

A Christian Life worth Living

Colossians 1:9-12 *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰ that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*

When the South African Rugby team won the world cup, we noticed most of the players, when interviewed, tended to say things like, “When you put that jersey on, it fills you with the desire to play above your ability.” The same would be said by many other players in many other sports. Putting on the uniform means they are part of something which makes them want to play in a way which honours their country or the team. Probably a lot of soldiers and policeman and firemen feel the same way. They know they have to live up to what they are now a part of.

Do you know that you should feel the same way, probably with greater intensity when it comes to being a Christian? A Christian doesn't put on a sports team jersey, or even a military uniform. A Christian has put on Christ. If you are a Christian, there is a life, a walk, a manner of conduct which is in keeping with that name.

That's the idea Paul has in v10 when he says ‘*that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him*’.

Just as rugby players want to play worthy of their team, and soldiers want their service to be worthy of their country, a Christian is to walk worthy of Christ. That word worthy actually has the meaning of ‘*having the weight of another thing*’. Here is the weight on the one side; now your walk is to match that weight. Your walk must match this other thing. Your manner of life is to weigh as much as the character of the Lord.

Ephesians 4:1 *I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.*

Philippians 1:27 *Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ.....*

This implies there is a walk unworthy of the Lord. There is a Christian life that does not carry the weight of Christ. So we might say of that kind of Christian life – it is not worth living. There is a Christian life worth living, and it is the life described in these verses

When you live this kind of life, it is worthy of the Lord, and it is all *fully pleasing* to Him. We can glean that an unworthy Christian life is not fully pleasing to Him.

Just to remind you, we saw in our previous message on Paul's prayer for the church, that what causes this worthy walk is the knowledge of the will of God, illuminated by the Spirit to be spiritual wisdom and understanding. As you come to the Word of God desiring to do the will of God, desiring to please Him, and meditate on the knowledge of the will of God so as to find out what it is and how to do it – God will grant you wisdom and understanding.

But now we see the results of that knowledge. We see the purpose of that knowledge. Verses 10 through 12 describe the picture of a worthy walk.

There are three things in verses 10 through 12 which tell us what the worthy walk is. They are describing what pleases God when it comes to a Christian's life. And it is attractive. It is delightful to look at. It is a sparkling promise to live a life above the shallow inheritance of the children of

darkness.

I. Showing and Knowing Jesus Christ

“...*being fruitful in every good work*”.

This is the first marker of the worthy walk.

What does the Bible mean when it says – '*being fruitful [or bearing fruit] in every good work*'?

Well, think for a moment about that idea of fruit bearing. Imagine a tree which produces apples or oranges or lemons. Now think of why God compares a Christian's life to the process of fruit bearing.

1) Fruit speaks of the result of life and growth. You plant a seed, and it germinates – there is life. You water and fertilise, and even assist the sapling as it grows. Then, depending on the tree, it might be a year or more, or several, before it has grown enough to start bearing fruit.

The point is, *where there is life, there will be growth*, and where there is growth there will be fruit. Fruit is the product of life and growth.

So whatever this fruit is, (which we'll see shortly) – we know this much: it comes about because the Christian life is one of life and growth.

So the Christian life is not merely adopting a new way of thinking and acting. It is not merely choosing to live by a new code. The Bible says, “*He that has the Son has life, he who does not have the Son does not have life*”. The Christian life begins when God miraculously implants within you His own life – the life of Christ, through the indwelling Spirit. He resurrects your dead heart. He implants a new life and germinates it. Up springs a brand new life which is almost the opposite of the old. It seeks God. It treasures Christ. It wants to trust and depend and be humble. It desires the Word of God. It feels magnetically drawn to other believers. It feels more guilt over sin and desire to please God. It senses false doctrine and wants the truth.

Once this new life is present, it will grow; it will strengthen; it will mature. And at some point, it will produce fruit.

Fruit is the ultimate goal and result of healthy growth. Apple trees are not planted merely for their bark or for shade, or for leaves. We plant an apple tree for its resulting fruit – apples.

2) Fruit *reveals the nature of the tree*

Matthew 7:16-19 *You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?* ¹⁷ *Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.* ¹⁸ *A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.* ¹⁹ *Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

Pay attention to Jesus' words '*you will know them*'. Jesus says you can know who and what they are (in other words the invisible things of character and heart) by what they do.

