

98-05-22b Colossians

Okay, we're back now from our break, and as we proceed on into Colossians, I would like to point out again that the information that we've covered in the first session, as far as background and circumstances and so forth, does have a purpose and does have a point. In addition to giving us the context for the letter, it reminds us of something. This is an inspired part of the Word of God, this letter that Paul wrote.

And yet, if I can give you a quote from Dr. Lightfoot, who wrote one of the first really important commentaries on Colossians back in about 1875. He said, Without doubt, Colossae was the least important church to which any epistle of St. Paul is addressed. It was the smallest town and the least important church that Paul ever wrote a letter to, according to Dr. Lightfoot.

And when you think about it, think about the circumstances of the town. It's over 500 years old. There are younger, brighter, more vigorous cities just a short distance away.

Colossae's a has-been, faded glory, over the hill, no potential kind of a town. But when you think about it, God, in His plan and in His purpose, valued the believers in that town just as much as He valued the believers in Rome. They got a personal letter from the Apostle Paul, freighted with some of the greatest doctrines in the Word of God.

One of the most beautiful doxologies about the Lord Jesus Christ is contained in this letter to the Colossians. It expresses the Apostle's concern over them. He uses just as strong a language in talking about His concern for them, and His prayers for them, His hopes and aspirations for them, as He does any other believer anywhere in any of His letters.

And that should tell us something. Even before we begin the letter, the fact that this letter exists tells us something. It is not circumstances that count.

It doesn't matter if you think your circumstances are dead end. The first time I had the chance to teach through Colossians, I was pastoring a church full of elderly people. Some of them were exceedingly elderly.

Most of them were well on in years and were residents of a retirement community. That was the bulk of the congregation. It was so striking because many of them were retired Christian workers, retired missionaries, retired pastors and so forth.

In that stage of life where many times you need assisted care and so forth, this might seem to be your circumstance. Well, my best years are behind me. I'm over the hill now.

I'm in this sort of faded glory, short outlook, the type of people that don't bother to buy green bananas type of outlook. You just don't know how much longer you're going to be here. Well, God is now using the younger, vigorous, the next generation has taken over and not my time has

passed.

There are many other people who may not be old age or advanced years that are the issue, but you think, well, I've never been caught on the great upward escalator to success. I'm not in a position of influence. I don't have a great place to plant my lamp and shine like a light to my generation.

I'm in very common, ordinary circumstances. I have a very small circle of acquaintances or a very small circle of influence. I'm just a very ordinary.

God is looking for the vigorous and the bright and the talented and the gifted. These that are on fire are going to go out and win great victories for God. I'm just not in that category.

I'm just kind of a very ordinary and lackluster sort of an individual. Well, Colossians was written to a church in a town that all of those adjectives would fit. But you think about it, it's a great letter.

It's an inspired part of the word of God from the Apostle Paul, probably the greatest of all the apostles, certainly the most prolific, especially in the Gentile world. And in God's foreknowledge, he knows that Colossae isn't even going to exist five years after this letter is written. These people, if they survive the earthquake, will have scattered and probably gone to Hierapolis or Laodicea or gone out and lived in a rural area somewhere.

Their town and their church probably is about to go away. But God invests the same love and the same care and the same grace in sending them this very important message in exhorting them and encouraging them to stick with the faith and not to be deceived and not to be led astray. He sends that important message to these people.

You notice Colossians is not a one paragraph note that says, Hi, this is the Apostle Paul and I've just written a really nice big letter to Laodicea. Please read that. Love, Paul.

They get their own letter addressed to them, reflecting Paul's personal concern for them and through Paul the concern of God himself. And the love of the Lord Jesus Christ expressed through the Apostle Paul to these people. And anybody in the region, if you talk to secular people, they would say, Why is Paul bothering? I mean, if he's trying to get this Christian movement thing off the ground, why is he investing in this has-been town? There's nothing happening up there in Colossae.

They're off the beaten track now. He ought to be concentrating his efforts over in Hierapolis. There's a young and vigorous town.

They've got these hot springs over there and they're famous for it. They get a lot of tourist trade. If he wants to spread the gospel, he ought to concentrate over in Hierapolis and get those people on fire.

