

99-03-12a Colossians

Let's take a moment as we begin our study this evening to go to the Lord in prayer, to take that opportunity to clear our minds and our hearts and to seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Father, we thank you for the many ways that you have expressed your grace toward us. We thank you for the daily provision, the daily blessings that we can all think back on.

We thank you for bringing us to this point of opportunity, opportunity for fellowship, opportunity for being built up through the study of your words, through the ministry of your Spirit. We pray tonight as we examine the closing portion of Paul's epistle to the Colossians that God the Holy Spirit will give us insight and understanding and help us to tie these things in with the other lines and precepts that have been laid down in our souls. We pray that as a result we will be more closely conformed to the image of our Savior, that we will be fully equipped for every good work, that we will be in a position to put on the new man that is renewed in knowledge according to the image of our Maker, according to your perfect image, which Jesus Christ makes possible for us to reflect.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We resume our study in Colossians tonight at the dividing point between chapter 3 and chapter 4. We saw the last time we met the study Colossians this closing section that has taken the principles and the foundational truths that Paul has communicated in the opening and middle portions of the letter and he brings it to the practical application level.

One thing that I would really love to have done and actually considered doing, but I think it's a little ambitious for us perhaps, is to lay the two letters side by side, the Laodicean letter that Paul is going to be encouraging them to read in chapter 4, which is our book of Ephesians, and the letter to the Colossians. I think we can probably use our personal study time or our personal time of meditation or time other than Bible class to see those connections. If nothing else, I would encourage you to take some time and just read, especially the last couple of chapters of Ephesians with Colossians in mind.

But I think Paul does such a great job of distilling what's on his mind and the truths that are applicable in Colossians that we find the complementary expression, sometimes fuller expression. Ephesians is a longer letter and he fleshes out some of these ideas and he transitions in and out of them in slightly different ways. But it's a wonderful, I can see why he encourages the church in Colossae to exchange letters with the church at Laodicea because they are wonderfully complementary and each has something by way of illumination for the other.

But our study is the study of this letter to Colossae and so you will notice that I've been careful not to spend a whole lot of time over in Ephesians, although it's very tempting. But you will recall, if you're familiar at all with the contents of Ephesians, that there is a very similar section to what we've just seen in Colossians 3, 18-25. This actually extends all the way to 4.1. I'm not real sure

why we ended up with the chapter break where it is.

It should be one verse down after 4.1. That's really the part of our section that we have just finished looking at. But this is a beautifully concise section. It's balanced.

Each exhortation to one party is balanced with an exhortation to the complementary party. So you have the wives who are free agents, who have the ability to decide and to choose what they are going to do. They are exhorted to submit themselves to their husbands because it's fitting.

It's fitting in the Lord. It's a part of Christian life to see the structure that God has built into society and to conform ourselves to it. This is why we lift up hands in prayer for kings and rulers and those who are in authority.

Not because we agree with them politically. Not because we admire them. Not because they are necessarily men of leadership or even character.

But because they occupy a position of leadership and this is fitting in the Lord. Because it honors the structure that God has imposed on human civilization. And in that light it is possible to pray for those with whom we disagree, with whom we violently disagree.

Those that we personally do not admire and we do not admire personally. But because of the position they hold, we can pray for those individuals. This includes the president, our senators, our congressmen, our state leadership, our local leadership, people that function even in the realm of public school or any other area that is a properly constituted authority.

We have the opportunity to pray for them. We will see a little bit more about that as we go forward. These are examples.

If you step back because we are about to conclude our study of Colossians. We may even conclude it tonight. We remember how this letter began.

We remember the occasion for it and the ideas about what constitutes a worthy life that are being put forward by those teachers other than the apostles who are blending secular life with spiritual life, who are often syncretistic. Syncretism is when you take several different things and mix them all together and try to blend them and take the best of each one. We have that going on today with psychology.

People think there are good ideas in psychology. This is what happens in psychology, by the way. I was talking to someone at work, the person I work for, because our organization engages in a lot of counseling.

