

98-08-17a Colossians

Let's begin our study this evening with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you as always for the ways that you have demonstrated your love and manifested your grace toward us this week. We thank you for safe travel.

We thank you for your provision in all of the different areas of our lives, the circumstances that we face, the people that we deal with. We thank you for the power that you have placed at our disposal through your spirit and through your word. We pray tonight as we study your word that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding that these things will be clear to us as we see them on the page and that they will remain in our hearts as we leave and resume our lives so that the things that we do are pleasing in your sight and our thoughts and our actions reflect the glory of our Savior Jesus Christ.

We ask these things in his name. Amen. We resume tonight our study in Colossians.

We are in a very important part of the letter. This really summarizes the theme of the letter. The section that we're in, in chapter 1, verses 9 through 14, the prayer of Paul for the Colossian believers encapsulates the key to the book.

It's the thrust of his message. It is the summation of the answer to the problem that he is addressing when he writes the letter. It is not fully explained.

It doesn't fully capture the essence of the message. But it is the summary. And inherent in what he prays for them is the answer to all of their problems.

Hence, it contains the answer to all of our problems. And we have seen in the past, looking at the time and the place and the circumstances of the writing of this letter, that it is very apropos for us. We are surrounded by distractions.

We are surrounded by alternatives to the Christianity that is taught in the New Testament. Many of those alternatives are suggested and encouraged and put forward and sometimes foisted upon us by fellow believers. It is exceedingly important that we know who we are and why we're here.

You've heard me mention this before, but any time that particular subject comes to my mind, I think about Admiral Stockdale when he was the running mate, vice-presidential running mate to Ross Perot. And when they had the debates, it was televised. And I had seen Admiral Stockdale when he came and spoke to us at the Academy about his experiences as a POW.

But he began his speech with the most unforgettable words. He's all white-haired and he had his black military-issue-looking glasses on. And after all of this wonderful speechifying by the other vice-presidential candidate, Admiral Stockdale came up to the microphone and stood there for a second.

And then he looked out at the audience and the camera and he said, Who am I? Why am I here? Which is a great question to ask and to answer. At that time, of course, he was to the civilian world at large, I think, relatively unknown. And it is a question we need to ask ourselves regularly.

Who am I and why am I here? This is what Paul prays the Colossians will never forget. What they have started to understand with the teaching of Epaphras, and what the knowledge of God, the epinosis of God's will, will remind them of on a daily, day-by-day basis. Paul says in Colossians 1, 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. This section, in addition to summarizing the priorities and the goal of our lives as believers, also serves as a bridge from the introduction of the letter, where we saw Paul's observations about faith and hope and love.

It goes from that to the goal for which Paul prays, the goal for which believers should strive, to the end of that goal. When you're striving for something, there's something you're running toward. If you're rowing and you want to get across the lake, if you're traveling, I saw on TV this week some young guy is going to try to swim across the Atlantic from the United States to France.

He figures it's going to take him about eight months, swimming eight hours a day, every day. But when he starts out, he's not going to be able to see his goal, but if he actually makes it all the way across and gets inside of land, he's going to have to steer for a point and crawl up on a beach. If you're going somewhere, it's good to eventually come inside of the goal and be able to see it.

So Paul describes the qualities that characterize a healthy believer, and now he's going to move, this section is a transition, to the picture of Jesus Christ himself that he is going to paint. All of this is keeping in mind the opposition, the distractions, the chirping noises that are drawing believers away from the simple truth that was first communicated to them through the ministry of Paul and continuing through the ministry of Epaphras. Now, last week we looked at the content of this prayer.

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. We saw that that word knowledge is not just gnosis, but epi-gnosis. It is knowledge that reaches into and seizes hold of the essence of a thing.

It is over and above knowledge. It is super knowledge. This is something that some of the competing philosophies were claiming for themselves.

Well, you have a good thing going there as a Christian, but we've got some higher knowledge. Let us fill you in on the rest of the story. Let us give you the rest of the equation that will really fulfill and really make you everything that you should be in life.

