

CORRECTING TO JESUS

A DEVOTIONAL VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY

ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE

COLOSSIANS

BY LOREN HOULTBERG

Correcting to Jesus

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DEDICATION

To our wonderful Lord Jesus Christ, in Whom
are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and
knowledge, and in Whom we are complete.

Colossians 2:3, 10

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	9
Our Identity and Purpose in Christ.....	15
A Christ-Filled Prayer.....	25
The Preeminence of Christ Declared	39
In Christ and Christ in Us.....	55
Complete in Christ and His Preeminence Defended	71
Putting On the New Clothes We Have in Christ.....	91
Living a Christ-Centered Life.....	111
Ambassadors for Christ in the World.....	127
Conclusion.....	141

INTRODUCTION

*C*orrect to Jesus. You will hear this phrase over and over again in this commentary on the Apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians. Why did Paul write this magnificent letter to a church in a small town that had lost its prominence? The little-known church of Colosse is not even mentioned in the book of Acts.

Colosse was just over 100 miles east of Ephesus and overshadowed by the larger, nearby towns of Hierapolis and Laodicea. Paul could have written his letter to the church at Hierapolis with its famous hot springs, or to the church in the banking center of Laodicea. A letter to the Laodiceans is mentioned in the Colossian letter but in God's providence it was not preserved. So why did the Lord allow the letter to the Colossian church to stand the test of time and be preserved in the canon of Scripture? Here is my opinion: because this message of the preeminence of Jesus Christ is for every believer in every church, large or small, in every generation...the church constantly needs to be reminded to correct to Jesus.

"It is the wonder of heaven we make so little of Jesus Christ." I don't know where to attribute this quote I heard long ago, but I have often thought of it. The main theme of Paul's letter to the church at Colosse is the preeminence of

Jesus Christ. The church had drifted away from this central theme through false teaching that had infiltrated the church.

This false teaching, as we will discover in our study, was a blend of Jewish legalism and Gnosticism. The first error was putting the Colossian believers back under the law, demanding that they keep certain days and observe certain rituals mixed with mysticism and astrology. The Gnostics (*gnosis* is the Greek word for knowledge) claimed to have a special knowledge that came to them by revelation. They believed only the spirit was good and all matter, including human flesh, was evil. This so-called special knowledge produced either a fierce asceticism of denying the flesh of all pleasures, or a license to do whatever you wanted with your body since the flesh was evil and only the spirit mattered. The Gnostic view also ushered in all kinds of false beliefs about Jesus Christ. For example, some held to the belief that Jesus didn't have a real human body; others believed that because He was God He could not have died, and so the Christ left His human body before He was crucified. The Gnostics alleged that Jesus was just one of the emanations between us and God. The special knowledge they received by revelation supposedly taught them Jesus was just one of the ways to God. To summarize these heresies, the false teachers didn't deny Jesus, they just dethroned Him from His place of preeminence.

This book is a verse-by-verse devotional commentary on Colossians with one major appeal—that you will correct to Jesus and return Him to preeminence in every area of your life. “Correcting to Jesus” is a phrase I heard in a sermon by Joe Wittwer, founding pastor of Life Center Foursquare Church in Spokane, Washington. Wittwer, who is now retired, also planted eighteen other churches in Washington and one in

Russia. During Wittwer's sermon he said correcting to Jesus is something we need to do often—I agree.

I am approaching fifty years as a minister of the gospel. Terry Walling, founder of Leader Breakthru, wrote a thought-provoking book entitled *Stuck: Navigating the Transitions of Life and Leadership*. In it he outlines three seasons of life, with a corresponding question for each season. The first is the Awakening season or Call: What can I do? The second season is the Deciding or Contribution season: What should I do? The last is the Finishing or Convergence season: What must I do? (Walling, *Stuck*, 2015.) I feel the “what must I do” in this convergence season of my life is to help pastors, the church, and individual believers correct to Jesus and purposefully give Him preeminence in every area of life.

The Apostle Paul was concerned the believers in Corinth would “be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3). My goal for my life and my teaching is to return to the simplicity that is in Christ by inviting Him into every moment of my life—including my thoughts, words, and actions—that He may have the preeminence in all that I am and all that I do. I certainly haven't mastered this goal, but one thing I know is that every moment that I do include Christ makes that moment much richer and more fruitful. Is this a worthy goal? I believe it is. As we discover together the preeminence the Father has given His Son, my prayer is that your goal as well, will be that *in all things He may have the preeminence (Col 1:18)*.