We have a lot of people who are professionally trained as counselors and who work in the human services area. One of the problems with that is that you have a very large proportion, I say it's a problem, it's an observation at least, a lot of the people who work in that area, who work as

counselors and psychologists and this sort of thing, are former patients. They are people who at some point felt that they had an unsolvable problem or some sort of a personal crisis and went to someone who took them through this process of analyzing their problem and of looking for its roots in the past, in behavior, in attitudes, a lot of times going all the way back to childhood and the environment that their parents created and so forth.

People felt like they were helped in this area and it struck them that this was such a wonderful area of knowledge that they went back and got an education in it and themselves became counselors. It's very common. People say, I'm interested in this and I believe in it and I'm putting it forward because it works.

Well, now you have testimonials, you have people who are convinced of the efficacy, of the usefulness of some approach to problem solving in the area of life and the area of thinking and so these ideas come forward. Well, what if that person is a believer? Well, why can't I take these wonderfully effective ideas that have, they would say, impacted me so profoundly and why don't I bring those in and here's a wonderful thing, all truth is God's truth, so let me bring that in and things are getting a little stale, church and just Bible study and so forth, prayer and just the straight spiritual approach to things can be enhanced if I bring these things in and so we'll mix them together, we'll combine the best, we'll bring these wonderful scientific approaches to problem solving into the church and we'll, along with the power of God, just think how great it would be when all the glory goes to God and it's a part of Christian life. Well, it sounds great and there's a huge movement in the city and Christian counseling has become an accepted and considered by many to be a wonderful part of church life, of spiritual life, a profession for people who believe honestly and sincerely that this is a wonderful way to help solve problems.

How can you argue with that? You have people who have problems that are being helped, they have pain and it's alleviated, they have dysfunction that's now function. What could possibly be wrong with that? Their life is now better than it was, they're happier, they're more productive, they're better adjusted, they're fruitful in their area of embedment and so forth. Well, it is a very difficult thing to raise questions about and if you do raise questions about it, now you're sticking the mud, you're a fighting fundee, there's going to be something wrong with you if you raise any questions and people are just astonished.

How could you even question this? Well, it goes to the criteria by which you measure. What is the measure of what constitutes a worthy life? This is what we're talking about. This is what was introduced in the opening lines of this letter.

As we draw near the conclusion of our study in Colossians, what are we going to carry away from this study? Well, what was its point? What was its purpose? Paul, when Epaphras comes to him and says, we've got these competing ideas and people are being swayed and they compare what you taught Paul and what I have taught, they compare that to these other ideas and people are prying at the cracks and they're levering people away from the faith that was delivered to us at

the beginning. They're mixing in other ideas. They're saying, well, why can't we combine the best of several different philosophies? Or, why can't we take the good parts of our background that we came out of and just improve it all, mix it all together and come up with a wonderful salad instead of just having this one green leaf that is the teaching of the Word of God? Why not mix it and enhance it? Well, the bottom line is, you're never going to convince people by pointing at the benefit.

Because there are people who go to Scientology and see huge benefit. You hear these movie stars and so forth. I don't even know if you're familiar.

I don't even know if I know what Scientology is. But there are a lot of people in Hollywood, famous movie stars and so forth, who get on TV and just seeing its place is about how wonderful it is. They were drug abusers.

Their life was in shreds and tatters and they got into Scientology. Now they're happy and well adjusted and organized. They find meaning in life.

They enjoy the simple things. They've got their fame and perspective. They're not about abusing substances and abusing people around them.

Everybody compliments them and tells them how much better everything is. Well, Buddhists and all, you think of anything in life. Go to any cult.

They're going to have their success stories. Just like diet schemes. You can go point to any diet.

Somebody has used that diet and lost weight and they're going to sing its praises. So relative happiness in life, I'm happier now than I was, that's not going to be a valid criteria because we know that some of these things are obviously evil and godless, have no reference to God, don't bring God any glory, and yet people swear by it as a wonderful means of personal improvement. You've got the, I never can think of the mouth full of teeth guy, Tony Robbins.

Tony Robbins has got his tapes and his books and his courses and seminars on how to improve your life and organize. They've had the things on channel 13 this past week or two of the lady, this is fascinating. Have you seen the woman who tells you all about your finances? What's her name? Susie, S-U-Z-E is her first name.

