

Ephesians 14-03-09b

We pick up our study now in Ephesians, we're finishing chapter 3, looking at the love of Christ, which passes knowledge, so that we can be filled with all the fullness of God. This is verse 19. We talked about verse 18, Paul praying that we, because he's talking to the Laodiceans, and he says, not just you, but all the saints, can comprehend, comprehend with all the saints.

And you have several words in the Bible that are translated to know, but you have, for example, in Ephesians 1.18, this is where Paul really began to develop this idea of how important it is to know things. This is why we're a Bible church. This is why you have faithfully attended Bible class, after Bible class, after Bible class, because you recognize, right, how important it is to know.

You can't get there without knowing. You can't emote your way to it. And this, I think, is one of the sleight of hand deceptions going on in the world today, is there is an assumption, it's a tacit assumption, it's an unspoken assumption, it's sort of a given, and people grow up in churches now where the ethos and the prevailing view, unspoken though it may be, is that the way to get to a real appreciation of God is emotionally.

If we can create a video and show the individual drops of blood trickling down from the cross. Mel Gibson tried this in his depiction of the crucifixion of Christ in a movie a few years ago. There's a new movie out and TV shows about the Bible and one thing and another.

And it is an appeal to emotion. And certainly there is a valid emotional appreciation for Christ, for the work of Christ, for the things of God. I'm sure, like me, there are times when you're singing a hymn and you hit a particular line in the hymn and it just chokes you up because of what it means.

You think about a particular concept in Scripture. There are times when I'm just quoting a verse to myself and I get to a certain part of it and I just have to stop if I'm speaking out loud because there is an emotional component, there's an emotional response. It's normal, it's natural, it's great.

However, it does not substitute for knowledge. It should be a result of knowledge, it is not a means to knowledge. You cannot emote your way to appreciation of God.

You have to appreciate God and your emotions will follow. Emotions are a wonderful cart being pulled by the horse of knowledge. And you can't reverse that order.

You don't get your train up the hill when the caboose is the only form of motive power. Paul understood this and that's why back in Ephesians 1, verse 18, he says, I pray to the Father knowing that the eyes of your understanding have already been enlightened. You have been given sight, spiritual sight.

At the point of your salvation, you are given a set of spiritual eyes. But you've got to open them and you've got to focus them and you've got to direct them at the right things. You've got to use them to perceive, to get information just like our human eyes and our physical body do and then process that information.

It doesn't do any good to look at a thing if that vision doesn't produce beneficial results. Have you seen these programs where they show you how your eyes and your whole visual perception system work and how it can be fooled? I saw a thing I was showing Patty the other night. There was a guy showing this.

It's sort of a bar trick. I'm not supposed to know as a pastor that this is a bar trick. Don't ask me how I do.

But there's a bar trick and they film this. Here's a guy and he has a \$100 bill. And he walks up to young people who are healthy, perfectly normal functioning, optimized human beings in their early 20s.

And he says, all right. They're sitting there. He says, I've got this crisp, fresh \$100 bill.

I'm going to hold it by one end. I'm dangling it before you. And I want you to grab it.

And I'm going to give you an advantage. You put your hands, you put your fingers and thumb on each side of this \$100 bill, right in the middle. All right? Now, when I release the bill, you grab it and it's yours.

All right? I'm holding the \$100 bill. Your fingers and thumb are on each side of it. Now, you watch.

And as soon as I let go of this bill, you grab it and you keep it. Nobody can do it. Try it.

Takes two people now. Don't you do it yourself. Not like this.

You have another person holding the bill. And you try to grab it. What's the problem? There is latency.

By the time your eyes that you use to look and watch this \$100 bill and the fingers that are holding it, by the time you see the fingers move and the bill begin to drop, that information goes through your eyes, through your visual cortex, your retina, and everything else, gets into your head, and your brain says, hey, the bill is moving. Fingers and thumb, compress. And the signal goes down your arm and thumb says, oh, got a message.

And the fingers say, well, okay, let's come together. Well, by the time that loop takes place, the bill has dropped below. And people were trying to cheat the system and grab low.