I decided to write this commentary on Colossians because in his letter to this obscure little church in Colosse, Paul is encouraging the believers to correct to Jesus and realize He is to be given preeminence in all things. Warren Wiersbe (1929—

2019), an internationally known Bible teacher and prolific author, confirms this purpose in his excellent commentary on Colossians. He outlines the book in three divisions: Christ's Preeminence Declared, Christ's Preeminence Defended, and Christ's Preeminence Demonstrated (Wiersbe, *Be Complete*). When researching commentaries on Colossians, I found an abundance of titles including *All Sufficient Christ* by William Barclay, *The Lordship of Jesus* by David Jeremiah, and *Exalting Jesus* by R. Scott Pace. As Wiersbe observes, "Many Bible scholars have concluded that Colossians is the most profound letter Paul ever wrote" (*Be Complete*, 25).

The church today desperately needs the message of Colossians. And the very best the church has to offer this hurting world is Jesus Christ. Paul says this very simply: *Him we preach (Col 1:28)*. In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul describes the preeminence of Christ as his own personal goal. "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). Phrases like these abound in the Colossian letter: *Christ in you, the hope of glory (1:27)*, in *whom [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (2:3)*, *you are complete in Him (2:10)*, *Christ who is our life (3:4)*, and *Christ is all and in all (3:11)*. To the individual Christian who has lost their first love and zeal, Colossians has one message—*correct to Jesus*.

Paul's letter was written to a church in a small town that had lost its prominence and was falling prey to the false teachings of that day. The church needed revival and renewal. Paul's message for her was to correct to Christ. Maybe you find yourself in need of this message today; if so, then Colossians holds a key for you.

I would describe this book as a devotional commentary with one purpose: to point you to the preeminence of Jesus

Christ and prayerfully help usher you into a more intimate relationship with Him. I pray the words in this book will be like the “well-driven nails” in Ecclesiastes 12:11, and that they will bring you to a deeper understanding of the preeminence of Jesus Christ. In Jeremiah 31:21, the Lord tells Jeremiah, “Set up signposts. Make landmarks.” To help sink these well-driven nails deeper, I have included *Correcting to Jesus* signposts throughout the book. These will remind you over and over to bring Jesus into everything you think, say, and do. At the end of each chapter, you will find a *Questions to Ponder* section to help facilitate individual or group Bible study.

Correcting to Jesus

CHAPTER 1

OUR IDENTITY AND PURPOSE IN CHRIST

Colossians 1:1–8

**1:1 Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the
will of God, and Timothy our brother.**

Saul of Tarsus chose the name Paul after he became a believer in Jesus Christ. Saul, a common Hebrew name, means “prayed for.” Paul, a Greek name, means “humble or small.” This makes me think of the words of John the Baptist: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). When Saul of Tarsus was humbled by his encounter with the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, he decreased and became small, but Christ increased and became large and preeminent in his life. Paul wrote thirteen epistles in the New Testament (fourteen if he wrote Hebrews) and all but Hebrews begin with his name. When Saul became Paul (small) after his conversion, Jesus lived large in him and blessed the world through him. The first word in the Colossian letter teaches us that all our lives will be much more fruitful when Jesus is supreme, and we are small and humble.

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #1

Jesus must increase, you must decrease.

Paul was *an apostle of Jesus Christ*. The word “apostle” means one who is sent out with authority. I believe Paul carried the same authority as the original twelve apostles. One mark of an apostle is that they have seen the risen Lord. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15:7–8 that “He [Jesus] was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” Paul defended his apostleship to the Corinthian church by saying of his ministry, “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor 12:12). There were other apostles besides the original twelve, including Matthias who replaced Judas Iscariot. For example, Barnabas was called an apostle (Acts 14:14), and Andronicus and Junia were apostles (Rom 16:7). In the order of the risen Christ’s gifts to the church (Eph 4:11), apostles are listed first.

There are apostles today. I believe there are apostles who have authority and leadership over not just one church but a group of churches that they have started or oversee. Many missionaries are apostles, starting new works for Christ in foreign countries. There is a grave danger today, however, of self-labeling yourself as an apostle. On the extreme side of this trend, there are conferences you can attend and afterwards call yourself an “apostle.” It was important for Paul to establish his apostleship in the eyes of the Colossian church, which he hadn’t visited personally, because he was going to bring authoritative correction to errors that were being perpetrated in the life of the church.

