**EPHESIANS**

**The Hope of Glory**

**RED OAK CHURCH**

**Andrews, North carolina**

**May 17, 2015**

**to**

**SEPTEMBER 13, 2015**

All Scripture quoted herein is from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

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Ephesians Introduction

Spencer Davis

We have a dog, now. His name is Buck and he’s a black Lab. He’s great. So, I read an article this week by that has been tearing me up. It was about how they believe that dogs, particularly retrievers, have the same intellect as toddlers, and I thought, “No! Not true!” What CNN based their conclusion on in this study is the fact that when they showed toddlers a math problem the toddlers were confused, and when they showed the same problem to dogs, the dogs were also confused; so, they must be on the same level. That was the whole study and I’ve just had it grinding in my mind as to how stupid this study was. So, I was sitting on the porch and I was watching the dog and he was just running around sniffing things and chewing on things. I was still thinking, “No way,” when, at one point, Buck was just sitting and looking out over the field in front of our house. He’s a handsome dog and as he was sitting his chest was all puffed out and it looked like he was just thinking. For a minute, I thought, “What’s he thinking?,” because I knew that surely he wasn’t thinking, “Am I really the best Lab I could be? Am I doing it? Am I going to finish well?” He was more likely thinking, “I’d like to eat some of that horse poop out there.” Eventually, I realized he was just looking out because my kids were coming across the field and I hadn’t heard them yet. But, these people are saying that Buck’s intellect is the same as my four-year-old son, Jed’s.

So, the other night something happened that was awesome. I had just passed by Jed’s room and it was really late and he should have already been asleep. When I walked by, he said, “Daddy,” so I went in to see him. He’s been doing this a lot lately, but that night he said, “Tell me, again, about Hell.” I thought what a tough topic this was to tackle at bedtime, especially for a four-year-old. It’s a tough topic to tackle with your four-year-old son, but we were talking and he’d ask a question like, “Who goes to Hell?” Then, I’d be explaining it and I’d say a word he didn’t understand and he’d say, “What’s pain?,” and I’d tell him that pain is like hurting a lot. And, I was realizing that this, hopefully, could be the beginnings of the Holy Spirit working on my son.

But, animals don’t do this. They don’t lay in bed thinking about eternity. They don’t lie in bed and think about identity. “Who am I and why am I here? What matters? What is real?” So, when we start looking into the book of Ephesians, it is all about identity. One pastor I was reading this week said, “Identity questions are the questions that cause people to kill themselves and kill others, if they don’t get satisfactory answers. They are questions that gnaw at the deepest part of us.”[[1]](#footnote-1) And, I think that Ephesians is such a crucial book because it gets at the core of where we find identity. So, I encourage you to read this book a lot and study it.

Let me give a little background on Ephesians. We are going to start in verse 1 and we are just going to cover the first two verses. It says,

Verse 1,

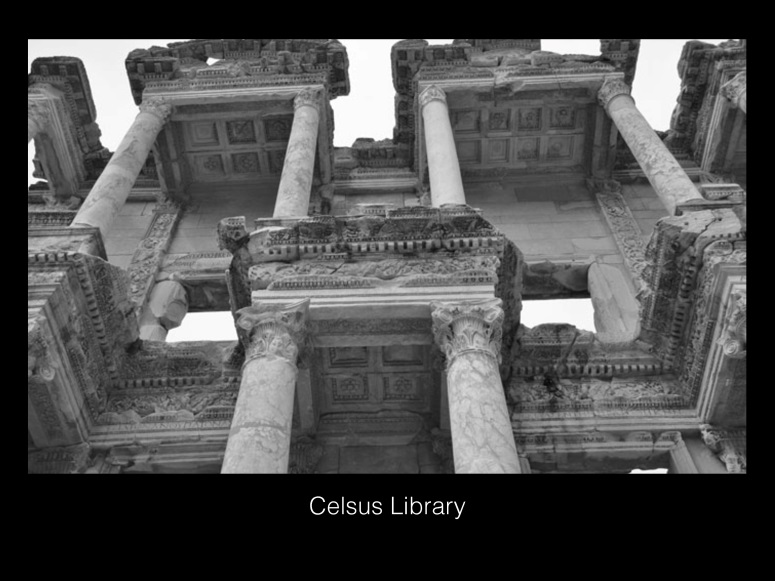
*“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:”*

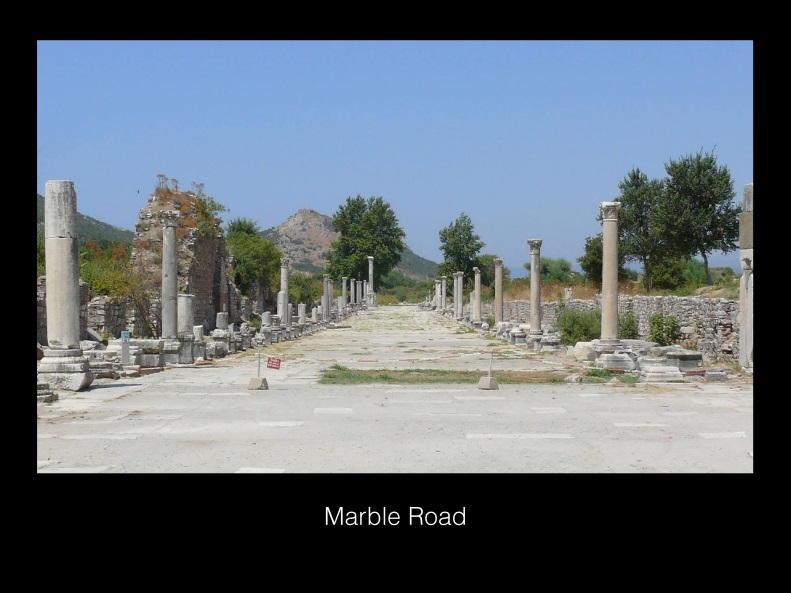
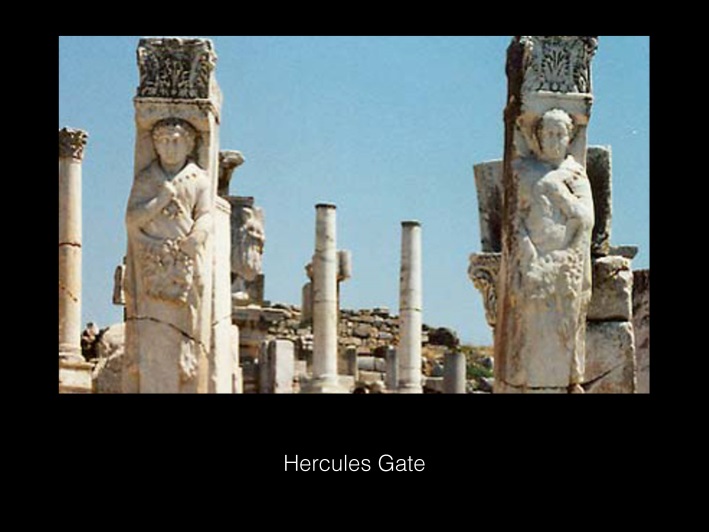
If you were here when we went through 1Timothy, I kind of went through a little history of Ephesus at that time. I just want to show a couple of pictures of the city of Ephesus. It was a port city and was originally a Greek city but then, later on, around Paul’s time, it became a Roman city, when they were taken over. It would be the principle city in the province of Asia. So, if you look at this map, it was a port city.

Today, it’s about eight kilometers inland because of all the silt that has built up, but at the time it was a really thriving port. It was a very wealthy city.



If you look at some of the ruins that are still there, it is fascinating how beautiful some of the buildings are that were there. This first picture is of the Celsus library and it was built just after Paul’s time. It is one of the ruins that is the most intact and if you look at the next picture you can see some detail. Hopefully, you can see some of the detail that is on the ceiling. There is some beautiful architecture.





The next one is the Hercules Gate and it is at the end of the long Marble Road that ran about eight-hundred meters through the town. This road is called the Arcadian Way and it stood when Paul was there. When Paul was in Ephesus, this road ran through the middle of the town and it ran into this theatre at the end. But, the crown jewel of Ephesus was The Temple of Artemis. Now, that ruin is gone and all that is left is one little pillar, but this is a drawing of what the temple would have looked like. It was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world and it was as big as a soccer field. It was a huge temple, and there they worshipped a Greek goddess named Artemis. Here is a picture of her. The Romans would call her Diana.



But, Ephesus, at the time of Paul, was a very, very dark city. These people worshipped Artemis of the Ephesians, or Diana, and their city was filled with magic. If you look at Acts 18-20, which is about Paul’s time at Ephesus, you can see this. At one point, people who were converted to Christianity burned their magic books, and just those books were worth twenty to thirty thousand pieces of silver. There was a great deal of sorcery and occultist fascination around this worship of Artemis. But, the city is beautiful.

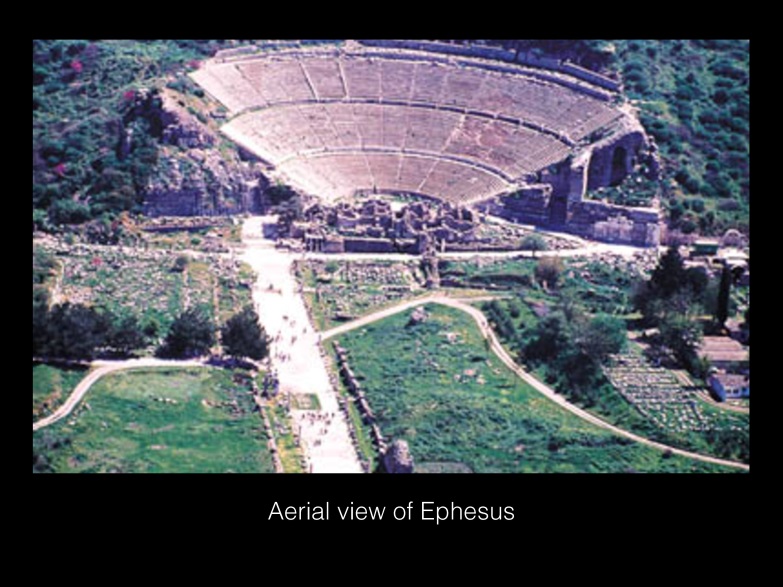
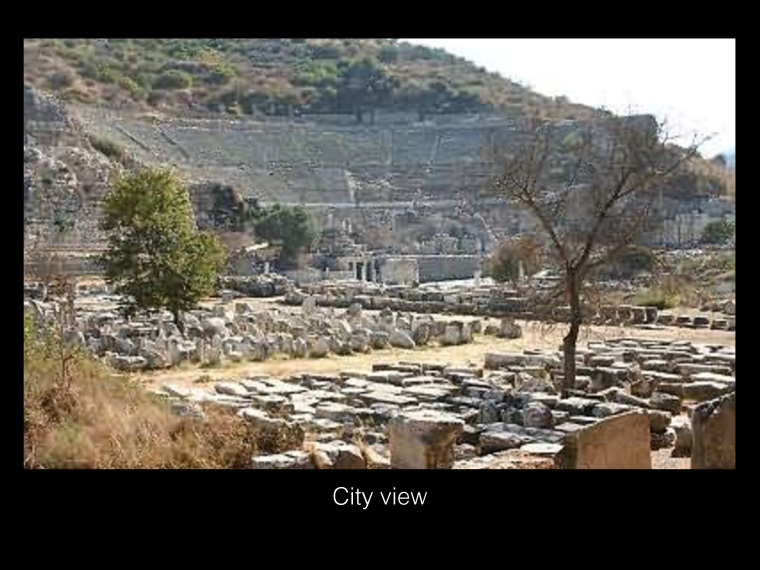
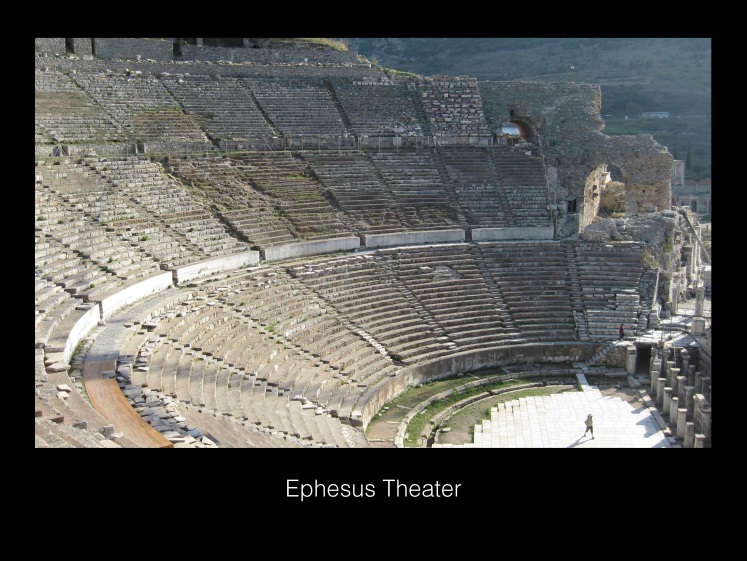
So, you really have Christians springing up in a very unlikely place. The next couple of pictures are of the Ephesus Theatre, which was there during Paul’s time. It sat about 25,000 people, and if you remember, this theatre is where all the people rushed in. There were so many people becoming Christians at the time, that the silversmiths, who were making the idols of Artemis, were complaining about losing money. They had to do something because so many people were converting to Christianity. The silversmiths were afraid of losing money because nobody was going to worship Artemis anymore, so they started a riot.[[2]](#footnote-2) They started yelling, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” and all the town rushed into the temple. You can imagine this temple that holds 25,000 people in its heyday, and it’s filled with people shouting, “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!” Then, Paul tried to go in there and the Christians prevented him from going in. Soon after that, Paul left and went to Rome, and around 62AD is when he wrote this book back to the Ephesian Church.

So, the Church was growing in a really unlikely place and through a really unlikely man. Because, remember, Paul didn’t choose this work for himself. God chose him. Remember, Paul was on his way to throw Christians in jail in Damascus, and God spoke to him on the road and saved him[[3]](#footnote-3).

This book begins with Paul talking about his own identity. It says,

*“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God,…”*

Now, Paul calls himself an apostle. This is the same title the twelve disciples had. He calls himself an apostle because he saw Christ Jesus, face-to-face, on the road to Damascus. He says, “…by the will of God,” because this wasn’t Paul’s will. It wasn’t his will that he was made an apostle. God appeared to him on the road and saved him. Paul’s will was to persecute Christians but Paul was given a new identity, and he talks about this new identity all throughout the book of Ephesians. And, the question of identity is a serious one. It is probably one that each of us has sat and thought about in bed at night. “What am I doing here? Who am I? Is this what God has called me to do? Is the Bible true? Is what Christ says real? What am I doing with my life?”



Ephesians is written to believers and I think we know what we should say to this. We know what we should say to the question of identity. Not thinking about what we should do, but just thinking about when we think about our identity, where do we find it? I want us to think about this for a minute. I know it is unorthodox in relation to how we do sermons here, but I just want us to think about this for a minute. Like, what do you find your identity in? I think a lot of people find their identity in being the funny guy, or the pretty girl, or the solid dad, or the athlete, or the girl who doesn’t care, or the artsy one, or the mom who gives advice. Or, maybe you find your identity, not so much in what you do but in who you are around. Maybe you find your identity in your actions, or your friend group, or your family, or your future ministry, or your future job, or your followers on Instagram. Where do you find your identity? Because, once you know who you are then you can live in light of that; you can know what to do.

Here, at Red Oak, we believe what the Scripture says of us, and it’s good for us to remember who we were before Christ, because the Scripture speaks boldly about our identity before Christ. I’m going to read a few verses about our identity before Christ, and then I just want to talk about the hope of us being in Christ.

About our identity before Christ, the Scripture says this:

* Genesis 6:5-6 says, *“The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on Earth had become…that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.”* Before Christ, this is our identity.
* Leviticus 26:27-28, God is saying, *“If in spite of this you still don’t listen to me, but continue to be hostile toward me, then, in my anger, I will be hostile toward you, and I, myself, will punish you for your sin seven times over.”* So, not only are our thoughts wicked, but we are hostile toward God, pre-Christ.
* Jeremiah 17:9 says, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it?”*
* Psalm 11:4-5 says, *“The Lord examines the righteous, but the wicked and those who love violence, His soul hates.”*
* Romans 1:18-2:5 talks about how we *“exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worship the creation over the Creator.”*
* Ephesians 2:3 says that, before Christ, we are by nature *“children of wrath.”*
* Colossians 3:6 promises, before Christ, “*The wrath of God is coming.”*
* In Revelation 14:10-11, we read about those who are unrepentant of their sin, and it talks about our punishment, saying, *“Those who are punished will drink the wine of God’s wrath, poured full-strength into the cup of His anger. He will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of His holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.”* There is Jesus. *“And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever and they have no rest day or night.”*

These verses are uncomfortable. They are very uncomfortable to read, but we need to remember where we were pre-Christ; that without Christ we are dead in our sins. Pre-Christ – if Christ never acted on us – we are hostile toward God; we are enemies of God who deserve God’s just wrath and His punishment. But, the good news of Ephesians is that God punished Christ for us; that Christ became sin for us.

* 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *“For our sake, He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.” That is great news! “In Him we might become the righteousness of God.” God’s wrath is poured out on Christ so that “while we were sinners Christ died for us.”*
* Romans 5:6-9 says, *“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.”*

I think that Paul starts this letter in a very important way; he tells us our identity in Christ. It is important to know that this letter is written to believers; those who have accepted Christ and who have put their faith and their hope in Christ. In that, Christ takes our punishment and we get His goodness. The way that I explain it to my kids is that Jesus gets our badness and we get His goodness. What Paul is about to say in the first two chapters of Ephesians is really the most important things about us, and here, I think Paul opens up the doors to the treasure house of God. Even in just the first couple of verses, he opens up the doors to the treasure house of God, and he says things that are true about *you*. So, when we hear these things, I want us to apply them to ourselves.

First, here is what he says,

Verse 1,

*“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God…”*

Here is how he begins.