They still missed it. After the first few times, they said, well, you know, I've obviously got to. Well,

even moving their hands down and trying to grab it halfway to the bar, not happening.

You're just not quick enough. And so with the best of intentions and even seeing that there are limits, there are all kinds of optical illusions. If you've ever seen the whole world of optical illusions, Paul says the eyes of your understanding have been enlightened.

You have been given a spiritual perception ability. Carnal mind can't understand the things of the spirit. They're spiritually discerned.

People who are in the flesh, either as believers who don't cultivate their spiritual life, their relationship with God, aren't sensitive to the Holy Spirit, don't even really know that he's present. And certainly unbelievers have no ability to see. There are people who are spiritually blind.

They have no eyes. They cannot see. Remember Amazing Grace? I was blind, but now I see.

This is what happens at the point of faith, not just saving faith. Saving faith gives you the eyes. But living faith opens the eyes, focuses the eyes, points the eyes at the right things.

And emotion isn't the way to get there. If you're blind and you need to go make a sandwich, you don't sit in a chair and emote a sandwich. You can't get a sandwich by emotion.

And I wouldn't advise living life blind. Blind people can make themselves sandwiches. But how much easier is it when you can see? You get a jar out of the cupboard and you read the label.

This is not a cleaning solution. This is not silver polish. It's peanut butter.

So I can make a sandwich out of this. Oddly enough, the skippy jar is shaped the same as the silver polish. Well, it's helpful if you can read the label.

Kind of got the same texture. Everything's going well until you take a bite. And if you're eating a silver polish sandwich, not going to be nearly as inviting and tasty and nutritious as a peanut butter sandwich.

The eyes of your understanding have already been enlightened. They have been activated. They've been given to you, Paul says in Ephesians 1:18.

Why? So that you may know. The eyes of your heart having been enlightened, having been activated, having been wired up. If you've seen blind people, they've got perfectly good eyes.

There's no white film. There's no strange direction to them. Their eyes look normal in every way, and yet they're just utterly and totally blind.

They've got eyes, but there's no connection to the visual cortex in the brain. They work. Light goes in.

The lenses are there. But it's just not a functional system. There's some disconnect.

It's not a complete system. Our eyes having been enlightened. The eyes of the heart, the cardia.

This is the understanding. So that you may know the hope of His calling, the riches of the glory of His inheritance, and the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe. Those of us who are having faith.

To know. This is really important. The psalmist understood this.

Psalm 103, 11. As the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. It is immense.

It is vast. God's mercy isn't just a little helping hand in a crisis. It's not just a momentary favor that He does us.

Oh, God, my car is about to crash. Please keep me alive. Crash.

Hey, I'm alive. Thanks, God. As the heavens are high above the earth.

How high are the heavens? Is there a place? Is there a measurable spot where the heavens end? They've got these wonderful special effects now where they zoom out or zoom in. Here you are on a city block. And somebody is raising up.

And suddenly you're looking at the yard and the roof of the house. And then it zooms out and you see the block. And then you see the neighborhood.

And then it just zooms way out. And suddenly you're looking at the state and then the continent and then the earth. And now it's just a marvel.

And it disappears. And you're zooming out and out and out and out and out into the heavens. Well, you haven't even left the solar system yet.

Before you leave the solar system, you can't even see the earth anymore. And yet the heavens are so far beyond that, that's just minuscule. Well, as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him.

Not those who know him, not those who acknowledge him, not even those who believe in him. Those who fear him, those who live their life in worship and awe and respect. God's mercy is infinite.

The next verse says, as far as the east is from the west. And all of these naysayers that say, well, you know, people in the Old Testament, they thought the earth was flat. I suspect that this is evidence that the psalmist knew the earth was round.

Because he didn't say as far as the north is from the south, did he? He said as far as the east is from the west. Why? Well, keep traveling west until you hit the east. You can go west infinitely.

You can go west and never stop and have to go back east. You can keep going west. The sun traverses the sky from east to west every day and it just keeps going and going and going because we've got a round planet.

So far has he removed our transgressions from us. That's mercy. That's God's love.

