him first from the dead and then this little phrase, “so that.” Why is it that God raised Jesus Christ first from the dead and made him firstborn from among the dead? You ask yourself: What’s he up to? What is the one thing he is up to in all of this redemption in history? You find it in the “so that...”

so that in everything he (Jesus Christ) might have the supremacy.

What is God’s will? There is that secret decretive sovereign will of God—his orchestrating and arranging and sovereignly designing every single thing that comes to pass. We say, yes, its 73 degrees outside today that is the will of God. Its fair to talk about the will of God that way. But when the Bible talks about the will of God it mostly means, and certainly Paul means in this context, not the secret sovereign will of God but the saving purpose of God in and through Jesus Christ. So what is the will of God, what is the one thing he is up to in the world? The will of God is what he has done, is doing and will do to make Jesus Christ supreme in all things. That is the will of God!

And I think it sheds a lot of light on our wrestling, friends. We wrestle with, “What is God’s will for my life?” Can I say this without it sounding to irrelevant? I don’t think God cares about what college you go to. I don’t think he care what color you paint your living room, or if you go to the first service or third service at Calvary, or whatever. What he cares about is in everything you do, are you seeking to make Jesus Christ supreme?—in your mind, in your heart and in your actions. All the rest of it is details. Saint Augustine famously said, “Love God and do what you want.” Seek to make Jesus supreme in all things, and do what you want. That’s the will of God. I think that’s what Paul is getting after, that the Colossians would be filled with the knowledge of who Jesus Christ is, and the purpose and plan of God: what God is doing in the world through Jesus Christ, what he has done in redeeming them and dying for their sins, propitiating their sins, forgiving them and delivering them, and bringing them into this kingdom of light. And what he is doing to them now—he is creating them anew; he’s renewing them in the image and likeness of their creator. And what he will do when Jesus Christ one day appears, and they too will appear with him in glory, supreme. The supremacy of Christ! That is what God is up to in the postmodern world and throughout history. That’s the will of God.

## **The Source of Our Knowing**

How do we come by the will of God? This is the third and final point: How do we know and learn the will of God? Do you see that phrase there?—“through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.” That’s how we learn the will of God, through all spiritual wisdom and understanding. What’s that? The tricky thing there is the adjective, “spiritual.” It’s a word that has quite a lot or currency in our own contemporary context. Have you been to a bookstore lately, in the spirituality section? That’s not exactly what Paul has in mind when he talks about spiritual wisdom and understanding. When Paul and when the NT writers use “spiritual,” they are not talking about spiritual as opposed to material the way our contemporary context uses it. “Spiritual” has to do with non-material things. It has to do with getting in dimly lit rooms with incense and doing meditation, the get out of the body spiritual experience, so to speak. When the Bibles uses “pneumaticos” which is the adjective in Greek, what it’s referring to is that which comes from and is related to *the* Spirit, the Holy Spirit. So friends, how do we know the will of God? We know it through the Spirit’s wisdom and knowledge—the knowledge and wisdom that the Spirit brings into our lives. Spiritual wisdom is the Spirit’s wisdom. Spiritual people are people that are endowed with, indwelt by the Holy Spirit.

How is it that the Holy Spirit gives us wisdom and knowledge? Ever wonder or thought about that? How does that happen? The last passage we'll turn to is Colossians 3:16. Here we find it—how it is the Holy Spirit brings us wisdom and knowledge and enables us to understand the will of God. Paul says,

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom. And as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts with God.

How is it that we come by the Spirit's wisdom and knowledge? We get it by the word of Christ, the word of God and through the people of God who are indwelt with and infused with the word of God. That's why we come to church. That's why you meet in a Life group. Did you think about that? You gather around with other believers who love the word of God, who live the word of God and can speak the word of God into your life. They have the word of Christ dwelling in them richly and they can therefore teach and admonish like I'm doing right now. And what am I reminding you of? What is the big picture? The big picture is the supremacy of Christ! That's the punch line. Of all the teaching and admonishing that happens, of all the songs and hymns that we sing, it's an exaltation of Christ—a reminder that this is the will of God. Hang on to it! The will of God is the supremacy of Christ in *all* things. That's what God is doing. It's the one thing friends, that we need to know.

## Conclusion

So as we find ourselves making our way through this age of massive information explosion, it's good to be reminded that the one thing we need to know—the knowledge of the will of God—comes as a gift of grace; it comes by the Spirit, not as the by-product of technology and technique. And that the one thing we need to know—the will of God—centers upon Christ and that the rest of the world, like a universe flying out of control, tries to de-center Christ. So the one thing we need to know that centers upon Christ comes as a gift of grace.

Thirdly and lastly, the one thing we need to know—the will of God—will always result in life change, and a life, that as verse 10 says, that is fully pleasing to the Lord. That's what we'll look at next week. How it is that the understanding of the will of God results in you and me, astonishingly, Paul says, pleasing God in every way. That's what we'll look at next week. So you've got a homework assignment. Memorize this passage. More importantly, pray this passage for yourself and others, pray it for those who don't know the Lord. That's what you are praying that they would understand the saving will of God in Christ Jesus.

Amen.