*“To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:”*

This seems like a really simple greeting. Most times, when we get to these parts of Scripture, like the greeting, or the ending, or the genealogies, we kind of skim those parts and breeze through them and move on to the body, but in this intro there is a lot of meat, because he tells us, “*To the saints who are in Ephesus…”* I think that most of the time we reserve the term “saints” for people who we think are extra-holy. We say, “Oh, she’s a saint. She’s done a lot. She’s extra-charitable.” We reserve this term for certain folks, but the Bible doesn’t do that. It doesn’t reserve this term for people who are on a whole other level spiritually.

When he says, “*To the saints who are in Ephesus*,” he is talking about all of the believers. All of the believers in Ephesus, he says, are saints, and the root of that word is “holy.” So, really, in addressing this letter, he is saying, “Paul, to the holy ones.” Get that—to the holy ones. A lot of people believe that this letter wasn’t specifically addressed just to the folks in Ephesus, but that it was a letter that Paul meant to be circulated to different churches. Because in some manuscripts it doesn’t say “in Ephesus,” some people believe that Paul almost left a blank there, like “to the saints who are in (blank).” But, we know that here he is writing specifically to the church at Ephesus, and he calls them holy. *“To the holy ones,”* he says, *“the holy ones who are in Ephesus and who are faithful in Christ Jesus.”*

So, Paul says that not only are these guys holy but they are faithful. They are faithful because of Christ. Now, “faithful” can have two meanings; it can mean that either they are full of faith or that they do what they are supposed to, right? But, I think it has both meanings here; that they are trusting and they are trustworthy.

So, Paul is saying that these people are saints, and they are faithful, and the third phrase that he uses to describe them is that they are “in Christ Jesus.” This is one of Paul’s favorite phrases. He uses the phrase “in Christ Jesus” one hundred sixty four times in his writings. “In Christ…in Christ…in Christ,” over and over, one hundred sixty four times, he uses the phrase “in Christ.” It’s an important phrase.

There is a verse in Psalm 133 that says,

*“Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”*

Why is that? What sort of unity do we have in the Church? The only unity we have, as believers, is our unity in Christ.

In the world, there are a lot of attempts at community. Think about it. I’m not going to throw off on any groups, but there are a lot of groups that bind themselves together, like groups of Masons, or frats at college, or biker gangs. There are a lot of groups that come together looking for community. If you think about it, these groups meet together, and they bind themselves by laws because they are not bound by anything stronger. Do you know what I mean? They meet together and they say, “In our meetings we are going to do this, and we are only going to accept people like this…,” and they bind themselves together by laws, because they are not bound by anything stronger.

But here, *“it is good and pleasant for brothers to dwell together in unity,”* because we are bound together in Christ. In Adam, humanity was lost, but in Christ, there is identity, forgiveness, and belonging. We are defined by our being in Christ, which no law or any work could accomplish. Christ alone – by grace alone.

I think that a lot of us don’t really connect who we are to when we are in Christ, but our identity is not in our accomplishments. It is not in our abilities, and it is not in our image, or accomplishments, or our job, because in the end these things don’t matter as much as we think.

There is a quote from a pastor[[4]](#footnote-4) who said, “And you know what people don’t ask for on their death bed? They don't ask for a lot of the things that we use to establish our identity. ‘Hey, bring me all my trophies. I want to see them one last time. Hey, could you print out my resume? Read it to me again. Could you bring in my report card? I want to see my GPA. Could you bring a scale? I want to step on it and see if I finally lost that weight.’” A lot of people don’t ask for things that they used to use to establish their identity. Our identity is not in our accomplishments; our identity is in Christ.

I want to read thirteen things about our identity in Christ Jesus. When I read these, I want us to know that this isn’t just a list. This is reality. This is reality for those of us who are in Christ and who have Christ’s forgiveness. I got this from John Piper, and it says this. I’ll go through all thirteen of these.

* 1 – In Christ Jesus, you were given grace before the world was created. 2 Timothy 1:9 says, *“He gave us grace in Christ Jesus before the ages began.”*
* 2 – In Christ Jesus, you were chosen by God before creation. Don’t just hear this as a list. Think about this. You were chosen by God before Abraham, before Moses, and before creation. Ephesians 1:4 says, *“God chose us, in Christ, before the foundation of the world.”* In Christ Jesus, you were chosen by God before creation.
* 3 – In Christ Jesus, you are loved by God with an inseparable love. Romans 8:38-39 says this, *“I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”*
* 4 – In Christ Jesus, you were redeemed and forgiven for all your sins. Ephesians 1:7, *“In Christ, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses.”*
* 5 – In Christ Jesus, you are justified before God and the righteousness of God, in Christ, is imputed to you. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, *“For our sake, God made Christ to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.”*
* 6 – In Christ Jesus, you’ve become a new creation and a son of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *“If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old is passed away and behold the new has come.”* And, Galatians 3:26 says, *“In Christ, you are all sons of God, through faith.”*
* 7 – In Christ Jesus, you have been seated in the heavenly places, even while He lived on the Earth. We will get into that in the next chapter of Ephesians 2:6, where it says, *“God raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”*
* 8 – In Christ Jesus, all the promises of God are yes for you. 2 Corinthians 1:20, *“All the promises of God find their yes in Christ.”*
* 9 – In Christ Jesus, you are being sanctified and made holy. 1 Corinthians 1:2, *“To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus.”*
* 10 – In Christ Jesus, everything you really need will be supplied. Philippians 4:19 says, *“My God will supply every need of yours according to His riches in glory, in Christ Jesus.”*
* 11 – In Christ Jesus, the peace of God will guard your heart and mind. Philippians 4:7 says, *“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds, in Christ Jesus.”*
* 12 – In Christ Jesus, you have eternal life. Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life, in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”*
* 13 – In Christ Jesus, you will be raised from the dead at the coming of the Lord. This is our hope of glory. This is the theme of Ephesians for us, as a church. The hope of glory—in Christ Jesus you will be raised from the dead at the coming of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 15 says, *“For as in Adam all die, so also, in Christ shall all be made alive.”* This is huge. All those united in Adam in the first humanity die; all those united in Christ in the second humanity will rise again.

As we look in Ephesians, as we read through these chapters, as you read through this at your desk at home, or at your kitchen table, I want you to write down the things that are true about you. This is the treasure house of God and these things are real. Because, I know that there are some people in the room who can’t get past, “Well, I’ve done this. I’m a sinner. I’ve screwed up in this way and I can’t get over the guilt from past sin.” But, now is the time to move on. Now is the time, because in Christ we are holy, and faithful, and we belong to Christ. These are real things.

Who we are, or who we perceive ourselves to be, informs what we do. If we just see our past sin, we might say, “I’m just a sinner, so I sin. That’s what I do; I give in.” But, if we see ourselves as God sees us, then everything changes. Romans 4:7-8 says, *“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”* 1 Thessalonians 5:9-11 says, *“For God has not destined us for wrath but to obtain salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with Him. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*

So, if you are a believer, no matter what you’ve done and no matter what someone else has done to you, if you are a Christian, that thing is not your identity. Your identity is that you are in Christ.

Look at verse 2. The first verse says, “*To the saints…to the holy ones who are in Ephesus…and are faithful in Christ Jesus.”* Now, look at what he says in verse 2.

*“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

That’s not what I expect him to say. I expect Paul to say, “Grace and peace from me; from Paul. I, Paul, am writing to the guys in Ephesus. Grace and peace from me.” But, look at what he’s saying. He’s saying, “What’s coming down from God to you is grace and peace.” This is coming from God, not Paul. So, what is coming from God to you? Not condemnation, if you are in Christ. Romans 8:1 speaks to that. What is coming to you is grace from God and peace with God.

John Stott says, “‘Grace’ and ‘Peace’, then, are key words of Ephesians. In 6:15 the good news is termed *‘the gospel of peace’*. In 2:14 it is written that Jesus Christ himself ‘*is our peace’*, for first he ‘*made peace’* by his cross (v.15) and then he ‘*came and preached peace’* to Jews and Gentiles alike (v.17). Hence his people are to be ‘*eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’* (4:3). ‘Grace’, on the other hand, indicates both why and how God has taken his reconciling initiative. For ‘grace’ is his free and undeserved mercy. It is ‘*by grace’* that we are saved, indeed by *‘the immeasurable riches of his grace’* (2:5,7,8), and it is by the same grace that we are gifted for service (4:7, 3:2,7). So if we want a concise summary of the good news which the whole letter announces, we could not find a better one than the three monosyllables ‘*peace through grace’*.”

In Christ, we are holy, we are faithful, we receive grace, we receive peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is our identity. And then, for the next six chapters, Paul goes on, and on, and on to reiterate that this is your identity in Christ.

Listen to what Paul says in just the first few verses. Brody is going through the next passage on Sunday. The next portion, in verses 3-14, is one sentence. I want to look at what he says about our identity in the next portion and, hopefully, you will have a chance to read this before next Sunday. But, in the next fourteen verses, Paul says that we are:

* holy
* faithful
* in Christ
* recipients of grace and peace from God
* blessed
* recipients of every spiritual blessing
* chosen to be in Him before the foundation of the world
* holy
* blameless
* loved
* predestined for God’s family
* adopted into God’s family
* recipients of redemption
* acted on by Christ’s blood
* forgiven from our sins
* recipients of the riches of God’s grace
* recipients of the knowledge of God’s mysterious will
* part of God’s plan before time
* united with God through Christ
* in Christ
* recipients of the family inheritance
* predestined to God’s family
* recipients of hope in Christ
* recipients of the Word of truth
* saved by the Gospel
* sealed by the Holy Spirit of Yahweh, which guarantees our inheritance

…all to the praise of His glory.

Ephesians goes on, and on, and on. This is the treasure house of God, opened up for us. Many of us believe this on paper, but we don’t feel it. We don’t feel forgiven. We don’t feel adopted. We don’t feel sealed. We don’t feel chosen. We see it on paper, but we don’t really identify with it. This is our identity according to the Scripture. We need to believe it and put our hope and trust in it, because our identity here is so God-centered. It is not in what we do; it is in what God has done. This is what our identity is wrapped up in. Not your body image and not your competency. That’s not where we find our identity; we find our identity in what Christ has done on the cross and who He has made us as a result.

Piper says, “There is a lot of discussion in our day of self-concept or self-identity. How do we view ourselves? It is an important question. The specifically biblical angle on this question is that Christian selfhood is not defined in terms of who we are in and of ourselves. It's defined in terms of what God does to us and the relationship he creates with us and the destiny he appoints for us. In other words as a Christian you cannot talk about your identity without talking about the action of God on you, the relationship of God with you, and the purpose of God for you. The biblical understanding of human self-identity is radically God-centered.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

So, we are diving into the letter of Ephesians. This is the treasure house of God, and let me give you some encouragement. Meditate on it and think about it. I’ve been reading a book about Bible-reading for a session I’m teaching at Snowbird, and I read a passage by this guy named David Mathis[[6]](#footnote-6), and he talks about the different ways that we study the Bible. He talks about three different methods to study the Bible and the first one he talks about is like raking it in. He says, “There is a place for raking in Bible reading; gathering up the leaves at a swift pace.” This is when we read through large passages of Scripture, when we are just raking in the truth. Just read large passages and rake in all that truth. Then he says, “But when we dig in Bible study we unearth the diamonds, and in meditation we marvel at the jewels.”

There is a place, as we are studying through the book of Ephesians, when we need to just rake it in. We need to read these large passages, like this huge eleven-verse sentence that Paul is getting ready to write, telling us who we are. We need to just rake in all that truth. But, then, when we dig in during our services, we mine and we find the diamonds. Then, it is up to us to meditate on it, and marvel at the jewels. This is the treasure house of God, open to us. If you don’t feel these things to be true of you, then meditate on them until you do. Meditate on them; chew on them; chew on these things. These truths aren’t like water that you can chug down quickly. They are like wine; you have to sip it slowly. It’s not like McDonald’s French fries that you just cram down. It’s like steak that you want to slow down and enjoy. Slow down and meditate on the Word.

The Bible says, “This is true of you. You are adopted as my son. You are holy. You are a saint. You are faithful.” If you don’t feel that, meditate on it until you do, because it is true of you if you are in Christ. These things are true, and God invites us to look into His treasure house, His storehouse. Meditate on these truths until you feel them. Let these great realities change how we view and treat others, because some are not in Christ. We talked about this last week in a big push for sharing the Gospel in our community. Some are not in Christ. These realities are not true about them and that’s why we have to share—share the glorious truth of God.

1 Peter 2:9-10 sums this up. Peter says, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession.” He is telling these people who they are and what their identity is and then he gives them a purpose for it. *“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”* He didn’t just give us this identity so we can say, “Great.” It’s for a purpose; so that we can proclaim His excellencies in Cherokee County. It's so that you summer staff can proclaim His excellencies here, knowing who we are in Christ first, and then we can spread that, and share Now, you are a people of God that once had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. So, I encourage you, rake in the book of Ephesians and rake in these large portions of Scripture, and then dig deep, and when you do, meditate on this. Meditate on these words until you feel these things to be true about yourself.

May 24, 2015

Ephesians 1 – Part 1

Brody Holloway

We want to welcome you, if you are visiting, and we hope you have an awesome evening of worship with us. We are excited to open God’s Word. The idea of coming together, and singing songs together, praying together, and opening God’s Word and reading it together, and hearing from its teaching—that’s biblical. Church was not man’s idea; it is something that Christ instituted. So, you need to know, and I need to know, and we need to be aware that every time we meet like this in worship, we are honoring the Lord and we are being obedient to the Lord. We know that when we are being obedient to the Lord that we can expect His blessing. In meeting together and coming together for worship, we should expect that the Lord is going to be here, He is going to meet with us, and He is going to bless our time together, so we pray that He does tonight.

So, we are in Ephesians 1, and we will read verses 3-14. This is the Word of the Lord,

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

*11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”*

Let’s pray. Lord, please clear our hearts, clear our minds, and make us vessels that are clean and ready to receive your Word tonight. I pray that we would receive it, and then submit to it, and then respond in obedience to it. Please, give us deep spiritual truth, but also practical, edifying, and sanctifying application of your Word. I pray that your Word would be handled faithfully tonight, for your glory and your purpose. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

I remember about fifteen or sixteen years ago, I was visiting with Matt and Cara Jones. They are here, now, but at the time they were living in northern Wisconsin. We went up there to go hunting and I had never been to a Cabela’s store. If you know what Cabela’s is, it is man-land. If you go in there and you are a big game hunter, it is like a museum of trophy mounts. They have a fishing department the size of Walmart, a gun department the size of Walmart, and it is just a man-land. So, I had never been to one and a Cabela’s had opened in the twin cities in Minnesota. We were going to be driving that way when we left, so we planned to go through this new Cabela’s store. They were touting it as the biggest one ever, and I had never even been to a smaller one, so I was pretty excited to go there. But, I didn’t have any money, which was really kind of a good thing, because when you go into a place like that with no money the pressure is off, you know. But, as I was leaving Matt’s dad’s driveway, his dad handed me a hundred dollar bill and said, “I want you to spend all of this in the Cabela’s store.” Well, I just got giddy with excitement, but as I was driving three-and-a-half hours to that store, it was beginning to close in on me. I was thinking, “How do you spend $100 in a store that has about $100 billion of stuff you want? How do you whittle it down?” Then, to compound the problem, we got caught in traffic in the city with the store was on the south side and we ended up getting to Cabela’s with only twenty-five minutes to shop. I had a hundred bucks and twenty-five minutes in the biggest Cabela’s store in the world, and I walked away with a pocket knife, a ball cap, and a t-shirt.

So, tonight, what I pray is that I don’t take this passage, and forty minutes, and walk away having given you a ball cap, a t-shirt, and a pocketknife. Because, this is deep, and wide, and glorious, and this is a passage that a lot of theologians will say is a culmination of all of the Apostle Paul’s ministry. Everything he taught, all the doctrine that he instructed, and all that he equipped pastors and elders to be, and all the missionary journeys he went on, from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth at that time, and all that he had ever done for the sake of the Gospel, he wrote in this epistle from prison; and right out of the chute, in this sort of song of praise, including 202 Greek words in one sentence, he contained every major doctrine that is reality for the believer. So, how do we unpack that in forty minutes?

Well, we start with prayer, which we have done, and which I have done a lot of over the past few days. Then, what is the old saying? “How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” So, here we go—let’s dive in.

In verse 3, every spiritual blessing comes from Christ. For the believer, one of the most important doctrines in our lives is what theologians call the doctrine of “union with Christ.” I’m going to give you a definition of what the doctrine of union with Christ is.

“Union with Christ is a phrase used to summarize several different relationships between believers and Christ, through which Christians receive every benefit of salvation. These relationships include the fact that 1) we are in Christ, 2) He is in us, 3) we are like Christ, and 4) we are with Christ.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

So, here are these four things in Wayne Grudem’s definition. We will unpack this in just a second. So, Paul says, in verse 3,

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing.”*

What we are going to see, as we work through this passage, and actually as we work through the whole book of Ephesians, is that Paul is repeatedly going to use the phrase “in Christ.” As a Christian, it is critical that you understand what this means; at least, as fully as you can understand it. For us, the greatest treasure that we have is knowing that we have been placed in Christ.

I’ve thought about how I could explain this, and I don’t really know how to unpack it. We are going to do it methodologically in just a minute, as we walk through an outline, but if I could illustrate it, it would be this way. Turn with me over to John 17 because I don’t have this memorized and I don’t want to mess this up. This is Jesus, kind of praying down through history, for you, and me, and for the Church today.

John 17:20-23,

*“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, 21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. 24 Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”*

So, here is this love that the Father and the Son have for one another that existed before the foundation of the world. So, before the world has been created, the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, and they have this strong, powerful, eternal love. A few verses later, John even uses the word “mystery,” because one of the things that we learn as we unpack the depth of the Gospel, and as we mine the depths of the Gospel, is that there will always be an element of mystery to the Gospel that we just cannot get our minds around to fully comprehend.

So, before the foundation of the world, which is something that, as finite beings, we can’t fully comprehend, and outside of time there existed this relationship that is defined by eternal love between God the Father and God the Son. What God does, in Christ, is He brings us up into that love so that you and I are engulfed in it. So, what defines us when we say we are in Christ is that we are in the love that exists between the Father and the Son.

