

98-08-24b Colossians

As we resume our study this evening in Colossians chapter 1, we are engaged in examining the section here that centers around Jesus Christ, His place in the Father's plan, and ultimately in Paul's argument in this book, remembering once again our background, these are people who are being offered a lot of alternatives. It is being suggested, they're being wheedled, they're being cajoled, they're being argued with, they're being presented with different ways of looking at life, different standards by which to measure who they are and what they accomplish and whether what they do has meaning or value. They're up against a lot of alternate viewpoint.

So you would think that Paul would come in with his strongest arguments right at the outset, the things that Epaphras might not necessarily have been able to bring to them as a relatively young pastor without near the insight into the plan of God that the Apostle Paul has. And isn't it interesting that in the face of these distracting, deflecting, dragging away influences in the church, that Paul sketches out here in the latter part of the first chapter the things that really count, knowledge of God's will, wisdom in discerning God's will, and concentration on Jesus Christ, because He is the key. We know that in a theoretical sense.

We know that Christ is our Savior. We know He's at the center of the Father's plan. We know that He's perhaps the most important thing in our lives, that our salvation and our relationship with God all come through Him and depend on Him.

But Paul is using these things in a practical situation. Here are people that are being told that they're not quite good enough. They're not quite on the beam.

Their lives are not really being lived with the right set of priorities. Their accomplishments don't really count like they should. They're not really bearing the fruit that they should.

They're not doing the deeds and thinking the thoughts and living the life that they really should. People are saying, we measure you and find you falling short. You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting in some sense.

Here is the way to add to your side of the scale so that you can balance out and be what you ought to be. We're going to see as we go forward in the letter more specifically what some of these alternative ideas are. But Paul brings out the heavy howitzers right here at the beginning.

He says, look, my prayer for you is that you come to a better and greater and constantly improving understanding of God's plan, because that's going to give you long-suffering. That's going to give you patience and peace with joy. And it's going to give you an appreciation for Jesus Christ, who is the embodiment of God in human form, and he is the human being that recovers the image of God.

He approaches earth from heaven, and he goes to heaven from earth. He brings together God

and man in one person forever. And keeping him in mind and stopping and reflecting on him, no matter what is going on in our life, be it good or bad or humdrum, that is what is going to help us sort out other things that come our way.

Have you ever had things come to you and you begin to question? You may be going along and you think everything is okay and you don't have any big questions, and then maybe you have a visit or you are the visitor and you get around other believers. This is what most often seems to happen. You get around other believers or you visit a church or you have a brush with some other viewpoint.

And you say, wow, here is a bunch of people that really seem vital and vibrant and fruitful and enthusiastic, and they seem to have some things that I lack. And they are saying that some of these things that they partake of and emphasize are the key. And I'm not really in that sphere.

I'm not doing the things that they are doing. Maybe I'm missing something. And you started out being tranquil and at peace and moving forward, and now suddenly you are dissatisfied and uncertain and a little bit insecure.

And you say, well, maybe I sort of have my blinders on and haven't been aware. Well, what is it that gives us genuine sight? What is it that gives us genuine insight into where we stand before God? It is not looking at other believers. It is looking at Jesus Christ.

Who knows where other believers are relative to God, relative to the pursuit, the recovery of the image of God in Christ. Who knows? Who are you to judge another man's servant? We are not to look at each other, find which one best seems to represent the plan of God, and then emulate that believer. This is the great fallacy that you've heard me mention before.

It is a great peeve. This generation especially is that Christians are encouraging each other to be subjective. What is subjectivity? What are the three areas of subjectivity? You know that you're not being objective and you're not looking at life from the divine viewpoint if you're subjective instead of objective.

Subjectivity means I'm relating everything to me. And the three areas of subjectivity are eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances. Well, our little second category there, eyes on people, it doesn't say eyes on bad people or eyes on evil people.

It's eyes on people. If you have your eyes on people, you're being subjective. The plan of God, the word of God, the spirit of God never encourages us to focus our eyes on currently living people.

The people we focus on are the exemplars that God has given to us in his word. He doesn't say, look around you and find those that seem to have the best recovered image of God and emulate them. We occasionally have the apostle Paul say, look at my example and follow my example.

He can say that. He's an apostle. That's part of the apostolic gift is to be a witness of Jesus Christ and be qualified to be an example.