Not all of us are botanists or horticulturalists or environmentalists – who are trained and are able to spot the kind of tree by its leaves, shape, bark. Most of us look at the fruit to identify the tree.

Fruit gives external evidence of the internal nature. Your heart will reveal itself in your deeds. If you have a new, regenerated, heart of flesh that loves Christ, it will produce one kind of fruit. If you have a self-loving, rebellious, proud heart, it will produce another.

Let me add a corollary. You will know yourself by your fruit.

God could have chosen to save us by simply doing the transaction of justification in heaven, and then telling us – ‘just trust me. I have told you I will save you if you believe’. (This is how some people think we gain assurance). But that puts us in a dilemma – how do I know if I truly believed? How do I know if I don't have false faith? So what God graciously does is on this side of heaven He lets you see fruit – evidence of eternal life. It is the fruit that encourages you to say – I have the genuine article.

So again, whatever this fruit is, it reveals our internal nature.

3) *Fruit is enjoyed by others.*

Fruit is sweet to the taste. It is enjoyed. You walk up to a tree and pick fruits off and eat them.

Can you imagine an orange tree devouring its own oranges? No you can't. There is no such thing. A tree produces fruit because it has more than enough water and nutrients for its own life – the fruit is the overflow.

So a Christian is to be a tree from which people can enjoy the fruit. Whatever this fruit is, it is something which becomes evident and is enjoyed by people beyond yourself.

The Christian life therefore is not something which barely meets your own needs with none to spare. A tree doesn't bear fruit just to make it – just to survive. It bears fruit because it is more than surviving, it is overflowing. It is a life which turns to meet the spiritual needs of others.

What is this fruit?

Galatians 5:22-23 *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

Ephesians 5:9 *(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),*

You will notice in both verses the word 'fruit' is singular, not plural. It is not fruits. It is fruit - one kind of fruit with all the flavours of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, righteousness and truth. When you mix all those flavours into one fruit – what should the flavour be called? **Christlikeness.**

The fruit we bear is the fruit of Christlikeness. If you are a Christian, in the biblical sense, (for there is no other true sense) then Christ's life dwells within you. That life plus growth will produce fruit – the fruit of His life.

Because He is living inside you, as you grow, you evidence more of Him. This gives you assurance. And you do more than merely subsist on Him, you overflow into the lives of others – because He is so sufficient.

John 15:8 *"By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.*

This is what a worthy Christian life produces – the character of Christ. Christ's life was one prolonged good work. So the life of Christ in us causes us to abound in every good work.

By the way, fruits aren't always evident at all seasons. Nor are they the same size on every tree. The age of the tree, its supply of water, the kind of soil it is in all plays a part.

So it is in a Christian - you won't see the same amount of fruit in every Christian. Your maturity in

the Lord, how rooted you are in the Scriptures, how deep your faith goes, will determine your fruitfulness. Moreover, there will be seasons in your life when the fruit seems slim, not much of Christ's character is seen. But even when a fruit tree has a poor crop, it is still producing something. Fruit reveals life and growth.

But there is something that goes alongside this bearing fruit.

The Word tells us we will also be *increasing in the knowledge of God*.

Here is how it works – the more like Christ you become, the more you know Him. The more you are displaying Christlikeness to others, the more you are *knowing* of Him yourself.

The reason is – when your very character is changing to be like His, you know Him not externally, but internally. This word is in the passive. It is something that happens to you as you bear fruit.

The older I get, the more I understand my earthly father, now passed away. Because as I act like a father, and have much of his mind in me, I know him. I know why he did what he did, why he acted as he acted. I find myself copying some of his habits.

The more you grow to be like Jesus, the more you will know Him. This is what he wants – then that is how He is. This is what He desires – then that is who He is.

1 John 2:3-5 *Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. ⁴ He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. ⁵ But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.*

Maybe I can use a familiar phrase to help us see this – it is ‘*knowing Christ and making Him known*’. The more you know Him, the more you bear fruit and make Him known. And the reverse is true – the more you make Him known, the more you know Him.

But didn't verse 9 tell us we are to be filled with knowledge?

In verse 9 we were told that we are to be filled – filled up to capacity with the knowledge of His will. We are to be overflowing with the knowledge of His will, so how can we be increasing in the knowledge of God?