The closest thing that we might compare to this in an earthly relationship is that of a husband and wife coming together, loving each other deeply, and them sharing in that union through the giving of birth and the raising of a child; but that still doesn’t quite get it, because, we are talking about a love that existed before the foundation of the world. This love has no beginning and we are brought into this eternal love. We are brought up into this eternal love, with Christ, where the Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Father, it is eternal, and we are brought into it. We will see a few verses later, in just a few minutes, that this happens, for us, by the power of the Holy Spirit in us.

So, when we talk about union with Christ, I want to just kind of walk through those four things that we read at the beginning, in the definition of union with Christ.

First, when we talk about union with Christ, as Paul speaks of in verse 3, we need to understand this. First, it means that…..

1. We are in Christ. So, as Christ is seated in the heavenlies, we are literally in Him and we are there seated with Him. In verse 3, it says that, God “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” Jesus humbled himself, emptied himself, and came to Earth, and died, but now He has been exalted and He sits at the right hand of the Father. So, as Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father and experiences all of the spiritual blessings, as we are brought up in Him all of those spiritual blessings become ours, too. That’s what Paul is laying out in this lengthy text. He is saying that all of the possessions that Christ has spiritually, as the only begotten Son of the Father, and now the exalted Son of the Father and seated at His right hand—if you are a child of God—listen Christian—if you are a child of God, you have all that Christ has. You are not like the kid brother or sister. You have been brought up into Christ, so that the very relationship that Jesus has with God, you have with God. That is the life that a Christian has been given. That’s what it is to be in Christ.

Then, there are several tiers to what it means to be in Christ. We are in Christ:

* 1. In God’s eternal plan. Before the foundation of the world, the text tells us that God chose us in Him, in verse 4. So, we are in Christ before the foundation of the Earth.
  2. During Christ’s reign on Earth. This is important. We are in Christ before the foundation of the world, but we are also in Christ during His reign on Earth. Listen to this: during Christ’s life on Earth, God thought of us as being in Christ, meaning that whatever Christ did, God counted it as being something that we did. So, you will see in Scripture, oftentimes, that something is “counted to us” as believers; particularly, the righteousness of Christ is counted to us, or given to us, or credited to us. So, if you are here tonight and you are not a Christian, the only way you can be a Christian is for the righteousness of Jesus to be credited to you, or counted to you. So, in Christ’s life, there are many things that Jesus did, that God counts as us doing.
     1. Romans 5:19 – By one Man’s obedience, many will be made righteous.
     2. 2 Corinthians 5:21, Isaiah 53, 1 Peter 2:24 – God thought of our sin as belonging to Christ, even though we did not even exist yet, and Christ himself had never sinned.
     3. Romans 6:6, Galatians 2:20 – God thought of us as dying with Christ. When Christ died, we died with Christ.
     4. Ephesians 2:6, Romans 6:4-11 – God thought of us as being buried with Christ, and raised with Him, and taken up to Heaven with Him.
     5. 1 Peter 1:3-5, Colossians 3:3-4, Ephesians 1:3 – While Christ was on Earth, because we are in Christ, God thought of the blessings of salvation as being rightfully ours and He has stored them for us in Heaven and He awaits to apply them to us personally.

So, in Christ, we experience this union that exists before the foundation of the world, but it also existed during Christ’s life on Earth. We are identified with Him, and in union with Him, by the Father’s plan for our salvation. We also get to experience this…

* 1. During our lives now. So, in eternity we experience union with Christ; during Christ’s life on Earth we experience union with Christ; and now we get to, in our day-to-day lives, experience union with Christ. First, this happens by…
     1. Dying and being raised with Christ. Paul’s reference to baptism indicates that our dying and rising with Christ occurs in our life when we become Christians (Colossians 2:12). In this, Paul sees this present death and resurrection with Christ as a way to describe the change that the Holy Spirit brings about in our lives. It is why he says “we are dead to sin and alive to Christ.” We are dead to sin and alive to Christ, and in our lives now we experience union with Christ. Listen, Christian, you are not waiting to die and go to Heaven to be in union with Christ. That is a reality for you in the present because it was a reality for Christ in His life, and because it was a reality by the heavenly Father in eternity past, before the foundation of the world. We are unified with Christ. We are a new creation in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17) and we have power to overcome sin (Romans 6:12-14). Additionally, in our lives now, we are not only dying and raised with Christ, but we experience…
     2. New life in Christ. Because our lives are inseparably connected to Christ himself, the Holy Spirit gives us all the blessings that Christ has earned. Listen to this; these are the blessings we get in Christ, that He earned, but we are the recipients of. We are the beneficiaries. Imagine that someone earns something and then that person leaves that to you as an inheritance. You didn’t do anything to earn it, you just receive it. Here is what we receive, in Christ, in our lives now:
        1. Life that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 1:1)
        2. Eternal life (1 John 5:11)
        3. Faith and love (1 Timothy 1:14)
        4. Grace (2 Timothy 2:1)
        5. Salvation (2 Timothy 2:10)
        6. Wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2:3)
        7. Riches in glory (Philippians 4:19)
        8. Every spiritual blessing in Christ (Ephesians 1:3)
        9. Called to salvation (1 Corinthians 7:22)
        10. Regenerated (Ephesians 2:10)
        11. Justified and condemnation is removed (Romans 8:1)
        12. We die (1 Thessalonians 4:16)
        13. Our bodies will be raised up again (1 Corinthians 15:22)

So, we experience, in Christ, all of those benefits. Additionally…

* + 1. All of our actions can be done in Christ. As a Christian, it is critical that you and I understand that in our day-to-day lives our actions are being done in Christ. What I say, what I do, what I think, where I go, what I look at, what I touch, and what I taste – those things are done in Christ, because it is impossible for this union with Christ to be sort of temporarily separated while I indulge in sin. In the Bible, Paul uses the analogy of a man joining himself to a prostitute, when he is speaking of sexual union, and we know that in marriage sexual union is the most intimate act that can occur, and it’s a picture of this deep, deep intimate union that we experience with Christ. So, just like a man who is married to his wife cannot sort of undo that while he goes and indulges in adultery, a person who is in union with Christ cannot disconnect from that to go engage in sinful acts in this world that feed the flesh. So, whatever you do, whatever you say, wherever you go, as a Christian, you are doing that in Christ. We are doing that in Christ, so we need to think of all the repercussions that come with that. Every action in our lives can be done in Christ. The danger is then that we step out of that and begin to operate and do things out of the flesh; functioning in the flesh, and feeding the flesh, and operating in the old way that Christ has saved us out of. It is critical that we understand that to live in Christ is to experience, to some degree, the new powers of the kingdom of God that affect every part of our lives. So, all of our actions can be done in Christ, if we would be willing and obedient.

Think of this in terms of day-to-day activities in your life.

* + - 1. Paul speaks the truth. (Romans 9:1) When we speak the truth, it’s because we are speaking the truth in Christ.
      2. Paul boasts of his work in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:31). Paul sent Timothy to the Corinthians to remind them of his ways in Christ.
      3. Children are to obey their parents in the Lord (in Christ)
      4. Wives are to submit to their husbands in the Lord (in Christ)
      5. Believers are to be strong in the Lord
      6. Be encouraged in the Lord
      7. Rejoice in the Lord
      8. Agree in the Lord
      9. Stand firm in the Lord
      10. Live a godly life and have good behavior in Christ.
      11. Live in Christ (Colossians 2:6-7)
      12. Abide in Christ (1 John 2:28).
      13. We are one body in Christ. This unity in Christ is what brings believers together. We are the body of Christ with Christ as our head. We are not in Christ as isolated individuals, but rather we are joined together with other believers as one body, in Christ, in the Church (Romans 12:5)
      14. Entire churches can be in Christ (Galatians 1:22), but if one member of the body suffers we all suffer. If one member is honored, we all rejoice (1 Corinthians 12:26). All worldly divisions and criteria of status are broken down and no longer apply (Galatians 3:28). Peter uses a metaphor where believers are living stones built into a spiritual house, and Paul uses the same metaphor in Ephesians 2. Jesus prays for believers using the analogy of the trinity, praying that we may all be one like Himself and the Father (John 17). So, as Christ the Son and God the Father are unified and one, Jesus prays that we would be like that, and that is possible only through this union with Christ.

So, we see that we are in Christ during His life on Earth, in eternity past, and during our lives now. But, we also see that….

1. Christ is in us. I am in Christ, but then Christ is also in me. That’s critical. Not only are we in Christ, but Scripture teaches that Christ dwells in us, as well. Jesus says that, *“He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit.”*
   1. Paul says that Christ lives in him (Galatians 2:20). The factor that determines whether someone is a Christian is whether Christ dwells in him (Romans 8:10). So, if Christ is in me, that is evidence that I am a believer. I am in Christ, but Christ is also in me, giving evidence of my true salvation.
   2. Christ dwells in our hearts (Ephesians 3:17).
   3. We get our spiritual strength from Christ, who is in us. *“He who is in us is greater than he who is in the world,”* (1 John 4:4).
   4. We accomplish all things because Christ is in us and working through us (Romans 15:18, Philippians 4:13), which, as Spencer Davis says, is not about running touchdowns, but it is about the victorious Christian life.
   5. The Holy Spirit bears witness to us that Christ dwells in us (1 John 3:24).

So, we are in Christ and Christ is in us, but the third thing is also that…

1. We are like Christ. We are not just in Him and He is not just in us, but we are like Jesus. So, for the child of God there should be evidence in our life that reflects Christ. Literally, we are being conformed to His image, as we read in Romans 8. Also in 2 Corinthians, Paul tells the Corinthians that we are literally, by one degree of glory to another, being conformed and made more into the likeness of God. So, every day of our lives we are being transformed, shaped, and conformed, one degree at a time, more into the image of who Jesus is. Union with Christ implies, then, that we should imitate Christ and walk in the same way that He walked. Scripture gives numerous examples of what this looks like.
   1. We should welcome one another as Christ welcomed us (Romans 15:7)
   2. Husbands should love their wives as Christ loved the Church (Ephesians 5:25)
   3. We should forgive others as Christ has forgiven us (Colossians 3:13)
   4. We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren as He did (1 John 3:16)
   5. We are to run the race, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 13:2)
   6. We should follow the example of Christ in suffering (1 Peter 2:21)
   7. The purpose of imitating Christ is to become more like Him and grow in maturity in our Christian walk (Ephesians 4:13).

So, lastly, in terms of our Christian walk, not only are we like Christ, but…

1. We are with Christ. So, we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ, and we are with Christ. Could anything more fully define what a union between two looks like? We are in Him and He is in us. We are like Him and we are with Him.
   1. Jesus promised that *“where two or three are gathered in my name, I am in the midst of them.”[[8]](#footnote-8)*
   2. Jesus also promised, in Matthew 28:20, that He is with us always, “*even unto the end of the world*.” We live our lives in the presence of Christ, and as Christians we are called into fellowship with Christ. In this fellowship, we work together with Christ.

I think it is probably time to stop and take a breath and let your brain rest for a second, but here’s the thing; if you are going to begin to unpack union with Christ, here is what you are going to find; Scripture is laced with this reality, and there is no greater truth for the believer to grab hold of; your holiness depends on this. You sanctification and your pursuit of the Lord; your praise, your worship, and your obedience to Scripture depends on how you view yourself in this union with Christ. You may not have been able to catch it all, or read it all, or write it all down, but it doesn’t matter, because I didn’t even touch the tip of the iceberg. Please don’t sit there and think, “There’s no way I could follow all of that,” because I didn’t even scratch the surface of what the Scripture says about the identity that we have in Christ, as believers. So, I exhort you and I encourage you to go dig in. Dig in and find out who you are in Christ, because the Scripture makes it so clear to us.

Throughout this passage that we are working through tonight, there are eleven references to being “in Christ,” “in Him,” “in Christ,” “in Him.” That’s in just this one short passage, and throughout the book of Ephesians we are going to see it over, and over, and over. It is even referred to, partially, as a “mystery”; as “how can this be?” We know that the great miracle of the Gospel is that people who are separated from God by sin and who are at enmity with God, are in Christ brought near to the cross, as we will see later, in chapter 2. Christ makes peace, the Bible says in Colossians, “*by the blood of His cross.”* He reconciles us to God, so Christ is where we want to be.

So, we come to verse 4, and verses 4-6 tackle what is probably one of the most controversial doctrines in all of Scripture. Let me say this, we don’t have a lot of time to unpack the doctrine of election but it is one of those things that tends to be very controversial. Members of our church probably land in different places on this, but let me say this. A lot of you young people are gung-ho in your new Reformed theology that you’ve come into in the last couple of years, and you are so excited, but one pastor put it like this, “Understanding the deeper meanings of the doctrines of grace, as they have been revealed to us, particularly the doctrine of election, is kind of like carrying a gun.” It is dangerous and you need to have the proper mindset to even open your mouth and discuss these mysteries of who God is. John Stott says something like this in his commentary, and I’ll probably quote it wrong because I didn’t write it down, but it was something to the effect of, “The doctrine of election or the doctrine of God choosing us in Christ, is not something of human speculation, but it is something of biblical truth.” We cannot be confused when the reality is, as our Scripture says tonight, that God chose us in Him.

So, what I want to do is help us understand how we can agree, and agree to disagree, when we come in contact or communication with people who don’t hold the same view that we do of election. I do want to make a couple of things clear, and I want to tell you what election does not mean.

1. The first thing the doctrine of election doesn’t mean: When it says in verse 3, “even as He chose us in Him,” some people will water down this doctrine and here is how they will say it, “What this means is before the foundation of the Earth, God sort of looked down the corridors of time and He said, ‘That person will choose me. That person will choose me. That person will choose me. I know, in my perfect knowledge, who will choose me, so I will go choose them.’” But, our text discredits that idea. Here is why: “Even as He chose us”…what are the next two words?...”in Him.” The choice came from within God. If He looked down the corridors of time and saw who would choose Him and, in response, He chose them, then He would be responding to us, so the choosing would be in us, and God would be responding to us. So, the mystery would be in us and God would be responding to that mystery. But, the text says that He chose us in Him. So, God doesn’t look down the corridors of time and respond to what we are doing. But, additionally, He says that,

Verse 4,

*“In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will.”*

Not only did God not look down through the corridors of time and see who would choose Him, but He is saving people according to the purpose of His will. It’s what the text says. Dig in.

1. The next thing that we know this doesn’t mean, according to the doctrine of election; it doesn’t mean that we, as humans, don’t choose God. Whooooaa!! Your head is spinning now. It doesn’t mean that we don’t choose God. We do choose Christ. Every one of you who are in Christ, are in Christ because you chose Him. You confessed Him with your mouth, you repented, you believed, you called out to God for salvation, and you called on the name of the Lord and were saved. So we..choose..Christ! That’s why we proclaim Christ to lost people. Listen to what verse 13 says,

*“In him you also, when you* ***heard*** *the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and* ***believed*** *in him,”*

So, you heard it and you believed. Then, that brings us to the third thing that election doesn’t mean.

1. It doesn’t mean that we don’t need to do missions. The doctrine of election doesn’t mean that we don’t need to proclaim Christ. Because, verse 13 tells us that the very people Paul is writing this to heard the Gospel, responded in belief, and were saved. The doctrine of election doesn’t mean that we don’t choose Christ; it simply means that God chooses us first in Christ, and in response to that we choose Him, not vice versa.
2. Additionally, it doesn’t mean that we are in some way special because God chose us. Again, it says that God chose us “in Him.” So, if you can imagine that you are standing here and there is an unbeliever standing beside you. He is unregenerate and he doesn’t know the Lord. What is it in me that makes me a child of God and what is it in Him that makes him not a child of God? Can I take credit and say, “Well, I’m a Christian because of some merit in me. So, according to this text, if God is choosing people, he chooses me because He looks at me and He says, ‘Brody has merit of his own. There is a gift he has’?” Maybe I’m clever, or another guy has a good sense of humor, or she’s academic, or he’s athletic, or God thinks he can really use this gal, but then He looks at the next person and isn’t sure about him. Is that what it is? Is there some merit in us that causes God to choose favorites in picking people? No, that’s not what the text says. We are all sinners in need of salvation, which is only made possible through the redeeming work of Jesus to save lost people. He will tell us in chapter 2 that we were “dead in sin.” Christ quickened us and made us alive.
3. Lastly, not only does this doctrine mean that we don’t go proclaim the Gospel; in fact, to the contrary. It should invigorate our proclamation of the Gospel. It should motivate our missional effort. Paul was preaching at the Aeropagus, in the most academic circle on Mars Hill. In the Roman Empire, the Greek philosophers of the day had laid down hundreds of years earlier what would become the global philosophy. Every religion in the world was shaped by this philosophy. This was the most academic realm in all of the Roman Empire and Paul stood on Mars Hill, at the Aeropagus, and he said, *“We call all men everywhere to repent and believe on the name of the Lord Jesus.”*[[9]](#footnote-9) The Gospel demands from people repentance and confession, and the understanding of election should not dampen that; it should motivate a more vigorous missional effort. Don’t you ever step back and say, “Well, God’s going to save whoever He is going to save.” Nowhere in Scripture are we given that kind of an idea. We are to commit our lives to the proclamation of the Gospel, that all men may know, that all peoples may hear, and that the God of creation and the God of resurrection would be proclaimed to the ends of the Earth, with the hope that we have that men will come to faith and repentance, when we call them and command, in the name of Christ, that they obey, and believe, and turn to faith in Jesus.

So, we see in verses 3-6 that we are chosen in Him and we are chosen according to His purpose. So, why does God save us and what is His purpose in choosing and saving us?