Boy, what an impact they could have. Or Laodicea, the district capital. Growing, thriving, young town, vigorous.

Lots of Romans there. They've got a barracks and a garrison and thriving trade and commerce. They've got legal practices going.

They've got commerce and banking going in Laodicea. It's a great center of commerce. That's where you don't waste your time on old Colossae.

And if they knew the earthquake was coming, they would be doubly surprised. It's a reminder to us that you don't judge where you stand in the plan of God by where you stand in the eyes of man. They do not correlate.

They do not equate. You do not judge where you stand in the plan of God by where you stand in the eyes of man. There is no correlation whatsoever.

In fact, there is often a great contrast. And this is why Jesus over and over again reminds his audience, the last shall be first and the first shall be last. There are no greater accolades in any of Paul's writing than the ones that he bestows on the Colossian believers.

There are no greater compliments, no greater encouragements. Paul is inordinately proud of their progress and their growth and grace. And he prays for them daily.

Ever since he heard about them, they're right at the top of his prayer list. Right up there with the Roman believers, the Ephesian believers, the Laodicean believers, every other church that Paul has ever come in contact with. These Colossians that he's never met, that are often this has-been town, right up there in Paul's estimation and by extension in God's estimation because it's their spiritual life and their spiritual vitality that counts.

So it's an important thing to remember when we think about the circumstances of this letter is it didn't make any difference to God what the future of the town was going to be or what their current circumstances were. God is completely interested in the life of the heart and the life of the soul, the life that is ours in Christ Jesus. That's what counts.

And that's not necessarily going to reflect in physical circumstances. So Paul was certainly not turning his attention elsewhere when he heard of this small but thriving community of believers up in Colossae. Let's take a look now at the introduction to the letter, Colossians chapter 1. We will begin by reading just the first section of this letter.

We'll read the first eight verses. Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colossae. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you. Ever

since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints, because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you, since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth. As you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

When Epaphras comes to Paul, as he is there imprisoned in Rome, and tells him of this small but hearty group of believers who have come to faith and are growing in grace and knowledge of Christ in Colossae, it stirs Paul's heart. He is encouraged, he is excited about them and the potential for their growth and the evidence of their faith and their love and their hope that are expressed and are communicated to him through Epaphras. So Paul says, I'm going to write them a letter and I'm going to send it back.

He says, this is going to be a great fortuitous occasion. Epaphras has been detained, so we'll send Onesimus. We've got Tychicus here.

He can carry these letters back, the two of them together. Keep Onesimus from running into any trouble as a lone runaway slave and so forth. We'll have the two travel back together.

I'll write a letter of introduction to Philemon for Onesimus to return and to encourage him to treat him as a brother in Christ and to tell him the wonderful news of his conversion and what a great help he's been to me as an apostle. And I'll write a letter to the Laodicean church, and that's our book of Ephesians. So Paul sits down and probably in the space of just a day or two composes these letters under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

And they seal them up, roll the parchment, put on the wax seal, put them in a pouch, hand them to Onesimus and Tychicus and they depart probably with provisions from the fellow believers there in Rome and head back on this long journey all the way back across the sea to Miletus or Ephesus and then up the valley and across to these three towns at the other end of the valley. And so Paul, as he sits down to compose this letter to the Colossians, he doesn't know hardly anyone there except Philemon and his family. He hasn't seen them face to face, but he knows about them through Epaphras.

And you know how it is when you have great fellowship or great rapport with someone. They can communicate a lot to you in just a few words, and you know their heart and you know their frame of reference and what they see and what they value. And when they start describing something to you, it's real and you know the value of it because of who's telling you.

It's not just an objective little report that came on a scrap of parchment. This is Epaphras talking, and Epaphras shares his heart with Paul and how his little congregation is doing there and what the perils are that surround them as this false teaching springs up and starts to entice away those who are weak in the faith and who don't have a solid grounding. And Epaphras feels helpless.

He's been teaching the best he knows how, and yet this seems to be so subtle and so deceptive that he's having a hard time making clear where the danger lies, where the evil is in this subtle and yet very effective distraction from the truth of the gospel. And so he comes and lays these things before his mentor, the Apostle Paul, and asks for encouragement and advice about what to do. And so Paul says, well, let's not wait until you're freed and can go back.