Spurgeon answered this way. He said, ‘Make the vessel larger, and then there can be an increase. Take a vessel already full and reshape it to have a greater width and breadth and height – and suddenly that knowledge no longer fills it – you need more.’

This is what happens when you grow in Christlikeness. Your capacity for holding more Christlikeness gets bigger, so you continue to increase your knowledge of Him, your powers of reception have grown. Obedience to the knowledge of God already received is necessary to gain more knowledge of God.

The more you are like Him, the more you know Him.

Let these thoughts grow hope in you. A Christian life worth living is a supernatural life. It is Christ's life within you producing His character. That in itself is a supernatural thing giving you assurance. This work of salvation is not going to just barely meet your needs. Rightly lived, it overflows to meet the needs of others. And the more you bear fruit – the more you will know Him and love Him, and the cycle of knowing Him and making Him known is in place.

II. Continuing Through Empowering

You might hear this and say – ‘how could I ever produce the life of Christ? How could I ever bear that kind of fruit?’

Here comes the next phrase, filled with promise:

“Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy”

God is not just going to give you this incredible task through the knowledge of His will, and then say – ‘Good Luck!’ Someone has said – ‘God's commands are His enablements.’ What God orders, He pays for. When God wants the fruit of a Christlike life, He provides all the power needed.

The verb here, *strengthened*, is in the present tense. God continually strengthens us.

As children we all know that our windup toys only go as far, or as fast, as the initial pull or twist or push we give them. But God’s power is not that way. It is more than an initial push, it is a continual strengthening.

Look closely at that verse and you will see four ways in which you are strengthened:

- a) *with* all power;
- b) *according* to His glorious power;
- c) *for* all patience and longsuffering;
- d) *with* joy.

- a) *With all might.*

Notice the word *all*. This is the *extent* of the power. God gives you all the power you need. Not some of the power some of the time. Whatever work you need to do, the power will be there.

The strain of obeying God's will to be like Christ will be met exactly with power proportional to the strain. *When it comes to grace – the supply will always equal the demand.*

Deut 33:25 ... *As your days, so shall your strength be.*

Philippians 4:13 *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*

2 Corinthians 9:8 *And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.*

I'm reminded of when the woman came to Elisha with a huge debt to pay and all she had was a jar of oil. Elisha said, ‘*Go, borrow vessels from everywhere, from all your neighbours -- empty vessels; do not gather just a few*’. So she did that and began pouring oil from that one jar into the others, filling them all up until she had filled all of them. Elisha said, ‘*Bring another vessel.*’ She said, ‘*There aren't any more*’. So the oil stopped, and she sold what she did have and paid off the debt. One of the lessons was that the problem was not the supply of oil, it was the vessels to hold them. The oil stopped when there wasn't a further demand.

So it is with grace. The power of God to enable you flows at the point of obedience and continues to the degree you need and want it. The problem is never with grace; it is with how much of our life is an empty vessel for God.

The more of Christ you seek to know and show, the more power will flow.

- b) *According to His glorious power*

This is the *source* of the power. The word for power is the word ‘*kratos*’ in the original which was

used to mean *perfect power*. This word means might, dominion, great power. The kind of strength you need is not going to be a fallible power source. It is God's power. It is the power of His glory. Notice, like in other places, the words are not 'out of', but 'according to'. A millionaire could give you an amount out of his riches, but if he gives in accordance with his riches, you can expect much more.

God's power is not divided up amongst several 'sub-stations' that deliver less power for lesser things. Power for Christian living comes from the same Almighty Source that created the universe and effected Christ's Resurrection.

c) *For all patience and longsuffering*

Here is the *purpose* of the power. God does not want sporadic, occasional, temperamental Christlikeness. He wants fruit trees that bear fruit even when there is a drought, even when there is fire, even when there is pestilence. When fruit trees bear fruit in spite of adversity – it increases the value of the trees, and people glorify the farmer.

God empowers us so that our obedience will become a pattern. The more your Christlike words thoughts and deeds happen, the more it becomes part of your character.