1. The first purpose in saving us is sanctification. Verse 4 tells us this. What does sanctification mean? If you are a young Christian, or a young person, you may have heard this big word. Paul says, in verse 4, *“that we should be holy and blameless before him.”* To be “holy and blameless” is the idea that we are being sanctified or that we are in this process of sanctification. Here is an easy definition for what sanctification is. “Sanctification is the fact that as a Christian you are being, every single day of your life, conformed and made more into Christ’s likeness.” So, if you are a Christian right now, and you’ve been a Christian for a year, your life should not look like what it looked like eleven months ago. If you’ve been a Christian for thirty years, it should not look like what it looked like fifteen years ago, but it also, for you, should not look the same as it looked eleven months ago. Literally, we are moment-by-moment being conformed more into the image of Jesus. So, one of the purposes that God has in saving us is sanctification; that we would be holy and blameless. So, Paul is saying this; as a Christian, what is your responsibility? Pursue Christ. Pursue holiness. Follow hard after God every day of your life. “Holy and blameless” – don’t confuse blamelessness with righteousness. We are made righteous in Christ but blamelessness also carries the idea that you and I live lives of obedience that are above reproach, so that we can’t have blame cast on us because of our actions. You are made righteous in Christ. We don’t earn salvation, but as a Christian we are to live above reproach. We are not to do things, go places, say things, or act in a way that brings shame and reproach to the name of Christ. We are to pursue holiness. So, that is God’s first purpose in saving us.
2. The second purpose in saving us is adoption. He gives us sonship through our union with Christ. John Stott points this out, “When people ask us why God went ahead with the creation when He knew that it would be followed by the fall, one answer that we can tentatively give is that He destined us for a higher dignity than creation would bestow upon us. He intended to adopt us and make us sons and daughters.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Maybe you’ve even wrestled with this in your own life; why would God create a world in which He knew sin was going to come, people were going to fall, and evil was going to exist? The answer is adoption. Because, what creation bestowed on mankind was nowhere near the glory, and the grace, and the love that adoption by the heavenly Father would bestow on mankind. The dignity that creation gave to Adam and Eve does not compare to the dignity that salvation and adoption gives to you and me. God created us for adoption as sons and daughters and for good works.

I’ll tell you this; as an adoptive dad, if you said to me, “If you could go back in time and stop the poverty, and stop the disease, and stop the warring in Uganda, so that there would be no orphans, there would be no war, and there would be no poverty, would you do that?” I would say, “You can’t ask that question. The reality is that my son and my daughter are my son and my daughter precisely because of the evil that exists in the world.” We do not ask why would God create a world that would fall; we ask how God could love us so much that in our fallenness He would redeem us out of it and make us His sons and daughters?

God adopts us, but a loving father also provides instruction, discipline, and direction. “It is inconceivable,” Stott goes on to say, “that we should enjoy a relationship with God, as His children, without accepting the obligation to imitate our Father and cultivate the family likeness. This goes back to the fact that we are to be holy and blameless in our living. God saves us and makes us sons and daughters but He doesn’t spoil us. He disciplines those He loves. He instructs us. He places demands on us. He expects that our lives would reflect the nature and union that we have with Christ.”[[11]](#footnote-11)

There is something that is really fascinating to me, right here. In the Old Testament, you rarely see God referred to as a father. In fact, if any of you did any pre-studying for this text, you may have come across this. I believe it is that, in thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, only fourteen times is God referred to as a father. But then, when Christ comes onto the scene, He says this, *“I’m going to teach you how to pray. You say, ‘Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be your name.”[[12]](#footnote-12)* In fact, at Christ’s baptism, remember the interaction that goes on between Son and Father, and the Holy Trinity is at work there. What God does, is He brings us into that interaction by empowering us and filling us with the Holy Spirit, and bringing us into union with Christ, so that the sons of men no longer look at God as a distant figure of deity, but we look at Him as our loving, adoptive Father, who has crushed sin and brought us into a loving relationship with Him. So, it’s only used fourteen times in all of the Old Testament, but in the Gospels alone, Jesus uses the word “Father” over sixty times. The cross changed everything in terms of man’s relationship to God. The cross changed everything. So, the second reason that God purposes to save us is for adoption. In Christ, we who once were simply created beings, part of the fallen world, and enemies of God, are now made sons and daughters with, as we will see a few verses later, an inheritance.

1. The third reason God saves us is for praise. God created us for praise, He is worthy of our praise, and our fulfillment is only in praising and worshipping Him. This entire text we are looking at tonight is bursting with praise to the Father for all He has done in and through the Son and by the Spirit.

So, we come to verse 7, and the word Paul uses is “redemption.” If we were to define “redemption,” it simply means to pay a price or a ransom. We know that what Christ has done in saving us is that He has redeemed us. God creates us, but then, according to His purpose and His plan, in Christ, He redeems us.

The story is told of this little boy who spent weeks building a boat. He is fascinated with ships and the ocean, and he spends weeks putting together this wooden model ship. He spends hours and hours crafting this boat and he goes down to the river and he puts it in for its maiden voyage, and the wind takes it and it is gone. So, weeks of his life and all of his allowance from the summer have been spent building this boat and he has nothing to show for it. Then, a few weeks later he is walking down the main street of the little town he lives in and he sees the boat in the window of a pawn shop. So, he goes in and tells the shop owner that it is his boat and he wants to take it. But, the shop owner tells him that he can’t just take the boat because it now belongs to him. But the little boy boys says, “It’s my boat. I worked for the money, and I bought all the parts, and I spent hours and weeks putting it together, and it’s my creation.” But, the shop owner says, “I’m sorry. I paid money for this boat and it is mine now. I have ownership of it, now. The only way you can have this boat is to buy it.” So, the obvious ending to the story is that the little boy goes, and he mows grass, and he picks up trash, and saves his allowance, and whatever else he needs to do to go back to the store, and he purchases the boat that was his to begin with. That is a picture of how we are redeemed in Christ. We are created by God, lost in sin, and redeemed back into fellowship with the Father, through the purchase of our salvation by the blood of the Son. And, He says that this happens *“according to the riches of His grace.”*

Right now, at my house, my youngest daughter, Juliette, is obsessed with the latest Annie movie. When I was thinking about God saving us according to His riches, I thought of this as a way of illustration. You guys know the Annie story. Let’s imagine that Daddy Warbucks is the richest man in the world and he rolls up to the orphanage in his Rolls Royce limousine and he calls all of the little orphans out and gives them each a twenty-dollar bill. He tells them that is not all; that tomorrow, when they get out of school, the ice cream truck will be there and everyone will get free ice cream. In fact, for the rest of their lives, as long as they live in the orphanage, the ice cream truck will come and give them free ice cream. So, they are all excited, and rejoicing, and happy, but then he gets in the car and rides away. What he has just done is he has just blessed them *out of* his riches. But, he has not blessed them *according to* his riches. He has blessed them out of his riches, which is different from according to his riches. But, when Daddy Warbucks goes into that orphanage, and he gets Annie, and he puts her in the car, and he takes her home, and he gives her a room, and he changes her name, and she has a place at the table, not as a guest but as a daughter, and he gives her an inheritance and a place in the family will, and he gives her a future education—what he has done now is he has brought her into the family *according to* his wealth and riches. That’s what God does for us! He doesn’t just hand us something in passing, He brings us into a union with Christ, according to His riches, which are eternal. It’s an amazing picture, not only of the love that God has for us, but of the generosity to share in His riches.

Then, Paul says, in verse 8,

*“which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight,”*

So, God gives us discernment. Something that I often hear in Christian circles, is someone will say, “I have the gift of discernment,” and I’ll say, “Oh, you’re a Christian.” They will say, “Oh, not just that; I have a special gift.” Listen, y’all, if you are a child of God, God has lavished on you wisdom and insight. Don’t sit around, twiddling your thumbs, waiting to get wise. In Christ you are given wisdom. There is not some kind of sixth sense bestowed on certain people. Now, do some people have discernment in terms of maturity, and wisdom, and deep knowledge of Scripture that has come to life? Listen to me; if you are a twenty-something young adult, let me tell you what you need to do right now: study the Word of God and keep your mouth shut. Grow in wisdom and insight because you don’t know as much as you think you know, just yet. Is it not true, older folks, the older you get the more you realize you don’t know, rather than realizing how much you do know? The younger you are, and the more information you obtain and retain, the smarter you think you are. Then, there’s this weird reverse effect that happens as you get older. But, what we can be sure of is that at the core of that pivot from youth to old age, is the wisdom and insight that we are promised in Christ. If you are a Christian, God says, “I’m going to give you wisdom and insight. I’m going to give you discernment.” That means that you are going to be able to make good choices. If you are in the Word, and you are in prayer, and you are in worship, and you are studying, and you are being obedient to the Lord, you are going to make good choices. You’re not going to make bad choices; you’re going to make good choices. You are going to have wisdom, and insight, and discernment, and those things are critical and helpful. Trust me, as a parent to teenagers, it is helpful to have discernment on a daily basis. As a young, single adult, it would be helpful for you to have discernment on a daily basis. As a grandparent, who is looking to finish life strong, it would be good if you have discernment on a daily basis. Because, whatever stage of life you are in, you need wisdom and insight to make the decisions that need to be made on a day-to-day basis, and God promises that, in Christ, we have those—lavished on us. It’s not even like, “Here’s your allowance for the day,” but it is *lavished* on us. It’s heaped up and poured out.

I’m going to share an illustration with y’all about what I think of when I think of “lavish.” There were some boys a few years back that were sharing with some of us other guys about how they bathe with a loofah and they were getting made fun of a lot for it, but they were holding their ground and talking about how life-changing the experience is and how clean you can get with a loofah. I’m kind of old school in that I take an eighty-eight cent bar of soap and I just rub, rub, rub until I’m clean and then I’m done. Even though everyone was making fun of them, when I left that night, I thought, “I’m going to give it a try with the loofah.” So, I got a loofah, and they had made it clear to me that you were supposed to use body wash and not a bar of soap. So, I got one of the girls’ body wash bottles and I squirted it on heavy and went to work. Man, in just a minute there was a mountain of foam this thick, from the top of my head to my ankle bones, and it was invigorating! I’ve never felt so clean in all of my life. To this day, I bathe with a loofah when I’m at home. I haven’t gotten to the point to where I will carry a little loofah caddy with me when I go on the road.

On the other hand, those of you who have been with us when we’ve gone to work at the orphanage in Honduras have seen how they take those little kids and they line them up at bath time, and each kid holds their hands out, and each kid gets a little dime size squirt of soap, and they have to somehow make that work and last to clean their entire bodies.

We need to understand that God lavishes His grace on us. He lavishes His wisdom. The promise is that He lavishes His goodness. The Christian life has no biblical example of mediocrity. God does nothing—nothing—in mediocrity. If He’s going to give something to us, He’s going to lavish us. It’s not partial. He pours out His Spirit on us.

So, we see again, in verse 11, that God predestined us according to something within Himself.

*“In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,”*

We are in union with Christ and we see that we have this promised Holy Spirit as a seal that guarantees our sonship and our inheritance. So, somehow, God seals us with His Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is in us, sealing us, and that’s important to understand.

An analogy that I have heard that I think falls short is that it is like a guy giving a girl an engagement ring as a promise of what’s to come. The problem is that the engagement ring is not part of the wedding or the marriage union. So, that illustration falls short. I think that a better analogy would be a home mortgage. You place a downpayment on a home and that goes against the payoff of that home. So like, for me, this morning, I was sitting out on my deck and the sun was hitting the northern mountain range here in the Snowbird Mountains, and I was sitting there with my coffee with the steam rising up, and I was enjoying my home, right now. But, how much more am I going to enjoy it the day I write that last check to the bank? That coffee is going to taste so much better that day.

So, there is this sense where the Spirit of God is the downpayment. We are sealed with the Spirit of God but there is yet something that awaits us that comes after death. So, that’s the picture Paul is painting when he says we are sealed with the Holy Spirit.

So, in this last section, verses 11-14, I want to close with three evidence of what it looks like to be in Christ. Look, when you all go into discipleship groups this week, you could unpack this passage a thousand ways to next Sunday, but in terms of union in Christ there are three things that will be evident in your life if you are the person Paul is describing you to be.

1. Radical transformation. You cannot call yourself a Christian, you cannot expect your faith to be real, and you cannot expect God to take you seriously, when you say, “I’m a Christian because I said a prayer when I was a kid,” or because of this, or because of that, when there has been no radical transformation. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that, “*In Christ we are new creations,”* and 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, literally, *“We are made alive in Christ.”* It’s a radical transformation. It’s pretty radical when a dead person comes to life.
2. The second evidence of a person being in Christ is that we are a part of the most dynamic body of people in history; one with cosmic dimensions. In Christ we are joined together. Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 3:28,

*“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*.”

Not only are we in union with Christ, but we have this bond of the spirit in unity, that he will talk about later in this letter to the Ephesians. All of chapter 4 is about being unified in Christ. So, in Christ, the second thing that should be evident is our love for the Church and our love for Christians. We love the world for what we offer the world, but we are going to love the Church because we are unified with the Church. We are unified in Christ.

1. The third evidence of being in Christ, is that it brings great and deep satisfaction. Ask yourself this simple question; “Am I deeply satisfied in my life.” Now, I want to be careful here, and I’m thinking of a little book that Piper wrote years ago, called *The Dangerous Duty of Delight.[[13]](#footnote-13)* In that, he coined the phrase “dissatisfied contentment.” I’m content with what I have, like when Paul says, *“In whatever state I’m in I will be content.”[[14]](#footnote-14)* But, I’m not satisfied to stay here because of what we talked about earlier; tomorrow, I want to be more like Jesus. I’m satisfied with who I am, where I am, and with what I have, but tomorrow I want to be more like Jesus. One evidence of a child of God who is truly in Christ, is that he will experience true, deep satisfaction in his life.

Let me ask you tonight. If you are here and you don’t know if you are a believer, and you’re like, “I don’t know if I’m saved or not. I went to church when I was a kid. I got baptized.” Are you satisfied in Christ? On most days of your life are you willing to step back and go, “God is enough. Christ is enough. Jesus is enough”? Because, the first lie that was told in history, that led to the first sin that mankind committed, was the lie that God is not enough and that His promises are not sufficient; that the one tree is the one that you should get to take part in, because it will bring you the deepest satisfaction. The greatest lie the Enemy will ever tell you, the greatest lie your flesh will ever tell you, and the greatest lie you will ever convince yourself of, is that God is not enough. One of the great, deep evidences that you are in Christ, and in union with Christ, is that God will be enough in your life. God is enough. The Psalmist says, in Psalm 73, “He’s my portion.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Today, and tomorrow, and when I wake up, and when I lie down, is God enough? And, if He’s not, and if you need that next promotion for happiness, what you will find is that it won’t bring you happiness. If you need that next relationship to find satisfaction and identity, that person will let you down just as badly as the last six did. If you think your child will grow up and give you satisfaction and fulfillment, because you didn’t get that from your dad or your mom, you are running the risk of ruining that child. You will either put pressure on that kid that he can’t handle or you will spoil him completely rotten. God has to be enough, and for the true believer, who is in union with Christ, we will find that He is.

So, finally, we can hold on to the hope of our inheritance in Christ. Hold onto the hope that there is something greater than this world, which awaits us. Christ is our hope. Our faith has an object that produces and brings promised hope, but one day we will be with Him and the mystery will be fully understood and fully appreciated, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:12, *“because we will see Him as He is.”* We will be like Him as He is, and we will know Him as He would have us know Him, and we will have an eternal union with Christ.

“God, I thank you for your Word. I thank you for the great joy and satisfaction of knowing you, and the fellowship that comes from knowing you, and the fact that if we are buried with you in the likeness of your death, so we will also be with you in the likeness of your resurrection. I pray that you would help us to understand and experience today, and tomorrow, and every day after, for those of us who are in Christ that we are in you, not because of anything good in ourselves, but because of something in you that chose us, and according to your purpose we have been saved, but there is great responsibility in our salvation, as we have also cried out to you in faith, and repentance, and responded to you in obedience, Lord; that we must daily respond in that same obedience. Please help us to. Give us what we need, and the direction that we need, and the strength that we need, and help us to love you, as you are worthy of being loved. I pray that we would find our hope, and our peace, and identity, in you and Christ, alone. In Christ alone we would put our trust. In Christ alone we would find ourselves. In Christ alone we would hope for the future. In Christ alone we would bury the past. In Christ alone we would proclaim the Gospel. In Christ alone we would worship you in spirit and in truth. In Christ alone we would live in repentance, and obedience, and that fruit would be born. That everything that is done in us would be done as a result of the union that we have in Christ Jesus. Help us to be the church you would have us to be. In your strong name, I pray.

May 31, 2015

Ephesians 1 – Part 2

Brody Holloway

Ephesians 1:5-21,

“*In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. 15 For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”*

Father God, we pray right now that by your Spirit you would open our hearts and our minds, and that your Word would be faithfully handled, and that we would faithfully receive it in our hearts, and that we would respond to it in obedience. Please, give us clarity and, as Paul prays even in our text for enlightenment and for spiritual vision, please give us that tonight, as we are able to by your Spirit, discern what the Word of God would have us to hear and obey. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

So, the passage breaks down like this. Just as an overview and a kind of summary, Paul’s prayer for the believers, in this passage, breaks down into three major points.

1. Foremost, Paul prays that the believers would have a better knowledge and understanding of who Christ is. So, Paul thanks God for the believers in verses 15-16, and then he prays that God would give them a better knowledge and understanding of who Jesus is.
2. The next thing he prays for is spiritual vision and for spiritual perception in three areas, which we are going to really key in on tonight:
   1. The hope to which He has called them
   2. The riches of His glorious inheritance
   3. The power of His might in their lives. You will see that last one in verse 19, *“and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.”* That’s a power verse, where Paul uses these two words, “power” and “might.” Paul breaks that down further by laying out in the next four verses what it looks like to see, thirdly, the power and the might of the Lord Jesus. In verse 20, Paul references
      1. The resurrection of Christ and
      2. The exaltation of Christ, and in verse 21,
      3. The dominion and authority of Christ. Then, Paul closes in verse 21 by looking at
      4. The headship of Christ.

So, we are going to unpack those things; the resurrection, the exaltation, the dominion and authority, and, ultimately, the headship of Christ over the Church.