You can set an example. Paul the apostle tells Timothy the pastor and Titus the pastor, be an example of patience, be an example of these things because you're a communicator of the word of God. But we are never encouraged to go and find worthy people and use them as our example because we have a perfect example, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is what I've been thinking about as I make copies of my record albums. I have this fancy new technology now where I can make my own CDs. It's just as exciting as it can be.

You can preserve this music digitally. You can play it as much as you want. It doesn't wear out.

It may wear out in the minds of others who have to listen to it along with you. But the media itself, you can just play it and play it and play it and it sounds as good a thousand times as it does the first time. You think, well, I want to take these precious rare recordings and commit them to CD.

Well, I have some copies of these albums that I've gotten for \$5 and \$7 and so forth that aren't that great. They've got noise and static and scratches and pops and ticks. But I have a friend that's got a really great set of recordings that are much better than mine in some cases, nice clean ones that have very little.

So if I'm going to possess a CD of a piece of music, I want to get the best possible copy to put on CD. I want to put an old scratchy inferior copy on there. It's an inferior representation of the original performance.

I want the best one I can get. Well, if you're going to get an example to follow, do you want an inferior copy in the form of a human being or do you want the real, wouldn't it be great if you had your digital recording equipment at the time when the Statesman Quartet were singing live in Fort Worth or in Los Angeles or someplace and you could get a digitally mastered recording. That would be the ultimate.

Well, Jesus Christ is our example. And Paul puts before us here in Colossians 1, Jesus Christ. He is the image.

He's the perfect, undiluted, undisputed, undefiled image of God. He is the firstborn. He is the beginning.

He is the one we should look to. We've noted in the past that we sometimes get so focused on the Christ-centered life or the Christological focus in our life and we want to remember that Jesus said, I am the way to the Father. No man comes to the Father but by me, John 14, 6. And we don't want to lose sight that the goal is to come to the Father.

But that is not to say that we don't have a healthy attention to our Savior, Jesus Christ. And to

understand his role. This is what I was referring to earlier about understanding that we don't view him primarily as our king.

We view him primarily as the head of all things to the church. He is the head of the body. He is our example as the man who reflects the image of God.

So it's a healthy thing to focus on Jesus Christ, remembering at the same time that his purpose in the plan of the Father is to bring us to the Father. He is the firstborn among many brethren, all of whom have that close relationship with the Father. So we've seen that in these preceding verses.

And now Paul is going to explain that. He says in verse 18, he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that in all things he may have the preeminence.

And that's in our perspective. That's with regard to us. These things did not pertain, as I pointed out last hour, in Israel.

Israel didn't look at the coming Messiah and say, well, he has the preeminence because he's the firstborn from the dead, and he's the beginning of this new life because he's the last Adam. They have a different frame of reference. They have a different point of reference with Jesus Christ.

This is what he means to us. We are church-age believers. We are body of Christ.

We are bride of Christ. We are heirs of all things, potentially, through Christ. So to us, why does Jesus Christ have the preeminence? Because he is the beginning.

Because he is the firstborn. That makes him our pioneer, our example, our founding father. And now Paul is going to explain that in verse 19.

He says, for it pleased... And then in your New King James, you'll have the father that in italics. You say, well, if it's in italics, it's not in the original, so if I leave that out, it says, for it pleased in him all the fullness should dwell. You say, well, that doesn't make much of a sentence.

Well, that's pretty much exactly how it reads in Greek. And there has been a great deal of study done to try to resolve exactly how this sentence should be translated. But it yields to study, and it's fairly straightforward.

Basically, it pleased all the fullness in him to dwell. And the fullness is, of course, a reference to God the Father. But it doesn't say that the Father dwelt in the Son, because what is the aspect? We're referring back to verse 15.

He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn. What do we know? The Son, like Father, like Son.

The chip-off-the-block concept. To be a Son indeed is to reflect the characteristics and attributes

of the Father. Jesus Christ, if there ever was a Son indeed, He is it.

So, when it says He is the firstborn of the Father, He is the residence place for the fullness. And it pleased the fullness of God to dwell in Him. This is the place where it pleased.