There are two things which threaten to prevent fruit:

Firstly, internal fatigue. Mental, physical, emotional and even spiritual tiredness set in. We get weary. We are tired of fighting sin, and battling unbelief, and experiencing persecution, and walking the narrow way. So we need what the Bible here calls *patience*. The word means endurance, perseverance, steadfastness. It keeps obeying, even when everything in you wants to quit. It doesn't give up under pressure.

Secondly, external temptations and persecutions and other forces which wear us down. Whether it is persecution or problem people; or temptations to get annoyed or irritated or vengeful or malicious, there are external things which threaten to undo our obedience. So that is why the other word here is *longsuffering*. Whereas patience has to do with not *giving up*, this one has to do with not *flaring up*. It is the self-restraint which does not retaliate or avenge wrongs.

Patience has to do with circumstances; longsuffering has to do with people.

Longsuffering carries the idea of elasticity. As tension is applied to both ends, it stretches. The greater the tension – the greater the stretch. But it stretches – it doesn't snap. Then, when the tension is over, it returns to rest.

This is what God's power is going to do in you. It is not only going to do the work, it is going to keep doing the work in spite of weakness, failure, pain or suffering. It will produce endurance in you; and it will grant you the ability to do it when everyone opposes you.

Endurance and longsuffering are really what reveal whether this is something we ourselves are doing, or whether it is something God is doing in us.

We could aim to copy the ethics and morals of a particular person's life. But try and keep the Sermon on the Mount for a week, a month, a year, a few years! Endurance is another form of assurance – it is proof of God's work in you.

When you say the words *endurance* and *longsuffering*, you typically don't think of someone smiling. You think of the pain on a marathon runner's face. You think of someone being beaten for Christ and grimacing under the pain. But here comes the last and greatest promise. You will do it with joy.

d) *With joy.*

Some texts place the words *with joy* together with *giving thanks* (as in verse 12); others keep it with *patience and longsuffering*. When you think about parallel Scriptures, it goes with both. You will be able to endure and suffer long (James 1:2) because the joy of the Lord will be your strength. In the midst of difficulty you will give thanks. So let me combine the two in our last description of the worthy Christian Life

III. Rejoicing over Grace

The work of God in you is not like a virus which drains you. It is like nutrients which invigorate you. The work of God is not God leeching power out of you; it is injecting it into you. Bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, by the power of God, is not something which leaves you depressed, despondent and hopeless. The Christian life can, and will, fill you with joy.

It is one thing to endure and be longsuffering with a stoic attitude. It is another to sing praises when your feet are in the stocks. It is another to sing hymns when you are on the martyr's pyre. It is another to bless God in your heart and thank Him for trials as they come.

What is it that causes us to thank God? It is His grace. He qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance. He has saved us. Our gratitude flows out of meditating on grace - past grace as well as future grace; what He has done; what He has promised to do.

Grace and gratitude go together. They even sound the same – and are related in root word (*gratis*). The experience of having joy and gratitude when everything circumstantial is not joyful, and not apparently worth giving thanks for, is a supernatural experience. It is part of what makes this Christian life a worthy walk.

What has happened to a Christian without gratitude? He or she has lost sight of grace. They have begun to think that when it comes to life, they have more debits than credits. An ungrateful person believes life is in debt to them – they are getting worse than they deserve. And 'life' is just another way of saying – God – because He is sovereign over life. An ungrateful person thinks they are putting in far more than they are getting out, and frankly, someone is in debt to them.

A grateful person sees that when it comes to life, they have more credits than debits. A grateful person realises they are in debt to the Lord of life – they are getting much better than they deserve. For a grateful person, they are getting far more than what they could ever put in – and that makes them grateful.

Colossians insists upon gratitude:

Colossians 3:15 *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.*

Colossians 3:17 *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.*

Colossians 4:2 *Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;*

This is the Christian life – the grace of God making us like Christ, the grace of God empowering us to be like Christ, and the grace of God causing joy and thanksgiving.

Now step back for a moment and ask, is this a life worth living? Let's list it out:

The character of the loveliest Person ever will keep coming out of you, bringing joy to others, and assurance of your salvation. As this happens you will be growing in knowledge of Jesus Christ. This won't depend entirely on you. As you work out the knowledge He puts in you, He will give you all strength from His storehouse of power, to help you to keep obeying, even under pressure. He'll see you through. And even in the hardest patches, there will still be joy and thanksgiving.

Does that sound like a Christian life worth living?

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