So they were claiming to have this over and above, this epi-gnosis. But Paul says, my prayer for you is that you may be filled with the overarching knowledge, the penetrating knowledge, the over and above knowledge of his will in all wisdom and understanding spiritual. The word spiritual applies to both of those.

We saw that wisdom is sophia, understanding is sunesis, and there is a purpose for this. We often think that knowledge is just a wonderful end in itself. If you think about the normal progression in our education system, everyone hopefully goes through grade school, junior high, high school, and we pretty much assume that everyone is going to go to college and get a college degree.

In our sort of typical or average view of progress, we assume that that's what's needed. Well, you just need to keep going. The more education you have, the better.

If you're bright enough to get good grades in school, well, then you need to get on the fast track. You need to get in the REACH program or go to the magnet school or get the extra. The more knowledge, the more training, the more education you can get, the better off you are.

That has a ring of truth about it. It can be true, but we have to stop and think. What are we trying to do when we raise our children? Is it really contributing to our goal to take our child, who might be a second grader or a third grader, their grades are good, they're happy and well-adjusted and doing fine in school, but they say, you know, your child qualifies for REACH.

Your child qualifies for this wonderful extra program here. So we think, well, if they qualify, they must go because more education is a good thing. We need to stop and think.

What is our purpose? Is this particular education, this particular magnet school or program or whatever it might be, is this something that actually contributes to our goal? Is our goal just to cram as much education as we can into the child's mind? No, it isn't. Education in and of itself, education as an end in itself, isn't a valuable pursuit. It needs to lead to something.

It needs to go somewhere. It needs to be a part of the larger program. And we can be short-sighted and say, well, if it's education, it's good.

This goes back to our whole scientific basis for our society. Science is just another way of saying knowledge. And the scientific method and scientific discoveries and the science that fuels all of our appliances and our computers and everything else, we say, well, knowledge is a good thing.

The more we know, the better off we are. And we think that knowledge is an end in itself. Notice

what Paul says here about wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

Look at the first word in verse 10. It's so that. There is a purpose.

There's a reason why he says, I pray that you may be filled with this epinosis knowledge of God's will and that you'll have all of this spiritual Sophia wisdom, the wisdom that knows how to accomplish a particular task, and that spiritual Suneisis, the wisdom that knows the larger view, how that task fits into the scheme of things, the difference between a battle and a war, between a skirmish and a campaign is the difference between Sophia and Suneisis. Paul says, I pray that God will give you that range of wisdom to be able to handle the details and do small things well, be faithful in that which is least, and also have all of those things work together into a great fabric, into a great comprehensive plan, so that there's a purpose for having that knowledge. And we need to remember this when we attend Bible class, when we spend time attempting to understand the Word of God.

In a lot of cases, many of us have been personally led down this trail in the past, we can seek an understanding of the Scripture for its own sake. And we think that we haven't thought beyond that. We figure, well, if I understand it, that's the goal.

But Paul says there is a reason why we need this knowledge and understanding. It is so that you may walk worthy of the Lord. If your knowledge doesn't result in a worthy walk, you've been living that short-sighted, short-term goal, you've been seeking knowledge and haven't stopped to think, well, what's this knowledge for? That you may walk worthy.

The word worthy here, by the way, is the Greek word axios. A-X-I-O-S. Axios.

We have this in English as an axiom or axiomatic. Something is axiomatic. It's a rule.

It's a given. In geometry, we work with axioms that are the basis of working out other things. That you may walk worthy.

Axios. We also, a related word is axis. A-X-I-S.

What is an axis? It's a thing that something pivots on or rotates around. You can have a seesaw type of thing, a lever type of thing, and one end and the other go up and down at the pivot point or the axis of rotation. The reason why this word is used here for worthy is that it has reference to the idea of a scale.

Remember in the ancient world, when you wanted to weigh something, you had a pivoting scale, like a seesaw. You put the reference on one side, and you put the thing to be weighed in the other. You add and subtract your little.

