

## 98-06-19b Colossians

We're back now from our break, and a very wonderful musical interlude there, courtesy of Philippe. And we're ready to resume now as we consider the things that Paul is saying under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit in the letter to the Colossians. Now we have an idea that this probably applies to us.

I think we are probably in a position of needing to understand faith and hope and love. We are probably in a culture that needs message because of all of the distractions, because of all of the belief systems that want to add just a few extra helpful things to God's plan. Just a few things to really finish it up and fulfill it and make it complete. God has a good core thing going there, but if he could just put a few of these other things in, it would really, you know, gild it up and make it be complete.

And here we have in Paul's account, he's recounting for the Colossians the prayer that he prays for them always. He gives them, always, every time he prays for them. And here is the thing, this is what Paul thinks would be a good set of things to happen to the Colossians.

They're not the Corinthians. Paul doesn't have to worry about, can't you all get together and stop fighting among yourselves and being divided and following different leaders and saying, well, I'm this denomination and I'm that denomination. I follow this leader.

Well, my teacher's better than your teacher. My teacher teaches longer than your teacher. Well, my teacher's got more tapes than your teacher.

Well, my teacher's had more years of Hebrew than your teacher. They had teacher wars in Corinth. But the Colossians here are not plagued with any of those major difficulties.

They're not like the people up in Galatia who were being attacked on every side by the Jews and were starting to believe, well, maybe we do need to go back to the real Bible, the Old Testament, and follow the law and get circumcised and observe the feasts and get rid of the swine herds and that kind of thing. They don't have that problem. Their problem is more advanced.

Our problem today is more advanced. We, as believers who desire to grow, believers who are hopefully somewhere in that intermediate stage of moving toward maturity, this is what we need to understand. Because remember when we talked about the fundamentals in Hebrews 6 last session and we said, you know, change of mind away from dead works, faith toward God, and then you have those other things in the list.

The first thing, I mean, you usually get this with the Gospel, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There's this sin thing, and you're full of it, and you're choked down with it, and you're headed to hell because of it, and so forth. That's what we generally hear in the Gospel.

Jesus Christ came and died for our sins and has paid the penalty for sins. So sin is an issue. When we first hear the Gospel, we say, well, there are things that please God and there are things that God abhors.

The things that God abhors, that's sin. The things that please God, that's good or divine good. So we make that fundamental distinction.

Just like children, when they first start growing up in the household, they know that crawling in circles in the floor is fine. There's no problem. They know that going over and sticking their finger in mommy's plants and digging all the dirt out is a no-no.

One of the first things that children learn or should learn is right from wrong. This is okay. This is not okay.

This is a good thing when you eat up all your food like you're supposed to. This is a bad thing when you've been told to clean your room and you don't. And maybe you've been told more than once.

You've been told not to touch the lamp cords. If you touch them, that's a bad thing. Children, one of the first things they learn is that some things are okay.

Some things are even commendable and make your parents laugh, and so you do them a hundred times. And then there are other things that are bad and they're not to be done. When you do them, bad things happen.

This is the knowledge of good and evil. We train our children. The Lord would desire us at least to do that.

And that's what babies learn. We as believers, that's one of the first things we get under our belt. A lot of these things are sins not to be done.

Lying, cheating. Then we learn some of the more subtle sins like mental attitude sins of anger and bitterness or jealousy or carrying around a grudge. Every time we think about this person or we think about what they did back when, a little sack of bitterness opens up and that poison starts oozing into our soul.

And we get to where we can identify even those sins and we know that it's wrong to bear a grudge. So we get this sin identification thing down and we start to get a little proud of ourselves just like a child that knows what's right and what's wrong. We think, I've got this right and wrong thing nailed.

I know where sin is and when I sin I know how to get purified and get right with God and go before Him and acknowledge it and claim His cleansing grace and so forth. We get a grip on this. This is one of the things we do in our early stage of growth.

What is the unfortunate thing is a lot of times we don't ever get past that. And we think that divine guidance and that navigating through the plan of God and navigating through life is basically an exercise in discerning right from wrong. What we often fail to realize, to learn and to start to do is that that's kid stuff.

That's basic things. If we're going to reach the place where we're really going to be fruitful in God's economy, the place where God wants us to be goes beyond just figuring out what's right and what's wrong. Think about your daily existence.

