

98-09-25a Colossians

Let's begin our study of the Word of God this evening by going to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank You for the privilege of gathering together with believers who share an enthusiasm for Your Word and a desire to live in a way that pleases You. We thank You for the work of our Savior, Jesus Christ, and through Him the standing that we have before You.

We thank You for the gift of Your Spirit. We thank You for the Word we have before us tonight. We pray that as we study and as we meditate on it that Your Spirit will give us insight and understanding of the content of what Paul has to say to this church and even more importantly of Your will for our lives.

We pray that as a result we can see more clearly how to set our priorities, how to make our decisions, and which actions to pursue so that our lives will not only accomplish Your purpose in time but also in eternity. We thank You again for our salvation and for the blessing of fellowship and of the opportunity to grow in grace and in Christ in this age. We pray that You'll bless us tonight as we study and we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We resume tonight our study of Colossians. We are very close to entering chapter 2. Having seen the situation, and we reviewed this somewhat last time just to make sure that we keep our perspective on why Paul is saying these things, it's very easy to dive into the middle of the theological section of Scripture and just begin looking at ideas and turning them from one vantage point to another, looking at them in the light of different parts of Scripture.

And we tend to sometimes forget that all of this has a purpose and that it ought to somehow change us. If we engage in the study of the Word of God and are no different afterward, then we have missed the point somewhere because the purpose of God's Word and the presence of God's Spirit in our life is to transform us by the renewing of our minds. And that is a real thing.

We ought to see, especially over time, it may not happen in one night, I don't expect everyone to have altered states of consciousness after tonight's lesson, but over time as these things become more and more real to us and the things of this earth dim in our estimation, we ought to begin to find new resources in our soul. Every day we have to make decisions. Every day we have to decide how to spend our time, how to prioritize our tasks, and the basis upon which we are either going to do or not do a lot of things.

By consistently exposing ourselves to the truth of the Word of God, not only exposing ourselves to it, but taking it in and having it become resident in our minds and then taking the time, making the time to meditate on it and to think, Well, so what? If that is true, does that make any difference in my particular path through life? It ought to make a difference. God designed this information. He gave us the gift of His Spirit to make a difference, to begin to separate us to a greater and greater degree from those who have no life, who have no truth, who have no hope

and are without God in the world.

If having God and having the gift of the Holy Spirit, having the Word of God available to us in so many great forms, if that doesn't produce any transformation, what is the point of being a Christian? Why even bother to acknowledge Christ if your life is going to be no different, if your future is going to be no different? These things ought to count for something. They ought to make a difference in the daily scheme of things. The extent to which it makes a difference is the extent to which it becomes real in our thinking.

Paul knows from what Epaphras has come and told him about the Colossian church that people are all clamoring to try to present their view of reality, their view of what's important. There are competing philosophies, competing priorities, competing views of life, and we find that around us today. It is annoying, I think, to a lot of us to find the extent to which the media, especially television, tries to shape our thinking and tries to dictate to us what is important.

There are many important things happening in the world, but sometimes you have to buy a newspaper and go to page 18 to find them. There are atrocities being committed. There are important shifts in the balance of power in different parts of the world.

There are places where the United States as a nation is failing in its foreign policy, and as a result, eventually hundreds and perhaps thousands of American service people are going to die because we are failing to plan. We're failing to exercise statesmanship and diplomacy, and as a result, things are falling apart, and then we will do too little too late. We'll send ill-equipped people into a bad situation, and lives will be lost.

But none of this seems to be able to edge the headlines off our screens and off of our papers and off of the Internet and all of the communication channels. Well, this same kind of thing in a different time and in a different culture was happening in Colossae. Epaphras was a faithful teacher of the Word of God.

He was a student of the Apostle Paul. He had come to faith in Christ through Paul's ministry and recognized that he had a gift of learning and communicating the Word of God and was exercising that. But in the great maelstrom of events and ideas, and with the Lycaeus Valley being such a melting pot for different civilizations and travelers and so forth, this was getting lost.

It was like someone speaking in normal tones on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange. You've probably all, hopefully you haven't been guilty of this, but you've probably seen someone else who has. Have you ever seen when someone puts on headphones, and they're listening to a great song or something, and they start singing? And to them, they can hardly hear themselves.