But this still seems a little unsatisfactory, doesn't it? You say, well, why? That still seems like an awkward way of saying it. Why does Paul use this language, and why is this such an awkward statement? Well, one of the things that helps us is to remember that Paul is talking to people who have been working out of the Septuagint Bible. What is their Bible? It's a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

Well, do we have any places in the Greek Old Testament that might shed some light on this particular terminology? There's also been a great deal of scholarly effort that has gone into tying some of this language to Greek philosophy that later developed into Gnosticism and Stoicism and some of these other isticisms that were floating around as competing philosophies. And the idea of pleroma, the fullness, came up in Greek philosophical thought. They had the idea that there is this fullness, and how do you arrive at the fullness? Well, we could get off into a lot of stuff that doesn't really pertain.

I'm not so much interested in all of the failed, flawed, humanly generated philosophies. You have to wade through a lot of that if you do any research on some of the scholarly thought on this verse. But that, to me, is a waste of time, because if they were important, Paul would have mentioned them, and he didn't, so they're not.

What is important? Well, there is a scriptural background for this. The scriptures also use these terms, and I think that is what is in Paul's mind. I don't think he's referring out and trying to make comparisons between Christianity and Stoicism or Christianity and Gnosticism. Instead, and don't worry about what incipient Gnosticism is, I don't know what it is either.

It's the early roots of Gnosticism. He's referring back to their understanding of the Old Testament scriptures. What do you think Epaphras said when they met on Sunday mornings? He said, well, greetings, in Greek.

He said, grace to you and peace, or whatever. And then he said, what would he say? He would say, open your Bibles. Where is Epaphras teaching from? He's not just waiting for something to strike him from the Spirit.

They're opening their Bibles. They're just like we do. They're getting out their little Septuagint, or somebody has a copy there in the church.

They probably didn't have a copy for each person. And they're reading the Old Testament scriptures, and they're expanding their understanding into the New Testament age from those Old Testament scriptures. So they're going to have some familiarity with this language.

So let's go, for example, to passage like Jeremiah chapter 23 and verse 24. What we're looking for here is, what does it mean when it says, it pleased all the fullness to dwell in him? What is the fullness, and what does it mean for it to dwell in Christ? And as I mentioned before the break, why does it say all the fullness? If it's fullness, that seems like it ought to be the whole thing. Can you have more than the fullness? More than the totality? It's like saying all the totality, or all the allness.

Well, in Jeremiah chapter 23, we start to get some insight into this. This is a section where God is condemning the false prophets and the false oracles, and the prediction of God's fury and His justice falling violently on the heads of the wicked. And He says that these false prophets, in verse 21 of Jeremiah 23, He says, I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran.

I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear my words, then they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. Am I a God near at hand, says the Lord, and not a God far off? Can anyone hide himself in secret places, so that I shall not see him, says the Lord? Do I not fill heaven and earth, says the Lord? So, we have some Old Testament scripture to remind us of the fact that God is omnipresent.

And the fullness of God is here a reference. His filling of heaven and earth is at least an indirect reference to His omnipresence, and therefore His omniscience. Because He is everywhere, He's going to see everything.

No one can run and hide from Him. He knows them wherever they go. This idea of near at hand and of far off, they think, well, He's near at hand.

He's only here in Jerusalem. If I run off to Moab, He won't see me. Or if I run off to Dan or Beersheba and engage in false worship and cult practices and temple prostitution and so forth, He's kind of stuck down there in Jerusalem, He won't see me.

God says, I'm not just a God near at hand, I'm also the God that's far off. I fill the heavens and the earth. So, we see that creation is filled with the fullness of God.

Take a look at Psalm 72 and verse 19 for another view of fullness. Psalm 72, 19. Verse 18 says, Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things.

And blessed be His glorious name forever, and let the whole earth be filled with His glory. The glory of God can fill the whole earth and will fill the whole earth. These passages in the Greek Bible, the Septuagint, take the Hebrew terms and translate them by the word *pleroma*.

P-L-E-R-O-M-A. And *pleroma* is fullness. And there's a verb that goes along with that.

In Isaiah chapter 6 and verse 3, the seraphim that surround the throne of God, Ezekiel says in

chapter 6, In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. And the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim, each one had six wings.

With two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory.

Isn't it interesting? Because in Psalms the prayer is, May the glory of the Lord fill the whole earth. Here the seraphim declare that the glory of God does fill the whole earth. I'm sorry, I think I said Ezekiel.

That's Isaiah that says this. There is a passage in Ezekiel chapter 43 and verse 5 where we have a similar statement. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court.

And behold, the glory of the Lord filled the temple. So what do we get from this idea of pleroma or plerose? The idea of filling and fullness. This is the radiant glory of God.