Paul was an apostle because Jesus Christ called him to be one. All Christians are called in the sense they have answered the call to follow Jesus Christ in their daily lives, but there is a specific call to ministry, as well. A good verse to validate such

a call is Acts 13:2: “As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” Church ministry consultant, author, and speaker Reggie McNeal stresses how important it is for a minister of the gospel to understand this call. “Leaders convinced of their call do not easily succumb to disappointments or discouragements” (McNeal, *Work of Heart*, 95). McNeal goes on to propose it is this call to ministry that gives “a sense of destiny that emboldens, energizes, and empowers leaders as well as followers” (*Work of Heart*, 95).

Paul lists the Lord’s gifts of leaders to the church in Ephesians 4:11–12: “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.” The primary assurance for staying power as a minister of Jesus Christ is certainty of your calling. When Paul ministered he would often rehearse his calling, as he did before King Agrippa in Acts 26:19–20. Your pastor should be able to say, “I am a pastor of Jesus Christ,” or the missionary you support should be able to say, “I am a missionary of Jesus Christ.”

Paul tells the Colossian church he is an apostle of Jesus Christ *by the will of God*. God’s will first is that we are saved by repenting of our sins and by accepting Jesus Christ as our Savior. We then live out God’s will by abiding in Christ. We prove something to ourselves when we put Jesus first and purpose to live our lives by faith each day in Him; we “prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). The very best thing that can happen in your life is that you live out the will of God. Jesus taught us to pray, “Your kingdom come Your will be done” (Matt 6:10). I pray this verse daily for my children and grandchildren.

At a recent service our pastor asked us what is something we are thankful for that Jesus has given us. I answered, “Jesus has given me a purpose that lasts for a lifetime.” Seeking, following, and obeying the will of God for your life is the acceptable, perfect, and best way to live on this earth. Before I surrendered my life to Jesus, I tried different things like sports, fun, and achievement to find purpose, but nothing gave me the purpose I was searching for. When I embraced the will of God for my life, I found purpose. Sadhu Sundar Singh who was called the Saint Paul of India said, “Though the world is so large, it is utterly unable to satisfy this tiny heart” (Foster and Smith, *Devotional Classics*, 290). Only Jesus can do this.

Paul finishes his introduction to the Colossian church by including *Timothy our brother*. The first church I attended after I was saved was the First Foursquare Church in Salina, Kansas. Everyone there called each other “brother” or “sister.” The church is a family; to tie this thought to the previous paragraph, one thing our church family members should have in common is a desire to discover and accomplish the will of God in their lives. Jesus answered His own question when He asked, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” Jesus then said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother” (Mark 3:33, 34–35). Jesus Himself identified His purpose in coming to earth: “Then I said, ‘Behold I have come—in the volume of the book it is written of Me—to do Your will, O God’” (Heb 10:7). Desiring and doing the will of God is something our brothers and sisters in the family of God share in common.

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #2

Seeking God's will and doing it gives you your highest purpose in life. And His will is found in Christ Jesus.

1:2a To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse.

Paul addresses all the believers in Colosse as *saints* because this is their position in Christ, set apart unto God and holy without blame before the Father in love because of what Christ has done for them (Eph 1:4). If you are born again and have put your trust in Christ, then you are a saint, a holy one set apart to be included in the *faithful brethren*. We are saints because of what Christ has done for us, and we become faithful brethren by living our lives by faith in Christ. H. A. Ironside (1876–1951) says it like this: “The first expression (saints) suggests the divine call; the second (faithful brethren), the human response” (Ironside, *Notes on the Epistle*, 12). Ironside was a Canadian-American Bible teacher, preacher, theologian, pastor, and author whose many lectures on Paul’s letter to the Colossians form the basis of his commentary.

The saints in Colosse lived in two places—they lived in Colosse and also in Christ. Most likely as you are reading this book you are seated somewhere in the town or city where you live, but if you are a Christian you are also seated somewhere else—you “sit together in heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 2:6). According to Ephesians 1, your heavenly seat in Christ is a seat blessed with every spiritual blessing (v 3), it is a seat chosen by the Father for you (v 4), it is a beloved seat because you have been accepted in the Beloved, the Lord Jesus (v 6), it a redeemed and forgiven seat because of the grace of the

Lord Jesus (v 7), it is a seat you share together with the saints in Christ from all the ages (v 10), and it is a seat sealed by the presence of the Holy Spirit who lives inside you (v 13). As you consider this truth, I encourage you to take a few moments now to reflect on another signpost that corrects to Jesus.