Can't think of her last name. Looks like Suze when you look at it, but it's Susie somebody. She's a big financial wizard and she tells everybody this is how to get your personal finances.

This is how to do investment and savings and use the laws of money. It's fascinating because if you watch her for any length of time and the approach and the way she presents this, it's not just here's wisdom in managing your money. She says this is a way of life.

You live your life by the laws of money. If you respect the laws of money, the laws of money will

work for you. It takes on the trappings of a religion.

She would never call it a religion, but she says you've got to incorporate this into your thinking. It has to become a perspective. It has to be a way of viewing life and a way of ordering your priorities and that it's more than just what do you do when you sit down to balance your checkbook or when you sit down to spend money.

This is living your life by the laws of money. Well, I started thinking about those you cannot serve God and man type of things and it gets kind of frightening, but just sometimes if you happen to see this lady, a very nice, sweet lady trying to help people with their finances, but why can't this be good? Why can't we just incorporate this and have a seminar at our church and have a lady come help us with Christian financing and so forth. Look at the improvement.

Look at the wisdom. Look at the stewardship that could be involved. Here's the thing.

What is your standard of measure? The common standard of measure is how does it benefit me? How do my circumstances turn out? That's our knee-jerk, instinctive measure. If I think my situation has improved, that was a good thing. Well, this opens the door to a great deal of evil in our lives because that is not the biblical standard of measure.

It is not what does it do for me. It's where do I stand before God in this area? Is God pleased, not am I pleased? Sometimes doing the godly thing doesn't necessarily improve our circumstances. And there may be no... People like to say, well, if you do the godly thing, the old gospel songs got words that say, do right and you'll come shining through.

If you do right, truth will never fail and prayer will lighten your load and one thing and another. If you do the right thing, your circumstances are going to come right side up in the end. Well, perhaps, but that's still reflecting this thinking that while doing the right thing will turn out best for me in the end, you might as well just go take a big bite out of the prosperity gospel.

If I send in my tithe, the windows of heaven are going to open and bless me. The point is not to do whatever it is that's going to make things turn out the best for me. The hard thing in getting this across is if we do the Lord's will, they will turn out the best.

But the way of thinking about it and the way of measuring is wrong in those perspectives. What we want to be looking for and measuring by is the divine ruler, the divine measuring stick for these things. What does God think? What if it doesn't look like it's going to turn out well? What if it is apparent to the casual observer that this is never going to be a recoup and come shining through situation? If I fail to adhere to the truth of the word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ, I will die for it.

I'll be burned at the stake. I'll be beheaded. I'll be thrown to the lions.

You think about the Christians in Rome who had that decision to face. It's not like, well, God will

make it all come right in the end. The lions will fall over paralyzed.

The gates and chains will fall away and I'll just walk out into a wonderful happy life. Those people who persevered in their dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ and refused to renounce him and they didn't rationalize and say, oh, well, I'll still worship him in my heart. I'll just say something to these Romans and everything will be fine.

They claimed the name of Jesus Christ and walked out and went to their death rather than renounce him. That's happened all down through history. We're wonderfully blessed that we don't face that kind of choice in terms of life and death.

We face it in more subtle ways and in some ways our test is harder because it's easier to compromise. It's not a life and death, black and white, go-to-the-burning-stake decision for us. It's small daily compromises that challenge us.

And these dilutions of biblical truth, these amalgamations, these syncretistic forms of Christianity that Paul is writing against in Colossians face us today. Why can't we incorporate a little bit of prosperity gospel? Why can't we incorporate a little bit of Christian counseling? Look how well things will turn out for me. Look how my problems can be solved when I incorporate the laws of money into the laws of the word of God.

When I incorporate the observations of secular psychology and the mechanisms of action and reaction that it reveals to me and the principles of how to get people to do what I want type of things, why wouldn't this be beneficial? If I can understand the reason I'm committing this attitude sin all the time or this sin of the tongue all the time that's breaking up my marriage or messing up my job relationships or slowing me down professionally or socially or whatever, if I can get insight to that from secular psychology, how can that be a bad thing? Look how it will improve my life. This is what we're thinking in terms of measure of value. How do I determine the value? Well, if we don't take anything else away from the book of Colossians, from this letter that Paul wrote, into a situation virtually identical to the one you and I face today, this is the thing.