We'll go ahead and send a letter, and that'll get the ball rolling. I'll send a letter from myself. They know me by reputation.

Many of them have heard from people who sat under my teaching in Ephesus. So I'll write them a letter. So he sits down, and what's the first thing that he says? He says, Paul, an Apostle.

They know in Colossae who Paul is. They know him by reputation. They know him secondhand from those who sat directly under his teaching.

They know of him through Philemon. They know of him through Epaphras. He says, Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

And this is a gentle but effective reminder that Paul is not just a yahoo somewhere that has some ideas about what the plan of God is. He is an Apostle. He is one of twelve, one of only twelve, who have been personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ, personally instructed by the Lord Jesus Christ in the truth of the Gospel.

And we know when we talk about the Gospel that this is not just the means of salvation from the lake of fire, but this is the content of the plan of God for man, specifically the content of the plan of God for believers. Not only how we enter in to God's plan and into union with Christ through faith, but also what we're supposed to do afterward. We're not just getting recruited and signed up, we're recruited and signed up for a purpose.

And the Gospel contains the truth of that purpose. It gives us the information on how should we then live now that we are believers. So he says, Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

And as you have probably observed, this is often the way that Paul begins his epistles. You can see this in 2 Corinthians 1.1, Ephesians 1.1, 2 Timothy 1.1. He says, an Apostle of Jesus Christ. And all of those references I have just given you include the next phrase.

Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, how? By the will of God. If there's any lingering doubt in your mind about the little straw ballot election that they have in the early chapters of Acts to replace Judas, and they're in that interim period before the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost, and Peter says, well, there's only 11 of us and there ought to be 12, let's cast lots and let's find somebody who was with us from the beginning. They have an inkling that an Apostle needs to be someone who was personally witness of the Lord and His resurrection and so forth.

And so they find a couple of guys and they say, well, we'll let the Lord choose between these two men. And they cast lots. Well, it has to pick one or the other.

That's the nature of a lot. The lot would have to land on its edge and not fall either direction. And it falls on Matthias and he's elected.

They elect him as the 12th Apostle. Well, what does Paul tell us in Colossians 1.1, 2 Corinthians 1.1, Ephesians 1.1, 2 Timothy 1.1? Paul was not elected an Apostle, was he? He is an Apostle by the will of God. God determines who an Apostle is going to be.

And you can't fake yourself out. The disciples faked themselves out. They said, well, we'll cast the lot between these two and that will be God's choice.

It will be God's will that whoever the lot falls on is the disciple. But they've already decided that it's going to be one of those two men. They've decided that it needs to be one of those two men.

And they're just going to choose between. This often happens in Christian circles today where somebody looks at a situation and they want to make a choice and they want it to be a good choice. They want everything to turn out well.

And they say, well, we want to do God's will in this situation. They haven't backed up to see if even being in that situation is God's will or if they even ought to be deciding one way or another. And so they say, well, we're going to pray for God's leading.

And then something will happen that seems fortuitous for one of the options. And they say, well, this is obviously the will of God. Look how well this fell into line.

We need to be more cautious. We need to be more prayerful. We need to be more careful about applying the word of God as we even begin to make a decision to not corner God and decide that only one of two options is going to be his will or his choice.

God may have an entirely different idea. He may have an entirely different plan. Most often this sort of thinking occurs in communities of Christians or in churches of Christians who don't have a good understanding of what the purpose of God's plan is.

They say, well, should we buy the property on Elm Street or should we buy the property on Oak Street for our new church expansion project? We're going to build and move the church to a larger facility. We're going to indebt ourselves for \$150,000 and build a big sanctuary and big parking lot. We want to have a youth building and a basketball court and a big kitchen and fellowship hall and so forth.

But we can't decide if we should. We've got two options. We can buy the one on Elm Street.

We can buy the one on Oak Street. And in many cases, the whole focus is on what are we going

to accomplish with the money that we have in the treasury rather than what is God's purpose for us as a church. Are we fulfilling our primary function? Are we pursuing our calling of growing in grace and knowledge? Is this moving and building a bigger building, is that even going to contribute to that end? Or are we doing because we can, or doing because we've got a false understanding of the plan of God? Well, Paul was not elected.