Okay, so I’ve never been in the military, but anybody who knows me knows that I would consider myself patriotic, and I love to read stories of war heroes. Now, I don’t remember how I learned about this, but I read a story about a guy named Jay Redman[[16]](#footnote-16). Jay Redman was a Navy Seal for eleven years and he is still living today. Actually, I remember seeing this guy being interviewed on Fox News, and there was something unique about the way he looked. I was trying to put my finger on it and then I realized that the right side of his face wasn’t moving, in fact his eye and his cheek weren’t moving. Then, I realized that this was all the result of plastic surgery. His hair was kind of patchy and you could tell he had some major surgery done. So, I looked this guy up and learned that Redman had been in the Navy Seals at the time of 9/11[[17]](#footnote-17), so he was one of the first guys to deploy. Then, I believe it was in 2004, he was shot seven times in one engagement. It blew out his elbow and he took two shots to the face that happened to hit at an angle that blew out the side of his face. So, he had undergone about 37 surgeries, and there is a listing on a Wounded Warrior page of the number of stitches, and staples, and surgeries.[[18]](#footnote-18) He had to be trached and it’s just a miracle that he’s alive.

So, Jay Redman travels around and he speaks on behalf of people who have been wounded. He started a kind of Wounded Warriors project and he said that what inspired him to do this was that he was so tired of people asking him if he was in a car wreck or some other kind of accident. He would have to say, “No, I got shot with a machine gun seven times.” People would think that he was joking and he was starting to get bitter, so he started wearing a t-shirt around that said, “I got shot in the face with a machine gun. Why are you so ugly?,” or something like that, and on the back it had an American flag. So, veterans started commenting that they really liked his shirt and he ended up starting a project called “Wounded Wear,”[[19]](#footnote-19) and all the proceeds go to wounded warriors.

But, I love to read about a guy like that and read his personal bio. It turns out that he has three kids, and I think, “What is it like to be that man’s child?” His child would think, “My father is a war hero.” He’s a patriot, but it’s the next level of patriotism; he’s an actual hero. So, one of the things I think is critical for the believer, in terms of boosting our confidence or our faith in who God is, is understanding the relationship that we have to God, as Father to son, or Father to daughter, or Father to child.

We have talked several times over the last couple of weeks, with quite a few of the Snowbird folks, about what gives you hope in this life. It is when your faith is placed in an object that is able to sustain the faith, grow the faith, and prove that the faith is legitimate. So, a lot of people will say something like, “If you have faith, then so-and-so,” or “If you have faith, your marriage will last,” or “You need to have faith that you will be faithful to your spouse,” or “You’ve got to have faith that your finances will be okay.” But, if the object of your faith is not the Lord, then you’ve taken your faith and placed it in an object that may actually sink you. So, we used the illustration that if you were drowning you would much prefer to have someone throw you a safety line or a rescue buoy than a dumbbell or a kettlebell. Right? So, if I’m drowning and I say, “I have faith in that big rock on the side of the river. Please, throw me that rock and I will be okay,” and someone throws me the rock and I grab hold of the rock, I’m going to drown. So, you can have all of the faith in the world – in fact, devout Muslims have a very active faith that actually drives them to do some pretty radical stuff – but if your faith is not in the right object, and the object of your faith is not worthy of that faith, then what is going to happen is that you are going to have no hope in the end. So, the right object of your faith leads to hope. So, when we understand that the hope that we have is an inheritance through the relationship that we have with our heavenly Father, then what we ultimately have is a hope that will sustain us, no matter what comes in this life.

Some of you are coming in here tonight after a crazy week of life, and family, and work, and whatever, and what you need, is you need to know what the object of your hope is. What is the object of your faith? If those two are not the same thing, then you are going to be disappointed and you are going to experience further pains, sorrow, and destruction. But, when the object of your faith and the object of your hope meet at the cross, and in Christ Jesus you trust in God’s provision for your life, then you will be able to be sustained no matter what comes in life. That’s the way the Lord works in our lives.

So, Paul is praying for these Ephesian believers, after he just laid out this long, deep explanation of their salvation, that we looked at last week. Now, he’s going to pray, “God, I want them to have the right hope.” He is telling the believers that he wants them to have hope, and here’s why he wants them to have hope, and here’s how he wants them to have hope. So, let’s unpack it.

In verse 15, the church had love for one another in Ephesus. In fact, later in the book, in chapter 4, we will see that Paul really begins to challenge them to be unified and to love one another. And, John tells us in John 15, that Jesus’ words are recorded this way, *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* So, we know that the Lord desires for us to love each other.

Now, if you’re a parent, this is not hard to figure out. If you have more than one kid, one of the greatest blessings in your life is when those kids love each other, and specifically when they show affection to one another. If you have two kids and they haven’t seen each other for some time, and they come together, and they are excited, and they run and hug each other, that’s awesome. But, when you see children serve one another, and show unity with one another, and show love to one another, as a parent it makes you very fulfilled.

So, we know that the Lord desires for us to have love toward one another, and our love for one another in the Church should be bound up in the love that Christ has toward us. So, we saw, in the first half of the chapter, that God loved us in Christ, and we said that He sort of brought us up into this love that existed before the foundation of the Earth. Between Father and Son, there was this love that existed, and by the Holy Spirit we were brought up into that love. And now, the Lord would say to us, “I want you to love each other this way.” He wants them to have this love for one another that reflects the Trinitarian love of God the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That’s what He wants; He wants us to love each other that way.

So, in verse 16, Paul then gives thanks to the Lord. For us, as believers, one of the things that I think would be fruitful and helpful for us in our church, is if we would begin to actually give thanks for each other. You see Paul do this in all of his letters. I just did a cursory reading of the intros to each of the Pauline epistles, and in 1 Corinthians 1:4, Ephesians 1:16, Philippians 1:3, Colossians 1:3, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, and 2 Timothy 1:3, Paul thanks God for the recipients of the letters—the people he is writing to. Paul thanks the Lord for them. Here is what happens when you begin to display thanksgiving in your life. Thanksgiving is one of those areas of our lives where most of us probably don’t do a really good job. Most people would say that they struggle with their prayer life or they don’t focus and pray like they ought to, but most of us, probably, on a day-to-day basis, don’t give thanks like we ought to.

What does thanksgiving do for us in our lives?

1. The first thing that giving thanks does is it humbles you. You will not meet a person who walks in humility who is not abundantly and overly thankful. They constantly walk in thanksgiving. We are thankful to the Lord for everything, particularly for the people the Lord has surrounded us with. Can you imagine being in a culture where you are the only believer? I think about this young man we are discipling and working with in a remote Himalayan region, and we have invested a lot into this guy. He is the only person in that people group who is a believer, and every time we talk to him he says he is so encouraged to talk to us because he is discouraged often by the fact that he doesn’t have any Christian fellowship in his own community. Church, we should be thankful for one another, but we should act on that thanks by thanking God for one another. We should do that, and thanksgiving humbles us.

What happens is, when we give thanks to the Lord for each other, it humbles us, but when we don’t do it we tend to sort of compare ourselves to one another, and that can lead to a number of problems; maybe I want to exalt myself over someone else, or I become puffed up and talk down to somebody, or maybe I look at someone and I’m judgmental toward them, or talk ugly about them. But, when I’m giving thanks for the work of the Gospel in another persons’ life, it’s going to humble me, and it’s going to put that person right inside the viewfinder of the Gospel. I am looking at that person through the lens of the Gospel. We use that phrase, “the lens of the Gospel,” a lot. It’s kind of Christianese or a cliché. When we look at someone through the lens of what Christ has done for that person, and it lines up with what Christ has done for me, that’s going to humble me and level the playing field in my heart and mind. So, thanksgiving humbles us.

1. Thanksgiving also, as an attitude and as a prayer, keeps me in a mindset of receiving mercy from the Lord. So, let’s say that on your worst day you lose your job, and you are out of work with nowhere to go, and you have no idea how you are going to pay rent or put food in the refrigerator. What thanksgiving does is it puts me in a proper attitude toward the Lord, particularly as I look at what God has done in my life. It puts me in a mindset of receiving His mercy.

Follow this hypothetical train of thought. Is it not true that if I die of starvation, as a child of God I have received such an infinite portion of mercy that in a thousand eternities I will not remember what that hunger felt like? Here’s the beauty of it: Jesus said, “I give flowers food. I give birds food. You are going to get to eat. I’ll take care of you.”[[20]](#footnote-20) When we understand that our thanksgiving toward peripheral things like food, clothing, money, or a job, which are good things—when we thank God for His infinite mercy that is extended to us in Christ Jesus, then it puts us in a mindset so that whatever we encounter on a day-to-day basis at work, at school, or wherever, it is in the context that as a child of God, He has saved me. God has justified me. I have received mercy, and mercy has opened the door for me to be justified. Because, if God just came at us with justice, what would happen? We know what would happen—we would be condemned as sinners. You would burn in Hell for eternity. You need to know, if you have come to Red Oak to visit tonight, that if you don’t have a relationship with Jesus because you have never received the mercy poured out at the cross of Christ, you are bound for an eternity separated from God, and that is a just thing according to Scripture. So then, what the mercy of God does is it opens up the door to be received into the kingdom of God through the cross of Christ. On your worst earthly day, thanksgiving for the mercy of God, received in Christ Jesus at the cross, should be the very thing that you set your mind on in this life, in this world, and in this time. A mindset is critical.

1. The third thing that thanksgiving does is it simply helps me remember the Gospel. Every time I think about being thankful for God’s goodness—if you follow a train of thankfulness in your life, like “Thank you, Lord, for my church. Thank you for the pastors. Thank you for the elders and deacons. Thank you for the children.” We have like eight million children in our church. We are like rabbits. “I thank you, Lord, for this nation of little people who are growing up in this church. I thank you for the Gospel that is going to the nations that our church is a part of. I thank you for my job…” Get specific. “Thank you for that loaded omelet biscuit I ate this morning because I am not weak and famished right now.” Don’t just thank God when you are getting ready to stuff your face, with a rote prayer, like, “Thank you for this food and bless it to the nourishment of my body and my body to your service. Amen.” Don’t pray robotic prayers. Thank God that you ate today. What happens is when you begin to thank God for that kind of provision, it is a fast, speeding, bullet of a train until you are right into the lap of thanksgiving for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because, you realize that as good as God has been in giving you food, He saved you. He saved you! Thanksgiving is a good thing because it puts us in the proper mindset and it brings the Christian life into the right context.

So, we should thank the Lord for each other and it will make us a church of humble people, focused on Christ and focused on others. That’s a strong and healthy church. Focus on Christ, focus on each other, and focus on the nations. Thanksgiving will drive us to that, so it’s a good example that Paul sets when he said, in verse 16, “*I don’t cease to give thanks for you.”* He says, “I don’t cease.” There are two other places in Scripture where Paul says, *“Pray without ceasing,”[[21]](#footnote-21)* or *“Pray continually,”[[22]](#footnote-22)* so what we can probably draw from that is that any time Paul is going to the Lord in intentional prayer, part of that walk in prayer in Paul’s life is that he is thanking God for people. He is thanking God for the Ephesian church; he’s thanking God for the three people that got baptized here today; he’s thanking God that people have gotten saved at Red Oak; he is thanking God for what He is doing in the Church, so we need to learn from that and be like Paul in that sense. Because, what Paul is actually doing is he is being like Jesus.

We laid out our outline earlier and we said that Paul’s prayer breaks down into three big things.

1. The first thing is a better knowledge of Christ. In verse 18, he says, I want *“the eyes of your hearts enlightened.”* So, the first thing that Paul prayed for was better knowledge through the Word of God, and secondly Paul prays that they would have a deeper knowledge of Jesus. In verse 17,

*“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,”*

Paul prays for wisdom and insight, understanding that true wisdom and true insight come from a deepening knowledge of God and knowledge of the Word.

I didn’t plan this, but let’s go back to the biscuit analogy. One of the guys here, Vann Jones, told me that he had a monster biscuit today at Hardee’s. He said that when you go to Hardee’s, you ask them to put your monster biscuit on Texas toast. Then, they feel an obligation to fill the toast from border to border, so they put more stuff on it than normal. So, when Vann walked into my house this morning while I was frying bacon and eggs, and I invited him to eat with me, he said I was going to have to eat by myself because he was about to have a heart attack because they put so much stuff on his toast-biscuit.

But, here’s the way that food and nutrition work. I never knew this until I brought people into my home to nurse back to health, who had been dying of starvation[[23]](#footnote-23). They had been, literally, dying of starvation. You don’t start dying of starvation overnight. That’s not how it happens. So, the effects of starvation don’t reverse overnight either. We are eighteen months into this thing and we deal with very, very regular and frequent issues that are the result of a season of starvation. When you eat regularly you are healthier. I’m not talking about nutrition. For some of you, you think that a healthy meal is red meat and fried food. Some of you are vegans and you’ll come around. But, the thing about nutrition is you need to eat consistently.

I’ll never forget being on in Honduras one time on a work detail. We were working with some Honduran guys who were incredibly hard workers. We were working with concrete and those of us on the team we took down there thought that we would have to work super-fast and super hard to keep up with them. Everyone one of us was about two-hundred pounds, but the average weight of the work crew was about a hundred-thirty pounds. So, we were working, and hauling eighty-pound bags of concrete, and we were mixing, and working, and working, until about the four-hour mark, when the foreman came over and said we had to stop. He said, “My guys are hard workers but they have to work slow and steady. They can’t keep your pace.” Then, it dawned on me, that although the men were hard workers, over the course of a work day each one of them would have a couple of tortillas, a small bowl of beans, and a little bit of rice.

The food that you take into your body, physically, doesn’t just generate energy for you right now, but a lifetime of getting a full belly makes you strong and healthy. So, when you hit the wall in life, you can’t just go to the back of your Bible that someone gave you as a gift, which has a list of “read these verses when you are feeling this way.” Do you know what I’m talking about? There are lists that say that when someone has died…read these verses, or when your parents divorce…read these verses, or when you’re feeling blue…read these verses. What Paul is praying is for God to give them a deepening, constant, growing knowledge of His Word, so that when the wave comes, when the wall hits, or when they are backed into a corner, that they will be sustained because they have this deep knowledge and understanding of the God that Paul is getting ready to describe in the next four verses. Paul can lay out who Christ is, but it’s critical that we understand and know who Christ is. Paul wants them to know—to have this constant knowledge. For us to have that, it is critical that we be committed to the daily reading of, and studying of, and obedience to the Word of God in our lives. So, we are continually thanking God for the Gospel, and for what He’s doing in people’s lives, but we are also committed to the study of Scripture.

Through the years we have done several anonymous surveys in terms of what people’s lives look like in terms of reading and studying the Scripture’ and across the board the average American churchgoer/church member, by a huge percentage majority, does not read the Bible. They do not read the Bible. American church people don’t read their Bibles. Over half of you don’t read your Bible! You are consumer Christians! If you show up on Sunday and let someone shove spiritual meat into your mouth, if you don’t have the canines, and the incisors, and the teeth to process it, then it’s not going to do you any good. You have to chew, and consume, and digest the Word of God daily in your life.

As a man, you can’t love your wife well and raise your kids in the nurture, and discipline, and admonition of the Lord[[24]](#footnote-24) if your spiritual walk with the Lord, and your study of Scripture, and your prayer life is anemic. You can’t do that! It won’t work! It is no wonder that our teenagers are being sucked away by a tide of culture, because we are not showing them what it looks like to stand firm, in this day, with our eyes set on that day that is coming—the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour, our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ! The Word of God will build up that hope in you. You can’t be a church that ignores the Scripture in your life, daily. So, in your mind, how are you doing there? What does it look like for you? To take this Book, in your world, every day, do you open it?

Jesus said, “Bread is good. Meat is good. But what you need is the Word of God—every word.” “The grass withers, the flower fades, but this (God’s Word) is eternal,”[[25]](#footnote-25) and we need something rooted in us as we are rooted in Christ, so He has given us His Word. Paul said that he wanted their knowledge to increase through the understanding of the Scripture.

1. The second thing that Paul prays is for better spiritual vision. That’s how Kent Hughes worded it in his commentary[[26]](#footnote-26), “better spiritual vision.”

The young people here at Snowbird, who are serving on staff this summer, love to play this game called “Bodies.” Now, if you are over thirty, you have no clue and it sounds terrible. You are probably thinking of the game we played when we were kids, called “Operation,” when you tried to remove the body parts from the little man. But, the basic gist of the Bodies game is that you turn all the lights off and you have one person who is the murderer, and everyone else is just feeling their way around in the dark trying to not get murdered. It freaks them out and they get completely giddy, and silly, and goofy. Well, we have this glorious contraption here called infrared security cameras, and with these, Brodie Ellis and I sat in the booth up there and watched the game going on in the dark. The kids couldn’t see anything but we could see all of them, and it was one of the most entertaining things I have experienced in a long time. There were people with nothing in front of them walking along waving their arms like this, and others, who needed to be careful, charging headlong and getting their shins blown out from under them. The reason it was so entertaining for us to watch was because we had the right lens; we literally had night vision.

One of the reasons that modern warfare has changed so much is that combat now, predominately, occurs at night. We have figured out, through technology, how to do this. There was a time when, oftentimes, plans would have to be made for early, first-light attacks, because you can’t attack what you can’t see.

So, Paul has already prayed that the Ephesians would have this knowledge, and wisdom, and discernment, but now he takes it a step further and he asks for spiritual vision and perception. As our hearts are enlightened, and we gain wisdom and insight, we will have greater hope and confidence in our calling. Who said this? “I just don’t want to have hope. I don’t want to have confidence. I don’t want to be enlightened. I don’t want to have insight and I don’t want to have wisdom.” You know who said that? Nobody ever. Ever. That’s like saying, “You know what I don’t want? Food or oxygen.” These are the things that in our natural, human existence we desire. So, we need to live with confidence and hope only in Christ. The Ephesians knew this and they lived in a world that was really messed up. They lived in a world that was legitimately messed up and we live in a world that is legitimately messed up. So, Paul prays that they would have great spiritual vision.

Remember in 2 Kings 6, the story of Elisha, who was the prophet of God? They were surrounded by an enemy force and Elisha prayed because his servant was freaking out thinking that they were going to die and there was no hope. Elisha said, “Lord, just open his eyes and help him to see.” So, God opened his eyes and he saw angelic armies and hosts surrounding their position. You know what’s interesting about that scene? Go back and read 2 Kings 6. You know what’s interesting?—the servant doesn’t quit seeing the enemy. He doesn’t quit seeing the threat that is there. It’s not like he sees God’s protection and all of a sudden there is no threat. The threat is still there but the threat is diminished in light of the power and the awesomeness of God’s provision in his life. I think a lot of times we get it wrong when we pray for God to remove something from our lives, when a lot of times it is through the trial or through the difficulty that God is going to enlighten us and show us who He really is.