What has Paul said in this letter? The standard is God's approval, not how circumstances turn out. Jesus Christ stands in heaven as the divine member of the Trinity looking earthward. He stands on earth as true humanity looking heavenward.

He bridges the gap. He lifts us out of the mundane, out of the viewpoint that says it all depends on how things turn out down here. We fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

He lived here as a human being. Did he decide what he was going to do based on how things would turn out? Did he decide to go to the cross because it would work out the best for him? Did he teach the things that he taught looking at how people would respond? Was he making sure he didn't offend the Pharisees or the Sadducees, or that he didn't give offense, that he didn't create a stir? Did he just concentrate on the things that united and not on anything that might divide? Did

he appeal to the itching ears? People are looking for political deliverance. Let me talk about that some because that will attract them to the gospel of God.

That will attract them to the gospel of the kingdom. I'll just keep harping on how this is going to eventually throw off the Roman yoke and so forth. Did Jesus look at it in earthly terms? He did what he did based on the divine standard of measure.

I have come to do the will of my Father, he said over and over again. Many times the will of the Father was a sword that divided instead of a bond that united. But Jesus didn't compromise.

He didn't measure what he would do next by how it's going to turn out. When we put on the new man, as Paul encourages us to do here in Colossians, this is the mindset we're shooting for. This is what we're looking for, to have the mind of Christ, to have the perspective of Jesus Christ, to know when our words are going to be appealing and attract someone and when they're going to state the truth in a way that's probably going to turn someone off.

How do we know? Jesus spoke and it attracted huge crowds. He wasn't always harping on people and calling them broods of vipers and whitewashed tombstones and so forth. No one would have been sitting at his feet on the mountainsides.

But Jesus did what he did. He healed when he healed and he decided not to stay and heal at different times in his ministry. How do we make those decisions? That criteria is what we want to absorb.

That's what we want to have functioning and setting our standards and our priorities in our soul. Whatever it was that guided Jesus Christ, that's what we want. We want to be that new man.

We want to have the image of God reflecting in our lives. How do we do that? Well, Paul has come down and brought these things to concrete expression, concrete application. Rather than trying to make an impact on the community, on the neighborhood, on humans who may be watching, what is the criteria? Where is the worthy walk? It is all about perspective.

It's all about where is your starting point in your soul before you ever speak, before you ever decide, before you ever get out in the world of circumstances. What's going on in your soul? Inner transformation, changing the landscape in the soul. When our perspective and our priorities have been transformed by the renewing power of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, we will have an instinct for the things that please God.

Insults and wrongs that are done to us, slights or sins that are committed against us are not going to have the usual inflammatory effect in our soul because our soul has been changed. We're not sensitive in that area like we used to be. Our ego is not out there with all of its nerve endings dangling.

Instead, we're going to be looking at the plan of God, the purpose of God. I am in this circumstance. I have this temptation.

I have this opportunity for failure. I have this opportunity to return evil for evil, whatever it may be. But that's not the thing that pleases God.

It may make me feel like my circumstances are going to turn out better, but where is the divine evaluation? This is why hope is the motivation for the Christian life because it's constantly looking ahead at the evaluation of God, not at immediate gratification, immediate justification, immediate vindication of who we are and how important we are and the wrong that was done to us and so forth. So it's all about perspective. Our perspective, that's the hand that holds out the measuring stick and says, how important is this person who just cut me off in traffic, this person who just failed to fulfill their obligations, who just let me down in some way or who just slighted me in some way or who just wronged me in this way.

And this is where most of our problems come in is when our ego, our sense of self importance, our natural sense of justice where our own self is concerned gets attacked in some way, gets damaged in some way, this is where we have our biggest battles. This is where these competing ideas sink in their hooks because they offer us a way to compromise pure Christianity with something that appeals to us, something that lets us have, that we think is going to be the best of both worlds. We can be a believer and think that we're serving God but we can also get our ego out there.