He goes on in verse 17 of that same psalm. Psalm 103 is the width and length and depth and height psalm. In verse 17 he says, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

It's not from yesterday until tomorrow. It's not from March the 1st until March the 14th. It's not like a sail at coals.

I started to say a sail at J.C. Penney's, but J.C. Penney's is always having a sail. It might be like a sail at J.C. Penney's. My dad used to get the mail and bring it in and say, oh look, Sears is having a sail.

Like, you know, it's not exactly an event. Sears is always having a sail. It's perpetual.

Something is always on sail at Sears. Well, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. There's never a time when the mercy of God is not available to those who fear Him.

On those who fear Him it says again in verse 17. And His righteousness extends to the children of children of children of children. To endless generations.

Interestingly, in the Old Testament, they often said, this knowledge is beyond my reach. You go to Psalm 139.6. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high.

I cannot attain it. I can't grasp it. Isaiah 55 verse 9. God speaking.

As the heavens are higher than the earth. How much higher are the heavens than the earth? What is the number of miles to the top of the heavens from the surface of the earth? Can't be named. There is no ceiling at which the heavens end.

As the heavens are higher than the earth. So, God says, are my ways higher than your ways. And my thoughts than your thoughts.

We're back to the parent. Who straps the child in a car seat. And the child says, I want to play.

Why are you limiting me? Don't you know that I'm a child and it's good for me to move around? What kind of a parent are you? Strapping me into this chair. For minutes that seem like hours. And hours that seem like days.

But you're strapping me down. How can I grow? How am I going to learn to walk when you keep strapping me in this little chair in the car? The parent says, this is a limited duration thing. We're in the car.

We're going from point A to point B. You need to be strapped into the car seat to protect you. The child doesn't understand when they're little. That this is necessary and beneficial to them.

It's restrictive and limiting. And in their little minds they say, you know, isn't it better for me to move and develop my reflexes. And, you know, stress my bones so that they'll grow and develop my muscles, my hand-eye coordination.

What could possibly be good about being strapped into this little chair? Well, the wisdom of the parent is much greater than the wisdom of the child. And infinite illustrations where the child is hungry. Mommy, I'm hungry.

Can't eat right now. Why? Well, for a variety of reasons. Something bigger than the child is going on.

Not time to eat yet. Can't drop everything. I'm in the middle of changing a diaper.

I can't give you your food right this minute. Something more important, a higher priority, is being observed here. You've got to wait.

Waiting is good for you anyway. You need to eat at regular times. This enhances your digestion.

This allows me to prepare nutritious foods. I don't hand you a Twinkie because it's the only thing I've got at hand to feed you right this minute. I need to prepare your food, and it's not prepared yet.

I have other priorities. I've got a schedule. You are one small part of a vast household here, and it's not time.

It's not convenient. It's not ready. You must wait.

And it's good for you to wait. You need to learn that everything doesn't revolve around you. What's the child's perspective? I'm hungry.

What kind of a parent doesn't feed their hungry child? Don't you know how important nutrition is to me? Don't you realize that Wonder Bread builds strong bodies 12 ways? What's the matter with you? Why are you ignoring me? I've got this need. I've got this hunger. It's all about me, and you're not feeding it.

And in my world, you're a bad parent. The heavens are higher than the earth. God says, My ways are higher than your ways.

My thoughts are higher than your thoughts. What is faith? A well-adjusted child has faith that their parents have good reasons for doing what they do, and they don't have to explain every single thing to the child. Well, I'm not going to obey until you explain it to me, until you rationalize it, until you convince me that I should obey.

I'm not going to obey. I don't understand your reasoning here. Justify yourself to me, Mom.

Justify yourself to me, Dad. Or I don't see any reason why I should submit. I'll just go in and grab a handful of dog food because I'm hungry.

And it's right here. I can reach it. And even though you told me no, I'm hungry, and in my mind, I'm justified in finding any food I can get.

Remember the death in the pot we saw Friday night? Hey, stew's not thick enough. I can fix that. I'll throw in some gourds.