It is the consciousness of the presence of God and the magnificence of God. The all-seeing, all-knowing, all-pervading presence and knowledge of God is bound up in this idea of fullness. God seems to be located at a place.

He's at the throne or He's in the center of the temple. But His glory radiates out and fills the whole earth. It fills the temple.

So that you have two ideas that are in tension. You have a localized presence of God and yet you have a universal presence of God. He is on His throne but He fills the heavens and the earth.

His glory emanates from one place but it fills everything. This helps us realize that the fullness that Paul is talking about in Colossians is not so much the idea of the entire universe or the entire earth. This is the way the Greek philosophers used pleroma.

They said, well, the fullness is sort of the totality of the universe or the totality of what can be known or whatever. This fullness, as you find it in the Old Testament or in the Bible that this church had, that Epaphras taught from, always has the idea of God manifested. There's God's presence and there's the manifestation of God's presence.

His presence and the manifestation of it fill all things. When you turn over a page in Ezekiel to chapter 44 and verse 4, you once again have the glory of the Lord filling the house of the Lord and you have Ezekiel falling on his face. He is not in the midst of the presence of God but when he sees the glory of God, it puts him on his face.

He falls on his face in reverence and in wonderment and in something of awe and even fear at the revelation of the presence of God. Yet we know that the glory of God fills the whole earth, so this is a local manifestation of it. This is a manifestation of filling or fullness that is observed at that time.

It all seems kind of technical, but when Paul uses this word *pleroma*, talking to the Colossians, what are they going to think of when he says it pleased the fullness of God to dwell in Jesus Christ? The idea here is the same one we see in Hebrews chapter 1. In former days, God spoke in many different manners, in many different ways, but in these latter days, his glory doesn't fill the temple. In his latter days, he doesn't shake the mountains. He doesn't split the earth and divide the seas and give pillars of fire and pillars of smoke.

Have you ever wondered why we have so little in the way of miraculous manifestation of God? I've wondered that often. It would be so much easier to believe God if you could just do one miracle. Make the picture blank.

Just let me know that there really is, because I can explain away everything I've ever seen in my life. It's just natural, normal, physical manifestations. Our perception of God is pretty much entirely based on faith.

We can't look back and say, I remember the day I saw the pillar of fire. I remember the day I saw the Red Sea part. It seems a lot harder.

It must have been easier in those days. You see these tremendous things. You think, well, there's got to be a God, because I saw the... Well, if you stop and think about it, that really unravels over time, because science can explain away, oh, you know, they had a tsunami over here, and so all the water ran away briefly and made a dry path, and then after the tidal wave was over with in Japan, well, then all the water rolled back.

Oh, there was a volcano. A volcano that buried the people at, what's a famous buried people place for volcanoes? Pompeii and Herculaneum. Well, that made the pillar of smoke.

It was a big volcano pillar of fire, and that's why they saw fire at night. It was the glow of the lava. People explain away the miracles.

They didn't do the Israelites much good. They all dropped in the wilderness, and they saw all of those things. They saw the manna day by day.

They saw the pillar of fire, the pillar of cloud. They grumbled and complained while the pillar of cloud was standing right there in the midst of the camp, and they grumbled and complained. Have you brought us out here to die? So don't think that if you could, if we could see some supernatural manifestation, it would be a bolster to our faith.

You'd say, well, maybe my mind was playing tricks on me. Maybe I hallucinated when the picture blackened. I mean, you can't, it has never been the basis of changing anyone's mind about God, no matter what miraculous.

There were people that saw Jesus Christ, saw him raise Lazarus from the dead, and those are

the same people that hung him on the cross. Lazarus, I mean, how can you explain away this mummy guy walking out of the tomb after three days when there was a stench in the tomb. Everybody knew he was dead.

His sister said, Lord, it's been three days. He's stinking. And this dead man that's already started to decompose comes walking out of the tomb.

People saw that and did not believe. So it doesn't matter. Abraham tells the rich man bobbing about in the flames, and over in Luke there, the rich man and Lazarus story, they won't believe even if somebody comes back from the dead, and it's literally true.

Isn't it interesting that the greatest miracle of convincing seems to be coming back from the dead? When that story reaches for an ultimate miracle, it isn't parting the sea, it isn't cracking the earth open, it's resurrection from the dead. The very same thing Paul uses as his superlative of God's power. He says, my ambition is if perhaps I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

Remember, Paul is reaching for that. He says, Jesus Christ has been declared to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead. That's the biggest thing God did.