We had one of these. They probably have all digital things now in school, but we had the old swinging scale with the dishes and the little set of brass weights and a little wooden case. You

pick up the one gram and the .5 gram and the .1 gram, and you'd add up until you could get it to perfectly balance, and that would tell you how many grams of material you had in the other dish.

It balances out. It's equivalent because when it settles, it's level. Well, this is how the word *axios* means worthy.

It doesn't mean that we need to be personally worthy. We tend to think of our self-worth, well, am I worthy? I'm not worthy of salvation. We start thinking about our personal value and our self-esteem and others' esteem of us and so on.

That isn't what's in view here. When it says that you may walk worthy of the Lord, what it's literally saying is that your walk may, in the scale of balance, be like the walk that the Lord had, that your walk is worthy of the Lord. It's not our personal worth that's in the scale.

It's the walk. It's our lifestyle, not our personal worth. As soon as we see that word worthy, we start thinking, oh, I am not worthy, I am unworthy, or how can I be worthy? Worthy is the Lamb.

How can I ever balance out with Jesus Christ? We're not talking about personal worthiness. We're talking about the worthiness of our walk. And our walk, our conduct, the manner and pattern of our lives can be worthy.

Otherwise, there's no point in praying it. And when it is worthy, it's not talking about intrinsic worth so much as it is how does it compare. A scale compares two things.

It compares to what the Lord did when He was on this earth. It compares to what the Lord is looking for, what the Lord considers to be worthy. How does your lifestyle, your priorities, your choices, how do they weigh in the scale? Paul says that he prays that they be filled with the full knowledge, the inward-reaching, rich knowledge of God's will so that their walk will measure up in the scale.

That means it's possible. If that prayer is fulfilled, if we gain a knowledge of God's will, if we're filled with spiritual wisdom and spiritual understanding, Paul says the purpose of that is so that your walk is worthy. So you've got a cause and effect.

If we gain that knowledge of God's will, and if we get both the Sophia and the Sunesis side of it, we understand the way things are done and we see how that fits into the bigger plan, that is going to enable us to have a walk that measures up, a walk that God can look at and say, that's right, that balances in my scale. It's just right. So it's possible.

We don't have to get introspective and start wondering about our personal worth and our guilt, or this, that, or the other. It has to do with how are you functioning. Your function will measure up the way you live.

And it goes on to say, fully pleasing. And then the word *hymn* is in italics because this is the word

pas in Greek, P-A-S, which means every. And then the word pleasing, arresting.

This is the only place in the New Testament where this word is found, arresting. We have to look for parallels in secular Greek literature. But it has the idea of, it was used in both a positive and a negative sense.

In the negative sense, I think I mentioned this last week, it was used for people who were obsequious. What does an obsequious person do? I can't think of any nice synonyms for obsequious, maybe because there are too many un-nice synonyms in my mind for it. But somebody who is too anxious to please is what obsequious means.

Someone who you lose respect for because they're so anxious to please. But what do they do? What is the nature of obsequiousness? It means that you run around trying to do every little thing. Everything you can think of.

If someone reaches for something, it's already there. If they need the paper, it's there. Their slippers, it's there.

Cold drink, it's there. You try to anticipate and fulfill every whim, every desire. That was the negative use of the word.

On the positive side, there's a way that you can do that where it's a wonderful thing. If you know someone well, you can anticipate. And one of the great ways of expressing love and expressing the intimacy that you share with another person is to anticipate because you know them well.

There's nobody else on earth that might know that you're really in need of a good neck rub or you really need your back scratched or you really need just ten minutes of quiet left alone. Someone that knows you well knows about the little things and knows about the big things. And because they love you, they do those things and they make those things happen.

And that's the positive side of arresting. How can we do that in the spiritual realm? How can we anticipate and fulfill God's expectations, the things that please God when He looks at us? We have to know what He's looking for. We have to have a relationship with Him just like we do with each other.

That's the awkward part of dating. And great fodder for television and entertainment has come out of people who are trying to get to know each other because they don't know. And they'll change in mid-stream.

They'll say, oh, I'd like chocolate. And the other person says, oh, I hate chocolate. I mean, I'd like to spill chocolate.