Think about the choices that face you when you go to the supermarket and shop. Let's say I can do this. I go to a shop for pizza.

I know Tombstone makes pizza. I know Red Baron makes pizza. I know they have the Brand X pizza in the white box with the red stamped on lettering.

I know pizza. So I can go to the store and I can choose between different frozen pizzas. Now, any pizza I pick, unless you really start reaching for some nutritional taboo or something, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with picking any one of those pizzas.

But most of the time, I'm deliberating, well, what's my price per ounce here? And what did this taste like the last time I had one? And the crust, was it working hard on my dental work? And so forth. And how many additives am I going to have to put on this to make it palatable? And so you start looking at these different things. And it's not a matter of there's only one right pizza and all the rest of them are wrong, sinful, evil pizzas, is it? There's a choice there based on which is the better pizza.

None of them are sinful. None of them are bad, in my example. In real life, they might be.

But it's what I weigh factors to try to find the best of several acceptable alternatives. This is the next stage in your life as a believer and in my life as a believer. This is where most of us are.

We can identify sin. That's not a big trick. Most of us, we know when we commit it.

We figure it out. We can name it. We claim God's wonderful grace in forgiving us and cleansing us.

But that just gets us back on our feet. That just gets us back able to move about without hurting ourselves. What is the next important phase of our lives is learning to discern the better things.

What is the better? We think that divine guidance is involved in analyzing the options, finding the sin in all of the wrong options, and whatever's left must be the right one. Well, this option can't be right because look at the sin in it. And so we try to find the wrong.

We try to use our sin identification to get us all the way through life. It's exceedingly important for

us to realize that there are things that may not be inherently or intrinsically wrong. Finding a homeless person and giving them shelter or giving them food or ministering to their physical needs in some way, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with that.

Most people would think that is intrinsically good. There may be a ministry to homeless people. Someone may need to go down there and do that.

Take a van down to the underpasses and try to keep these people from starving to death or freezing to death or getting hit in their drunken state and killed. That may be a perfectly legitimate. There may be a need for that.

In your circumstance, you may see that opportunity. You may say, you know, I've got access. I've got friends over here at the place where these clothes show up.

I've got access to some things. Maybe you also have a family. Maybe you have a spouse.

Maybe you have children. Maybe you have a job. Well, your spouse and your children, no inherent sin there.

Your job, hopefully, no inherent sin there. But at some point, you have to start balancing how much time am I going to spend on this particular afternoon, this particular evening, which of these non-sinful things am I going to prioritize and invest my time in and invest my energy in. And it's such a shame that in Christianity at large, in the teaching at large, we hammer on sin.

We say don't do the sinful thing. Do the good thing. We describe what good is like.

But we don't get down to brass tacks on distinguishing between good things in our lives. How many missionaries have augured into the ground like a pilot who didn't pay attention to all of the instruments on the dashboard and have gotten so involved in ministry that they lost all or part of their family? How many pastors have gotten so involved in their ministry or so involved in some aspect of what they're doing that something else has fallen off the shelf? How many of us have gotten captivated or become somewhat obsessive on one part of our life? It seems to consume our thinking. We're thinking about it all the time.

And we suddenly turn around and realize, oh, this other thing just fell completely apart. It is balancing and prioritizing the good. It is discerning the better among good choices that is our next great challenge in life.

This is the problem in Colossae. Because many of the alternatives that are being presented to them, many of these things where people are saying, if you have this, your life will be full. There's no sin involved in them.

They're saying, you need to pay attention to some of the things in the Bible, in the Old Testament that they had. Well, there's nothing intrinsically wrong with looking at the Old Testament. We

study it today and find wonderful, the greatest Christology in the Bible is in the Old Testament, not the New.

They're saying you need to go out and have impact. You need to get involved. You need to make a name for yourself.

All of the things that we see surrounding us today, there's nothing intrinsically wrong. Do not get the idea as we go through Colossians that we are saying something negative about overt ministry or physical ministry or these things that we name as things to be careful about. We're not saying you shouldn't evangelize, you shouldn't minister, you shouldn't meet physical needs, you shouldn't wind up having your love expressed.

What we're saying is the priority on making sure that faith and hope and love and the transforming power of God are at work within us is far, far higher. Because if you concentrate and prioritize that, these other things will take place. You cannot captivate the power of God in your soul and bottle it up there.