And this is why works-based spirituality is so popular because it runs under the flag of Christianity but it lets us stand up and talk about all the good things we're doing for God. Or it lets us drop names of who we're associated with or what ministries we've been involved in or who it was we witnessed to or where it was that we were active. And we can vindicate ourselves and when others are out with elbows and knees flying in ministry and in works of good and impact and so forth we can say, well, you know, I'm right in there with you.

And it appeals to us. It's a part of our nature, our old nature. But when we think about what impresses God, righteousness by faith, we can do that without being involved in any circumstances.

It's a matter of perspective. Now, it all comes down to this section we've just covered. Where is the battle? Is the battle out there? Let me go find some people to evangelize.

Let me find some people to minister to. Let me get out there amongst my church members or my fellow employees or my fellow people in whatever social circle I run in. And this is where the battle is going to be.

Well, Paul says when we've wrapped our minds and we've spent many lessons, we're pretty familiar, I think, with the content of this letter. We know how righteousness by faith comes about

in our lives. We know what constitutes the worthy walk.

We know that the new man is put on in wisdom and understanding and immersing ourselves in the perspective of the Word of God. We know that. Well, knowing that, how does it work itself out, tomorrow and the next day and the next day? Well, it's not going forth, finding where God is at work and joining Him in His work, like the Experiencing God crowd would have us do.

It's not jumping into some form of overt ministry. Not that there's anything wrong with overt ministry, but it has to begin somewhere. And you're not ready, you're not qualified to go out and engage in overt ministry until the inward ministry of the Spirit and the Word is functioning, is underway.

It doesn't have to be complete, but it has to be underway and we have to have a sign at its proper place. That's why in verse 18 when Paul says, if these things are happening in your soul, if you've really wrapped your mind around the content of chapter 1 and chapter 2 and the first half of chapter 3 is Colossians, you know where the first place is going to make a difference is? It's in your marriage. It's in that one individual that is closest to you in the whole world.

If you are a woman, if you're a lady, and you're married to a man, your opportunity, the place where you can measure how well this process is going in your soul is in your attitude toward your husband. Your husband with his sinful nature, with his flaws, with his blind spots, with his imperfections, with his insensitivities, with his boorishness, with his bad judgment. Think of all the worst things that have happened, are happening, will ever happen as far as how did this guy get assigned to be my authority? Well, this is the place where your soul's inner transformation is measured.

It's measured in how well you can submit yourself to an imperfect, unfair, flawed authority. Because just think, if you learn this skill, if you develop this area of self-control and self-discipline, if you can function graciously, sinlessly in submitting yourself to a very imperfect authority, which all of us as husbands are, how much easier is it going to be to maintain your submission to the perfect, righteous, just authority of God as it is communicated through His Word and through His Spirit. You get your chance to flex your developing muscles of self-control, of humility, of gracious endurance, of wrongs that are inflicted.

Why does God ask ladies to submit themselves to guys who can make so many mistakes? Because it's a great testing ground. It's a great place to measure your soul's improvement. And I know a lot of you who are ladies have been able to see in that area improvement.

You've been able to see that you are more long-suffering, that you're more patient. None of us arrive in any of these areas, but this is a place where you can definitely see how you're doing, isn't it? You can tell when your impatience just runs away with you or when your frustration or when your sense of injustice just runs away with you. You can tell.

And you can also tell when you think back and you think, boy, I'm doing better now than I would have a year or two or three ago in this area. I last longer before I fail now in this area. This is what Paul is talking about.

It's a small little section here, just a couple of verses, but this is the measuring stick. This is where you find out how you're doing. Are you growing in grace? Are you growing in knowledge? Are you growing in wisdom? From the Lord? This is the place where you find it out.

And this is one of the world's greatest victories. You'll never get the chance to stand up in front of a group of people and talk about this because you'll never embarrass your husband in that way. You'll never hang his almost literal dirty laundry out in front of the public.

But you know who sees in secret and who rewards openly. And you know that in your relationship, your personal, individual relationship with God the Father, you've won a great victory. You've made progress.