I don't want to drink it. I don't want to eat it. I don't want to see it anywhere.

And they try to adjust themselves to the other person because they don't know. This is what happens in Christianity today. A lot of believers are guessing at what God is pleased by or making up their own idea of what God is pleased by and then fulfilling that and then wondering why God is not pleased.

And in some cases, they won't find out how displeased He is until the judgment. So all of this should be contributing to our curiosity about, well, how can I get this knowledge that Paul prays for? It sounds like a very important thing. It sounds like something that we really need.

I want to be fully pleasing. I want to please God in every... In fact, it's a very awkward Greek phrase. It looks like there's a missing word.

It says, in every pleasing... and then there's nothing. Literally in Greek, it says that you may walk worthy of the Lord in every pleasing and that's all it says. And what's doubly interesting here is that there is a kind of chiasm here that emphasizes and centers.

We've seen this in many places where you have parallel ideas that bracket and you have brackets inside brackets and brackets inside brackets and right at the center you have something very important. In this little chiasm here, the thing in the center is in every pleasing. And the awkwardness of the Greek phrase and its central place in this chiasm tells us this is the point, to be fully pleasing to God.

He looks at us... It always used to amaze me to look at some of the passages where it says that Christ might present to himself a glorious church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. How can the church be without spot, without wrinkle, be holy and without blemish? Because we're all sinful and we mess up, we do things to each other and before God we sin in a hundred different ways. How could we possibly be pleasing in every thing, in every way to God? That's what this letter is about because this is the little chink in the armor that the enemies and the distractors and the philosophizers in the Lycus Valley, this is where they're inserting their little point of the spear to pry apart these believers and their lives.

They're saying, look, you don't have it all, you lack and we're going to fill that lack for you. This is what happens today. People find the weakness in our armor, they find our insecurity, they find where we have failed and our guilt and our shame over having failed and they work a pointed object in there and start prying.

Well, the way to get over that is to get busy over here. The way to fill this lack and this need is to adopt our program, get into our stadium and read our book and listen to our tapes and go to our seminar and get the fulfilled life this way. It's been going on for 2,000 years.

Ever since Pentecost, somebody has been saying, you don't know it all, you don't have it all, you're not sufficient with what you're currently operating with. So this is what Paul is addressing. All of us need reinforcement in this area.

Paul says, if this knowledge of God's will becomes a part of your soul, if you are filled with wisdom and understanding in the spiritual realm, you will walk worthy. You will balance perfectly in the scale of God's evaluation. You will be pleasing in everything.

It just says, in every pleasing, and it's just like he stops. He says, there isn't any way that you won't be pleasing God if these things are true. Being fruitful in every good work.

This doesn't mean that the fruit consists of good works. It means that when good works take place, you are fruitful in them. People can do good works and not be fruitful.

But when your good works take place, you will be fruitful in them because the fruit is internal. We documented that last time. And increasing in the knowledge of God.

This is the last phrase of verse 10. And once again, we have to pay close attention. Increasing in the knowledge of God.

In English, it sounds like that your knowledge of God is increasing. If you read this in the Greek, what it says is increasing by means of the knowledge of God. Being fruitful and increasing are two growth synonyms.

Being fruitful in your good works and increasing, growing. The image here is of a tree in a grove or a vine in a vineyard that is fruitful and expanding, growing, increasing. And the word in here, in the knowledge of God, this is the grammatical case that we talked about last week where you have a dative, locative or instrumental.

They're spelled the same, but you have different ways in which those words are used. And this is the instrumental of means. By means of.

Increasing by means of the knowledge of God. And this understanding of the case here is well attested. All of the Greek scholars that know even more than I do understand it that way.

It's a shame that our English translation has sort of blurred that over because once again, this is our outside bracket. Where have we just seen the word epinosis, the word knowledge? This is epinosis again at the end of verse 10. Being filled with the knowledge of His will is up in verse 9. And you have the knowledge of God.