It is going to come out. And if you're going to make some error, if you're going to overemphasize something in your Christian life, pray that it's studying the word of God and meditating on the word of God and seeking to have it make a difference in your life. Because if you overbalance in that area, that is a self-correcting error.

Because you're pumping the power of God into your soul and that is not something that can be contained in a vessel. It is going to burst out. It is going to find a means of expression.

Because a human being cannot contain the power of God unless you are Jesus Christ himself. And as we have that power through faith, through hope, through love in our souls, we are going to become more and more Christ-like. Because that's who he was.

He was a human container for the power of God. He was God incarnate. And we are to be like him.

So this is what Colossians is talking about. This is what Paul is about to talk about in his prayer. Because when Epaphras came, he said, you know, they're talking about these things that don't seem to be intrinsically bad.

Denying oneself certain things. Watching out for certain things. That can be a good thing.

There's nothing intrinsically wrong with maybe refraining from certain things. Maybe you don't want to make a bad impression on the unbelievers by avoiding this meat offered to idols. Or maybe you don't want to offend the Jews by blatantly disregarding their customs and so forth.

But when people start bringing this in and saying, these things will complete you. These things are necessary for you to have a full and complete Christian life. They've taken something that

wasn't intrinsically bad and they are using it to become bad.

I'll never forget a man who came when I was a young teenager. I was 13 or 14 years old. It was a man who came to our church up in Tulsa.

Very admirable man. Sort of soft-spoken, but when he spoke, people listened. Because he had something to say.

A great man of character. Taught Sunday school and taught a good Bible-based Sunday school class in that church. He stood up and filled in for the pastor one time.

He brought a message. One of the things he said was he was a very graceful man when he moved. He was tall and limber-looking as he moved around.

Come to find out he was a tennis player. And a very, very good tennis player. Sort of like the semi-pro level of tennis.

Very, very good tennis player. He loved tennis. He was extremely good at it.

But he told us the story of how tennis sort of started taking over his life. He found himself out on the court when he should have been at home. He found himself out on the court when he should have been preparing his Sunday school lessons.

And things like this. And he brought this out by way of illustration to us in the church. He said, you know, there's nothing wrong with tennis.

It's a great game and I love it. But it became an evil in my life. It became a stumbling block in my life.

Because I elevated it to a level that it should not occupy. And that can happen with any good thing. And this is our exercise now.

Is to go beyond identifying something that's a blatant sin or an overt sin. And to learn to identify those good things in our life that we have misplaced. And by misplacing them we have taken a good thing and caused it to become an evil.

That's what Colossians is about. That is the threat that faces the churches in the Lycus Valley. The good things that are put forward and are touted and encouraged as being part of a healthy Christian life are in fact being over-emphasized, are creating imbalance.

And in so doing are distracting and deflecting and neutralizing believers. Epaphras, a young pastor coming up under the ministry of the Apostle Paul, doesn't have the experience and the advanced doctrinal perception to know how to make this distinction to his congregation. So he's come to Paul and he said, Paul, this is the problem I've got.

Whenever I say, watch out for these things, people say, what, are you against these perfectly good things? These perfectly biblical things that are in our Old Testament scriptures here? Are you against ministry? Are you against impact? The very same thing that happens to us today. If we say, well, but there's a cart and there's a horse, and you're calling something a horse that I believe is a cart, then it causes friction and it causes schism, and we have a very difficult time trying to clarify what we believe the scripture teaches and how we believe God has stacked the blocks of priority in the Christian life. And it's a difficult thing.

And a lot of us who are just average Epaphras types have a hard time trying to make that clear. If we speak, people either affirm everything we say, or they say, you're coming out against something that you don't care about the lost. You don't have a heart for the lost.

You don't have a burden for the sick and afflicted around you. You're cold. You're soaking sour.

There's something the matter with you. You don't have the fullness of Christ. You don't have evidence of love and so forth.

And so we get caricatured. We get pushed to an extreme. And we get made into a straw man that then gets burned up or tossed aside when we try to point out this distinction.

So Paul is going to do it. God the Holy Spirit is going to do it in this letter of Paul's. And he's going to talk about where the cart is, where the horse is, and what has to come first.

He's going to summarize that and introduce it, really, in this next section of Colossians, which is verses 9 through 14. He says, for this reason we also, ever since the day we heard it. What is it? Well, it's everything we just covered in verses 3 through 8, isn't it? We heard of your faith.