It's bigger than the three hours of darkness. It's bigger than the tombs opening and the shades walking the earth at the time of the crucifixion. The biggest thing is Christ's resurrection from the dead.

But there are people that even as witnesses of that don't believe. So, the presence of God manifested. It puts Ezekiel on his face.

We wish that God would manifest himself in some way, and he does, but our perception of it is not in the visible earthly realm. It's in the invisible interior realms. But, take a look at this.

Look at Psalm 67. Psalm 67. Because not only here do we have the idea of... Actually, that's in the Septuagint.

It's 67. It's one number off in the English. It's going to be 68 in your English Bible.

That's what you get for studying out of one and reading out of another. This is the famous section here. Psalm 67, 17 and 18.

Remember over in the New Testament where it quotes, you have ascended... Look at verse 18. You have ascended on high, you have led captivity captive, you have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious, that the Lord might dwell there. Look at verse 17.

In fact, go back to verse 15. A mountain of God is the mountain of Bashan, a mountain of many peaks is the mountain of Bashan. Why do you fume with envy, you mountains of many peaks? This is the mountain which God desires to dwell in.

Yes, the Lord will dwell in it forever. What mountain is being referred to here? It's Mount Zion. The place where the temple is.

The place where Ezekiel sees the glory of God filling the temple. That's the place of God's dwelling. And he says, this is the mountain which God desires to dwell in.

Yes, the Lord will dwell in it forever. The chariots of God, 20,000, even thousands of thousands, the Lord is among them as in Sinai, in the holy place. And then he says, you have ascended on high, and so forth.

You have received gifts among men, even from the rebellious, so that the Lord God might dwell there. And there's a lot that we could talk about in this verse, but what I want to observe here is you have the idea of God choosing a place to dwell. God chooses a place for the fullness of His glory to dwell.

Here in the Psalms, it is Mount Zion. You can see this, and of course this is not the only place. Turn over to Psalm 131.13. We don't often get to go to Psalm 131.

And once again, this is going to be 132. I'm using these because they're in the Septuagint. And for a lot of reasons, there's a difference of one in the Septuagint references.

But this is where we find the two words, katoikeo, which means to dwell, and eudokeo, which is to be pleased. We have in Colossians, it pleased the fullness of God to dwell in Christ. So what are the Colossians going to make of this? Well, they're going to think of the language of their Greek Bible, their Greek Old Testament.

So Psalm, in this case, 132.13, what does it say? The Lord has chosen Zion. He has desired it for His dwelling place. How can the omnipresent God localize His presence in one place? Well, that's where we get the understanding of fullness.

Where does the fullness dwell? You have the localized presence of God, and then it is manifested and fills the heavens and the earth. It fills the temple. It fills whatever the immediate observable context may be.

And so you have these ideas in the Old Testament already. The amazing thing is, what kind of containers does it take in the Old Testament to hold the fullness of God? It takes the heavens and the earth. It takes the land of Israel.

He's going to fill the land of Israel. It takes the entire temple. Ezekiel sees the fullness, sees the glory of God filling the temple.

The Seraphim say that the earth and the heavens are filled with His presence, filled with His glory. We have here God choosing the place where He is going to manifest His presence, manifest that fullness. It's always there, but He's manifesting it in a particular place.

He's manifesting it on Mount Zion. It doesn't mean that He's any less present on Mount Seir or Mount Nebo or Mount Sinai or Mount Everest for that matter. But this is the place where it's manifested.

This is the place where it's going to fill the temple. The Lord has chosen Zion. He has desired it for His dwelling place.

He says in verse 14 of Psalm 132, This is my resting place forever. Here I will dwell for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision.

I will satisfy her poor with bread and so forth. It's a blessed place because it's the residence of God. You can see similar ideas.

We won't turn there, but Isaiah 8.18 and Isaiah 49.20 use the same language. God has desired a particular place, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, to be His dwelling place. You have this explicit language back in Deuteronomy beginning in chapter 12, verse 5 and 11 and so forth.

You can follow this on through Deuteronomy 14 and chapter 16. We'll just turn to one of these quickly to make our point. Turn with me to Deuteronomy 12, verse 5. You shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses out of all your tribes to put His name for His dwelling place, and there you shall go.