So the knowledge of God and knowledge of His will are set in parallel to each other on the outside of this. And then in verse 9, we have all wisdom and understanding spiritual, or all spiritual wisdom, all spiritual understanding within that. And inside in verse 10, we have being fruitful and increasing.

So being fruitful and increasing, these two words. I would write this all on the board for you and show you. It's a much more beautiful symmetry in Greek than it is in English, but you just have to trust me on this.

You have those words wisdom and understanding in verse 9. And there's a parallel down in verse 10 of fruitful and increasing, which is very interesting because, of course, the knowledge of God, that wisdom and understanding are what make us fruitful and increasing. Then within that, you have the walking worthy, fully pleasing. That's in the center of this symmetrical construction, the symmetry here in these two verses right at the center.

It's walking worthy. Peripateo, to conduct oneself, to order one's life. Axios, worthy of the Lord.

Fully pleasing, in every pleasing is what it says. Then it starts over again. It's like after that symmetrical grouping, then we begin again in verse 11.

Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy. This strengthened with all might, you remember there are five words for power in Greek. This is dunamis and dunamou.

Dunamou is the verb strengthened. Dunamai means to be able or to have the ability. Dunamou means to make or to give that power or ability.

So this is dynamited with dynamite, if you will. Dunamis is where we get the word dynamite. Dunamis and its word group mean the inherent power or inherent ability.

The stick of dynamite laying there isn't moving tons of dirt, it isn't blowing things apart, but it has the power to do so. The energy is in the dynamite. It has the ability.

So a good alternate translation for this might be enabled with all ability. According to the standard of his glorious power or the power of his glory. And the word power here is kratos, k-r-a-t-o-s.

This is another one of the Greek power words. Kratos has more the idea of power in action. There's a word in Greek called kosmokrator, a worldly power.

It has the idea of a ruler, someone who's exercising authority, who's getting things done. Krator is the kind of power that's in action. Well, how do we understand God's power? We've seen it in action.

We see the record of his activities in scripture. So we know how great the power of God's glory is. And it says that we are enabled with all ability according to the standard of... Think about the biggest things that God has ever done.

The parting of the Red Sea, creation, the mighty acts that are recorded in the Old Testament, the raising of Christ from the dead, the raising of others, healings, calming of the wind and the waves. Anything you want to think of that is an expression of the glory of God's power or the power of God's glory. That's the standard by which we are enabled.

We have enough ability from God. It's from the same source as parting the Red Sea. It's the

same source as any mighty act you want to name.

Parting the earth and swallowing up the rebellious. So, this once again... Remember how before Paul said, I want you to be filled with the knowledge of his will so that you can have a worthy walk? Well, now he says we are enabled with all ability according to the standard of God's... the power of God's glory in order to do something. It's a little bit different construction here.

Now we have the word ace, E-I-S, which in its basic meaning means into or unto. But many, many times, especially when you're dealing with concepts, it means with a view toward. We are enabled with all ability.

You think, well, if I'm a TV evangelist of the emotional or Holy Ghost variety, I'm enabled with all ability so that I can heal. I'm enabled with all ability so that I can call down bondage on the demons. And I can drive out sickness.

And I can heal and invoke the power of God for people. That's the purpose of my enabling and my ability. This verse tells us what our enabling is for.

What would you like to have ability for? If we think about our lives, we think about the current challenges we face, we think about the uphill grades that we're looking at right now, what sort of ability would we like to have right now? Would we like to be able to make a big pile of money and pay off all our debts? Would we like to be able to resolve some issue or solve some problem, make it through some crisis and come out on the other side? We would like to be enabled to foresee what the stock market is going to do or foresee to make good business choices or good home economic choices. Should I buy a car or not? Should I buy this house or not? Should I move or not? Should I change jobs or not? When we start thinking about ability and enablement, when we think about knowledge and wisdom, we generally start thinking, I really wish I had a crystal ball where I could see to get my immediate problems solved. So this verse is especially interesting because Paul says that we can be enabled with all ability, but it's for a specific purpose.

This reminds us a lot of Jesus talking to the disciples in John 14 and 15. He says, Whatever you ask the Father in my name, He will give it to you. We think, wow, this is like the best credit card there ever was.