We heard of your hope. We heard of your love. We heard that you are growing believers.

That God is producing fruit in and through you. And ever since we heard it, we do not cease to pray for you and to ask. And this is the petition that Paul puts forward for believers, hopefully, like us.

Hopefully, we would qualify to be the objects of this kind of prayer. To ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. That you may walk worthy of the Lord.

Fully pleasing Him. Being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Strengthened with all might according to His glorious power.

For all patience and long-suffering with joy. Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. And in verses 13 and 14, you see the transition into this great doxology about the Lord Jesus Christ. Which we will treat as a separate section.

So we are going to consider the petition really in verses 9, 10, 11, and 12. Now this begins as a statement of fact. Where Paul says, this is what I pray for you.

He says, I pray and ask, what is the content of the petition? What is the main verb there that Paul puts in the content of the prayer? Because a lot of the rest of this is modification of the initial thing. What is the substance, the core of what he prays? It's right there in verse 9. Ever since we heard it, we do not cease to pray and to ask that you may be filled. Now if you think about that, what does that tell us? Are we filled by what we do or by what we choose? Are we filled by what God does? By what God dispenses to us in His grace? We don't fill ourselves.

We don't achieve fullness. Paul prays to God because God is the one who fills. Paul says, I pray that you may be filled.

Now he can't pray this for just anybody, can he? Does he pray that the Corinthians may be filled? Does he pray that the Galatians may be filled? He does not. At least not in the record of Scripture. Why? They're not in a position to be filled.

They haven't taken those first steps through the door of God's grace by faith. What does he say about the Galatians? You have fallen from grace. You are severed from Christ.

You who think that the law is going to be your righteousness. They don't have that problem in Colossae. And so Paul can pray for them.

He says, you all are on that road. You're in the light. You've got faith and hope and love figured out.

And you're in that intermediate stage. And my prayer for you is that you be filled. He can pray that for them because they qualify.

They are able to be filled by God because they're doing the right things. And he's going to explain those as he goes forward. He says, I ask that you may be filled with what? That you may be filled with opportunities.

That you may be filled with talents. That you may be filled with more people in your building. You poor little small church meeting in the living room of Philemon's house there.

I pray that you be filled. You need more spiritual gifts in your church. You need more evangelists.

I pray that God will bring you some more. I pray that God will enrich you with gold and silver and precious stones. So that you can spend more and do more.

You see the contrast. And I'm exaggerating for the sake of emphasis. Please understand we're talking about the difference between what is not intrinsically wrong and what is intrinsically right.

I pray that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will. In all wisdom and spiritual understanding. Paul knows that the way to fullness is the knowledge of God's will.

Spiritual wisdom. Spiritual understanding. Everything else is going to flow through and from that.

Because that knowledge can be the object of faith. When faith makes that truth its object. When it seizes and lays hold of it.

Here comes hope. Here comes love. Here comes that three part engine in the soul that God has created to reflect his own glory.

And to implement his own power. And you can see logically why it's God's glory that shows forth when this takes place. Because where did the love come from? God put it there.

Where did that hope, what is the substance of that hope? It's everything that God has done for us and laid up for us in the heavenlies. You notice that that hope, remember back in verse 5? How much of that hope is man made? How much of the pearly white gates and the mansions and all that stuff did we construct? It's not like Noah with the ark. He constructs his own salvation, doesn't he? He goes out there and hues down the gopher trees and so forth.

But this hope is entirely manufactured by God. Jesus Christ has gone to prepare a place for us so that we can be with him eternally. So the hope laid up in heaven, that's all God's work.

The love that's in our hearts, it's all God's work. The faith that we exercise in our souls, the object of it and the substance of it is all God's truth. God's promises, God's character, God's plan.

So who do you think is going to be at center stage when this works? Well, it's not hard to figure out. We are vessels that God fills with divine treasure. When we keep our priorities straight, when we seek this first.

This concept of fullness, as I mentioned in the introduction to the book, was the big issue. This is what everybody kept saying, you don't have it all. This idea of fullness is something we'll return to, but I want to cover this whole petition.

So watch for those words. How many times does Paul talk about all, every, full of, in this little section here of three or four verses? He says that you may be filled. He doesn't say that you may gain some.