So, Paul has prayed that they have the eyes of their hearts enlightened, and in that second part of the prayer, where he prays for better spiritual vision and perception, he does it in three areas. So, in verse 18, he prays that they would have the eyes of their hearts enlightened, and now he is going to break that prayer into three sections. So, if you are an outliner, under Roman numeral one he prayed for knowledge, under Roman numeral two he prayed that their hearts would be enlightened. Now, we are going to go under that and there are three ways that he prays for that:

* + The first one is, he prays that they would have hope. In fact, he says, “the hope to which He has called you.” What is the hope he has called them to? Paul has called them in Christ.

We saw in the first half of the chapter, last week, at the end of the text we looked at in verses 13 and 14, where he says that the Holy Spirit seals them. When the Holy Spirit seals you it is because it is Christ you are in, and because before the foundation of the Earth, God started this work and process, and He saved you then, in Christ; because of that, Christ can handle keeping you.

One of the things that Christians in our doctrinal tradition love to bring up is the doctrine of eternal security. We love to say, “Once saved, always saved,” but a lot of people in the Bible Belt will use that as a license to sin. It’s the “It’s better to ask forgiveness than permission” kind of mentality attached to the Christian life. The doctrine of persevering to the end is not the doctrine of living however I want to live. So, I can’t say, “Well, God saved me when I was twelve and I know He is going to keep me. I know I’ll go to Heaven one day so from now until then I’ll do whatever I want to do.” We know that flies in the face of all of the theology of Scripture.

So, when Paul is praying for them to have this spiritual vision into “the hope to which He has called you,” he is saying that God called you into this relationship with Him, through Christ, and you are in Christ, and you are held up in Christ, and you are assured of salvation in Christ, and you are sealed by the Holy Spirit. There is a strong Trinitarian picture of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we are in that relationship, and it is an eternal relationship, both in eternity past, in that God predestined it, and in eternity future, in that God reserves for us an eternal inheritance, which Paul will get to next. So, Paul says, “God, let them have hope in that.”

Can you imagine this scenario? I know that there are several of our members who have endured cancer. Can you imagine that the day that you get the horrific report that you, or someone you love, has terminal cancer, if within moments of that you are promised that the outcome of that is going to be a clean bill of health? But, you are also promised that from this day until that day, it is going to be very painful, very difficult, the disease is going to take a lot out of you, exhaust you, wear you down, and the medical treatment that you are going to have to undergo is going to almost kill you, but in the end you will live a full and healthy life? It would make it so much easier to endure that, wouldn’t it? It would still be difficult but it would make it so much easier to endure it. Well, exponentially beyond that illustration is what God is promising us in this life. In the Ephesian church, at Ephesus, where riots were breaking out over Christianity, and where there was a heated climate where they wanted to kill Christians and were doing so, Paul said, “God, give them spiritual vision into the hope of their calling.” If you are a child of God, your hope is in your calling. It’s not in your marriage, it’s not in your portfolio, and it’s not in the property you own or the retirement you have awaiting. It’s not in your children and their future and it’s not in the finger-crossed hope that you will meet a spouse someday soon. Our hope is in Christ alone! The Psalmist David says, “In You I put my trust.”[[27]](#footnote-27) Period. What can mortal man do to me? Paul wants them to hope in Christ.

* + The second thing Paul wants them to have spiritual vision and perception into, is the “riches of His glorious inheritance.” In verse 18, he says, *“…what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.”* He wants them to see what God has awaiting for them.

I’ve thought about this. I’ve thought, “What if I found out that I had this big inheritance somewhere?” That was a fun little daydream. I just kind of went there in my mind. What if I brought my kids in and sat them down and said, “Hey, guys, I have some news for you. We have just been given a lot of money and a lot of land and I’m going to divide it amongst you”? Now, hypothetically, if they got excited about that, that wouldn’t be an insult to me. But, if they got excited about it, the next thing they did would show me how they view me as their father. If they got excited about it and then began to live lascivious lifestyles, running up credit card debt, thinking that one day they will pay it off but for now they abandon everything I’ve ever taught them and they put me and their mother in the rearview mirror and they are gone, that is way different from if they say, “Okay, this is good but this could be dangerous. Would you please walk us through what it’s going to look like to invest that money and guard that money? Would you please help us learn good work ethic and responsibility? We are excited and we are overjoyed that this money awaits us, but we see the dangers so please help us enjoy it for generations to come.” Those are two very different responses.

Paul wants the Ephesians to respond in a way that says, “We understand the inheritance that awaits us, so let’s live as those who have been redeemed, who are marked by the Holy Spirit, and who are literally sealed by the Spirit of God. Let’s live lives that way, victoriously awaiting the inheritance that God has for us.”

* + The third thing that Paul prays for them, in terms of spiritual wisdom and insight, is that God’s power and might would be in their lives. In verse 19, he says,

*“…and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might.”*

When you talk about the power and might of Jesus, or of God the Father, it’s a very difficult task, because the fact that he uses the word “immeasurable” makes it impossible to illustrate. Amen? I can’t come behind him and say, “Paul says it’s ‘immeasurable’ so it’s kind of like this.” I don’t need to be your preacher/pastor if I would say that. The word itself says it’s immeasurable, so I thought that rather than trying to measure the power of His might, we could just look at several verses from Scripture that reflect the immeasurable greatness of God’s power, because we can’t grasp it in our minds, period.

* 1 Timothy 6:16 says, “He dwells in inapproachable light.”
* Isaiah 6 says God is “wrapped in mystery.”
* John 4 says God is not even physical; He’s a Spirit.
* Psalm 50 says God has no needs. If He did have needs, He wouldn’t tell us because we wouldn’t understand them, but He has no needs.
* Mark records Jesus admonishing His hearers that He did not come be served, but to serve. Mark 10:45.
* Romans 11 says He cannot be repaid for His grace.
* Psalm 50 says He doesn’t ever get hungry.
* Psalm 121 says that God doesn’t ever go to bed and, maybe more importantly for some of us, He never takes naps.
* He is unbound by time.
* Romans 11 says He has perfect knowledge of all things.
* Colossians 1 tells us that He has never lost at anything. He cannot fail at anything. He owns everything and He is over everything.
* Colossians 1 also says that He holds all things and people in place.
* Romans 11 also says that no one can give Him counsel.
* Philippians 2 says He does not sin. All of creation will bow down to Him, and yet He humbled himself and was killed by us.
* Jeremiah 23. He is everywhere.
* Matthew 28. He is with me always.
* He has perfect and infinite knowledge. God is great. God is good. God is sinless.
* God is king of all the Earth in Psalm 47, and He is to be feared.
* His kingdom will never end, in Luke 1:33.
* Angels fear Him and little children sat on His lap.
* He’s more powerful than death and the grave has no hold on Him. 1 Corinthians 15.
* He’s the measure of all truth. John 14.
* He knows all things and there is no limit to His knowledge. Psalm 147.
* He is literally incomparable. Exodus 15:11.

We could go on, and on, and on and never exhaust even what Scripture says about the immeasurable greatness of God, but I think that this quote from Scottish pastor, James Stewart[[28]](#footnote-28), sums it up, amazingly. This comes by way of Ravi Zacharias in talking about Christ. Listen to this,

“He was the meekest and lowliest of all the sons of men, yet he spoke of coming on the clouds of heaven with the glory of God. He was so austere that evil spirits and demons cried out in terror at his coming, yet he was so genial and winsome and approachable, that the children loved to play with him and the little ones nestled in his arms. His presence at the innocent gaiety of a village wedding was like the presence of sunshine. No one was half so kind or compassionate to sinners, yet no one ever spoke such red-hot scorching words about sin. A bruised reed he would not break. His whole life was love. Yet on one occasion he demanded of the Pharisees, how they were expected to escape the damnation of hell. He was the servant of all, washing the disciples’ feet, yet masterfully he strode into the temple, and the hucksters and moneychangers fell over one another to get away in their mad rush from the fire they saw blazing in his eyes. He saved others, yet at the last, he himself did not save. There is nothing in history like the union of contrasts which confronts us in the gospels; the mystery of Jesus is the mystery of divine personality.”[[29]](#footnote-29)

In that, what we have is that Christ is the revelation of this God who is immeasurable and unknowable. People say, “I would believe in God, but I can’t see Him.” We have seen Him; His name is Jesus. And, He came into this world and humbled himself, so what is unattainable, unreachable, unapproachable, and could not be drawn near to—so He draws near to us, and puts us in himself, and literally ushers us into the throne room of God. Paul says, “I want them to know that! I want them to know His power and might in our lives!”

In the last four verses, Paul breaks it down “His power and might in our lives” this way.

1. The Resurrection. First, in verse 20, *“…he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead.”* Listen to this, “Just as the cross is the highest display of God’s love, so the resurrection is the ultimate display of God’s power. Just as the cross is the ultimate and highest display of God’s love, the resurrection is the ultimate display of God’s power.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Because, not only is Christ resurrected, but as we saw tonight, we are resurrected and raised with Christ. That’s what baptism is a picture of. So, in the resurrection of Christ, we see the power and the authority of God over death.
2. The Exaltation of Christ. The second thing that Paul points out in verse 20, *“…he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places,…”*. So, Christ is raised from the dead but then He is exalted. He is exalted to the right hand of the Father. That idea of a right-handed position is not what we often have in our minds. We all have a mental picture of God on the throne and Jesus beside Him positionally. The right hand of the Father is the same kind of position as the position of the firstborn; it is more a position of status. Don’t look at the geography of it, but rather look at the status. The right-hand position is basically the position of authority.

So, here are five things that the exaltation of Christ does for you and for me.

* + - 1. It completes the resurrection. If Christ is raised from the dead but isn’t exalted, somebody else already did that; his name was Lazarus. He died again so it was just an elongated resuscitation. If Christ is raised from the dead and the exaltation doesn’t happen, then He’s just a resuscitated man that eventually died again. So, the exaltation is paramount to understanding the resurrection. Understanding that is really cool because Jesus went to Heaven bodily, which means we are going to bodily go to Heaven. You and I, if you are a child of God, are going to be in a new Heaven, in a new body, with Christ, because He has gone before us! That’s a big part of the Good News! That should make you giddy some days. This is not all there is.
      2. He became the firstfruit of His people. So then, through our union with Him, we, too, will be exalted. Listen to 1 Corinthians 15:15, 20, 23[[31]](#footnote-31).

Verse 15,

*“We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised.”*

So, there is going to be a resurrection, y’all. Stop for a minute. Listen. You are going to die. Your heart is going to stop beating. Oxygen will no longer be taken into your lungs. Brain activity will completely stop. No blood will move through your body and there will be no life in your fingers, your arms, or your legs. You are going to die. Let that sink in. Every single one of us is going to die. Some people are going to come and gather around you and spend one hour condensing all that happened in your life. One hour, and then there will be a few stories told around campfires, or at Thanksgiving meals, but after one hour, all of your family and friends are going to sit around and eat fried chicken and potato salad, and talk about the ballgame, while your dead, lifeless, empty corpse is being carted away from the church. But then!!...There is coming a day when the God who breathed life into you the first time is going to resurrect that which is physically dead! He is going to resurrect that which the sting of death has touched, and is going to breathe eternal life into you, and forever we will reign with Christ, and that will happen because Christ has been exalted! He wasn’t just raised and your grandma ain’t going to stay dead. If she was in Christ you are going to be reunited with her. That’s glorious! Whoo!

* + - 1. Jesus ascended in order to be an intercessor for His people. He’s our High Priest. Hebrews 4:15 says, *“We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God.”* In the next verse, it says, *“Therefore, let us boldly approach the throne that we might receive grace and mercy in our time of need.”* Jesus ascended in order to be our intercessor. The exaltation of Christ gives us an intercessor.
      2. The Holy Spirit is poured out on us through the exaltation of Christ. Jesus prayed in John 14-16, and in three chapters He continually talked about how, “I’m going to go to the Father and that’s better for you because when that happens I am going to send my Spirit.” We see it happen in the book of Acts; the Spirit of God is poured out. The exaltation of Christ gives way for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit onto the Church.
      3. Most of all—His ascension leads to His super-exaltation over all things. That’s in the next two verses.

1. Christ’s dominion and authority. His ascension leads to His super-exaltation over all things.

Verse 21,

*“Far above all rule… and authority… and power… and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”*

Above every name that is named…over Mohammad, over Buddha, over Joseph Smith, and Brigham Young, and over David Koresh, and over Satan! Over Barack Obama, George Bush, Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, or whoever your man was in the last three decades. Christ’s name will be exalted over that guy because that guy wasn’t the savior of this place. That’s good news. So, we have His resurrection and we have His exaltation, and now we have Christ’s dominion and authority.

1. Headship over the Church.

Verse 22,

*“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”*

He’s our boss. I love it when people under my direct supervision refer to me as “boss.” It’s not because it’s this authoritative thing; it’s because it’s become a sort of term of endearment. So, I have a lot of college kids that I’m responsible for and they will come in the room and say, “Hey, boss!,” and I know they don’t mean it in a secular, factory-job way. It’s awesome—it’s a term of endearment and respect. I love it. Some other people call me some other things, but I like that one.

That Navy Seal that got shot in the face twice, got his left elbow blown out, had thirty-seven surgeries, and had complete facial reconstruction, has three people in this world who call him “Daddy.” Nobody else gets to do that. He’s more than a war hero to them.

The exaltation of Christ impacts, influences, and affects every created being. The resurrection of Christ influences, and impacts, and affects every created being. And the dominion and authority of Christ literally sustains and holds the Universe in place. But, the Fatherhood of God and the sonship of you and me, through Christ, affects us apart from the world. We are unique because we are in Christ. We have a heavenly Father, and for that, we should worship Him every day, with thanksgiving. The unique nature of our relationship to God is only possible in and through Jesus. I love that. I get to call Him “Dad.”

So, God’s great power is evident in all these things toward us, and my salvation rests on all of this, in Christ. I’m saved and I’m secure. Let’s pray.

God, I thank you for your Word. We have tarried long tonight, but what hope and promise we have in Christ! We rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and full of glory, that you have done what you’ve done. How firm a foundation and how great a salvation! What an exalted King you are! But, your power and your might are immeasurable. We can measure earthquakes because we have figured it out. We can measure the blast and effect of an atomic bomb because we have figured it out. We can measure the force of a tornado, but your power and your might are immeasurable, and yet they are put on display at the cross of Christ, and in the resurrection of Christ, and in the exaltation of Christ, and in your headship over us. Help us to see that and to have eyes that are enlightened, and hearts that are quickened, and a faith that is committed and resting in an object that is solid and that leads to hope. You are our hope and so we worship you as such. In Jesus’ name.

June 7, 2015

Ephesians 2 – Part 1

Rob Conti

A while back, I was watching an interview with George W. Bush, when he had just opened his presidential library. You know, each president gets a library that is used to document his time in office. He was making comments about how long he had posed for this portrait that was done of him. He was talking about the painting and he said something like, “In years to come, people are not going to ask ‘Who was this man?,” but they are going to ask, ‘Who was the artist?” The reporters kind of joked with him and he did his kind of “W” laugh and they moved on. But, the point he was making was that he was giving credit to the artist. He was saying, “It’s not about me, as the image that has been captured, but it’s about the tremendous skill and craft that went into making this portrait. As the person who posed, there is no glory that I should receive from this, but the glory should go to the one who made it.” So, ultimately, this work of art should point to the artist.

I have recently started listening to a particular band. For most people, that’s nothing big, but I haven’t intentionally listened to music since the Seattle grunge movement of the mid to late nineties. That was my genre, and then God saved me, and then I started listening to Rich Mullins. It was no longer about style. But, I’ve been kind of captivated by this one band and the depth they have. I enjoy their style and I enjoy their music, so I found myself, while taking breaks from study or whatever, going online and reading their bios. I’ve been reading about who they are and trying to get a glimpse into what their life is like. That’s natural, right? I appreciate their art, and I appreciate their music, and it makes me want to go beyond that and know who it is that created it. What is going on behind the scenes?

So, I think that if we can get what has already been going on in Ephesians, and see where we are going to land tonight when this passage ends—in that, we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, and that we are God’s workmanship, and it is God who has crafted us, and made us, and created us, and saved us to be who we are in Jesus—then it should point us back to Him, not toward us, right? When somebody looks at who we are, as a Christian, it shouldn’t draw attention to us, and our character, and what kind of person we are; it should draw attention to what kind of God Jesus is.

Remember in chapter 1, Paul was going through this exclamation of praise to God’s glory, and what He has done for us, in Christ. Over, and over, and over again, he says, “In Christ.” Right? In love, He predestined us unto adoption as sons. And over and over again, we are forgiven, and redeemed, and sealed by the Holy Spirit. We have this inheritance as a guarantee. And over, and over, and over again—three times in the passage—Paul comes back to saying “to the praise of His glory…to the praise of His glory…to the praise of His glory.” Hopefully, you are meditating on what is going on in Ephesians 2. As we learn who we are in Christ, and what our lives are to be, it should humble us and turn all of our attention back to the praise of His glory.

So, let me read the passage, ten verses, and I’ll give you the basic outline, and then we will just work through the text.

Ephesians 2:1-10,

*“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

Just as a basic outline, so you know where we are going:

* Verses 1-3 emphasize our shared, but very personal, past experience. As a Church, as believers, we have a shared past experience. If you are not a believer, and you are not in Christ, and you haven’t been rescued by the life, and the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, then this is your present reality. But, the way that Paul writes to the Church, it is our past experience.
* Verses 4-7 is the change for believers, in Christ, by God’s grace and mercy.
* Verses 8-10 are a summary of the nature of salvation, achieved and gifted by God.
* The main point that will be emphasized in the first half is that we were dead in trespasses and sins.
* What will be emphasized in the middle, that changes everything, is the phrase “by grace you have been saved.”
* And, on either side of this—with “by grace you have been saved” being what this whole passage hinges on—on both ends bookending it, is “walking.” What we are going to see in the beginning of our text is that we were dead in sins and we walked in it. “Walking” being a manner of life; the way that we lived. We *formerly* lived in sins and trespasses and what characterized our life *was* sinful thoughts, sinful words, and sinful deeds. But, the other bookend is that *now*, these good works that God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them, characterize our life *now* because God has recreated us and we are His workmanship.