All they hear is what's in the earphones. And so they're sort of humming or half singing or trying to sing along and so forth. But to people on the outside who can't hear the music in the ear cups, it can be very entertaining and comical.

Well, in our society, we hear all of these voices, and we have all of these issues and ideas being pushed at us. But God in heaven is only analyzing one thing, and that is the status of our thinking, the status of our souls. What are we prioritizing? What are we listening to? What do we choose? How often do we turn on and turn off the television? How often do we stop and not only play a tape or attend a Bible class, but how often do we stop in the midst of our lives and analyze whether or not we're in the faith, whether or not the things of God are truly making the difference that God designed them to make.

This is the message that Paul is refreshing in the minds of the Colossians. This is the gospel. The gospel is not just praise God we've been delivered from the lake of fire.

The gospel is that God has a unique purpose in this time in human history for people who come to faith. Our purpose is not the same as the patriarchal believers. It's not the same as the pre-flood believers.

It's not the same as the millennial saints. It's not the same as the tribulational saints. In the days between Pentecost and the rapture of the church, everyone who comes to faith in Christ is set aside for a unique purpose.

We are entered into union with Christ. We form His body and His bride. God has a specific plan that He is accomplishing with those who are the called according to His purpose.

Many are called. Few are chosen. We want to be the chosen.

This life is short. Eternity is long. It pays from any point of view that you care to look at it to wake up to God's priorities and seek and follow them.

This is what Paul is reminding the Colossians of. We've seen this throughout chapter 1. He does it in a lot of ways both obvious and subtle. He does it perhaps less obviously when he recounts the kind of prayer that he prays for the Colossians beginning in chapter 9. He does it in a clearer way when he talks about Jesus Christ beginning in verse 15 when he says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

We saw the different perspectives that Paul presents Jesus Christ from. His divine nature, His human nature, the fact that all the fullness in verse 19 is pleased to dwell in Him. Through Him, God is doing something.

He is reconciling all things to Himself, whether things on earth, things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. Now he brings this down and he starts to answer the question, so what? All of these things are great and everyone can get into a big praise meeting over it. A lot of that happens today in Christianity where you have praise and worship choruses and people just kind of rock back and forth and sing we will praise Him, we will praise Him over and over.

But that's an experience on the part of the person doing the singing. There is a purpose in understanding those things that should create in us motivation and expectation. We should, from a basis of understanding, be able to operate in a way that pleases God and not just appreciate what God has done.

So Paul is moving that and he says, and you, in verse 21, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, now He has reconciled. And that reconciliation is for a purpose. It's not just a rescue, it is a commission.

It's not just a deliverance, it is a calling. So He has done this in the body of His flesh through death, in verse 22, in order to, and this is a real strong way of moving forward in a sentence in Greek. It's the beginning of a purpose clause.

In order to present you, this is the purpose. We are reconciled. It doesn't say in order to deliver you, does it? In order to present you and to present you in a particular status, holy, blameless, and above reproach.

And this is great food for thought because we look at ourselves and we know that we're not holy, we're not blameless, and we're not above reproach. We can see where our temper has flared or where we have been selfish or insensitive or worse. There's a whole range of sins and self-serving motivations that we can follow.

But it says that God's purpose in reconciling us through Christ is to present us holy and blameless and completely above reproach, pure and spotless like the driven snow. Well, how does that come about? It is a process that takes place in our souls as we exercise faith. This was the message of Romans and we spent a great deal of time studying that book, discovering that righteousness comes through faith.

It's living righteousness. How do we overcome the negative side of our nature? How do we overcome the corruption, the environment, the world, the flesh, and the devil that surround us, knowing that we stumble and we fall and we mess up in very big ways sometimes, yet the calling is still there. God doesn't say, for those of you that haven't yet messed up, I've got a calling for you.

For those of you that have never really gone down a bad road yet and you've only done small misdemeanors, you haven't committed any high crimes, I've got a calling for you. It's a calling for every believer. It doesn't matter what our history or what our proclivities or what the area of weakness of our sinful nature is or anything else.

Every believer is called to be holy, blameless, and above reproach because that status is an act of God, not an act of man. It is something that is granted by God. It is a declaration that God makes and there's a way to qualify for it.