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #3

You are in Christ; learn to live your life from
your heavenly seat in Him.

1:2b Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace and *peace* were common Greek and Hebrew greetings for a letter, but they have a much deeper meaning for Christians. Grace is God's provision for all your needs in Christ. Peace (both peace with God and the enjoyment of God's peace in your soul) is the full flourishing you have in every dimension of your life because of the grace you have in Christ. What wonderful Christian gifts—grace and peace—the Father has given us. Paul wrote *grace* and *peace* to the church at Colosse, and I write grace and peace to you who are reading now.

1:3 We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; 5 because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, 6 which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as

it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; 7 as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, 8 who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.

This passage is one long sentence, and it is packed with spiritual truth. Theodore Epp (1907–1985), the Protestant clergyman, writer, and radio evangelist who founded the *Back to the Bible* radio ministry, eloquently states, “Thanksgiving and prayer belong together like two wings of a bird” (Epp, *All-Sufficient Christ*, 20). We are to “enter into His gates with thanksgiving” (Ps 100:4). One of the most beneficial things you can do for someone is to give thanks for them before the Lord and then pray for them. Being thankful for someone prepares your heart to pray for them. This includes your family, but also your enemies.

My favorite verse on thanksgiving is 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” God’s will for us in Christ is that we live thankful lives; that our spiritual gas tank would be full of thanksgiving. The Greek word for “thanks” is *eucharisto*. At the center of this Greek word is *charis*, which is the word for “grace.” If you want God’s grace, which is His divine provision for us in Christ, then live a thankful life. It’s not as simple as it sounds; remember, of the ten lepers Jesus healed only one came back and said thank-you (Luke 17:17). One of the things that identifies you as a sheep of God’s pasture instead of a goat is that you give Him thanks forever (Ps 79:13).

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #4

God's will for you in Christ Jesus is that you live a thankful life.

Do you?

In the next few verses of his letter, Paul mentions that he has heard about the *faith, love, and hope* (Col 1:4–5) of the Colossian believers. Paul begins with positive encouragement to the church; later in the letter he will bring a correction. This is a wise thing to do—speak first of what is right before pointing out what is wrong. In 1 Thessalonians 1:3, Paul says the Christian life can be summed up as a “work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.” These three things make up the life of a Christian (1 Cor 13:13). Our work of faith is to believe in Christ (John 6:29) and do good works. Our labor of love is to allow the love of Christ to flow through us; a love that “bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things,” one that “never fails” (1 Cor 13:7–8). Our patience of hope gives us staying power that enables us to have a confident expectation of the goodness of God no matter what comes our way in life.

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #5

Are others hearing about and talking about your faith,

hope, and love in Christ?

This faith, love, and hope in the Colossian believers came from hearing and believing the truth of the gospel. The gospel brought forth fruit in their lives just as the gospel was doing *in all the world* (v 6) where it was preached. It does the same today. The greatest change agent for good in the world is God's good news to the world, “the gospel of Jesus Christ,

the Son of God” (Mark 1:1). The good news (the gospel) is all about who Jesus is, what Jesus has done for us, and what Jesus will do for us. It is the gospel of Jesus Christ (Mark 1:10) because it brings Him into the center of the life of the person who believes it, it is the gospel of salvation (Eph 1:13) because it produces repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21), and it is the only way we can be saved from our sin and be made right before God (Acts 4:12).

Paul announces boldly, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). We as followers of Jesus must never lose our faith in the gospel. This simple message that Christ died for our sins and rose again for our salvation carries with it all the wonderful seeds that will produce change. Repentance, forgiveness of sin, Jesus Christ coming to live inside a person, being born again, and becoming a new creation in Christ with a holy desire to serve God are all fruit that grow from the seed the gospel contains. Like an angel of the Lord told the shepherds on the day of Jesus’s birth, this good news has the power within it to bring joy to all people (Luke 2:10). Nations are changed wherever the gospel is preached and believed because people are changed and brought into right relationship with God and each other. Think about your own testimony. As for me, I didn’t just decide to change; I could not. I believed the gospel and was changed within by Jesus Christ coming into my life. I love to pray daily as Paul exhorted us in 2 Thessalonians 3:1. My prayer is “that the word of the Lord may run swiftly” in the world today as the gospel is preached in all manner of settings.