So, with those as the bookends and that as our outline let’s work through the text.

Verses 1-3,

*“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*

I have a quote here from John Edie on what it means to be “dead.” He’s a nineteenth century Scottish preacher and I’ve been listening to him on podcast. He said this: “Men without Christ are death walking. The beauties of holiness do not attract man in his moral insensibility, nor do the miseries of Hell deter him.”

What he’s saying is that we are the walking dead. The beauty of God, reflected in creation, won’t attract the natural man. We are dead to it. There is no sensitivity to who God is and what He has given us. Like Romans 1 says, we can look at the beauty of creation and, instead of giving thanks to the Creator, we can set ourselves up as our own gods. Our minds are foolish and our hearts are darkened to the reality of the one true God. We are not attracted to Him and, in and of ourselves, we are not drawn to Him. We are dead. The most true and defining reality of anyone is their relationship to God, so the dead here are dead because they are in sin and not in Christ. They are dead to God; dead to living for the praise of His glory, and that is not real life. Real life is breathed out by God into mankind so we have the breath to praise Him.

This is painting a picture that what was true of us before Christ, and what is true of all mankind is that we were children of wrath. We were dead in sins and trespasses. But true life, the life that God gave us, if we go back to Genesis where God was breathing life into Adam—why did He do that? Why did God take dirt and fashion it into the shape of a man and breathe life into him? Why did God create us? Why did God create you? Our kids could answer this[[32]](#footnote-32). It’s for His own glory. What has all of this been about? For the praise of His glory.

I don’t know for sure, because I wasn’t there, so I don’t know what Adam’s first words were. But, if I was a betting man I would bet that Adam’s first words, when the breath of God filled his lungs, and his heart beat, and his brain came alive, were, “Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty, Who was, and Who is, and Who is to come again!!”[[33]](#footnote-33) Because, that is what life is about. That is what real life is; to know, and to worship, and to serve, and to praise the one true God. Anything short of that is death, and Paul says, “This is where you all were. You were dead.” Why? Because you weren’t living for the glory of God. You were dead in sins and trespasses. You were rebels and you were hostile in your minds toward God. You were enemies of God. That’s not life; that’s death.

Just as believers are already experiencing a foretaste of what we have in Christ, and the inheritance to be fully realized at the end of the age, so also those who are still in sin are experiencing a foretaste of the eternal death that awaits. They are separated from the life and the glory of God. They are separated and alienated from God. They don’t see His beauty in creation and they don’t love the name of Jesus. They are without God in the world. This is the death that mankind has been living since Adam brought the curse on. God said to Adam, in

Genesis 2:16-17,

*“You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”*

We know the story. The curse was laid down and Adam and Eve were driven from the Garden. God said, “Lest they reach out their hand and eat of the Tree of Life and live forever.”[[34]](#footnote-34) They were separated and driven out from the presence of God, where they had communion, and relationship, and intimacy with their Creator. Adam would recognize the sound of God walking in the Garden, but that was now gone and there was death.

Turn over to chapter 4, to further illustrate what this death is like.

Ephesians 4:17,

*“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.”*

The emptiness, the pointlessness, and the vanity of their minds.

Verse 18,

*“They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”*

It can seem drastic to talk this way about real people, right? Can we time out for a minute and pretend that these walls aren’t here, and my voice isn’t contained to this room? What if we were surrounded by all of our family and friends who don’t know Christ? Picture that in your mind. What if we were surrounded by all of the people that we care about, and we love, and we want to see come to Christ? What if those people were here, right now, hearing these words? How many of us would be uncomfortable and think, “Shouldn’t we just tell them about God’s love? Let’s not say that they are spiritually dead. That’s offensive.” Let me put it this way; how many of us, when we go home and we are around those people, see them through that lens?

It’s easy to categorize the really, really bad people, right? Murderers, rapists, child molesters are “children of wrath” and spiritually dead. But, what about men who work really hard, and are honest, and moral, and don’t cheat on their wives, and love their kids, and go to work, and provide a living, and give to starving kids in Africa, and vote pro-life? What about those guys? Frankly and honestly, I’m amazed at people like that who don’t know Christ. Because, I remember where I was when God saved me. I remember the trajectory that I was on and it wouldn’t have landed me here. I look at people who live, in the world’s eyes, successful and good lives, and I’m amazed by it. It would seem drastic to say that guy is spiritually dead, and that he is a child of wrath, but that is the truth of God. Because, that man or that woman, at best, are living for the comfort and security of their family. At best, they are trying to make good decisions, but they are not living for the glory of God. That man is not living his life to the praise and the glory of the name of Jesus Christ. That is what we were made for and anything short of that is total depravity. We were created to, with our bodies, and our minds, and our souls, to worship Jesus, and He alone is worthy of it. It is a tragedy when somebody lives their whole life, and does good by everybody else’s standard, to find out in the end that they fall short of the standard of God, and that they are not righteous, but they are wicked to the core, and they are deserving of eternal death.

We are dead in trespasses and sins. Trespasses and sins both bring about the condition of death and characterize the existence of those who are spiritually dead. Here’s a comment by Andrew Lincoln,

“Trespasses and sins. It emphasizes the totality of the sinful condition of life outside of God’s saving grace.[[35]](#footnote-35)”

Verse 1,

*“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked,”*

Again, “walked” here means how we live; it’s an idiom for how people live life. It’s what characterizes you and is most true about you. God is saying that what was most true about us, pre-Christ, is that we lived and walked in sin and rebellion against God. Whether it’s what we would call “big sin,” like murder and rape, or whether it’s the sins of pride and lust that take place inside your head and that nobody else ever sees, it characterizes who people are outside of Christ.

The passage continues,

*“Following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom”* (referring back to “the sons of disobedience”) *“we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*

Here are three things:

1. We are following this world. These are the systems of society and culture that are devoid of the wisdom and direction and, ultimately, the worship of God. The system is in place. Wherever you go around the world, there is culture and society and there are pervading thoughts that link those people together, and all of that has been created by sinful man, in the passions of their flesh, and the darkness of their minds, and ultimately, what’s behind that is the prince of the power of the air. So we have this world system and we are following its wisdom and its definition of success in marriage, and relationships, and masculinity, and what it means to be a woman, and what it means to be a parent.
2. There is nothing new under the Sun; it’s just that you and I live in a culture where this is becoming more and more prevalent as we get further and further away from not being a Christian nation, but being a nation that looks to the values of Christianity. It’s evident what’s behind this, right? Have you read an article and just thought, “What in the world?!” Have you watched a segment on the news and said, “How can they think like that?!” Have you seen a picture on the cover of *Vanity Fair* and thought “How did we get here? How is this being championed in our culture?”[[36]](#footnote-36) Man, it’s the world system and behind it is the prince of the power of the air. Right? It’s not a mystery. It’s only a mystery to us when we stick our head so far down in the sand that we forget that there’s a real battle going on. There really is an enemy. This world is our enemy and it’s also the enemy of all the sons of disobedience; they just don’t know it because their eyes and their minds have been blinded to the truth of who God is. They follow blindly. The worst kind of slavery is thinking that you’re free. We live in a culture and a country where people think that all they do, day-in-and-day-out, is do what they want to do when they make decisions. Whether that’s the guy shooting meth or the man coming home, kissing his kids, and tucking them in, and not saying a word about Jesus. It is slavery to sin and to the prince of the power of the air. It’s not freedom. You and I, those of us who are in Christ, were under the dominion of Satan, and so many people who we love and care about still are.
3. Not everyone is as sinful as they could be. The point is that Satan isn’t concerned about wanting everyone to be a rapist, a murderer, shooting meth, organizing dogfights, or caring more about dogs dying than babies being killed in the womb. Depravity is just as much about the person who does well in this world and treats God as if He isn’t God. This world, Satan, and our flesh are fallen and self-centered in nature; controlled by sensual desires and poisoned by a darkened mind. We are, by nature, children of wrath. We are condemned. Romans 2 tells us how we will all be judged based on our deeds. The Bible says, repeatedly, that for those who aren’t in Christ, all there is, is an expectation of wrath, fury, judgment, and tribulation, and distress.

I want to make a comment about God’s wrath. “God’s wrath is not a bad temper; it is not God losing it. God’s wrath is not spite. It is not born out of a desire to hurt or to inflict pain. God’s wrath is not malice, or a desire for evil or to be unkind. God’s wrath is personal, righteous, constant hostility to evil; it is settled refusal to compromise with it and His resolve, instead, to condemn it.”[[37]](#footnote-37) By our nature, we are under God’s wrath, because we come from Adam; because he did reach out and eat of The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. That sin brought death and death brings wrath. But, again, let’s not think that we are paying off a debt that Adam made. The bill doesn’t just keep getting passed down. The Bible is very clear that we all sinned in Adam. We were there with him. We are one race and one people and we rebelled against God. We were created to love Him, and to honor Him, and to worship Him, but instead, we have worshipped ourselves, rebelled against Him, and hated Him. In Adam, we all died because in Adam we all sinned. That is why we, by nature, are children of wrath, and out of that nature we sin in thought, and in deed, and in word.

When we are dead and unresponsive, unable to resurrect ourselves, pay for our sin, or live a righteous life, we have no hope. We’ve all heard this before; what does a dead person respond to? Nothing. What does a spiritually dead person respond to? Nothing. He can’t resurrect himself or make himself alive. He can’t make peace with God or atone for his sin. He can’t go to the cross and shed blood. He can’t recreate himself. He’s dead.

So, the band is going to come up and play something melancholy and depressing and we will leave. Why are you laughing? What? What did you say?! “But God!!!” Thank you. Yes!! “But God….” That is our condition outside of Christ and that is who you and I are. The message of this world is, “You don’t have any hope!” But God….But God, who is rich in mercy!!!

I asked Marissa last night what she thought this meant, “To be rich means to have a lot of something. So, what is mercy?” and she said, “Kindness and compassion.” I told her she was absolutely right. Let’s read it,

Ephesians 2:4-5,

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.”*

This is so good, but until we feel the weight, and the reality, and the horror, and the terror of the wrath of God, we will never know how beautiful, and gracious, and loving, and kind, and sweet the grace of God is. So, we must proclaim the truth that we are dead in trespasses and sins apart from God. It is only in Christ that we have hope. “But God…” This initiative is launched because God is a God, not only of righteousness, and not only of righteous wrath, but also of endless mercy. For no other reason than His love, God has rescued men and women from death and given them life. The pairing together of love, grace, mercy, kindness, and faith is a full orb picture of what in the Old Testament was the word *hesed*. In fact, most likely, when Paul penned this and used the words “grace” and “mercy”, he was thinking of the word *hesed*; of God’s covenant love toward us and of a love truly only God can produce. We see glimpses of it in David’s relationship with Jonathan, and we see a shadow of it in the way that Boaz and Ruth interact, but only God can truly produce this kind of love.

Let me read to you about it. “This is the covenant love, the lovingkindness of Yahweh, the loyal love, the one-way love of God toward those who are undeserving and unlovable. It is persistent and unconditional tenderness, and mercy; a relationship in which He seeks after man with love and mercy. It is a love that never fails, never quits, never runs out. God’s lovingkindness flows from His position of absolute power, majesty, and compassion. God has chosen to make a promise, this covenant, to love us faithfully, loyally, persistently, and kindly, by constantly pouring out on us grace and mercy. He is not only compassionate toward us in our sin, He has the power to motivate, to love us, and to rescue us. This did not happen because He saw in us something that created in Him a love for us. Yahweh’s *hesed*, His steadfast covenant and loyal love, and His overflowing, active compassion is freely exercised, excluding all ideas of merit on the part of its object. There is no good definition for it. We can’t comprehend it.”

What did we just get done saying? God has mercy and compassion. What does that mean? It means He looks down on us. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. We can’t save ourselves. We can’t make ourselves alive. We have nothing to offer and nothing to give. But, more than that, we have no beauty. There is nothing lovable about this dead corpse, especially since it is dead because it rebelled against God. There is nothing that came from us that created in God even a flicker of compassion. This should resonate with us, because if we are honest with ourselves, you and I, what we mostly experience in the way of love, is that we love something because we see value in it, we see beauty in it, and we see in it something lovable. Then, we respond with love. How great God’s love is because the flicker that created it is just who God is. God is love. Out of God’s own nature and character He chose to pour out on us His lovingkindness, His faithfulness, and His loyalty. He chose to bring us into a relationship where, instead of receiving the wrath that we deserve because of our sins and our trespasses, we stand and receive wave, upon wave, upon wave, upon wave—for all of eternity—wave upon wave of His mercy and His grace, His compassion and His favor, becoming the objects of His divine endless, limitless love.

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved”*

*“By grace you have been saved.” “He made us alive together with Christ —by grace you have been saved.”* Let me read to you from chapter 1:18. This is what Paul is praying that we would understand.

*“Having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might 20 that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.”*

Why did Paul want us to know that? Why did he want us to see that? Why did he want our eyes to be opened to the reality of this power that raised Christ from the dead; and didn’t just raise Him but enthroned Him; and didn’t just enthrone Him, but put Him over every other power in this world? Why did he want us to know that? Because we’ve been raised with Him. Because we have been raised with Christ and we are no longer characterized by our sins and our trespasses. We are no longer under the dominion of Satan in this world system. Why? Because Jesus. Because Jesus took our sins and our trespasses. Because Jesus made himself vulnerable to the powers and the authorities that dominated this world. Because Jesus died the death that we were supposed to die. And because Jesus rose again, in victory over all of it, having satisfied, and absorbed, and extinguished the wrath of God, on our behalf, and He rises above every name, every power, every dominion, including the prince of the power of the air, the usurper from the Garden. Jesus has dominion over him, and you and I, in Christ, have been raised with Him.

The picture here isn’t exactly like Romans 6. The picture in Romans 6 is that we died with Christ and went in the grave with Christ, and came back out to walk in newness of life. That’s awesome! There are so many aspects and angles of the Gospel that there is not one book or one verse that could possibly capture it. Here, in Ephesians, Paul is saying, “Do you see the picture? You are a dead corpse that’s in the grave. It’s further than the grave; you are on the bottom of the ocean, dead, and bloated, and helpless. And Jesus went into death and went down and grabbed you by the hand and lifted you up by the back of your neck, and breathed new life into you, just like God breathed life into Adam. He has breathed new life, by salvation, into our mortal bodies. He didn’t leave us there, but our eyes opened, oxygen filled our lungs, and our hearts beat again, and He brought us up out of death. But, we didn’t stop there, we went with Him and we got seated in the heavenly places, where all these blessings in chapter one are true, and real, and unchanging, where moth and rust can’t destroy. We are there with Him. That’s who we are. So, once again, like I believe Adam did, we can live our lives to the praise of His glory. You and I can say, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, who was, and who is and who is to come again.[[38]](#footnote-38)” Once again, we have been recreated to be the people God intended us to be; worshippers of the one true God.

John 5:24,

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*

I got ahead of myself and skipped down to the second section, but that’s okay. If you get ahead of yourself while preaching the Bible, that just means that you get to preach something awesome twice.

*“By grace you have been saved.”* We didn’t earn it and we didn’t respond to anything on our own. We were dead and past feeling and God acted on our behalf. We were saved. The word here speaks of the completed work that has ongoing results in the believer’s new life. We were saved.

Typically, when Paul talks about grace and faith and he couples those words together, which he does often, he is typically speaking of justification, but here he uses the broader term of salvation. He just finished with chapter one, and you just can’t read that chapter enough. I hope you know that; you just can’t read Ephesians 1 enough. You read of the blessings of salvation. This is a completed act and we have it; but because we have it, it should have ongoing work in our life. It should mean something for how we live.

Verse 6,

*“And raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”*

I feel like we should stop right there. I’m not going to, so don’t worry, but, can we handle this much goodness in one text!? I mean, for real! I don’t have any more words. I’m fairly limited in my vocabulary and I just want to keep saying awesome, cool, sweet, and amazing. This is amazing, right?! This is awesome! How sweet is this?! It just keeps getting better, and deeper, and wider than we could imagine. We were dead in our sins and our trespasses and we deserve wrath and Hell, but we’ve been given grace and limitless love, *“So that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace.”*

The way that this is written is similar to chapter one. Lincoln points out that, like Ephesians 1:3-14, the ultimate goal of salvation was seen as the glory of God. That’s so foundational. Teach it to your kids and teach it to yourself. We exist for the glory of God. That will keep you out of a lot of trouble. We exist for the glory of God and we were saved for the glory of God. He breathed new life into us so that we would praise His name and exalt Him with our lives.

*“Ages to come.”*

1. The first point here is that age after age, as God saves people from sin, death, and Hell, and transforms their lives, it would be a demonstration to the following generations of the immeasurable riches of His grace. I always thought that this just meant “in Heaven,” right? In Heaven and in the ages to come, like “When we’ve been there ten thousand years,”[[39]](#footnote-39) that we would just continue to sing of God’s grace as we have received it. But, the picture here is that our lives, when God redeems us and takes us from being those corpses characterized by sin, and makes us alive so that we are characterized by good works that God predestined that we walk in, that the next generation will see it, and what they see in it will be limitless grace. This has been going on for two thousand years—limitless grace generation after generation. People have been saved by the Gospel and their natural response is to worship God, serve Him, and proclaim the name of Jesus, so that age after age the grace of God would be made known.
2. Second, what we have experienced of the grace here and now is nothing to what we will know of it throughout eternity. This grace is limitless, right? It’s infinite. There is no bottom to it; it doesn’t run out and it doesn’t run dry. The immeasurable riches of His grace, and kindness, and His sympathetic concern and goodness toward us; all of this is available to us only in the person and the work of Christ. It is the work and the person of Christ that unlock the grace and kindness of God toward us. Do you see that in the text? Read it again.

Verse 7,

*“So that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”*

It’s in Christ. Let’s not forget that it’s in Christ. We only have this because of the life of Christ; because Jesus humbled himself to become one of us. We only experience for all of eternity the love of God because Jesus left the throne, and humbled Himself, becoming one of us; not just becoming a human, but becoming a servant. Jesus humbled Himself to death. Jesus willingly laid down His life so He could, in power, take it back up.