This is the prescribed place of worship. Where are they going to worship? You shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses out of all your tribes to put His name for His dwelling place, and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand.

Now, let me just digress here briefly. You know, this whole idea of tithing. Bring your tithes into the storehouse.

You can see, I think, you can anticipate what the point of this is. When Paul reminds the Colossians that Jesus Christ is the place that God has chosen for His fullness to dwell, for the residing place of His glory, where is the place of worship for us? What did Jesus tell the woman at the well? When she says, well, some people say you should worship over here. Other people say you should worship down in Jerusalem.

Jesus says there is coming a time when it isn't going to be either one of these places. Because those who worship God will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

Where is the place of worship? It's no longer a concrete place. It's not the church building with the steeple, the pews, the baptistry and the education building. It is the place where God has chosen to put His name.

The place where God has chosen for His glory and His fullness to dwell. In the Old Testament

age, it was Jerusalem. It was Mount Zion.

It was the threshing floor of Arona where David would move the tabernacle and later build the temple. That's the place of worship. And throughout Deuteronomy, you can go down to verse 11.

Then there will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. This is Deuteronomy 12.11. There will be the place where the Lord your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you.

This is going to be the place of worship. So now in this age, where is the place of worship? Is it this room that we're in here or the room that we meet in Sunday mornings? Or is it a physical place? Obviously not. Where is the place now where God has chosen for His name to dwell? Where is the place where it has pleased the fullness of God to dwell? It's Jesus Christ.

Where do we worship? Where do we go for fellowship and communion with God? Jesus Christ is that place. Jesus Christ is the place of worship. He is the dwelling place for the glory of God.

He is the place where God has chosen for His name to dwell. What a wonderful cathedral that is for us to worship in. And my little digression here is if you look back at Deuteronomy 12, along those same lines, where is the place, where do we take our tithes and our offerings? Now, local denominational churches want to tell you, bring your tithe to us.

We are the place of worship. We are the place for your tithe and your offering. Bring your tithes to us and the windows of heaven will open.

Well, I'm awfully sorry, but the local building, the local organization is not the place to take your tithes and take your offerings. Where did Israel take their tithes and offerings? God said in verse 5, You shall seek the place where the Lord your God chooses to put His name for His dwelling place and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.

Well, if we maintain that same illustration and that same application of these truths, where do we take our tithes and our offerings and the firstborn of our flocks and our herds today? We take them to the place where God has chosen for His name and His glory to reside and that's Jesus Christ. You cannot use these passages to justify asking people for 10% of their income or 20% of their income. If you did an actual biblical tithe and followed all of the various contributions that Israelites were to make, you wind up paying as much to the church as you do to the government.

It's up over 30%. By the time the government gets 30%, the church gets 30%, you're living on a third of your income. Because what are the sacrifices that we offer in this day and age? What are the tithes? What are the firstborn of our flocks and our herds? Well, we saw it not all that long ago in Romans.

Present your bodies a living sacrifice. There is no scriptural support for a literal 10% tithe out of your income. That is a cheapening and a missing of the point.

It is a literalizing, it is a legalizing, unfortunate, misguided... Now, not to say that you couldn't or shouldn't tithe if you're doing it for the right reasons. But don't do it because you think the scriptures teach you to take 10%, that this is a law, that this is a rule, and that you are somehow going to be blessed more by God or be more pleasing in God's sight because you contribute 10% of your income to some arbitrarily chosen organization on this earth. It misses the point.

It misses the fullness. God doesn't need our money. If God owns the cattle in a thousand hills, He's not sitting there waiting for my paltry 10% to come in so that He can accomplish His purpose on earth.

There are much higher, grander things going on. We are to enter the temple of Jesus Christ. He is the place of worship.

He is the place where we come for fellowship and worship to the Father. It is ourselves that we present as living sacrifices. The sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit, a pure heart, a desire to know, to please, to walk the worthy walk in His sight.

Those are the tithes. Do we take a tithe of our time, a tithe of our attention, a tithe of our priorities, and devote those things to God and to our spiritual identity in Christ? Do we go to the Lord Jesus Christ as the place where the glory and the name of God dwell? Did you ever wonder why in John, especially when you get up over in chapter 16 and 17 and Jesus is praying and He gets into some of this sort of wraparound circular phraseology? He says, I am in them, they are in me, we are all in the Father. It goes back and forth.