My ways are higher. This is the nature of faith. We are not supposed to understand everything God is doing.

If we were supposed to understand it, we would get a nightly download of God's plan for the next day, with all of its causes, conditions, successions, and relations mapped out into the future. We could trace any individual line of God's dealing with us and see its ultimate end and purpose and see why He's doing it and what the benefit is. Oh, okay, well, I can see how this makes sense.

Now I will obey. It's all about me and my understanding, if it makes sense to me. Okay, I will condescend to obey because you have explained yourself.

This is the arrogant opposite of humility and faith. I don't have to understand. He is my Heavenly Father.

He is my God. His mercy has rescued me from the miry clay, from the pit, from death, from hell, and I trust Him. I don't understand what He's doing.

I don't expect to understand what He's doing. I am limited. He is infinite.

I am carnal. He is spiritual. But I trust Him.

A good, well-adjusted child trusts their parents. The parent says, Wait, we'll eat soon. We'll be home soon.

You can get out of your car seat then. It will come in its time. Be patient.

Well-adjusted child. And isn't this a joy to the parent when the child says, Okay, fine. Not going to cry.

Not going to whine. Not going to beat up my little brother. Not going to take out my frustrations on something else.

Not going to throw a fit and kick and scream. Make an issue of myself. Disrupt, you know, distract the parent trying to drive through traffic by creating this huge fit.

I will wait. I will be patient. This is how a child grows and matures and comes to recognize that they are part of something larger than themselves and that they can be useful and productive.

They can learn to help prepare a meal. They can learn to help keep the house straight. They can learn to enhance the safety of a car by not distracting their parents when they are driving with needless self-centered fist-pounding and foot-kicking.

This is what God does with us. His ways are higher than our ways. This is Isaiah 55, verse 9. That's what Paul is talking about.

He says, I pray that you will mature, that you will grow, and that your perspective will reach beyond yourself, beyond the limits of human, finite, short-sighted, short-term, shallow analysis and reasoning, and that you're not going to be stamping your little foot, demanding that God reveal Himself and explain Himself before you condescend to believe in Him, which is what the atheist and the agnostic does. God doesn't meet my standards of what a God should be, so I judge Him unworthy of my respect, much less my belief or my obedience. There can't be anything going on that I don't understand, and since I don't understand this, it can't be legitimate.

I mean, the arrogance. We do not want to partake of this. One of the benefits of this prayer being answered for us, if we come to know the width and the length and the depth and the height, we also know how small we are and how great God's mercy is in taking the small me and incorporating me into His plan, mercifully, graciously taking me, made lower than the angels and raising me up in Christ to glory and function and life and benefit.

It is a healthy perspective. One of the things you will notice, some of us have recently seen the expression of the atheist viewpoint distilled into little pithy aphorisms, and atheists are very proud of these because they sound very intellectual and very perceptive and cutting to the bone of everything that's wrong with religion. But if you read these, you cannot help but be struck by the self-congratulatory tone of them.

There is a superciliousness to them. There is an arrogance that exudes from these comments about the ridiculousness of a God that would behave in certain ways that they assign to Him or a system that functions the way they perceive religion, what they really mean is Christianity in almost all cases, the way it functions. But, of course, it's convenient for them to lump all religions together when they're attacking Christianity because then they can partake of genuine shortfalls in Catholicism or in other Abrahamic religions.

Well, Judaism went in and slaughtered people, so I'm going to attach that to Christianity. And Islam has terrorists. I'm going to attach that to Christianity.

When it's convenient, they will syncretize and combine things. But there is this very self-centered, self-congratulatory, oh, I have risen above this benighted religion that was made when only 1% of the knowledge in the world was available, and so on. That is never the path to understanding when you've decided that you know it all in anything.

I was researching yesterday the whole art of tuning pianos, and I consider myself to be reasonably informed on that. My father is a piano tuner and has been for decades. He has shared a lot of his knowledge and understanding with me.

But there were a few questions I had in my mind, and so I was researching this and trying to educate myself a little bit and develop some of the things that he had mentioned in brief. And I found out all kinds of things that really enhanced my appreciation for really doing that right. I also, in a sideways way, answered a question I had about the guitar.