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #6

Don't lose your faith in the simple gospel of Jesus Christ to bring change in others' lives. Keep sharing it at every opportunity that is opened to you.

Epaphras, who will be discussed in Colossians 4, was a faithful minister of the gospel. He is most likely the one who visited Paul at the prison in Rome and told him the church of Colosse was in danger of straying from Christ. As I travel to a different church almost every weekend in my ministry now, it is a joy to see in every church those like Epaphras who faithfully minister in their local setting.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What words would you use to introduce yourself if you were writing a letter to a Christian church?
2. What would you say is the will of God for your life?
3. Can you give an example of a work of faith, a labor of love, and patience of hope from your life in Christ?
4. In your own words what is the gospel of Jesus Christ?
5. Can you share an example of the gospel changing someone's life when you shared it with them?

CHAPTER 2

A CHRIST-FILLED PRAYER

Colossians 1:9–14

1:9 For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

Paul's apostolic prayers are packed with spiritual truth and are powerful prayers to pray for yourself and others. Two other apostolic prayers are Ephesians 1:15–21 and 3:14–19. Paul asks the Lord first that the Colossian believers be *filled with the knowledge of His will* (v 9). Wiersbe says of the word “filled” that it “carries the idea of being fully equipped. It was used to describe a ship that was ready for a voyage” (*Be Complete*, 44–45). What would fully equip a believer for this Christian voyage of life? It would be the knowledge of God's will. *Epignosis* is the word used here for “knowledge,” which is

the superlative of the word *gnosis*, the common word in Greek for knowledge. It might be translated as “full knowledge” or “super-knowledge.” Ironside says of God’s will here:

By His will, I take it, he means the wondrous plan or programme of the Father known from eternity and now being carried out in time to have its consummation in the ages to come—‘The eternal purpose of God.’ Here is super-knowledge indeed! Here is that which the cleverest human intellect could never fathom, apart from divine revelation. And this revelation we have in our Bibles (*Notes on the Epistle*, 18).

The false teachers influencing the Colossian church claimed special knowledge, *gnosis*, that would make them spiritual elites. Paul says here that in God’s will you find not just knowledge but full knowledge, super-knowledge, *epignosis*. Paul wants us to be full of the knowledge of God’s will; not only His will for our individual lives but the knowledge of His will for all creation. The full knowledge of God’s will gives us the grace to be full of something other than ourselves. God’s will is that we would be full of Jesus, cultivating His life in us and through us (Gal 2:20). God’s will is that we would be filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18) and exhibit the fruit of the Spirit and the boldness of the Spirit in our lives. God’s will is that our hearts would be filled with thankfulness (1 Thess 5:18). God’s will is that we would be filled with the love of God and allow His love to flow through us to others (John 13:34). God’s will is that we would be filled with purpose to serve Him and be His witnesses (Acts 1:8). Before I surrendered my life to Jesus, I tried to fill my life with all

kinds of things that didn't satisfy; but when I did surrender, God's will brought fullness of satisfaction, contentment, and purpose to my life.

According to Epp, "Knowledge is an accumulation of facts, whereas wisdom is the proper application of those facts to a particular situation. Paul prayed that the Colossians might receive wisdom from God. He wanted them to apply what they knew to their own situations" (*All-Sufficient Christ*, 25). *Spiritual understanding* (v 9) denotes an understanding of how to explain to others the wisdom that God has given you. God's wisdom comes to the world and to us, His people, in the person of Jesus Christ. "But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).

The second chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians says *all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ* (2:3). Proverbs personifies wisdom as crying out to us, as standing on top of a hill so we can see it, and as standing at the doors so we can access it when we go out or come in. Wisdom stands at the fork in the road so we can ask for help in making a right decision.

Paul's prayer reminds me of something a dear friend of mine recently told me. Randy was the best man in our wedding and has been a lifelong friend. Over the years we had many conversations about the Lord and I gave him copies of the books I have written, but he never expressed an interest in making a decision for Christ. However, just this last year he accepted Christ as his Savior. Since then he has reread some of my books and he says that now they make much more sense to him. He also has far greater understanding as he reads the word of God. Why? Because Jesus Christ now lives in

Randy and by the Holy Spirit he has wisdom and spiritual understanding as he reads.