There's a way to be in position to receive that declaration. You find that detailed again in the book of Romans as elsewhere in the scriptures, but you remember Romans chapter 4 where the entire chapter is dedicated to one man's life, a man who had been a believer for many, many years. Abraham believed God.

Abraham trusted God. Abraham placed his faith in God. Abraham made his decisions as a pattern of life, as a climate in his life based on his relationship with God.

And God credited him with righteousness. God declared Abraham righteous. Abraham made a lot of mistakes as did Isaac, as did Jacob, as did Moses, as did David.

And yet these men are high in God's esteem and all of them are declared righteous. All of them are saints. We have that same opportunity and this is the thought that should occupy our minds.

Our minds get occupied with, depending on your area of enthusiasm, they can be occupied with furniture, they can be occupied with computers, they can be occupied with something hobby-wise, family-wise, relationship-wise. What ought to keep... You know how it is when you have an enthusiasm. I have some enthusiasms.

You all have some enthusiasms. And you know that regardless of what you do through your day and through your week, your mind will keep returning to that one thing. And if it's something that you pursue, you're tracking something down, you're trying to find something, you like looking at things and acquiring them.

You have a hobby where you exercise your creativity. You have people with whom you love to spend time and that you invest yourself in and so forth. No matter what else goes on in your life, sooner or later your mind always returns to that thing.

Everybody that is a parent and has had small children, it doesn't matter how distracted you get by the things of this life, your mind always comes back to your child or to your children. When you're married, your mind always turns back to your spouse. You can be far away, you can be near, you can be right next to them in the room.

It doesn't matter. Your mind just constantly returns to that because it's one of your passions. It's one of your consuming priorities.

The things of God ought to have that kind of place in our lives. We have the opportunity for that when a lot do not. People in the Old Testament age did not.

People in this age who are not believers, they can have all the passions they want. The people that love opera and people that go on the stage and people that get into different kinds of entertainment and fly balloons around the world and so forth. It is all a mist and a chasing after the wind looked at from an eternal perspective.

We have the chance to redeem the time. We have a chance to take each day and make it count in the long, long, long term. It's a great opportunity.

Our mind ought to return to that. In the confusion and in the mix of everything that gets thrown at us, many times a day our mind ought to return to it. Well, wait a minute, I'm still a believer.

I still have a calling to be holy and blameless and above reproach. Where do I go to claim that grace? How do I stay a person of faith, a person who receives the declaration of God? Well, Paul is going to zero in on that now because that's the situation of the Colossian believers. But he has such a great introduction because after talking about his prayer and then talking about Jesus Christ who has made all of this possible and for whom it is all happening, everything centers on him.

He's 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. What a shame to us if our passion for one thing or another in life occurs to us more frequently in the day than our Savior, than our standing before God through him.

What a shame to us if we had to sit down in a little row and column format on a piece of paper or in a spreadsheet and map out where we spent our time, where we spent our thought life, where we invested our meditation and our attention. How much time did we spend on the various things about which we are passionate compared to the thing about which we should be most passionate, which is the one and only great person of the universe, our Savior. It's an area where all of us need improvement and need to constantly reassess and try to do better.

Paul says, why is it? Why should he have the preeminence in all things? In verse 19, it pleased the Father that in him all the fullness should dwell. Everything that counts dwells in Christ. Now, again, you can get off on these great speeches, but you still come back to the question, so what? When I walk up here and fold up my Bible and get in my car and go home, now what? When you get down to verse 24 and 25, Paul says, because I understand this, because I know that it is possible through continuing.

Remember verse 23? If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. There is a hope that should not be edged off of the stage in our mind. I like to watch quartets, old video performances of quartet concerts and things, and one of the little sight gags that they often do, this is true even in barbershop and so forth, when the four guys are up there singing and they get ready to hit a really big note and they throw their arms wide and somebody will be blocking the other guy's face.

They start receding into the background and pretty soon three guys are standing in front and the other guy is behind and you can't see him anymore. The things of God, that shouldn't happen in our mind, but it does. It happens all the time.

Paul says you can't be moved away. You can't lose your focus. You've got to continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven.

Paul says in verse 24, and we looked at this last week, I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Remember the great passage we went over and saw Paul talking about Epaphroditus and how he is filling up the lack in the ministry of the church to Paul. The church couldn't be there, so they sent Epaphroditus to do what they could not be there to do.

