

COLOSSIANS

A Biblical Study

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CHAPTER 1



DISCOVERING AND PURSUING GOD'S WILL



An Overview of Colossians 1

Colossians chapter 1 is one of the most powerful chapters in the New Testament. It includes Paul's greeting to the Colossians, which is more meaningful than a casual reading of it would suggest, and twelve key lessons for anyone who wants to grow spiritually. Learning and applying all these lessons could take years, but if you choose just a few to start with and focus on them over and over again and begin practicing them, they will transform your life and keep you on the path toward spiritual maturity. I will elaborate on each one in my commentary on their corresponding verses, but I am listing them here for you so you can begin to see what a powerful chapter Colossians 1 is.

1. The most important thing you can do in your practical, everyday life is to make sure you are living in the will of God (Col. 1:1).
2. Living holy lives should be our goal (Col. 1:2).
3. Being thankful can change your life and make every day better (Col. 1:3).
4. Focusing on your faith and living by it—trusting God no matter what—will keep you spiritually strong (Col. 1:4).

5. Love is what distinguishes believers from those who do not know Christ, and we are to live lives of love (Col. 1:4).
6. Whatever you do, hold on to your hope and do not let the devil steal it (Col. 1:5).
7. Paul's apostolic prayer will help you understand all that belongs to you in Christ, and it is a life-changing way to pray for yourself and others (Col. 1:9–12).
8. We have everything we need in Christ (Col. 1:13–14).
9. Jesus is before and above everything else. Put Him first (Col. 1:15–18).
10. Christians can rejoice in suffering (Col. 1:24).
11. Part of the Christian life involves being willing to be a servant to God and others (Col. 1:24–25).
12. Christ in you is the hope of glory, and Paul's goal was to present every believer mature in Christ (Col. 1:27–28).

Colossians 1 is filled with insight and revelation for your life. Many people, myself included, have studied this chapter for years and are still finding new treasures and spiritual strength in it. I pray the same will be true for you.

Personal Reflection

Which lessons from Colossians 1 do you believe you need most in your life right now?



The Importance of Being in God's Will

Colossians 1:1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother.

Colossians 1:1 is a short verse, but as we study it carefully, we realize that it is packed with meaning. Notice first that Paul says he is “an apostle,” which in this case simply means a person sent by God. Next we see that Paul is an apostle “of Christ Jesus” (emphasis mine). This is important because it tells us that Paul is serving God, not himself or other people. Before Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1–9), he was known for the zeal with which he persecuted Christians. He did everything he could to stop the cause of Christ. Once God touched him and changed his life, he poured all of his energy into loving Him and building His kingdom. The greatest fulfillment in life comes from belonging to God. And the best way we can spend our lives is to be in His will, enjoy being in a personal relationship with Him, serve Him, and help others know and grow in Him.

Notice also that Paul is an apostle “by the will of God.” This is important because, as Christians, we want to follow God's will. If we are not doing what we do because we truly believe it's God's will for us, how can we ever do it well or enjoy it?

Many times when I teach about being in the will of God, people ask, “How can I know if I am in the will of God?” Here are two simple ways:

1. You will enjoy it.

I mentioned John 10:10 in the introduction to this book. It tells us that Jesus came so that we may “have *and* enjoy life, and have it in abundance [to the full, till it overflows]” (AMP). God’s will for you will not be something that makes you miserable all the time. You may face challenges as you pursue it, or you may be required to make sacrifices, but if it is God’s will for you, He will give you the wisdom and grace to overcome any difficulty. And I believe you will enjoy the work you do in serving God.

2. You will be equipped for it.

I believe that when what we are doing is in the will of God, we will be good at it. God gives us the skills, gifts, and abilities to fulfill His will for our lives. He does not call us to do something without equipping us for it.

You may have to work, study, or prepare in some other way to carry out His call on your life, but you will have an aptitude for it and feel at ease in it. I have become very comfortable doing what I do as a teacher of God’s Word. I have learned some lessons about doing it effectively, and I do work at it, but teaching is not hard for me because I teach by the will of God.

Think about a woman who is called and designed to be a stay-at-home mom. If that is what God wants her to do, but

she tries to do something else because she thinks it is what she needs to do to be a modern woman, she will be miserable. She needs to know what God's will is for her life and put her time and energy into *that*, as well as being a wife and mother. It may sound like a daunting task, but God can enable you to do whatever He wants you to do.

My hope for you is that you reach the point where you can say, "I want to do what God wants me to do. I'm not going to compare myself with anybody else. I won't compete with anybody else. I just want to be in my place doing what God wants me to do."

Finding God's will for your life is not difficult: You step out and try things until you find what is comfortable for you. "Comfortable" doesn't necessarily mean easy. You will likely have to work at it, but you will know in your heart that it is what you are supposed to be doing, and it will bring you peace and joy.

Taking risks and walking by faith are necessary as you seek to discover God's will. When you take a step of faith, you must be willing to be wrong in order to find out if you are right. Sometimes we are excessively bothered by the idea of being wrong, but that is part of the way we learn. When we realize we need to change direction, we can simply say, "I thought that was what God wanted. I stepped out. I tried it, but it's not right. I can check that off my list and go on to the next thing." Being in the will of God is much more important than trying to avoid being wrong.

When I first sensed God's call on my life, I believed His will was for me to serve Him, but I didn't know exactly what He

wanted me to do. I wanted Him to use me, so I started saying yes to every opportunity that came my way. I went to work in the church nursery, and after only a week or two I knew that was not the place for me. I also tried street evangelism, and while I realize the value of that work, I did not have the grace to do it. I tried to be a secretary to my pastor, but after one day, he told me it wasn't working and it was not the right spot for me. When I began to teach God's Word, I found my place. Teaching is what God called, equipped, and anointed me to do, and in pursuing my calling, I am in the center of His will for my life.

God's will for your life will not be the same as His will for other people's lives. If we compare our gifts or callings with others', or if we feel guilty that we struggle to serve God in ways that come easily to others, we will not produce good fruit for God's kingdom. It's important for each person to determine what His will is for them and then pursue it wholeheartedly.

The key lesson of Colossians 1:1 is to believe that whatever you are doing is God's will for you at that time in your life. Over the course of your life, certain things may change. God's will for you today may not be His will for you ten years from now. For example, for many years when our ministry hosted conferences, I spoke in five sessions every weekend. Then I started speaking in only four sessions. Recently, I began to feel that it was God's will for this ministry to do three sessions. This has proven to be the right scheduling decision for us, and people have responded positively to the change. Being continually in God's will requires us to be willing to make changes when God leads us to do so.

Also in Colossians 1:1, Paul mentions that Timothy is with him. He thinks of Timothy as his “true son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2). He knew Timothy’s mother and grandmother as women of “sincere faith” (2 Tim. 1:5). He invested time and energy in Timothy and apparently cared about him, believed in him, and earnestly wanted him to succeed. He wrote 1 and 2 Timothy to encourage him as a young minister. At many times during his ministry, Paul made an effort to train and encourage young ministers, and we should also be willing to do that as God leads us. Timothy was one of those young men in whom Paul invested, and you can read more of Paul’s instructions and advice to him in 1 and 2 Timothy.

Personal Reflection

Do you believe that what you are doing in your life right now is in the will of God? How has God led you to that conclusion?