The full knowledge of God's will comes to us in Jesus Christ and our personal relationship with Him gives us wisdom—the proper application of knowledge in our lives—and spiritual understanding so we can share wisdom with others. Here is my summation of Paul's apostolic prayer in the form of another Correcting to Jesus signpost.

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #5

In God's will in Christ, wisdom and spiritual understanding
are available to you.

Paul prays for several outcomes in our lives as a result of our knowing God's will and having wisdom and spiritual understanding. Before we look at these outcomes, let's look at the "why" behind them. Paul uses two phrases here that define the ultimate goal of knowing God's will. The first is that we would *walk worthy of the Lord* and the second is that we would be *fully pleasing [to] Him (v 10)*. R. Scott Pace says, "Most believers desire to discern God's will for their own personal benefit—what makes them happy, fits in their plans, achieves their dreams, answers their prayers, and satisfies their desires. But satisfying him must become our deepest passion and our highest goal" (Pace and Akin, *Christ-Centered Exposition*, 21). Pace and Daniel L. Akin both have authored and/or edited numerous books on theological themes. Pace serves as dean of The College at Southeastern and associate professor of pastoral ministry and preaching at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; Akin is president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Is it your deepest desire to know God's will and to satisfy Him? I believe the greatest purpose of every Christian should be to walk worthy of the Lord and be fully pleasing to Him. Why? The answer lies in 1 Corinthians 6:19–20: “Do you not know that you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.” Christians are under new ownership; they have come under the ownership of Christ. Every Christian in a sense is a martyr—they have lost their life and then found it in Christ (Matt 10:39). This was my experience on August 12, 1972, when I surrendered my life to Christ. I lost my life that day but also found it in Christ and came under new ownership. Paul describes it like this: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Cor 5:14–15). Paul's wonderful apostolic prayer then outlines six ways we can be fully pleasing to the Lord.

1) We can *walk worthy of the Lord* (v 10). Paul expounds on this in Ephesians 4:1: “I...beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.” In Philippians 1:27, he adds that we are to “walk worthy of the gospel.” Epp explains, “The word ‘walk’ is frequently used in Scripture to describe the outward, or visible, expression of one's Christian life. It emphasizes progressing in conduct by taking one step at a time” (*All-Sufficient Christ*, 26). The NIV translates “walk,” as “live a life.” It is not enough to have head knowledge of spiritual truths; they must be lived out. Wiersbe stresses, “There is no separation between *learning* and *living*” (*Be Complete*, 46). As James says, “I will show you my faith by my deeds” (James 2:18).

The Gnostic heresy plaguing the Colossian church claimed a special, deep, spiritual knowledge that resulted in one of two extreme lifestyles. The Gnostic belief was that our fleshly life on earth was evil and only the spiritual things were important. This false knowledge endorsed either a lifestyle of rigid asceticism and self-denial or a lifestyle of fleshly indulgence and debauchery since it did not matter what you did in the flesh. Paul prays that our lives would “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (Titus 2:10), drawing people to Jesus instead of chasing them away.

2) Paul prays that walking in a way that pleases the Lord would result in our *being fruitful* (v 10). Fruit can be tasted, and the Father wants to taste the life of His Son in our thoughts, our words, and our actions. The Father’s will for us in Christ is that we might bear much fruit (John 15:8). As we abide in the vine Jesus Christ, His life flows in us and through us and we bear fruit to the Father. In John 15, sometimes known as the “I Am the Vine” chapter, we find the word “abide” ten times and the word “fruit” eight times.

3) Paul prays the fruit produced by believers would be expressed in *good works* (v 10). The New Testament teaches Christians are to be “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14), “maintain good works” (Titus 3:8), “be rich in good works” (1 Tim 6:18), “stir up” good works in one another (Heb 10:24), and let their good works point others to Christ (1 Pet 2:12). I see in Ephesians 2:8–10 great insight into the importance of good works in my life: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in

them.” Verses 8–9 teach the sound doctrine that by grace we have been saved through faith. Verse 10 adds something else God’s grace has provided for us. We get our English word “poem” from the Greek word for workmanship in this verse. The Father is writing a poem, a story, through our lives as we follow Jesus. And because He knew we would respond in faith to His saving grace even before we were saved, He designed some good works for us personally to do. We were created in Christ Jesus to do these good works, and just as we have received His grace to be saved, we have received His grace to do these good works.