I got a new guitar, and I thought, Wow, this new guitar is such a great guitar. I love this thing. It sounds so great.

But the strings are old. I'm going to put some new strings on it. So I went and bought some new strings, put them on, tuned it up, stretched them out, did everything.

I know how to put strings on a guitar. I know how to tune a guitar. I got it all tuned up.

I started playing a song, and as soon as I went up the neck, the thing just went way out of tune and out of shape. I would play a G, and then I would play a high G, and it was way off. And I thought, I've been sold a lemon.

This guitar isn't fretted right. There's something wrong with this. And it just sounded like a train wreck.

I couldn't play any bar chords up high. I couldn't play any notes up high. It was just terrible, just way out.

I retuned it and played up there, and it was awful. And I thought, what does it matter? So much so, I laboriously, you know, I don't have an electric deal. I hand took the new strings off, got the old strings out of the trash, put them back on, played beautifully.

I thought, what? Clearly, I did something wrong. Maybe the wraps weren't right. I took the old strings off, put the new strings back on.

They were already cut and stretched. I put them back on, played like a train wreck. What is going on? I took the guitar to a luthier.

I needed to anyway. I took it to a luthier. I said, look, what's the matter with this thing? They didn't know.

I found out last night what the problem was. I thought, well, what I did is I went back and figured out what the brand and model of string was that was on the guitar and put that same model and brand on again, and it was fine. And I thought, well, what is it? I mean, a string is a string.

Come on, they're the same thickness. Well, come to find out, long story short, if you gain some knowledge, you can understand why this happens. And columns of air and principles of physics are at work that it takes time to understand.

I certainly don't have time to explain now. But knowledge gives you insight that gives you practical perspective. And it's a humbling thing to find out that what you think you know, when you've been stringing and tuning and playing guitars for years, something can happen that you didn't know about.

And you say, you know what, there's larger things going on here. You don't know as much as you thought you knew. And it's healthy.

It's healthy for us to be put in a place where our perspective is proper and where we can learn, where we don't assume we know it all. Well, it's a busted guitar. I'm getting rid of that and getting a different one.

I know people that have actually sold this particular guitar because they couldn't get it to sound right. Instead of researching and figuring out, gaining knowledge even when they weren't looking for it, and coming to discover that if you know what you're doing, this guitar is one of the finest sounding guitars there is. But you've got to know what you're doing and you've got to know what not to do.

And I wasn't even looking. I was studying pianos and I learned something about my guitar yesterday. This is what happens when we study the Word of God.

We may have issues. We may have challenges. We may have situations that we're facing.

Come to Bible class and you think, well, Ephesians 3 has got nothing to do with my current situation. Kings and prophets for crying out loud. Old dusty prophets wandering around giving people flour.

What's that got to do with my situation? God smiles as He puts these little nuggets in our path if we're doing what we're supposed to do because we trust Him. This doesn't seem like a study that's going to benefit me. Why would I listen? Why would I go? It doesn't appeal to me.

And yet God says, if you trust Me, and if you do what you're supposed to do because you trust Me, I will give you the answer you're looking for where you least expect it. It is a matter of faith.

God doesn't have to satisfy us so that we can sort of meet Him on equal terms.

Well, now that you've given me the intellectual argument, I in my vast mental power can see what a God you are and I will deign to believe in you and acknowledge your plan and I will allow you to save me now that you've explained yourself. And I'm sure you'll be very happy to have me on board. I'll be quite the asset for you with my vast mental apparatus here that is so finely tuned and so carefully discriminatory.

You should be happy that someone with my discrimination and taste actually considers you a God worthy of worship. And if you've got a chair somewhere in the throne room, I'm sure you'll want me by for advice and counsel as you run the universe. You'll be needing me with all of my logic.

This is why there is a hell. This is why a lot of us are not going to go into the eternal future because this is what got Satan kicked out of heaven. This is why the fallen angels cannot go into the future, why unbelievers cannot go into the future.