You've grown. And you know that He's pleased. And there's nothing better than to know that God Himself has reinforced your soul.

He's giving you perspective. He's giving you strength through His Spirit, through His Word. He's doing it personally for you and you're seeing the fruit of it in this very personal and very private area.

It's a place of joy. It can also be a place of chagrin when you realize that, well, I still fail. I still fall short.

I still chafe under this authority. But this is the battleground. This is the place.

Don't let someone come in with a false Christianity and tell you that you're a good Christian because of what you do on the outside. That you're a good Christian because of meetings that you attend or organizations that you're a member of or activities that you engage in or how well you are seen and viewed out in the public. What kind of a witness you have or how many tracts you've handed out or what sort of evangelism or any of these other things that are standard parts of our Christian view today.

This is the area of measure. This is where it's make or break. It's either Super Bowl victory or it's Toilet Bowl defeat.

It's in this close, personal, private area. You, your husband, and the Lord. It's make or break.

The victories are great. They're just as great. You might as well be Billy Graham in the middle of a stadium with 200,000 people and they're all streaming down the aisles.

It's just as big a victory when you can freely and humbly and graciously without mental attitude

sin submit to a completely screwed up husband. Not that they're completely screwed up all the time, but there are times when we are completely screwed up. And to be a woman of virtue and a woman of grace and a woman of humility and endurance and a positive light shining in a dark room when the husband has got all of his wires crossed and is blind and insensitive and bluish.

When you do that, it's the greatest victory in the universe. There's only one kind of soul that can win that victory and it's a soul that has been transformed by the grace of God that has been empowered by the Spirit of God that has been molded and shaped by the Word of God and that is reflecting the image of God. It's the greatest thing there is.

Sarah wasn't a great woman. We've seen that in Genesis. She had all kinds of problems.

She was willing to lie. She was willing to do a lot of things. But she gets one word of condemnation in the scripture.

There's one place where Sarah with all of her faults is commended. She said one word in one conversation in Genesis. We're going to see it here in our study.

But there's a point at which she calls Abraham her Lord. She calls him her kurios in the Greek translation. Her adoni in Hebrew.

It's an expression of submission of the wife to the husband. And she did it one time. It's recorded one time in the scripture in Genesis.

And she is immortalized by Peter for that remark for all eternity. It's in the unchanging and eternal Word of God because at one point she expressed her perspective of submission to Abraham who was like a lot of us as husbands. Made a lot of mistakes.

Had her do stupid and crazy things that nearly got them killed. But she called him Lord. And she's commended in the scripture for doing that.

That's the battle. That's the area of victory or failure. That's where we need to be focusing our attention.

In my assigned place, my personal spot in God's plan, can I be transformed by the renewing of my mind? Can I fulfill the command? Can I live up to the calling in that area? It's so easy to define success in terms of some action that you can go out and perform some sunny afternoon or some Sunday morning. Go out and perform a physical action. It's wonderful.

And that's why everybody in the church, it seems, is so anxious to measure by these external standards. How many people did we get to come? How many people did we feed? How many did we witness to? How many tracts did we get out? How many people did we get to come to the Bible study? Who did we talk to? What did we say? Did we change their life? Did we make an impact? That's easy compared to the challenge and the calling of being transformed in the inner

man or the inner woman. And here's the measure.

Submit yourself to your own husband as is fitting in the Lord. If you can do that and do it in a way that is fitting and pleasing to the Lord, you have done the greatest thing you can do in life. There is no greater victory you can win than to manifest a transformed soul in that largely invisible way.

No one may know except your husband. But this is why husbands can be won without a word. People think that the greatest thing that can happen in life is for someone to come to Christ, and it probably is.

I don't think there's anything greater. You can do that, a wife, the Scripture says, you can do it without a word because of your behavior, because of winning this battle. You can bring someone to Christ.

That's how powerful it is. You can evangelize someone without a word winning this battle. You can please God.

You can get the well-done, good and faithful servant. You can receive the crown. You can collect the inheritance.

You can reflect the glory of Jesus Christ throughout eternity just winning this one central battle. This is the measure. This is what Paul is telling us.