A good work is one done in faith and obedience to the Lord’s leading and is completed through the gifts and grace He has given us. I believe these good works can be small daily things like calling someone at just the right time, or more extensive undertakings like starting a ministry. We can, however, miss the good works the Lord created for us to do by being too selfish with our time and not listening to His leading. We also can miss good works by not walking circumspectly, thereby failing to notice people and situations that cross our path daily as we walk through life. Nothing is more fulfilling than doing a good work because we were created in Christ Jesus to do it—doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason. I pray the Lord’s Prayer every day, and as I pray “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11), I pray that believers all around the world will do the good works they were created to do that day.

4) Paul prays the church will continue *increasing in the knowledge of God* (v 10). There is always more to learn about God; no one has arrived at the full knowledge of Him and His ways. Scripture tells us the Father will use the “ages to come”

to show us the grace He has given us in the gift of His Son (Eph 2:7). The love of Christ passes all knowledge (Eph 3:19), and we will be learning for all eternity more and more about the Father's gift of His Son to us.

May we as His people always have a "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt 5:6). As a pastor, I knew the sheep would be okay as long as I saw a hunger and thirst for God in their lives. Christian growth is a mystery, but keep hungering and thirsting to grow and you will fulfill Philippians 2:12–13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." Your hunger and the will of God work together to bring about Christian growth.

5) To be fruitful and to do God's will, we need to be strengthened by Him with *patience and longsuffering* (*v 11*). This strengthening is a part of His working in us "both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). This strengthening is the work of His Spirit in our inner man (Eph 3:16); it is this work in our character that enables us to be fruitful for the long haul of a life with Him, and it is a result of His might and His power working in us. We see God's might and power throughout the pages of the Bible in miracles like the parting of the Red Sea, miraculous healings, and even the dead being raised back to life. Wiersbe says "the emphasis here is on Christian character: patience, longsuffering, joyfulness, and thanksgiving. The inner victories of the soul are just as great, if not greater, than the public victories recorded in the annals of history" (*Be Complete*, 49). My eldest son is a gifted minister of the gospel but he is, more importantly, of strong moral character. I once told him that character trumps giftedness. Many gifted ministers have fallen because they

did not submit to God's work of strengthening them in their inner man.

Patience is staying power. It is enduring in a situation when the initial fun is over and the going gets rough. We don't need to pray for patience because, as we rejoice that the Lord is with us in the tribulations of life and as we endure while abiding in Him, perseverance (patience) is worked within us (Rom 5:3). The Greek word for tribulation means "pressure," and when we rightly respond to the pressures of life they work patience in our lives. We all go through periods of tribulation and they will either make us bitter or better depending on whether we find God's grace as we walk through them. The Apostle James says it like this: "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2–4).

We need patience because we aren't God and don't control all the circumstances that come into our life. Patience says, "My Lord can work even this circumstance together for my good as I abide in Christ and trust Him." Romans 8:28 teaches this, and saints all through church history have laid down their heads at night on this promise. Another comforting verse regarding patience in tribulation is 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it." Wiersbe paints this picture of patience: "We must never think that patience is complacency. Patience is *endurance in action*. It is not the Christian sitting in a rocking chair, waiting

for God to do something. It is the soldier on the battlefield, keeping on when the going is tough. It is the runner on the racetrack, refusing to stop because he wants to win the race (Heb 12:1)” (*Be Complete*, 49–50).

Patience gives us the mentality of a veteran. I am a Vietnam veteran. Many soldiers had it much worse than I did, but I endured my year tour there and can call myself a veteran. Christians who allow the Lord to work staying power or patience in their life develop a veteran mentality. In my forty years of pastoring Emmanuel Foursquare Church, the church my wife and I planted in our hometown of Salina, Kansas, I had the privilege of observing the lives of many Christian veterans. Some of these veterans were frail widows who suffered losses of husbands, children, and other setbacks, but they didn’t get bitter but better as they allowed the Lord to work patience in their lives. Patience is staying power in circumstances, while longsuffering is a forbearing, enduring love that doesn’t give up on others.