If you cannot humble yourself and pray and seek God's face and recognize that He is beyond us, and we trust Him and we follow Him and we obey Him out of faith and out of love and out of respect for who He is, like a good, healthy child, a well-adjusted young person respects and honors their father and mother so that their days may be long in the land which the Lord your God is giving you. Not because, well, my father's got the highest IQ of anybody in the... of course I will follow him. It is love, it is respect, it is faith.

This is what it means. This is why Paul prays this. Why didn't Paul pray, I pray that an angel will come and read you the entirety of God's plan so that you'll be able to anticipate what's coming next.

That God will give you the class schedule and you'll know exactly when your next test is coming up. Wouldn't it be great, you know, you go to class, first day of class, next semester, here's the schedule, here's the curriculum, you know, you're going to have a paper due, we're going to cover this chapter, you kind of get ahead, get started now. God doesn't hand out a curriculum, He doesn't give us a class schedule, He doesn't tell us when the nine weeks are coming up and it's going to be due.

We're just sort of flying blind, we wake up in the day. Why is that? Because it's not about intellectually grasping, it is about coming to know the dimensions of God's love. How is it that you can be filled with all the fullness of God? To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.

How can you know that which passes? This is like a, it's not exactly an oxymoron, but this is like to know the unknowable. This is the impossible dream, you know, to bear the unbearable sorrow, to, you know, climb the unscalable foe, or whatever that song says. You know, Paul Anka's, no, that's I Did It My Way.

I forget who wrote, you know, Dream the Impossible Dream. And there was another song called It's Impossible. It's impossible, it's something about love, but I like Steve Martin's version of it better.

It's impossible to shove a Cadillac up your nose, it's impossible to, you know. How can you do the impossible? What does Paul say here in verse 19? To know the love of Christ which passes knowledge. To know what cannot be known.

How does that work? How does it work? This is the difference between law and grace. Have you seen the federal, if you started with federal laws in this country, and you started on page one, what is the last page of the book of federal laws that detail felonies and everything associated with them? There is no end to it because it changes every single day because it's constantly having to be refined and court interpretations are constantly being added to it and you have case law that goes with the laws that are on the books and the legislature is constantly passing new ones, this kind of marriage is legal, now it's illegal, now it's legal, now it's illegal, this state, we've overturned this, we've changed that, we've updated this, we've modified that. The law on the books that says you can't spit on the sidewalk is still there, we finally revoked that one, we've added a new one.

You can't write laws that will cover every single exigency. So what's better? You become a person that instinctively operates on principle and on understanding. You don't need rules because you do it by nature.

You understand what's going on and you achieve what needs to be achieved out of your knowledge of principles. You know the basic structure, you know the rules of the game, but when the center hikes the ball to the quarterback and the quarterback hands it off to the fullback and the fullback heads for the line of scrimmage, there's no rule that tells him exactly where to place his feet, exactly what gap in the line to pick, exactly which blocker to follow, exactly when to veer and feint and dodge. And this is something he knows because he's an experienced fullback and he plays the play as it comes.

He reacts and responds because he is a really highly talented, skilled and experienced player. That's what God wants us to become. And as we come to know the fullness of God, you can't put the entire list of the fullness of God into any container.

What can you do? You can become an experienced and knowledgeable grace-oriented believer able to negotiate and navigate all of the circumstances and situations of life by principle, by faith, by knowing when to do things that need to be done and when to stop and rest in the provision and the promise of God. This is something we learn and gain by experience. And Paul says, I pray that when you realize the dimensions of God's love and you in humility and in faith adjust yourself to that, you have all the knowledge that you will ever need.

I don't need to know the things that pertain to your individual circumstance and challenge and test. You need to know them. You don't need to know the particular answer to the conundrums that I currently face and am trying to solve.

I need to know those things. God's love and God's mercy and God's grace are sufficient for all of them. And we go to the library and we pull what we need.

I don't have to know everything in the library. I just need to pull the right book, go to the right chapter, find the right page, read the right paragraph, absorb the truth that is there, and use it for my needs. That's what he means when he says that you may be filled with all the fullness of God, all the fullness that you need.

