

*9 For this reason we have always prayed for you, ever since we heard about you. We ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will, with all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives. 10 Then you will be able to live as the Lord wants and will always do what pleases him. Your lives will produce all kinds of good deeds, and you will grow in your knowledge of God. 11 May you be made strong with all the strength which comes from his glorious power, so that you may be able to endure everything with patience. And with joy give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to have your share of what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light. 2 13 He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, 14 by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.*

We all know that during the winter time that as soon as a flake of snow falls, the transport network immediately clogs up! A few years ago I remember that a heavy fall of snow caused major disruption of the railways. Bizarrely, the old trains seemed to work just fine in the cold conditions, but brand new trains had enormous difficulty particularly electric trains. It seems that the light fluffy snow got into their electric motors and stopped them working.

To their embarrassment BR as it then was had to apologise for the disruption. Unfortunately the weather was the wrong sort of snow – the trains hadn't been designed to cope with it!

Actually there are a number of types of snow and within reason, machinery like trains should be able to cope with all of it – as it has for over 200 years! But the designers of 80s trains did not understand that sometimes snow is just light and fluffy!

The problem with life is that people live with the wrong sort of knowledge. They base their lives on the wrong information. The most common misunderstanding of the Gospel that even Christians make is that good works keeps God happy and we get His approval through it. Even if they believe in the work of Christ on the cross and the forgiveness of sins etc. They still see the Christian faith as a process that is designed to keep God happy as it were – going to Church (at least on a Sunday morning), doing good things, being careful in how we treat others, being a good citizen and the rest of it. Salvation is by “faith plus”. Faith plus works, faith plus the Law, faith plus ritual, faith plus being in the right denomination, faith plus saying the right words.

Here we've always talked about the finished work of Christ. And that it is and it's why we celebrate Communion this evening. Salvation is about receiving God's grace through faith. Salvation is by grace through faith and that's it. Our only work is to realise what Jesus has done – and finished - and place our faith and trust in Him. Nothing else.

I know I've been criticised for strongly promoting this here. So what about good works are they not important? If salvation is by grace through faith and is complete, is there any point doing good works? This passage answers that very well indeed.

At the beginning of the year we looked at the beginning of Ephesians and saw how his prayer for them resonates so relevantly to us. The prayer at the beginning of Colossians does very much the same, this time Paul says this: *We ask God to fill you with the*

*knowledge of his will, with all the wisdom and understanding that his Spirit gives.*

Paul prays that they might know God's will. How? It's something that's imparted by the Spirit of God. As I've also said many times before, it's the Spirit that gives us understanding of the things of God. Yes, we can read the Bible, we can speak and listen to others but we can only understand and apply any of that knowledge because of the Spirit. It's what the Spirit shapes into our hearts that really makes the difference. In fact I'd take that further and say that the only way that we understand the nature of salvation is because the Holy Spirit reveals what it is to us. Knowledge is important – like the snow, it needs to be the right kind of knowledge – the knowledge of God's will – imparted by the Spirit if we are willing to let Him do that.

And what happens when we know God's will? We obey it. If we understand salvation, have the Spirit of God and hear His voice, we will start to know and understand God's will. We'll do it – enthusiastically to as the amazingness and awesomeness of God takes hold of us as the Spirit reveals it. What will be the result?

Our lives will produce all kinds of good deeds, and you will grow in your knowledge of God. When we know God's will, we will do good deeds. Like the right kind of snow and the right kind of knowledge, we will produce the right kind of good deeds.

There are good deeds and good deeds. There is a difference between the human definition of good deeds and what God defines them as. Good deeds in a human sense are usually good – helping someone, giving generously, speaking well of people, encouraging, rescuing people and whatever.

But good deeds in the Christian sense are God deeds. Things He wants us to be and do. That may equate to human good deeds or maybe something completely different that people don't think about. God deeds are what is done in conformity and obedience to His will – its what the Spirit reveals to us and empowers us to do.

As with a lot of things God turns human logic around. Human logic says, do things to keep God happy and you'll become closer to Him. God logic is learn to listen and move according to the prompting of the Spirit and you'll do good works, or should I say God works. What's more by living in obedience to His will an upward spiral starts :*you will grow in your knowledge of God.*

Knowledge of God's will results in practical outworking which results in knowledge of God's will. It's a life process. Key is allowing the Spirit to start off imparting it in the first place and staying open to His promptings.

## 2. Be made strong

There is a second point here in this section that leads on from the first. *May you be made strong with all the strength which comes from his glorious power, so that you may be able to endure everything with patience.* Paul prays not just for growth that comes through the right kind of knowledge, but that we shall benefit from something else – that we will grow strong. From where does that strength come from? His glorious power? And where does that come from. Paul does not say it explicitly here, but elsewhere (where?) but that power comes from the same place as the knowledge – the Holy Spirit. We need the right kind of strength – divine strength, not human strength. I'm sure we've all been through situations in life which we had to commit to God – and we wonder how we ever got

through it – well we did pray for God's strength. And that strength allows us to endure all of life's trials. It's a matter of learning how to live in the strength that comes from divine power – and not relying on our own, as we so often do.

3. Be thankful for what God has already made us. Finally Paul says this: *And with joy give thanks to the Father, who has made you fit to have your share of what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light.* An attitude of gratitude. The thing that knowing what God's will is all about is that we know and understand that we have a share *what God has reserved for his people in the kingdom of light.*

Tonight we have come to communion. It amongst other things a statement of what has been done for us in Christ. Through faith we have trusted Christ. We don't just have forgiveness of sins which the bread and wine so clearly speak to us, but we have so much more. Earlier I talked of a common error that people believe that salvation is faith plus.

The work of Christ is finished, our sins are forgiven! Hallelujah! *13 He rescued us from the power of darkness and brought us safe into the kingdom of his dear Son, 14 by whom we are set free, that is, our sins are forgiven.* This is what we give thanks and celebrate as we come around the table this evening. Let me finish with a quote from Australian theologian William Loader.

*The issue of belonging uses imagery of inheritance. Will there be a place for us? For us it may widen to a fundamental question of belonging and worth, and we may hear the strains of the West Side Story's song: "There's a place for us". ..... Colossians is written to Gentile Christians and ..... there is a place for us Gentiles among the holy ones of Israel. In 1:13 this place of light is contrasted with darkness. Coming to faith means moving from a system of authority and power which is destructive into a new realm or kingdom where Christ rules and where Christ's rule is characterised by love. ..... A major component of that liberation (redemption) is forgiveness of sins.*

Let's pray.

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