He says that you're filled with the knowledge of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding. That you may walk worthy of the Lord, pleasing him occasionally, fully pleasing him. If you do this, if you're filled with the knowledge of his will, all spiritual wisdom and understanding, you're

going to be fully pleasing, not just partially pleasing.

Well, now that you have that, go forth and do great things. You're already pleasing God fully when you latch on to the knowledge of his will. Because you will know when and where and how to stack those priority blocks.

You will keep your tennis game and your evangelism and your ministry in exactly the right place. Not too little time, not too much time. You will keep Bible class and meditation on the word of God where it should be in the scale of priorities.

Not an obsession, not a substitute for healthy spiritual life. A lot of us have been guilty of substituting Bible class attendance for healthy Christianity. And that's not it.

It's not just hearing, it's knowing. And that's what we do outside of class, as well as in it. That you may walk worthy of the Lord, in verse 10, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in how many works? Well, being fruitful in the sense of taking in, but now you've got, you know... Is it some or all? It's every good work.

Reminds us of what it says over in Timothy, doesn't it? That the man of God may be mature, thoroughly equipped for every good work. Thoroughly equipped for every good work. It comes through the word of God.

The knowledge of his will, spiritual wisdom and understanding. That has to be the priority. And that's not just Bible class.

It's not just hearing a lesson, hearing a tape, reading a book, attending a rally, going to church. What is it? If you're going to know his will, we have to stop and think. Some of us have to formalize a time of devotions.

Early in the morning, late at night, over lunch, whatever it may be. But if we do not stop and think, how are we going to make this come to pass? You generally can't really spend a lot of time in meditation during Bible class because, you know, things are moving forward. If you start and reflect, you know, you're going to come back to consciousness.

And where are we? Where did he turn? What was that verse? We can't reflect during Bible class, can we? So obviously, Bible class is not the whole Christian life. It is one step. It is one means to an end.

But the stuff that we get when we look at God's word, now we have something. But we've got to spend some time. It takes time to have faith.

Did you know that? It takes time to have faith. You have to take time to have faith. You don't just go to Bible class and now you've got faith.

You've got to stop and think. You've got to have some connected, continuous thinking going on. You've got to have a proposition in your mind.

God has said,  $x + y = z$ . Or whatever it may be. Those of you that are veterans of some studies through Hebrews and years gone by will find extra meaning in  $x + y = z$ . But God has said certain things that are true. Well, that ought to make a difference.

Is your life exactly like your neighbor? Is it exactly like the person sitting next to you? No. You've got unique circumstances. You've got to figure out how the word about applies.

And you've got to spend time doing it. That you may walk. Walking is, you know, they've said it's a controlled fall and all this kind of thing.

But you can't take a snapshot of someone walking, can you? Cannot be done. Walking is a process. Walking is a time spent in an activity.

It is a type of motion. You can stand and take a snapshot of someone standing. You cannot take a snapshot of someone and see them walking.

Because it takes time. How are you going to walk worthy? How are you going to spend your time in a worthy manner? You've got to go back to the previous verse. Fully pleasing him.

How many times now are we getting this all and every and fully pleasing? Being fruitful in every good work. Increasing in the knowledge of God. I thought he already talked about the knowledge of God.

Well, this is sort of a loop type of thing. Every good engine runs in cycles, doesn't it? And you go back to the basics. The most advanced.

I saw a thing today. We went to lunch. And we did something I've never done before.

I finally rode a dark train. I rode a train and we went to the other side of town. And we went to Landry's Seafood Place.

And I sat, as I always do, where I could see the door. And where I was facing was the bar. And I could see all the stuff there.

The neon signs and everything. And then they had a TV up at the top. And on the TV they were showing.

I didn't even know there was such a thing. They had a miniature golf tournament. These people were competing.

I mean, they were deadly serious. I never saw so many people having so little fun playing miniature golf. They were just deadly serious.

And it was all the same thing that you see on real golf. You know, the camera angles. Except you didn't see the ball flying up through the blue sky.

Because it was just puttering around. Bouncing off these little things. And going around the obstacles.

And I have no idea what anybody talked about. Because I was fascinated by the miniature golf tournament on TV. And they, I mean, you would have thought this was Arnold Palmer.

Or the Golden Bear. Or somebody up there. I mean, what is my point here? I almost forgot it.

But I remember it now. Those golfers, they were playing miniature golf. But they were just as serious.