You can never be filled with all the fullness of God in the literal sense. You would explode. You'd have to be as big as God is to contain all the fullness of God.

There's only one place where all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and it's not you and me. We are in the one defined by those terms. We are in Christ, and all of us are in him.

And he is still bigger than all of us in him put together. But everything we need is available at any given moment, in any given circumstance, any given situation. This is the fullness of God.

It's all available to us. Do I need it all at once? Do I have to understand everything that God is doing? No. I just need to understand that God is a good God, that he loves me, that what he allows into my life is for my benefit.

I trust him. I obey him. I glorify him and am thankful.

I do not become empty in my imagination. My foolish heart is not darkened. I don't exchange the glory of God for other things.

I am filled with all the fullness of God. Any part of his fullness that I need is accessible and available. And I trust him, and I appreciate him.

And I say to him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly, above all that I could ask or think, I'm going to ask and I'm going to think along one little path. It's a big forest. I'm going to trace one little path through that forest, right? It doesn't diminish the size of the forest that I walk from one side of it to the other, does it? I experienced one little part, but it's above anything I could comprehend by making one little journey down the path.

Patty and I walked through the redwood forest up there in northern California. Oh, unforgettable. Nobody can describe that to you.

You can't watch a film. You've got to crunch those needles under your feet. You've got to see the ponderous size of those living organisms to truly appreciate it.

But we just traced a narrow little path. I can imagine from what I saw all of the parts I didn't see. I can guess that it is similar but different, to be filled with all the fullness of God.

I recognize that the forest is far beyond my ability to see every tree, every piece of bark, every needle, every branch, every denizen that dwells there, every tree ring, some of those trees that were fallen and they saw through it, and you start counting the rings back, and there's hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, and you say, this wood right here that my finger is on grew when Columbus and the Niña Pinta and the Santa Maria were on the ocean. This is when Maimonides, the Rambam, was writing back in 1100, A.D. 1100. This is back when this is 800.

This is 600. This is 400. Some of those trees go back.

This wood grew when the Apostle Paul was writing his letters and preaching his gospel. It is there. It is a tangible thing.

It's a living thing. And here it was until it got cut down, and here are these rings. And it just stuns you.

Well, all of the old, old, old trees are that way. The whole dendrochronology science links these trees, and here's one that was young when this one was old. This one was young when this one was old.

And they string these tree ring things together, and they can go back well before Israel was traipsing around in the wilderness with dendrochronology. They can go back to the putative days of the flood. Well, I haven't seen every tree.

I haven't counted every ring, but I have seen representative samples. How can you be filled with the fullness of God? What does Paul pray? That you may know, that you will comprehend with all the saints, that there is a width and a depth, that there is a length and a height. There are these dimensions.

You recognize the dimensions. You don't have to occupy every square inch. You don't have to have seen and observed every single thing, but you recognize how big it is.

And from the representative samples in our lives, we are motivated to praise God, to appreciate Him, and to thank Him, and to be grateful for the particular experiences that He has assigned to us that nobody else has had. Nobody has had the life you have had. Nobody has had the specific insights that you have had.

You are like Daniel in that way. You are like Joseph in that way. You are like Gideon in that way.

You are like Job. You are like any other biblical character. Those guys lived unique lives that nobody else lived.

You are living a unique life that nobody else lived, and all of us are a part of the fullness that fills all in all, the fullness of God. That's how and why God can do exceedingly abundantly beyond what we could ask or think. We appreciate the vastness, but we could never comprehend it.

We can understand that it's got endless dimensionality in every direction, and we don't have to. What we have to understand is those pertinent parts, the particular book, the particular chapter, the particular line, the particular truth that pertains to what we are doing right now. I don't have a need to know for all the rest of it.

I only need to know what pertains right now. And when I find that, because God has provided it, because there is no experience in this life, there is no test that comes upon us, but such is His common demand, and God provides with it the deliverance. And we find that deliverance, and we appreciate Him based on that.

It leverages, it implies, it partakes of these larger things so that we can say He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond what we could ask or think. You know, I don't need Him to do beyond what I can ask or think. I just need Him to do what I am asking and what I am thinking.