The other eleven didn't take a little vote and say, well, here's going to be the twelfth apostle. He is an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. If you look at Ephesians chapter 3, we see one of the reasons that this is significant.

Ephesians chapter 3, beginning at verse 1. Paul says, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, it seems like many of Paul's letters were written while he was in chains as a result of his efforts as an apostle. I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles, if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you. Paul understands.

Paul doesn't have a big head about being an apostle, being one of the twelve personally selected by Christ and so forth. He says, if you have heard of the dispensing of the grace of God which was given to me for you. The reason I have this grace, the reason I have this gift of apostleship, is not to swell my head and make me a famous guy all down through history.

This grace was given to benefit the body of Christ. It was given to me for you. How that by revelation he made known to me the mystery, as I have briefly written already.

You review the first couple of chapters of Ephesians here to find that out. By which when you read you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Holy Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. That the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of his power.

Now remember this section that we've just read in Ephesians. This is a part of the other letter in the pouch, right? So it's an amplification. In some ways this letter is going to be read in Colossae.

So if there's any doubt about the phrase, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, there's an explanation here of exactly what that means, what Paul means by that. He has become a minister according to the gift of the grace of God that was given by the effective working of his power. And that is a ministry that is a conduit or a way of transferring, a way of applying the grace of God to individual believers.

And that is the case with every spiritual gift. How many believers have a spiritual gift? Obviously we don't have the gift of apostleship, but do we have a spiritual gift? Yes we do. We can go to 1 Corinthians 12, we can go to 1 Corinthians 14, we can go to several other passages where Paul

talks about the gifting.

He talks about it later on here in Ephesians. In the 4th chapter, verse 10, he who descended is the one who ascended far above all things, that he might fill all things. And he himself gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers for what purpose? For the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine by the trickery of men, cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, verse 15, speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into him who is the head, Christ.

This is the purpose for the communication gifts that are specifically mentioned here in Ephesians 4. And by extension, this is the purpose of all of the spiritual gifts. You go to your parallel passages on spiritual gifts, what is the purpose? Edification of the body, building up of the body. There's been a lot of introspection, and even encouraged by some people.

Well, you need to figure out what your spiritual gift is and start to function in it. Anything that is a means of building up, whether it's encouragement, whether it's just your fellowship, your presence, your cheerfulness, when you're around other people can be an encouragement. You can think about believers that have been in your periphery who didn't necessarily engage in any sort of overt act.

They didn't cook a meal or bandage your wounds or lead you to Christ through evangelism or anything. It's just their friendship or their fellowship or their just being there and always being stable and always being someone you can go to to talk about the things of God. It seems like there's so many believers who that's the last thing they want to talk about.

They talk about their kids, they talk about their job, they talk about their church functions, they talk about anything except life in Christ and things that are taught in the Word of God and things that might be meaningful by way of application or meditation or encouragement or just the sheer appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ. It just doesn't seem to come up. And then you come across someone who does, who is interested in those things, who shares your joy and your enthusiasm and your desire to seek and to know and to grow and to fulfill God's plan.

And just their presence, it's a gift, it's edifying, it's building up. And we can watch for opportunities to be those people and to not miss those opportunities because we get self-centered or we get caught up in circumstances and forget to be thankful, forget to be joyful, forget to concentrate on the things that are good and pure and noble and lovely and of good report. And it's important when we're not only in our personal walk with God but also when we're around other believers.

What is the nature of our fellowship? What kind of light do we bring into a room when we're there? Are we busy talking about other people? Are we busy talking about circumstances? Are

we busy trying to puff ourselves up or make ourselves significant? Or are we a quietly shining light where the Holy Spirit can do his work through us to edify and to build up? That's what a spiritual gift is. You don't have to put a name to it. You don't have to understand how it functions.

You don't have to know any association of actions. It is the ministry of God the Holy Spirit through you to other believers. That's your gift.

And it can take many different forms and it may be different on different occasions. You may be able to speak the truth to somebody in love. Maybe the only time you ever pass on some point of doctrinal truth and yet God may use that to make a big difference in someone's life.

You may share the Gospel one time in your life to someone else and your spiritual gift is not evangelism, but on that occasion it was. You may not think of yourself as an encouragement and yet whether you know it or not you may have been an encouragement to somebody at some point. And on that occasion that was your spiritual gift.

Some gifts do have names. Some gifts do have consistent functions like communication gifts because they in many cases require training, require pursuing the same path day after day and so on. But there are other gifts that don't and that's why there's not a detailed list of gifts.

We don't have to agonize and worry and try to figure it out. What we do want to do is be sure that we are in a position to be used by the Holy Spirit to be in the will of God so that on whatever occasion God chooses to use us we can be an encourager or we can be a leader or we can be a father or a mother. We can be a great son or a great daughter.

And on that occasion when we function in that role, that's our gift. And many people do find that there is a pattern to the things that God uses them for. They have a knack or they have an insight or they have experience in their past that makes them effective in doing certain things.

You may be able to put a name to that gift or maybe not, but it is benefit to the body, that's the issue. And if you want to know whether or not your fellowship with believers is a part of your, if it's an effective function of your spiritual gift, look at the description of what it does. It is for the work of ministry in verse 12 of Ephesians 4, for the edifying of the body of Christ.

Does your contact with others edify or does it distract? Does it contribute to unity of the faith or are we divisive? Do we know when to pull back like Paul did and not argue and not confront and not be divisive by our correctness? Do we divide ourselves from other believers because we feel that they are incorrect and we are so correct that we can't have fellowship with them? If we really are that correct, we should be mature enough to be able to have fellowship with anyone. If you look around in secular life and just social behavior, it's the little snotty children who think that they are too good to play with other children and say, well, I don't like the way you look or I don't like the way you dress or I don't like something about you so I'm not going to play with you anymore. Well, we don't consider those to be the mature, well-developed, relaxed, stable children, do we?

Children who are relaxed and confident and are gracious and are well-trained can get along with anybody that's within some bounds of normal social behavior.

And that's how we should be. We should not be divisive and straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel because we understand some doctrine that other people don't. If anything, that knowledge should make us more gracious, more patient, more kind, more flexible.

There are times to take a stand, but as it has been put, and I think it's an excellent summary, we need to be flexible on non-essentials. Many things in life are not essential. It doesn't really matter if someone sprinkles instead of dunks or if they effuse instead of sprinkling or whatever their method of baptism is.

Maybe their church, somebody stands up and speaks in tongues. Maybe they have elders and not deacons. Maybe they have deacons and not elders.

Maybe they have women Sunday school teachers and maybe they don't. Maybe there are some things that we would not personally approve of in church, but that doesn't mean we stiffen up and cut off all fellowship and go into some sort of a contortion. Our growth and our knowledge ought to make us function in the role of an older brother or an older sister.

You don't recoil in horror when your younger brother or younger sister does something that reflects their age. Because you're older and more mature, you're able to handle it. That's how we should be, and sometimes we forget that.

Paul is an apostle by the will of God. That is his gift. We have functions and we have opportunities by the will of God.

The people in your periphery, however many or few there may be, the opportunities for stewardship that you have, stewardship of time, stewardship of money, stewardship of opportunities to spend time with other believers or to spend time in fellowship, spend time in the study of the word and so forth. These things are in your life and in my life because of the will of God. It's not a happenstance.

It's not just a strange quirk of fate. We are where we are and we have the opportunities we have. We have the challenges we have because it's the will of God.

Paul was an apostle by the will of God. That was the deal of the cards and that's the arena in which he expressed his love and faithfulness to God. Most of us have been dealt different hands.

Some of us are parents. Some of us are single. Some are married.

Some are employed. Some are not. Some are old.

Some are young. But it's all by the will of God. And that should give us confidence because God

equips us.

He doesn't deal us a hand and then not give us the means of coping with it. He puts us there because that's exactly tailor-made for us. The problems that you have are tailor-made for you.

The problems that I have are tailor-made for me. They are designed to provide opportunities for growth, opportunities for application. They are opportunities.

They are not crises. They are not disasters. They are not calamities.

They are opportunities to grow and they come by the will of God. Paul is an apostle by the will of God. And he includes Timothy who is with him at this time.

And there is a community of ministers here. Paul says, I'm not alone. I'm here with Timothy.