And they used the exact same fundamentals. You could see them come up and address the ball. You know, that's the old joke.

You come up and address the ball. Hello, ball. And so they come up and they put their putter in front of it and then behind it.

They plant their feet. Get that posture and their grip and everything. Just like a real golf, on a miniature golf thing.

But the fundamentals, they never forget it. If you're playing miniature golf. If you're playing real golf.

If you're putting. The oldest guy that's still around playing golf. You know, if Sam Snead was still alive.

He would still go back and do the fundamental things. Because if you're going to play golf, it doesn't matter how long you've been playing. You've still got to observe the fundamentals.

In the Christian life, we never get away from faith. We never get away from claiming the promises of God. It's been called faith rest.

It's been called grace apparatus for perception. It's been called the edification complex of the soul. Whatever you want to call it.

It's knowing and believing what God says. His promises. His principles.

His doctrines. And realizing that that's a reality and having that shape your life. Having it shape the little things that you do.

We tend to get all excited about that when we have a big decision to make. But it ought to shape the little things. It ought to shape going down and buying a pizza.

Are you worried about certain ingredients in your food? Are you worried about money? And I'm going to buy the dirt cheapest pizza I can get. Because I don't know where my dollars are coming from tomorrow. These little expressions in your life reflect the realities in your soul.

You either do or don't trust God for your health. You either do or don't trust God for your finances. You either do or don't trust God.

You either are or are not enjoying your life. And expressing and fulfilling your capacity for life. I love pizza.

And God knows I love pizza. And thanks be to God, He's given me enough resources to buy a really nice frozen pizza. And cook it.

And enjoy it. Eat it. Eat the whole thing.

While Patty was gone, I cooked and ate an entire pizza. Added pepperoni and cheese on it. I enjoyed it immensely.

I didn't worry about anything that might have been in it. I was grateful to God that somebody had the idea of pizza. And there it is.

I can make it my own self. It's a great thing. There is value in recognizing that the Christian life is not a drudge.

There's a lot of great capacity for life and love and happiness that we can exercise. And if you assassinate all of your joy with worry and care and frustration and distraction, shame on you. It's a great, great life.

So anyway, back to miniature golf and back to basics. My first digression instead of my second. Everybody goes back to the fundamentals.

If they're good at what they do, they never forget the basics. And you come back and it's a cycle. You always start with your essentials and you build up from there.

We heard Philippe do a wonderful job of playing the guitar. And I was the only person sitting behind him. And one of the things I noticed, which is something I never do when I play the guitar, and I know that it's a basic and I've never mastered it and I have in some ways rebelled against doing it.

There's a way to hold your hand on the neck of the guitar. And you curl your fingers around and you get your thumb way on around. Well, see, I like to play in the old sloppy back hill country way where when you need to hit the E string, you don't reach over there and do it the right way with all your fingers.

You just reach around and mash it with your thumb. And then you can hit a lick. Well, see, Philippe never does that.

He's got his thumb way on around. He's got the exact proper hand position no matter what he's playing. He plays a little sample of jazz and country and that's on the other.

But his thumb never moved. I thought, you know, if he was really playing country, his thumb would creep around and hit that E string. Classical guitar.

Yeah, see. Well, you can do it on a classical guitar. But the point is, in this cycle, when Paul says, I pray that you may be filled, in verse 9, with the knowledge of His will, spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And then he says, these other things are going to happen. You're going to have a worthy walk and you're going to be fruitful in every good work. And then he says, increasing in the knowledge of God.

You come back full circle because you don't say, well, you know, I've got 16 pieces of the knowledge of God, so now I'm equipped for life. I'm going to go to the mission field. It's one of the saddest things if you hear missionaries talking.

And they talk about everything they're doing and their physical challenges and all the other things, financial challenges and whatnot. But it's rare to hear someone who's involved in a real active ministry like that talk about where they're getting their spiritual food. They kind of have the idea, well, you know, I got my seminary degree and now I'm a missionary and I'm an outlet.

I'm going forth and doing this. Well, you can't stop feeding on the Word of God. You can't stop learning and growing.

If you're a missionary, if you're in any kind of ministry, you'd better latch on to a good, good source of spiritual nourishment because you're not going to have anything to give. You're going to knock yourself out getting there and have nothing to give because you never get away from increasing in the knowledge of God. And that's why Paul puts that back in there.

He says, I pray that you'll increase in this and you're going to have all these wonderful things happen and that you're going to come right back to increasing in the knowledge of God because that's what makes faith happen. Faith is what makes love happen. Love is what makes genuine ministry happen.

Two people can go out and feed the poor. One of them glorifies God and the other does not. It's all dependent on what goes on in the soul.

Two men can be standing on the street corner praying. One of them has an attitude of humility. The other one has an attitude of arrogance.

It's all what goes on in the soul. It's not the fact that they're standing there praying, is it? Jesus made that point. So Paul says, look, in case you haven't realized it from the first nine or ten verses here, the knowledge of God's will, that's the object of your faith.

And faith is the means of living this life that God has called us to. That you may walk worthy, that you may be fruitful in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God. Now you'll notice, he says the content of his prayer is that they will be filled.

And there's a purpose for that. What is the purpose of being filled? The purpose of being filled is in verse ten. And this is an infinitive.

It's what they call an infinitive of purpose. If you want to get grammatical. What is the infinitive of purpose? To walk worthy.

I pray that you may be filled to walk worthy. You can't have a worthy walk if you're not filled. Don't go off high and right and start thinking about filling of the spirit, because we're going to take a look at Ephesians 5.18 here in just a moment.

But we want to get all the way through this request before we do. The content of my request, that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, spiritual wisdom and understanding, for the purpose of a worthy walk. Now there's going to be four descriptions here.

There's going to be four participles that describe what goes on as you walk this worthy walk. You know what a participle is? That's an I-N-G word. So watch for these four I-N-G's.

Bearing, being fully pleasing is the first one. Fully pleasing him is number one. Bearing fruit is number two.

Increasing in the knowledge of God is number three. Being strengthened is number four. So you have being fully pleasing.

Being fruitful. Increasing in the knowledge of God. And being strengthened.

All the rest of this is modifiers. Prepositional phrases and stuff that hangs around that structure. So you've got the purpose infinitive, you've got four participles, and all the rest of this modifies those.

Remember the big build up in the first lesson there? This is what we need to know. This is where we are as believers who are growing and want to continue to grow. We want the worthy walk.

We're asking. We're seeking. We're knocking.

We're saying, God, show me where it is and I will go there. Well, this is what the worthy walk is. If you're walking the worthy walk, you're fully pleasing him.

You are fruitful in every good work. You're being fruitful in every good work. You're increasing in the knowledge of God and you're being strengthened with all might.

Do you notice how each one of these seems to have one of those all and every and fully words attached to it? What is Paul saying here? If you're latching on to the knowledge of God and spiritual wisdom, you've got it all. You have every strength that you need. You're bearing every kind of fruit that you should bear.

You've got all the knowledge that you need for your circumstance and your situation if you're walking this worthy walk. You don't have to add anything from the outside. It all comes from and through God.

And this strengthening that you get in verse 11 is going to give you patience and long-suffering with joy. Now, turn with me back to Ephesians because we know about this filling thing, don't we? Being filled and having the fullness. We know all about that from Ephesians 5.18. You remember Ephesians is the letter to the Laodiceans.

It's the one that went in the same mail pouch with Tychicus back to the Lycus Valley. Ephesians chapter 5. We always like to go right to verse 18. Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

Dead seas of ink, hundreds of hours of teaching on the filling of the Spirit. Be filled with the Spirit. Be filled up with the Spirit.

Be filled by the Spirit. It's just been gnawed on like an old bone. Let me tell you something that I just realized as I was going through Colossians.

When it says be filled with the Spirit here in Ephesians 5.18, the Greek says ennumati which is en, the preposition that sort of corresponds to our English word in. It also means by. And then numati, P-N-E-U-M-A-T-I.

That is exactly the same prepositional phrase that you have in Colossians chapter 1 verse 8. Epaphras came to us and declared to us your love ennumati. Well now, how did we understand that phrase when we went through it in Colossians 1? Did we say that they were somehow in love, filled up with the Spirit? We understood, because we've seen it elsewhere in the New Testament, that this love is something that the Holy Spirit fills them with, right? Epaphras declared to us your love from the Spirit. Philippe was showing me in the French New Testament there how they've used the word anime in there.

You've been animated by this love from the Spirit. The Spirit has animated you with this love. They've got kind of a creative translation going, but they're trying to get at this idea.