That's what I need at the moment. But I recognize how infinite He is, according to the power that works in us. This is what the atheist misses.

Well, let me sit back here with my pipe in my mouth and opine about how limited and baroque and primitive these godlike mythologies are. You know, we've risen above that, and with my great intellectual perch that I'm up here deigning to even comment on the unworthiness of this religious belief and so on. You know what it lacks, among other things? It has no power.

I've mentioned before, I like Dr. Krizzle's illustration. He said, I've seen countless individuals on their deathbed say, bring me my Bible, read me the truth of Scripture, and be comforted and be eased into eternity with a review of those great truths of Scripture. Dr. C. said, I have never heard of an atheist on his deathbed saying, bring me that physics book.

Bring me that Stephen Hawking thing about the whole cone of imperceptibility, and you know, you can't know a thing. Bring me a treatise on black holes. You know, I'm here on my deathbed.

It has no power. You ask somebody in the atheist agnostic world, so what's science doing for you in terms of love and joy and peace and patience, self-control? What's science doing for you? Well, we've got a pill you can take. Yeah, it's one of those, on the backswing, you knock a hole in the wall just before you pound the nail a little further into the board.

It's, yeah, my head is clear, but my liver's rotting. You know, you've fixed one thing, and you've broken three others. Side effects may include.

It has no power. Verse 20, God can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think

according to the power that works in us. This intellectual rejection, it's a-theos.

It's a-gnosis. I reject. I define myself by rejecting God and rejecting knowledge of God.

It has no power. It has no power. You know, show me all of the charitable work that's been done in the name of atheism.

I'm such a committed atheist, I've got to find somebody to help. I'm such a committed agnostic, I've got to go forth and do good in the world. I feel myself healed, and I want to share that healing with others.

It has no power. And no human rationale does. It is the power of God.

It comes from outside us, from beyond us, from the infinitude of what God is, and enables us and transforms us, regenerates us, gives us life that we can't give ourselves. According to the power that works in us. How great is that power? When you say kata, according to, what's the measure? It's as wide and as long and as deep and as high as God himself.

There's no limit to that power. There's no limit to what it can do. But we still have our chooser.

And what do you choose? Are you going to be limited by the circumstances of this world? Well, it's genetics, it's environment, it's bad upbringing, it's the failures of my parents, it's the failures of my teachers, it's the failures of my peers. I helped Elizabeth write a paper last week where she had to analyze, she had to set up a situation of a child and say, well, here's everything that's wrong with the child and here's why. It's because of this home environment, it's because of this sibling and this drug addiction, and it's because of their anorexia bulimia, and you just make up all these things and here's all the psychological answers to that.

It has no power. It has no transforming divine energieo. It's just not there.

To him, the one who can do these things, who knows all, who weaves it together for a grand, beautiful, righteous, productive, blessed purpose, to him be glory. In the church, that's us. By Christ Jesus, that's chapters 1 through 3.13. To all generations.

Is the Old Testament a witness to God's glory? To all generations. Is the New Testament a witness? To all generations. Guess what? Your life and my life is going to be a witness as part of the church to all generations.

It's the third great testament that will witness to the angels, to us, through all the eternal future. It counts. It matters.

You are chapter 9 in some book in that testament. Make it count. Be somebody you can look back at in that record like Joseph, like David in his prime, like Jonathan, like Daniel.

Make it count. It's not going to get rewritten. It's not going to be redone.

They're not going to hire a new writer and have the script changed. To Him be glory in the church. By Christ Jesus.

To all generations. Unto the ages. La Olam.

Eis Ionos. Teis Ionos. Right? Or Tos.

To Him be glory forever and ever. That's our opportunity. You're not going to get that in human philosophy.

You're not going to get that intellectual self-congratulation. You get it in humility and in faith, entering into the vastness of the love of God. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the powerful expression of these truths as we find it here in this letter from the Apostle Paul. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate it, bless it to our hearts, that we can begin to comprehend with all the saints these wonderful treasures that are our life and define our life both now and in the ages to come. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen.