

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Knowledge of God's Will Comes Only Through Christ"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 6/21/2009

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Chapter Theme: Christ is the Way – His Preeminence Declared

Outline Main Point: 1 — Christ is Preeminent in the Gospel

Outline Sub-point: D. Knowledge of God's will comes only through Christ

Message Text: Colossians 1:9

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## **Introduction**

If you've been listening to this series of studies from the beginning, you'll perhaps recognize that this is our fifth program on the book of Colossians, but we're only down to verse nine of chapter one. In other words, we're not going through this book at great speed. I want you to understand that this is no accident. There's a definite purpose behind it.

I think it's important for us to proceed with this study of Colossians at a very careful pace, because otherwise we're going to miss a great deal. If you'll permit me to use a metaphor, I think too often today preachers are flying their congregations over the landscape of the Bible at an altitude of about 35,000 feet, and they're traveling at about 600 miles an hour. They're flying through the Bible so high and so fast that they're missing out on a great deal. Let me explain what I mean.

Perhaps you've had the opportunity to fly in an airplane over the central part of United States. And if you're flying in daylight and the weather is good, and if you happen to pass over Arizona, often the pilot will come on the intercom and he'll

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say, "Now if you look out the left side of the aircraft, you can see the Grand Canyon down below us." And you look down, and from a height of 30- or 35,000 feet all you see is what looks like this little ditch in the landscape. It looks like a very uninteresting and very insignificant thing. You can't see any of the details from that altitude. You can't begin to appreciate the grandeur and the wonder of the Grand Canyon from 35,000 feet, flying at 600 miles an hour.

And today a lot of preachers approach the Bible like that. Far too many preachers aren't even doing book studies today. They're jumping around from topic to topic in the Bible. And often they do that because they have a particular agenda in mind. But when preachers today do settle down to try to present a systematic study of a whole book of the Bible, often they take the congregation over the landscape of the book at such a high altitude and at such great speed that the congregation can't really see anything. The people aren't given the opportunity to see and appreciate any of the details. They aren't given the opportunity to understand how things relate to one another. They aren't given the opportunity to understand the deep riches of the Word of God, the riches that are ours if we are truly believers in Christ today. That kind of preaching really cheats people out of a full understanding and a proper appreciation of what is theirs in Christ. It's like flying over the Grand Canyon at 35,000 feet and 600 miles an hour.

But if you get down to 1,000 feet or 500 feet, or especially if you take a helicopter ride through the Grand Canyon, then you really begin to appreciate it. You begin to understand why it's called the Grand Canyon. You begin to

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appreciate the immense scale of it. You begin to understand the wonder of it. You begin to appreciate all the various geological formations, and all the varied colors in the landscape. You begin to understand that there are various layers in the rock formations. You begin to understand the plant life and the animal life that are present. And you begin to understand how all these things relate to one another.

Well, that's what we're trying to do with the book of Colossians. I don't want to take you through this book at such a height, and at such a speed that you can't really see anything. I want you to appreciate the riches of this book, and those riches are the riches of Jesus Christ. I want you to understand how things relate to one another. I don't want you to be cheated out of a full understanding and appreciation of what is yours in Christ, if you are truly a believer in Him today. And that's why we are doing verse-by-verse, and sometimes even word-by-word, exposition of this book. So I hope you'll bear with me as we do this, and I pray that the Lord will bless it and use it in each of our minds and hearts, according to His great plan for all things, and according to our need.

So today we pick up our study at Colossians chapter one and verse nine. And as we begin I want to read verses 9 through 12 for you because they form a single sentence. And I hope you'll open your Bible and follow along. Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse nine:

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- 9. 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.**

Today we're going to focus on verse 9, and here Paul tells the Colossian believers that his great desire is that they should know the will of God. Last week we saw that Paul is telling the Colossian believers that the Gospel of Christ has changed everything for them. And one of the greatest changes that has occurred for them is that they can now know the will of God.

At the beginning of verse 9, Paul is saying this – and now I'm giving you a bit of an expanded translation of the original Greek text. He says, "On account of the hope that is laid up for you – the inheritance that is ours because we are in Christ – on account of that, Timothy and I, from the day we heard about the fact that you have trusted in Christ, we do not permit ourselves to cease praying for you."

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And then Paul tells them what he and Timothy are praying. And again, I'm giving you an expanded translation of the Greek. We are praying, he says, "desiring that you may be liberally supplied with the precise, correct, and thorough knowledge of His will – that is, Christ's will and intent and purpose – in all spiritual wisdom in the broad sense, and in all spiritual understanding in the more specific sense, joining together in your minds the things that you have learned, are learning, and will learn about God."

Now that's a big statement. It is a very weighty statement. It's a lot to try to swallow in one bite. So I want to break it down for us into digestible parts, and I want to do that by forming the details of verse nine into a set of propositional statements. And I want to give you six of them.

Number one: Believing the Gospel of Christ is what makes knowledge of God's will possible.

Number two: Precise and correct knowledge of God's will is possible.

Number three: Precise and correct knowledge of God's will comes because of two things – prayer and study of the Word of God.

Number four: Knowledge of God's will involves wisdom in the general sense.

Number five: Knowledge of God's will involves understanding in the specific sense, and it is an understanding that involves joining various aspects of God's revelation together in the mind.

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Number six: The Christian's knowledge of God's will is superior to the world's false and speculative knowledge and wisdom.

We're only going to be able to cover the first two of these points today, but as we go on we will cover them all.

**Believing the Gospel of Christ makes knowledge of God's will possible.**

So let's begin with the first proposition. Believing the Gospel of Christ is what makes knowledge of God's will possible. Paul is not praying for something for these believers that is not possible. He is praying for something to be imparted to them that is indeed possible, but only because they are now in Christ. How do we know this is true? Well, we have many other passages in Scripture that tell us this is so. Let me just point you to one place in particular, and that is in the second chapter of First Corinthians, where Paul has more to say on this subject. 1st Corinthians chapter 2, beginning at verse 9. Paul writes this:

- 9. ...as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."**
- 10. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.**

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- 11. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.**
- 12. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.**
- 13. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.**
- 14. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.**
- 15. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one.**
- 16. For "who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" But we have the mind of Christ.**

Paul puts this first proposition both positively and negatively in these verses. First, he puts it negatively: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man" – that is, the natural man, the unsaved man – "the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." "...the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know

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them, because they are spiritually discerned." Knowledge of the will of God is impossible for the natural man, for the unsaved man. It hasn't been revealed to him, and he doesn't have the discernment to understand it. It is foolishness to the unsaved person.

But then Paul also puts it positively. Knowledge of the will of God is possible – but only for the believer. Believing the Gospel of Jesus Christ is what makes knowledge of God's will possible. "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man" – the unsaved man has no clue. "But," Paul says, "God has revealed (these things) to us through His Spirit." "...we have received," Paul says, "not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual." And we can do this, Paul says, because "we (believers) have the mind of Christ."

Knowledge of the will of God is possible, Paul says, and that's what I'm praying for, for you Colossian believers. And I'm praying for that because you are believers in the preeminent Lord Jesus Christ. Because God the Holy Spirit now lives in you, you can understand God's Word, and therefore you can understand God's will.

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## **Precise and correct knowledge of God’s will is possible**

And then we come to our second proposition from Colossians chapter one and verse nine: Not only does believing the Gospel of Christ make knowledge of God’s will possible, it makes precise and correct knowledge of God’s will possible. That is the force of the words here in the original language.

An expanded translation of the original language of verse nine would read like this: Our prayer, our desire, Paul says, is that you may be liberally supplied with the precise, correct, and thorough knowledge of God’s will – His intent, His purpose. And the Greek word that Paul uses here for “knowledge” is *epignosis*, which means not just “knowledge” but “full knowledge.” He is saying, my prayer is that you might be filled with full knowledge of the will of God – precise knowledge, correct knowledge, overflowing and abundant knowledge that is not lacking or deficient in any way.