Ask God for anything and He will do it. It's a promise of the Lord Jesus. But when we look in the context in which Jesus says those words, He says, If you have my words and keep them, if you love me, if you're abiding in me, if you're oriented to the plan of the Father, if you're doing things in my name, if you are focused on the objectives of God, whatever you ask, notice he says, in my name.

Whatever you ask in my name, my Father will do it for you. Well, am I going to ask in the name of the Lord? In the name means on behalf of, in the interest of. I am invoking the authority and the

presence of this person.

Plant a flag on Mount Suribachi and claim the top of this mountain in the name of the United States of America and all the Marines who died getting you there. Plant a flag on the moon. Plant a flag in the new world.

I plant this in the name of my home country. They didn't put a United Nations flag on the moon, did they? It was an American flag because it was American tax dollars that put them up there. When you do something in the name of, if we stopped and thought about that, our prayers would be different.

Many people's prayers would be different because is this in the interest of the Lord Jesus Christ? Am I praying this because it is a part of his glory, a part of the plan of the Father that centers around him or not? So when you look at that statement of Jesus, whatever you ask in my name, my Father will do it for you. We realize, well, but there's a purpose for that authority. There's a purpose for that promise.

It's to further the Father's plan. It's to further the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the kind of prayer that God is going to honor.

The same thing here. We're strengthened with all might according to the standard of God's mighty power, his glorious power, for a purpose. Not just to do anything we want to do.

Not to go out and walk on water just for the heck of it, or to solve our problems just for the heck of it. Solving our own problems may or may not have any part or place in the plan of God. Our problem may be very necessary in the plan of God.

If we don't stop and analyze it, we may go trying to invoke the power of God in a place where God hasn't authorized his power to be invoked. And then we wonder, why are my prayers not answered? Why do I not seem to have strength in this area? We may be going about it all wrong. And that's why Paul started this by saying, I pray that you will have a full knowledge of the will of God.

Because if you have a genuine, deep grasp of what God is up to in this life, you'll know in the spiritual realm. You'll have wisdom and you'll have understanding. And when God strengthens you with all might, you'll know what to do with it.

Samson had a great gift of physical strength. He was a judge in Israel. And that strength was for a purpose.

It was to keep the Philistine yoke off the necks of Israel. But Samson, he's a very famous example of somebody who is misdirected. He doesn't seem to really realize his calling.

He doesn't seem to really be a man of God. It doesn't say Samson prayed three times a day. It

doesn't say that Samson went and built an altar to the Lord.

Samson's kind of going off doing his own thing. He wants to marry a Philistine gal. He wants to tie fox's tails together and stick a firebrand between them and burn down the Philistines.

So there's a point at which he doesn't have his strength anymore because he's not got the knowledge of God's will. He kind of figures it out there at the end and he manages to wipe out the Philistine government who's all gathered there to mock him when God gives him that strength once again. But if we know what our strength is for, we'll know when and how to use it.

And we'll also know when and how not to use it. So that's what verse 11 is all about. We are enabled with all ability.

We are dynamited with dynamite. According to the standard of the glorious power of God, with a view toward, what's the goal of having the mighty power of God at our disposal? It doesn't seem to be in the physical realm, does it? Patience and long-suffering with joy. God has put the entire power of His omnipotence at our disposal to accomplish one of the hardest things in this life.

It's harder than moving a mountain. It's harder than uprooting a tree and casting it into the sea. It's being patient and long-suffering with joy.

That's what takes the mighty power of God to do. To be patient and long-suffering with joy. We're going to pause and take our break and when we come back, we'll examine these concepts more closely.

What exactly is this patience and long-suffering that takes the full measure of the power of God for us to have? That's the focus and seems to be the substance of the worthy walk that Paul is praying about in this passage. If we figure this out, we're going to be way ahead the rest of the book of Colossians and the rest of our lives, perhaps more importantly, are going to make a lot more sense because this seems to be very central in Paul's thinking, as we'll see when we come back.