Well, the apostles are here in the first generation of the church to do what Christ is not here to do, to make disciples, to communicate the truth of God's word, to give people a picture of the mission and the goal. Jesus has gone to be seated at the right hand of the Father, but there are twelve men doing what he originally did by himself, and that is to express the calling. And a part of that communication is suffering because the world hates the message.

The world wants to distort and twist and shuffle aside and dismiss as irrelevant that message. There is such a great... I've heard... how we have... disdain for the unseen or the spiritual or the things that religion should be attending to, the things of God. Culture likes the concrete.

We like science. We like what you can prove, what you can handle and taste and touch and so on. And to marginalize and to set to the side the things of God, that's the favorite ploy of the world and the viewpoint behind it.

But Paul says, I rejoice in my sufferings for you. Jesus said, if they have hated me, they are certainly going to hate you. And Paul and the other apostles received the brunt of the opposition that was directed at Jesus Christ.

And we occasionally will as well. We tend to think that opposition is going to be in the form of martyrdom and being burnt at the stake and thrown to the lions. The opposition that we experience is much more subtle.

And because it is less severe, typically it's not a life and death situation in this country about faith, but it's at a lower level. And because it is, it slips under our guard. Lots of times you can see the big truck coming and get out of its way, but you don't see the little thing in your path that will trip you up.

And it's the smaller forms of opposition that trip us up. We're around family members and they say, well, how come you're not doing this and so? And we want to just give an answer based on circumstances or based on experience or based on what advice or what people have said. And we don't say what's the real reason.

The real reason is because we believe that's what pleases God. But it's just, it's easier and it seems awkward to bring that up. And that's shuffling things off the stage.

That's pushing it to the side. It makes us dishonest. We're not saying the real reason why we have this priority or we take this action.

And at a time, there may be a time when we ought to be speaking up and we don't. And so we're quenched. There is water put on our fire because we get into an environment where we don't really want to be identified or we're somehow ashamed of what someone is going to think when we speak up and say who we are and why we do what we do.

Well, it would be better for us if we had a big threat. If somebody came and said, if you confess Christ, I'm going to shoot you, that's real cut and dry. And you say, well, am I going to deny the Lord or not? And, you know, it's real obvious.

But these little subtle attacks where the world just nudges us and edges us and elbows us and jives us just bit by bit by bit until we find ourselves in a corner and our little light is just barely shining at all. We've talked before about evangelism and about the priorities that believers should have. Is our whole purpose in life recruiting? Are we just a replicating pyramid organization now that we are one? We're going to go make others? No.

But we do have a responsibility to represent Christ. We are the body of Christ. Christ's physical body is not here.

His physical body is seated at the right hand of the Father, waiting for the time when the Father says, now I'm making your enemies a footstool for your feet. Go down and claim the kingdom. Until that time, the apostles are all dead.

The only representative that Christ has on earth is us. How do we represent him? Do we run around with a handful of tracts and knock on doors and see who we can annoy? We are salt and we are light. Our lives ought to be seasoning.

They ought to reflect and transmit the glory of God. And they do that when we become what we are supposed to become. So when Paul says, I rejoice in my sufferings, why is he suffering? Because he didn't take the easy way out.

He's got a message to proclaim. He knows his calling. His particular calling is the calling of an apostle.

He shares the suffering of Christ in a unique way. Those twelve apostles were uniquely commissioned. They were eyewitnesses of the Lord, eyewitnesses of his resurrection.

They were personally called. They were personally trained by the Lord Jesus Christ. And those twelve men, in a unique way, filled up what was lacking in the suffering of Christ.

They took his place in that first generation to pass momentum on to the church. Well, like a series of dominoes down through the centuries and down through the generations, now it's our turn. We are here.

It's our responsibility to be salt and light. It's our responsibility to think about Christ and to be willing to represent him. This is a part of our mindset.

Because what happens? When we find these occasional times when we say, well, I don't really want to speak up and say I'm a Christian and that's the reason I'm doing this. I'll just say I think it's the moral thing or I think it would be prudent or I think it's wise or whatever. We don't really say who we are and why we're here.