The Greek word for “longsuffering” is *makrothumia* which comes from two root words, “long” and “passion.” Longsuffering is one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22). N. T. Wright, senior research fellow at Wycliffe Hall at the University of Oxford, distinguishes the difference between patience and longsuffering: “The former is what faith, hope and love bring to an apparently impossible situation, the latter what they show to an apparently impossible person” (Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, 64).

A good indication we are increasing in the knowledge of God’s will is whether we are growing in love for others. John Wesley (1703–1791), the great evangelist and founder of the Methodist Church, reminds us: “We should always remember

that love is the highest gift of God.” As we grow in grace, Wesley speaks of the danger of seeking a “new grace” and warns that if we “seek something other than new degrees of loving God and our neighbor...we are looking wide of the mark” (Foster and Smith, *Devotional Classics*, 259–260).

Interestingly Paul adds *with joy* to his prayer for patience and longsuffering. Joy, a fruit of the Spirit, does not depend on your circumstances or the attitudes of other people toward you. I have often said joy is a little hallelujah, a calm delight that everything is under the Lord’s control, that gets trapped under the worries and cares of this life in our souls. We have to rejoice that joy to the surface. Paul reminds us of this in his epistle of joy written from a prison cell: “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil 4:4). May the Lord work in you not just patience but *joyful patience* in your difficult circumstances. May the Lord work in you not just longsuffering but *joyful longsuffering* when you deal with difficult people.

A wise and faithful member of our church who is with the Lord now, Vernon Hickman, observed that Nehemiah 8:10 could be interpreted two ways depending on where you put the emphasis. “The joy of the Lord is your strength” could mean the Lord Jesus’s joy that is in you (John 15:11) is your strength, but it also could mean the Lord is joyful when you are strong in His grace.

6) Paul ends his long, powerful prayer by praying the Colossian church would do all these things while *giving thanks to the Father* (v 12). We should enter the Lord’s presence in prayer with thanksgiving and we should close our prayer time with thanksgiving. We can be thankful for the inheritance we have now in Christ and for the inheritance that has been

laid up for us in heaven, where the saints who have already finished their race are enjoying their inheritance in the light of the Father.

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #8

Pray Colossians 1:9–12 often for yourself and others.

Both you and they will continue to grow into a deeper relationship with the Lord Jesus.

1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Paul now makes a profound theological statement about what happens to believers when they surrender their lives to Christ. Christ has *delivered us from the power of darkness* (v 13). Paul describes this darkness as a place where we “once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). In Wright’s commentary, he often connects this to Israel’s deliverance from the darkness of slavery in Egypt where the children of Israel lived under Pharaoh’s control before the Exodus. We now have been carried or “translated” (KJV) into the kingdom of the Father’s beloved Son, which is full of light and life.

We have been redeemed by the enormous purchase price of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and our sins are forgiven. As I write this today, I’m thinking of last Sunday which was Easter, Resurrection Day, when we celebrated the mighty power of our Savior’s resurrection. Jesus Christ, “declared

to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4), paid the full price for our sins through His death on the cross and carried us from darkness to light when He defeated the grave.

This same power of the resurrection occurs when a person is born again. Romans 6:1–11 and 1 Corinthians 12:13 teach that at the moment a person is convicted of sin and trusts in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit baptizes them into Christ, and His death and resurrection become their own. The old person they were is crucified with Christ and they are born again, resurrected as a new creation. Scripture also adds that as believers God has raised us up and “made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). In other words, as the verse we are addressing states, we have been delivered from the power of darkness and conveyed into the kingdom of the Son of the Father’s great love.

This is our position—in the Beloved, in Christ (Eph 2:6). We no longer live under the power of darkness, even though it surrounds us in this present world. This great deliverance and resurrection provided for all believers could only have been accomplished through the One who is fully God and fully man, the Lord Jesus Christ.

CORRECTING TO JESUS SIGNPOST #9

You have been delivered from the power of darkness, and you now live in the kingdom of God under the Lordship of King Jesus.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. After reading this chapter, take time to pray slowly Colossians 1:9–14. What stood out to you from this prayer?

2. What does it mean to you to walk worthy of the Lord?
3. Paul prays the church would be fruitful in every good work. What is a good work? Can you give an example of one from your own life?
4. Read Correcting to Jesus Signpost #9 and share your testimony of how this happened in your life.
5. What does it mean to you to be seated together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, and how do you live your life from this seat?