You say, well, do we abide in Christ or does Christ abide in us? Well, the answer is yes. And you say, well, isn't it true that if I incorporate the Word of God into my thinking, if I pursue an understanding of it, if God the Holy Spirit is active in my soul, that Jesus has promised that He and the Father will come and indwell, take up their residence in my soul. Yes, it's absolutely true.

At the same time, we go to dwell in Christ. We go to worship in Christ. Our daily life can be worship.

It's not a matter of once a week or twice a week or three times a week attending a worship service at a building. It's a matter of daily living in the temple, living in Jesus Christ, coming to God at the place where His glory and His name dwell. There is a lot of richness in the statement that Paul makes here in Colossians 1. It pleased the fullness in Him to dwell.

This is the place where it pleases God all of His fullness to dwell. This language harps back. It's a pointer.

It's a footnote that says, OK, you scholars of the Old Testament, what is fullness? What does it mean to choose a dwelling place? Well, you go back and look. This is the place of worship, the place where God chooses for His name and His presence to dwell. That place for us in this age, we who have Christ as our head and our firstborn and our beginning, our worship place is Jesus Christ Himself.

That's the place where God's fullness dwells. That's where we go. We can't get distracted and limited and have the glory of God veiled to us by focusing on a local church.

And a lot of us have made that mistake. And it's an easy one to make because the church is such a monolithic and visible entity. A local church is something you can see and feel and experience.

It's got a lot of times a structure and a parking lot and signs and titles and instruments and things. Bibles and hymnals. And you say, well, there's the church.

And I go to the church and that's the place where two or three gather together and Christ is in the midst. Well, it goes beyond that because we go directly to Christ. He's our church.

And we are His church. He is in us and we are in Him. He is our place of worship.

He is the place where the fullness of God has chosen to dwell. And that tells us, it means something to us in practical terms. That's where we take our sacrifices.

That's where we take our offerings and our tithes. That's where our expressions of appreciation and thanksgiving to God take place is in Christ. So it kind of changes our perspective a little bit because we value our local assembly but it is not a substitute for life in Christ and it has often become that in modern Christianity.

And it's a shame because we're substituting the scratchy, worn records, the pale, lifeless, imitation images for the real, living Christ as our place of worship. We settle and we fall short of seeing the fullness and the glory of God because it is so greatly veiled when we only look at each other rather than looking at Christ directly. So when Paul says it pleased the fullness, all the fullness, in Him to dwell.

And why does it say all the fullness? Well, what different kinds of fullnesses, what kinds of fillings were there in the Old Testament? All of those fullnesses, the glory of God, the presence of God, the knowledge of God, all of the things that are talked about of God in the Old Testament that fill all of that fullness. That's why we have that seemingly redundant or they say it's a tautology. T-A-U-T-O-L-O-G-Y which means it's a redundancy to say all the fullness.

Why does it say that? Because look at the different fullnesses that are expressed in the Old Testament of God. The fullness of His glory, the fullness of His presence, the fullness of His knowledge, the fullness of His compassion and love that extends down to the thousand

generations. All of those fullnesses are in Christ.

Where do you want to go? Do you want to go to a church of people as your ending point? Or do you want to go to Jesus Christ where all the fullness of God dwells? You can see what Paul is doing here. These competing philosophies that he hasn't even directly addressed yet are going to fall so flat next to the things of God that we have in Christ. How can you compare any system of works, any system of human approval or human approbation to going to the dwelling place of God's glory in Christ, bringing the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, the sacrifice of a pure heart, the sacrifice of one's self to God in spiritual worship? And there's the fullness of God and there's the worthy walk and there's where the knowledge, all the fullness, all the wisdom and knowledge and sanctification of God is bound up in Christ.

What are you going to compare to it? It's like the finest restaurant on earth and yesterday's McDonald's hamburger. There's no comparison to what we have in Christ. So why would you digress? Why would you diverge? Why would you fall away from the things that the Word of God reveals through the Spirit about Jesus Christ to settle for something that someone says, look how happy we are, look how energetic we are, look how fruitful we are, look what we have done.

Paul is already laying the foundation for knocking these things out of consideration because look at what you have in Christ. It's a real thing and it ought to really shift our perspective. With that, we'll close.

We'll resume in verse 20 next time. Father, we thank you for the privilege of studying these things. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will take them and use them to refine our understanding and improve our pursuit of the calling that is before us to live in a way that pleases you.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.