Bit by bit, we start thinking that way. And even in our own minds, we don't factor in our Christianity. Because what we say to others and how we represent ourselves to others, as we continue to move around pretty soon, we just get in that habit.

And it's easier and easier to not think in terms of being believers, who are here as pilgrims and strangers who have a heavenly citizenship. But Paul is a great example, just as the Lord Jesus Christ was. Because with all of his opportunities, with all of his intellect, with all of the different things that he could have done, he's sitting in a musty jail, chained to a couple of Roman guards, writing these words.

I rejoice. I am so glad that I am suffering. How many people can honestly say that? When was the last time you found somebody that you could tell was genuinely suffering and they said, you know, this is great? It's such a foreign idea to us.

But the reason is, the concentration on who we are and why we're here, generally speaking, is foreign to us. We don't have the mindset of Christ. We don't have the mindset of the Apostle Paul.

We are too comfortable in the world. We're too easily gratified by things going well in this life. Look at the example of Paul.

Think about where he is. He's been in chains, and he would have a lot of legitimate frustration. Lord, think what I could be doing if I was out.

Think of the churches I could visit. Think of the people I could evangelize. I could be back up on Mars Hill talking to the Greeks.

I could be over in Macedonia. I could be in Asia Minor. I could be going around training Timothy and Titus and all of these.

I could be having church conferences. I could visit Epaphras and the people in Colossae. All the things I could be doing.

Why do you have me down here in chains? The most I can do is write these letters. It's not the same. If I could be there in person and live the example, like he talks about in the first chapters of several of these epistles.

He says, you remember what we were like when we were with you. How we didn't accept any money. We didn't make an issue of ourselves.

We wanted to live out the gospel before you, which was another unique opportunity that the Apostles had. And now Paul's sitting there. He says, I can't do that.

I'm stuck here. All I can do is scratch out stuff on parchment, give it to a guy and hope that he survives to make it back to a church. But in the plan of God, we have the Bible.

We have the New Testament in front of us because Paul was right where God wanted him. Suffering exactly the things that he was supposed to suffer. Completing what was lacking in the sufferings of Christ.

And because of that, we have the prison epistles. And because of that, generations of untold generations of believers have the truth of the word of God that the Holy Spirit can take and build us into who we're supposed to be. Paul had the vision to recognize that God had a purpose.

And he couldn't see all down through the vistas of history, but he knew his calling. And if this is what God had for him, great. I rejoice in my sufferings for you, he says.

A lot of the Colossians he's never even met. But that's the perspective. When people talk about having a vision, and there's all this stuff about you've got to get the vision and so forth.

If there's any vision to be caught, this is it. To see the meaning that this life can have when we find out the reality of our position in Christ. Fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of his body, which is the church.

Every single one of you has a personal, individual ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Every single person that is a believer listening to the sound of my voice, you have an individual ministry of God the Holy Spirit that is given to you specifically for this purpose. To build up and minister to other believers the body of Christ.

It may or may not have a name. It may or may not be known to you what it is. But it will function when you are operating in faith, when God the Holy Spirit has room to maneuver in our souls because the word of God is there for him to pick up and knock on our door with.

Each one of us is equipped to minister to other members of the body of Christ. Paul had a gift of apostleship that encompassed many things. Some of us are communicators and encouragers in the area of the word of God.

You have a specific function that is fulfilled and has the potential to be fulfilled every time you're around one other believer or two other believers. It doesn't matter how big or how small the group is. You may be nothing more than an encouragement to one other person in your family.

But you have no idea. Paul couldn't see down through the centuries that these little scribbles he was doing on these parchments were going to be the sustenance, the spiritual food for millions and millions of people. But he had confidence in God and he knew that God had a purpose.

And because of that he rejoiced. He didn't fully understand what all would happen in the subsequent centuries, but he knew that God had a purpose and so he rejoiced. We are too easily discouraged.

We're too easily deflected. We're too easily distracted and we give up and we think we get self-centered. We're short-sighted.

We don't catch that perspective that Paul reflects here in his statement. I rejoice in my sufferings for you. I fill up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ for the sake of His body, which is the church.

The reason Paul rejoiced is he knew that the church, these people that he's ministering to, this is the body of Christ. He's still got his eyes on the Savior. He says, you know, I'm not just doing this so these people will benefit.