I'm here with Epaphras and all of us. I'm not one lone ranger out here with my wild ideas. There are other pastors and other faithful ministers of Christ who believe and encourage you with these same truths.

To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ in Colossae. That's what makes them count. Not where they live.

Not how much money they have. Not how much of a future anybody perceives them to have. They are saints.

They are faithful brethren in Christ. That's what makes them important in the eyes of God. That's why God details an apostle to write them an inspired letter that's been preserved and will be preserved throughout all eternity.

These Colossian believers, this little church that meets in Philemon's house, they are just as important, just as beloved in God's eyes as anybody else. They are saints and faithful brethren in Christ in Colossae. Paul gives what is a very standard greeting.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We tend to kind of blow right by that because it's sort of a standard formal greeting, sort of like dear so-and-so in our letters. We don't really think about the significance of calling someone dear.

If we did, we'd probably use some other greeting. Dear Mr. So-and-so, your rent is overdue. Well, what does dear mean in that context? Well, this greeting is not nearly so standardized.

It's not something that had lost all meaning by repetition. This is a greeting that Paul had formulated and uses in many of his letters, and it's significant. He gave it thought.

It's a careful greeting that has meaning. It's not a phrase. We say yours truly at the end of a letter.

Well, are we saying I am truly yours? I belong to you? They used to sign letters, you're a humble and obedient servant. Well, were they really a humble and obedient servant to the recipient of the letter? I mean, these things by repetition lose their meaning. This is a meaningful greeting.

It's not like a secular greeting. It's different. Grace to you.

This is the Greek word *charis*, and grace speaks of many things. Grace speaks of the work of Christ in providing salvation, the benefits of that. You can go to Romans 3. Pretty much everybody in the entire known Christian world has memorized Romans 3.23 as a part of a gospel presentation perhaps.

Romans 3.23, For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. What we often forget to add is verse 24, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. It's part of the same sentence.

It goes with. We shouldn't chop that off in verse 23 and make it into a salvation verse. This is a living verse for believers.

There is no difference. All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, but all are justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. That's grace.

It's living grace. It's the free justification through the redemption that Jesus Christ has provided for us. It is the cleansing that we see in 1 John 1.9. It's the return to fellowship that we see in 1 John 1.7. That's the grace that comes through Christ.

Paul calls his message the gospel of the grace of God in Acts 20.24. That's the good news. The good news is the grace of God. Acts 20.24 says Paul is talking to the Ephesian elders and he says, Even though the Holy Spirit testifies in every city that chains and tribulation await me, none of these things move me, nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

That's the thrust of the message. It's all the grace of God. So when Paul says grace to you, that word carries a lot of freight.

There's no work or merit. You can look at Galatians 1.6 and Ephesians 2.8 and 9. We're familiar with those passages. It is grace that comes from God.

You see that in Romans 3.21-26. A passage we just looked at. Also, you'll find this in Romans 4.4 and Romans 5.15. Christ's work manifests God's grace. Once again, the letter to the Ephesians.

Actually, the Laodiceans. Ephesians 1.6 and 7. Christ is the expression, the fullness of God's grace. Grace was often pronounced on people as they went forth to go do a work of ministry.

They would go with God's grace. You find this when they commissioned some of the ministers in

Acts, like Acts 14.26 and 15.40 when they send men forth to minister. They pronounce God's grace upon them.

Why does Paul say grace to you in this chapter? Does he say, well, if I say this, God will give you more grace? Why does he say grace to you? What is his hope for the Colossian believers? What is God's desire for all of us as believers? That we grow in grace. That we come to a greater appreciation of the grace that is already ours. You can see this in Romans 5.2 where he talks about that grace in which we stand.

We can never come to a great enough appreciation of what grace has done for us and what grace is doing and will do for us. Paul's reading here encourages us to come to a fuller understanding of God's grace. That enhances everything.

Our humility, our objectivity, and our ability to recognize the opportunities that God brings us to convey that grace to others. Well, this is the beginning of our introduction. We'll conclude our introductory section and move on into chapter 1 next time.

But let's close in prayer. We thank you, Father, for your grace expressed to us through our Savior, Jesus Christ. And we pray that as we study this letter, we will come to fulfill that.