Don't let people come in and define your Christian life for you and tell you what is and isn't spirituality and what is and isn't success. How your children turn out is not your measure. How your circumstances turn out is not your measure.

What your house looks like, what kind of car you drive, what your clothes look like, what your personal appearance is, how well you survive the ravages of age, your social standing, your ability to put on a social event in your home or elsewhere, how well you look when you attend one someplace else. Think of anything that you've ever gotten stressed over. That's not the measure.

The measure is right here in verse 18. To be submissive to your husband as is fitting in the Lord, which is in itself an expression of the transformed soul that pleases God. That's what he's looking for.

The same thing for a husband. We could talk just as long. Of course, since I'm a husband, I'm going to choose not to.

But we can talk just as long about ourselves. To love our wives and not vent bitterness toward them. This is the hardest thing to do.

To never let bitterness escape out of your soul toward your wife. It's the hardest thing to do because everything in life conspires to create bitterness in our soul. Frustration at work.

Frustration with people. Frustration in traffic. Frustration with politics.

Frustration with all the things that men are called to do and encounter in life. Everything conspires to create bitterness. We're supposed to be making everything go.

We're supposed to be bringing home the bacon. We're supposed to be running the country. We're supposed to be setting the standards for civilization and society.

We're supposed to be accomplishing everything large and small. Looking out for our families. Being the head of the house.

All of these other things where we feel like we have all these responsibilities, which we do. We have all these duties. The world is broken.

It's a fallen creation. It's in the grip of sin. We ourselves are flawed and in the grip of forces beyond our control, both internal and external.

The first symptom of that and the first product of that in our soul is bitterness. In some way, shape, or form we're going to get frustrated and we're going to be bitter. It may be something totally unrelated, but the person that is closest to us and in our immediate bursting radius, just like an artillery round, is going to get the fragments.

When we burst, our wife is going to get the brunt of it. Whether she deserves it or not. Whether we think she deserves it or not.

She never deserves it. Our wife never deserves bitterness. She deserves love.

We are commanded to express love and not bitterness. We fail in this all the time. What is the measure of our growth and our success as believers seeking to walk the worthy walk before God? If you want to hold up the measuring stick, it's not being a deacon in the church.

It's not being pastor of the church. It's not being involved in the church or heading an organization or any other of the standard. It's not going down to some meeting and mentoring other men or being mentored by a man or going down and joining hands and yelling in a stadium or any other popular things that are going on.

It's in the personal, private time we spend with our wives. How does our soul interact with the soul of our wife? If bitterness leaks out, we've failed. If love blossoms forth, we've succeeded.

That's the measure. That's all the measure you need. Don't let anyone come in with some other kind of Christianity.

This is the attack in Colossae, isn't it? This is the attack today, isn't it? Some other measure of where we stand before God. God has given us a wonderful place to find out exactly where we

stand. For wives, it's relationship with your husband.

For husbands, it's relationship with your wife. Not everybody is married and so, for children, it's the relationship with their parents. For parents, as a couple, once they've got their marital measuring stick there, you can also find out where you stand by looking at how you're treating your children.

There's a balance there because you've got to balance your time and your attention and you can't succeed in your marriage with your spouse and fail in the raising of your children. This is another area where, and it's close, it's personal, it's private, it's between us and the Lord and our immediate family members, but this is where the measure is found. Don't let anyone measure you by something else, Paul says.

This little section, 3.18-4.1 in Colossians, this is the measuring stick of the Christian life. If you can pass this measure, you will already have conquered every other challenge in life. You won't have any problems with your business decisions or your financial decisions or your social decisions or your church life decisions or any other decision in life.

When this is working, when you pass this test and this measure, everything else is taken care of and you can come before God in prayer, you can come before God with a clear conscience, with a heart sprinkled, having been cleansed because you've fought the good fight of faith. This is where it's going to be manifest. This is a good place for us to pause as we begin to launch into chapter 4. We'll take our break here and when we come back, we're going to see the rest of life.

What about those people that are outside? That's where we'll pick up in chapter 4, verse 2.