I'm doing this because they're the body of Christ. If you love Christ, you'll do anything that you can think of that pleases Him and that reflects glory on His name. That's what he's doing here.

He says, I became a minister according to the stewardship from God. The word for minister in verse 25, and this is kind of where we pick up now after my somewhat extended review, of which I became a minister. This word is diakonos where we get the word deacon.

A deacon, as you've probably heard before, this was a word used in secular Greek for a servant who brought the food to the tables, who carried away the empty platters, who attended men when they went to the Roman baths and carried their sandals and brought them towels and fresh robes, and who did the menial services that enabled people to function, to bathe, to eat, they would carry on assignments around the household and so forth. Paul says, and this is one of the things that I personally had to experience a little bit of a shift in understanding. I used to look at pastors who led churches and who were students of the word of God and put them up on a high pedestal.

And there is a need for balance in that view because it is a service. I was very dissuaded from ever going to seminary or ever recognizing my particular function and calling in life because I thought, well, that's way up on that plateau there. I'm not at that level.

I'm not qualified to do that. That's for these people that have all kinds of gifts and talents and characteristics that I don't have. And that false perspective also leads to emphasizing a person rather than what that person is communicating.

And this has been a big problem in our churches where people hesitate to accept something that is taught from the word of God because, well, I heard somebody else say something different. In our particular strand of tradition, people have said, well, I've identified the person that's my pastor and so whatever he says, that's what I'm going to believe. And we lose the ability to exercise critical thought and to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Hebrews says that the mature have their senses exercised to discern good and evil. But when you set up one individual and say, that's the only person I'm going to learn from and whatever they say, that's going to be my belief, that's going to be my understanding. Please don't do that with me.

You need to listen to anybody that you find gives you spiritual nourishment. If the studies that we have do, great. If you find someone else, please get the truth of the word of God and don't tie it to a single individual.

That's a false perspective. That's not the diakonos view. A deacon is a person who brings a plate of food to the table and sets it down.

You select the food. You put it on your plate. You cut it up and eat it.

You digest it. You run on the basis of that energy. The deacon is just a plate carrier.

And lots of people can do that. There's not just one qualified waiter in the whole restaurant and, well, I can't accept that food because the wrong waiter brought it. It's silly and it does a detriment to the church at large and to the body of Christ because God has commissioned many individuals.

So Paul, the apostle, if anybody had a right to swell up and say, well, I've got some special gifting here, it's Paul. But he says, I'm a diakonos. I'm a table waiter.

I bring you the platter of food. Epaphras can bring you a platter of food. Titus can bring you.

Timothy can bring you. Remember back in Corinthians where Paul says, I'm not proud of you because one says I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Cephas. And he goes on and argues, if you read that down to the end, he says don't limit yourself to just one guy.

All things are yours in Christ. By puffing yourself up and saying I'm a follower of this one guy, you're denying yourself 80% of what God's provided. He says all things are yours in Christ.

Go grab it all. Don't say, well, I'm just going to get the little narrow sliver that this one apostle is

going to give me. So Paul reflects that perspective.

It's such a wonderful example of orientation to the plan of God. He rejoices in his sufferings. Even though he knows that he's an apostle with a commission from God, he's going to go on to say, I became a minister according to the stewardship.

This is oikonomia, where we get the word economy. It's a stewardship. It's an overseeing of something, a custodianship.

This word is used for the plan of God in other passages. God has an oikonomia for human history. Paul has been given a delegated responsibility to communicate the gospel.

He says, I'm a steward. I've been commissioned to do these things. It's a stewardship from God, which was given to me for you.

It came from God to me, and it is on your behalf. Anybody that is a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, anyone that has a desire to walk the worthy walk, has the same opportunity. We've all received something from God.

We all have something to contribute, to benefit other believers in the body of Christ. To each one he has given a measure according to the measure of grace. Each one has a special expression of the power of God the Holy Spirit.

We've got to be equipped. We've got to be transformed in order for that to develop and take shape. But it was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God.

What does it mean to fulfill the word of God? We're going to pause and take a break. When we come back, we're going to see that Paul uses this same word elsewhere in talking about the gospel. We'll see how Paul thinks that what he's doing is fulfilling the word of God and what that mystery is that he is communicating.

Let's pause here and take a break.