And Paul is also using this word, I believe, to draw a contrast in relation to one of the challenges to their faith that the church at Colosse was facing. And that was the problem of the influence of worldly philosophers who had brought a heresy into the church called Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a philosophical system that was founded on pagan Greek philosophy. The term Gnosticism comes from the Greek work *gnosis*, which means “knowledge.”

The Gnostics claimed to have an exclusive kind of “higher knowledge” that wasn’t available to the common man. Gnosticism said that matter was evil but

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spirit was good. And therefore, said the Gnostics, God could not have created the material universe. It sounds like a lot of the atheistic evolutionists today who say, "I don't believe in God, because a good God could not have created such an evil world." They don't understand that God created a perfect world and man by his sin ruined it. The Gnostics also had a very un-biblical view of Jesus Christ, and their idea of salvation was not salvation from sin, but a philosophical kind of salvation that was only available to an "in group" that possessed "higher knowledge" – that is, higher knowledge than the Bible.

And some in the early church were made to feel intimidated or inferior by this, just as many Christians feel intimidated by secular humanists in our day. But Paul is telling the Colossian believers this: You don't need to feel inferior to these people. In fact, they are the ones who have a problem. They cannot understand spiritual things because they haven't been saved through Christ. You have. And so I am praying that you will have not just *gnosis* – not just "knowledge" – but *epignosis* – full knowledge, correct knowledge, knowledge that is far superior to anything that any man can have apart from Christ.

And that is knowledge of the will of God, Paul says, is in all spiritual wisdom and in all spiritual understanding. Precise and correct knowledge of God's will is possible, Paul is telling them, and that is what I am praying for, for you. And this is a knowledge that is open and available to everyone who is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, not just some special elite group. The lowliest among you, and the

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highest among you, in human terms, have equal access to precise and correct knowledge of the will of God.

### **Are You An Intimidated Christian?**

We're going to have to stop at this point today, and pick up in our study of Colossians chapter one, verse nine on our next program. But I'd like to close today with a few comments and questions, both to believers and unbelievers who may be listening today.

I mentioned a moment ago that many Christians today are intimidated by secular humanists and others in our society who make a great pretense of having superior knowledge and superior understanding. They look down on Bible-believing Christians. They ridicule Biblical Christianity. They ridicule anyone who says that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, authoritative Word of God. They ridicule anyone who says that the universe was created, out of nothing, by the spoken word of God just a few thousand years ago. They ridicule anyone who says that Jesus Christ is God Himself, and that He alone is the answer to this world's great problems. They ridicule anyone who speaks of the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, if you are in that category of Christians today who have an inferiority complex because of the ridicule of the unsaved world, I hope you will take comfort and encouragement from the Scripture passages we've looked at today, in Colossians chapter one and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter two. The Christian's

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knowledge is far and away superior to anything this lost and dying world can offer. The so-called higher knowledge that this world offers is false knowledge. It is speculative knowledge. The whole concept of man having evolved from non-living matter over billions of years is pure speculation, and it is easily disproven. It is a lie.

But Romans chapter one tells us that, apart from Christ, men would rather believe the lie than believe the truth. They would rather worship man, they would rather worship animals, they would rather worship the earth itself, than worship the God who made it all. Christian, don't buy into the world's lies. Stand firm in the truth, and recognize that the truth is only to be found in the Word of God. Knowledge of God's will is only to be found in God's Word. And that's where we're going to pick up on our next program.

### **A Final Word**

And let me say this final word. If you are an unbeliever today, do you understand that you cannot have true wisdom and knowledge apart from putting your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin? Do you understand that this world's wisdom is completely empty, and that fullness of wisdom and knowledge is to be found only in Jesus Christ? I pray today that God will open your heart and mind to have that understanding, and that you will receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin today. And if we can help you or answer any questions you may have, it will be our privilege, and we'll be delighted to hear from you.