Well, guess what? It's the very same idea in Ephesians 5.18. We've thought, well, how much of the Spirit do you have? We've said, well, it's an all or nothing deal. You can't divide the Spirit, so

you either fully have the Spirit or you fully lack the Spirit. It's like a big on-off switch.

This is something that the Spirit does. This idea of fullness is what Paul is going to explore in Colossians. And this is something that the Holy Spirit does in us.

He is going to fill us with fruit. These four things that we've seen here, these four participles, so that we can have the worthy walk, we're going to be filled with the knowledge of God. We're going to be filled with fruit.

We're going to be filled with strength. We're going to be filled with understanding. God the Holy Spirit is going to do that when we pursue it, when we walk through the door of God's grace by faith.

And that's what the same thing, letter written on the same occasion, Ephesians 5.18. What do you think Paul is talking about? Look up at verse 15. Don't start at 18. See then that you walk... He's got that walking idea like he does in Colossians 1, that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise.

As people who have that spiritual wisdom and understanding. Redeeming the time because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

The very same thing that he's saying in Colossians 1. Then he says, and do not be drunk with wine. And by the way, that's not *en oino* in Greek. It's what they call a dative, locative, or instrumental, depending on how many cases you want to have in Greek.

But it's a different construction. It doesn't say do not be filled *en oino*, but be filled *en pneumati*. They're not parallel constructions because they're different ideas.

It says don't be drunk because wine is influencing you. What's the deal with being drunk with wine? Is your body... We say we're 90 something percent water, 96 percent water. One of the Star Trek space fantasy things had one of the aliens coming in and calling the humans.

They finally got a translator. They could talk to these little nano aliens or whatever they were. And they came in and they were trying to think up a name for the humans.

So they said, we're fighting against you because you've been wiping us out, you ugly bags of water. And that's what they called the humans. They said you're ugly bags of water.

Well, you can get drunk as a skunk, and your body is not full of wine, is it? You've got three or four or five glassfuls of wine in your stomach, but you're not defined by wine. You're not 98 point something percent full of wine. Well, it's the same thing with the spirit.

It's not a matter of are you full of the spirit or has the spirit left until you confess your sins. Wine is influencing everything you do when you're drunk. You can't walk.

You can't talk. You can't even sit still. People can look at you and tell that you're drunk.

And, of course, drunks don't realize this. And we, when we are drunk, don't realize it. I include myself.

It hasn't happened lately. Thank goodness. But you can think that you're passing yourself off as sober, and everybody in the room says, phew, because everything you do is conditioned by that wine in your system.

Paul says don't have everything in your life conditioned by wine, which is just an excess of a physical thing. Be filled by the spirit. In the same way that he says in Colossians, the papyrus has declared the love that you have by the spirit, the love that you have through the spirit, the love that you have in the spirit.

The filling that you have is not filling with the quantity of the spirit, with the substance of the spirit. It's what the spirit fills you with. What does he fill you with? These things.

The fruit of the spirit that he's going to give in Ephesians. The things that he talks about in Colossians chapter 1. Strength, wisdom, discernment. All of the things that characterize the worthy walk.

That's what you're filled with. Where does it start? How do we get that? It sounds great. Sign me up.

How does it happen? We start with faith, and we never get away from that basic, because we pursue the knowledge of God. We pursue spiritualism and understanding, and we think about it sometime other than Bible class. That walks us through the door, into God's power, into the ministry of God's spirit, and he will fill us with those things.

We keep thinking, you know, I ought to be joyful. I ought to have more endurance. I ought to have more patience.

And so we try to have more patience, instead of pursuing the life of faith that enables God's spirit to fill us with those things. And it doesn't come by our effort. It comes by his grace.

This is where Paul is headed in Colossians, and we'll continue this study next week. But I hope that these things are an encouragement to you, because anybody can have faith. We can all choose to have faith, and all of these other things will follow.

Let's close in prayer. Father, we thank you for your grace. We thank you for your provision for us, and that the successful life to which you have called us depends on your grace and your power, not on our own.

We thank you for the truth that you have put before us, that we can seize and lay hold of by faith.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will make these things real and alive in our souls. We pray that we will remember them and be caused to reflect on them as the days go by, as we spend the hours of our day, and that as we ask and seek and knock, you will honor that wonderful promise and give us those things.

We pray that all things will reflect the glory of our Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.