Verses 8-9,

*“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

Paul wants to make it crystal clear that we didn’t earn this. We didn’t earn it and we don’t deserve it. It is grace, through faith. It’s the gift of God. All of it is the gift of God. The grace is a gift of God; salvation is a gift of God; being adopted, forgiven, loved, all of it is the gift of God. The faith is a gift of God. Scripture is clear that we are not the source of our faith. Our faith, when we hear the truth of the Gospel, as a response, is an absolute gift of God. Jesus is the author and the founder of our faith. He is the source of our faith.

Grace and faith are inseparable companions, which together provide the antithesis to any suggestion of human merit. God’s act of grace is the ground of salvation, and faith is the means by which it becomes effective in a person’s life. By grace we have been saved through faith. It’s such a contrast from being dead in sins and trespasses and being a child of wrath.

I want to stop here and be clear. If that is you—if your life isn’t characterized by a love for Jesus that produces a serving of Jesus and a praising of His name—if your life isn’t lived for the glory of God—if what characterizes you is those things God calls sin; pride, lust, envy, you name it—this amazing salvation truly is a gift. The good news is that you can’t earn it; the good news is you can’t save yourself; and the good news is that if you would hear this Gospel and you would hear this truth and believe, and trust, and put your faith in Jesus—not to put your faith in yourself and one more time try to pull yourself up by your bootstraps, and do better, and clean up, and try to live right, only to fail again—but if you would put your faith and your trust in the perfect life that Jesus lived, and the death He died on your behalf, and the resurrection that He alone could produce—He will rescue you, He will save you, and you will pass from death to life, and you will become an object of His never-ending, unrelenting, persistent, loyal love, and it will totally change who you are. It will totally change your identity. You will never be the same. You will never get bored of hearing about it. A sermon about it cannot go too long for you.

One more thing about verse 9; “not a result of works so that no one may boast.” Religion devoid of Christ leads to boasting and self-righteousness, and that was never the point. The point is always the worship of Jesus. Works, where we try to earn God’s favor, lead to boasting. Grace leads to good works that are praise to God. It might not seem like a big difference, except for verse 10.

Verse 10,

*“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

God has created us to serve Him and to love Him. God had things for Adam to do before he fell. He was to serve God and work for the glory of God. It would have been good, and it would have been good for Adam to find joy in producing those good works. What perverted it was the Fall. For those of us in Jesus, we need to realize that we are His workmanship, and that He has created us again, made us new, and given us new life. Your testimony, whether God saved you when you were four years old and it clicked, or you were eight years old and God opened your eyes, or you were forty-five and you have a life of regret behind you; whatever it looks like, you are His workmanship, crafted and designed for His glory. It’s beautiful. Not so that we get to draw attention to ourselves, but God, through us, will draw attention to Himself, as we do good works, and good deeds, and as we obey Scripture. In fact, the second half of this book is all about things that we should do and some things we shouldn’t do.

This might mess some of you up, but Christianity is a religion. We have a religious leader, we believe things about Him, and there are things He has told us to do and not do. What separates it from being just religion is that it is all grace. The good deeds we do are grace, because He gives us the desire and the ability to do them through His grace and mercy.

The second half of this letter will give us greater insight into what it means to walk in good works. Right? Remember our outline? We started this life walking in trespasses and sins. Now, we end it walking in good works because of God’s grace; because right in the middle is *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ.”* So, the rest of the book will walk us through what this looks like, but I went ahead and jotted down some things that stood out to me. Walking in good works will look like:

* Humility
* Gentleness
* Patience
* Loving each other
* Fighting for unity
* Fighting for peace
* Not being thrown around by false doctrine
* Speaking the truth
* Not being ruled by anger
* Only speaking what is good and edifying
* Being kind
* Being tenderhearted
* Forgiving others as Christ has forgiven us
* Not living sexually sinful lives
* Being thankful
* Being alive in the truth and exposing what is false
* Being wise
* Not being filled with alcohol, but rather being filled with the Spirit
* Speaking Scripture to one another
* Singing Christ exalting songs
* Submitting to each other
* Reflecting the Gospel in our marriages
* Obeying parents
* Parents who don’t provoke their children but invest in their sanctification
* Being an honorable employee and an honorable boss
* Arming ourselves with Scripture
* Praying always

….It’s going to look like that, as we go through the rest of the book, as to what it means to walk in good deeds. But, this is our starting point; we are only able to do those things because of the limitless, unsurpassing grace and mercy of God that flows out from an infinite nature of love toward us, in Christ Jesus.

So, for the believer, the Christian, the danger is that we look not to the grace of God but look to our own lives and our own ability. The danger is that we cut ourselves off from the flow of truth and begin to allow our minds to be manipulated, again, by this world’s system. When we lose sight of it, it will lead to boasting and to vain, empty thinking; and we won’t live for the glory of God and we won’t proclaim the Gospel.

So, I think that Shawn’s challenge[[40]](#footnote-40) at the start of the service was appropriate. Think about your week and your life, because as a child of God, when we set our minds on the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, and realize that what Paul is saying here is that our position in Christ is so sure that it is as if we are already there with Him, how can we not live it out, and how can we not extend to others the grace we have received? How can the love of God, which is an endless river of love, not overflow our lives and splash onto everyone we come into contact with? If it isn’t, then set your mind on the things above; open the Scripture and see what God has done for you and who He has made you to be. The flow will turn back on and the torrent will wash over you, anew.

Again, for those of you who don’t know Christ, I beg you to repent, because the wrath and the fury this chapter starts with is very real, and all that is for you is a fearful expectation of judgment. I beg you to repent and to have Christ wash your sins away and recreate you; to pull you up out of death and raise you up with Him. I beg you to cry out for salvation.

There will be a few of us up front, so that if you would be as bold as to come up front as we sing about the Lord, I would love to talk to you about the Gospel. I’d love to talk to you about what it means to follow Christ. I love that I can say this about our church—I’d say that you’d be pretty safe, if you went to about ninety-eight percent of the people in here that they would be able to tell you what it means to follow Jesus. I love our church. Let me pray for us.

Father God, thank you – thank you for your grace and thank you for your mercy. God, I pray that as we go into this time of worship and singing about the things that you have done, that we would see again, with new eyes, just how awesome your grace is; that we wouldn’t take for granted our position and that we would remember who we used to be and that we would have an emotional response to your Gospel. I pray that our minds would be flooded with the reality of your goodness and that it would lead us to sing to the praise of your glory. I pray that we would shout the name of Jesus and that we would exalt you. And, I pray that as we leave and those emotions abate, and that as we go into this week, that we would be steadfast and determined to live in the good works that you ordained that we walk in. I pray that we would be steadfast and committed in our desire and our resolve to share the Gospel with as many people as we can. Because of your grace and for your glory, in Christ’s name, Amen.

June 14, 2015

Ephesians 2 – Part 2

Brody Holloway

Let’s read the text in Ephesians 2:11-22,

“*Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— 12 remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility 15 by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. 17 And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, 21 in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. 22 In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.”*

This is the Word of the Lord.

When we were in Uganda, we lived in a community that was predominately South Sudanese refugees. South Sudan became a country when it broke away from Sudan several years ago; so now you have two countries, Sudan and South Sudan. There is a lot of fighting happening in Sudan that is trickling down into South Sudan, and that fighting is predominately between two of the people groups there, the Nuer and the Dinka. It’s estimated that they have been killing each other for about three thousand years. The people of the one group there grow up with a hatred for another group of people who basically look just like them. I couldn’t tell them apart. There are no real distinguishing physical characteristics, but although they are all tall people, I was told that the Dinka are somewhat taller.

When we were over there at the end of 2013, there was some intense fighting going on. There was bloodshed in the street and it was really bad. So, some of the wealthier people had fled to south-central Uganda, to the capital city, which is called Kampala. As Africa goes, it’s a pretty stable city with a decent infrastructure. Now, usually, when you think of refugees, you think of homeless people, but these were the wealthy people from South Sudan, and their age range was about eighteen to thirty. They came down and enrolled in the international university there. Because of our connection with the Dinka in South Sudan, which is the group that the Echelon team[[41]](#footnote-41) is primarily targeting, I was excited to get to know some of these Dinka folks.

You could usually tell who the Dinka were because of the beaded scars they put on their foreheads and their faces[[42]](#footnote-42). It’s raised up and it looks like beads under their skin. But, the refugees would be in suits and business casual; very well dressed. They were the well-to-do of the Dinka people and I got to know several of those men. So, one day I was walking down the street with Kilby and I saw a couple of Dinka fellas walking on the other side of the street whom I had spent some time talking with. They were believers. So, I yelled across the street and I said something like, “Hey, my Dinka brothers!!” Now, they all had nicknames and they had a nickname for me, which was “meat-eater.” They were all very skinny people so they would say, “Yes, my meat-eating brother!” Anyway, we had met several times and we were headed up the street toward them, so I said, “What’s up, my Dinka brothers?!” Well, they were just out of ear-shot in this crowded street and I thought they had made eye-contact, but, instead, a couple of Nuer men, who were about halfway between us, had made eye-contact and had heard me yell, and they thought I was yelling at them and calling them “Dinka.” What I didn’t know what that, in coming into Kampala, these two groups had found a kind of civil co-existence. They didn’t fight. They were there to go to school and they were professionals, but I didn’t know how deep-seated their resentment toward the others was. So, it turned into a really intense moment in the street. In fact, with the exception of one time when a guy hit on Kilby, it was the only time I thought I might get killed the whole time I was living over there. Now, I have this problem where I giggle when stuff like that happens, and I said to Kilby, “If this gets bloody, you just need to run back to the compound as fast as you can.” I guess my giggling was good because it helped to keep her calm. But these guys headed across the street, yelling stuff in their native tongue, and I held up my hands and was saying, “Whoa, whoa, you have got to chill,” while in my mind I’m thinking that I didn’t know it was that big of a deal.

But, the fighting between the Dinka and the Nuer goes back for dozens of centuries, and the hatred that existed in the first century between the Jews and Gentiles went back for centuries. You have to really press into world history to understand the social climate, including several events that had happened right up to the time of Christ.

If you’ve have heard of a man named Antiochus Epiphanes[[43]](#footnote-43), he was an Greek leader and he had defiled the Jewish temple during a time when they were conquering that part of the world. It was during the time of the Maccabean Revolt[[44]](#footnote-44) and there was a lot of violence and bloodshed. The Jews felt very offended by the fact that they had been displaced from their motherland that God had given to them seven hundred years before this. They had been displaced and they were living with only a part of the promise that God had given to them, and they were looking for a great military warrior to lead them as a Messiah against the kingdoms of the world. Under the Greek Empire, they thought that God was going to raise up a Messiah, and under the Persian Empire they thought God was going to raise up a Messiah, so now, they are under Roman rule, and they are thinking that God is going to raise up a Messiah. There was a lot going on in the world at that time and one of the things that happened was that this man came into Israel and he butchered and sacrificed a pig on the altar in the Temple. So, there was a seething hatred that went beyond the color of someone’s skin or a cultural difference; there was a hatred that drove into the religious identity of these two different nations – Israel being one nation and the rest of the world – the Gentiles – being the other nation. So, the Jews hated the Gentiles and there is nothing worse for someone who lives with hatred in their heart than to hate somebody and not be able to do a single thing about it. They couldn’t do anything about it because the Jews weren’t in power. The Romans were, the Gentiles were, and the Greeks had been in power before them. So, the Jews couldn’t do anything about it and in response to this hatred there had grown an equally spiteful hatred of Gentile toward Jew.

So, last week we were in the first half of chapter 2 of Ephesians. If you are new to Red Oak, we just preach through books of the Bible. In the first half of chapter 2, Paul lays out for us what our reconciliation to God looks like. As Christians, we are those who once were dead in our trespasses and sin and we were made alive together with Christ. We identify with the resurrection of Jesus. In chapter 1, Paul had said that before the foundation of the Earth God had in love, in himself, and for His purpose, chosen to save us. So, there is this powerful picture that has been painted up to this point of reconciliation between man and God. What we need to know is this: If you have a need for reconciliation between man and man, such as you have conflict with a brother, or a sister, or a family member, or a neighbor, or someone from another tribe, or race, or creed, that reconciliation will never happen until reconciliation happens between man and God.

I read a story in a commentary where the author was quoting a secular book. Someone had told the story of two sisters who had never married. They lived together all their lives and when they were in their sixties they had a falling out over something. It was most economical that they continue living together in this little one-room apartment, so they drew a line down the middle of the room and from age sixty to something like age eighty-five, when the first one died, they never spoke another word to each other. They just coexisted. You might think that is over-the-top, or crazy, or out there, but people live in that kind of conflict all the time. People turn their backs on family members and people live in racial conflict, and we live in a world where it is easy for us, as Christians, to know that there is a need for man to be reconciled to God, but oftentimes miss the reality that there is a need for reconciliation within the human race, in a thousand different areas, that each one of us comes in contact with. Probably, the closest we get to grasping this is that we say that there is racial tension in our country. Listen, there is racial tension in our country but it’s nothing like what exists in the rest of the world. We live in a fallen, broken world.

Remember when God went to Abraham in Genesis 12, He said, “I’m going to bless you and raise up many nations. I’m going to raise up a nation of people called the Jews and that’s the nation the Messiah is going to come through.” God had actually said to Abraham, “All the nations of the world will be blessed through you.” Now, less than two-thousand years later, the Jews are not only *not* blessing the nations of the world, they have rewritten the laws.

For instance, in the first century, if a Jewish boy took a Gentile wife the family would excommunicate him and hold his public funeral. If a Jewish girl married outside the Jewish faith, and married a Gentile boy, she would be excommunicated from her family and they would actually have a funeral. They had some crazy sayings that demonstrated their hatred; for instance, the Jews said that, “God created Gentiles to stoke and fuel the fires of Hell.” Another cliché was that if a Gentile woman was giving birth a Jew should not do anything to assist her because all you would be doing is bringing into the world “another dog who is worthy of death.” It was hatred beyond what most of us can conceive or comprehend.

I was thinking of the Rwandan genocide of 1994[[45]](#footnote-45). I don’t know if you remember that. For most of us it was kind of a blip on the screen because the American government didn’t do much about it. It happened right after the issue in Mogadishu[[46]](#footnote-46), Somalia, and America kind of twiddled our thumbs and didn’t do anything, but in the course of one hundred days, in 1994 – not in 1994 B.C. and not in a barbaric culture – but in the course of one hundred days, in a formerly European-controlled East African country, 800,000 Rwandan Tutsi people were executed in the most horrific ways you can imagine, by their neighbors. There is plenty of information if you want to study the Rwandan genocide, but one of the things that has shaken me to the core as I’ve studied it, is the fact that there were neighbors who had literally lived in the same communities, and cities, and villages for several generations, when all at once the more dominant Hutu people were called to take up arms against their neighbors. There are graphically violent pictures and videos of dozens of bodies of women, and children, and elderly people, laying in the streets and yards. There were no guns to go around and very few machetes, so they took up sticks, and stones, and rocks, and they bashed heads in. There is now one church in Kigali, Rwanda[[47]](#footnote-47), which is the capital city, that has a massive crypt underneath it, where over 40,000 skulls of the dead have been collected, and the majority of those skulls have huge chunks missing from them because in the genocide in Rwanda the easiest thing to do was bludgeon people to death by hitting them in the head. That happened in 1994, not in the first century in Rome.

So, what we find when we do a cursory overview of history is that history is by and large marked by that kind of behavior, not by people who live in reconciled, peace-loving, love your neighbor as yourself, reach out to those in need, civilizations. As much as Hollywood and the American media wants to paint a picture that we are all getting along and moving in the right direction, that’s not our culture. It takes very little global research to see that people who are left alone will kill each other in the most brutal ways. What that goes back to is the very first sin in the Garden, where Satan goes to Adam and Eve and says, “Did God really say….?” Satan questioned God’s authority, God’s sovereignty, and God’s goodness. The safest place that we can hide, as Christians, is in the sovereignty of God. That’s why we hold a high view of the sovereignty of God; because it’s the safest place that you can live your life. When that began to unravel, and the serpent began to question God, then Adam and Eve began to question God when they had no reason to question God. In human nature, it is most natural to go against the grain of authority, to go against what is right, and good, and holy, and to actually go in the opposite direction. It is not natural for those of us who were born and sinned in Adam to do what is right; it’s natural to do what is wrong. That’s why Jesus had to come in the first place. After that first sin between man and God made it necessary for reconciliation to be needed to restore the broken fellowship between man and God, what immediately followed on the heels of that was that fellowship was also shattered between humans. When God went to Adam, the first thing that Adam did was blame Eve, and the first thing she did was blame Adam, and they both had to cover their nakedness, because all of a sudden, when they looked at one another all that they saw were impurities, and inconsistencies, and that which they didn’t approve of.

We don’t just drag that mindset into governments, and armies, and causes, and revolutions, and slavery, and you name it down through history, from the Crusades and all their perversion of what Christianity really is, to the legalistic rules and dominions of the twentieth and twenty-first century American Church; but we drag it into marriage, and child-rearing, and into our contempt and resentment toward police officers and politicians. Then, what we see very quickly when we study humanity, is that we have a sin problem that touches every person that has ever breathed life since our first parents, Adam and Eve. So, what we need is for someone to enter into that humanity who is capable of reconciling man to God and who is also capable of reconciling man to man. Then, marriages can reflect the Gospel, and parenting can reflect the Gospel, and governments can rise and stand on biblical principles, and companies and corporations can be run in such a way that God is glorified and honored, and genocides can be stopped. What we have to believe is that in a fallen world, where people are naturally broken and where we are headed down a path of destruction, that there is a light, and that light comes from the Gospel, and the power of the Gospel will not only change one person but it can change millions. In fact, it can change whole governments, whole societies, whole people groups, and it can do and undo that which needs to be done and undone.

Paul has that hope for first century Christians, so let’s unpack the text. In the first two verses, 11 and 12, Paul uses some strong words. Paul makes reference to “alienation.” In verse 12, he says,

*“…remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise…”*

Now, Paul is obviously talking about the Gentiles, and he is saying that there was a time when they were alienated from the Jewish faith. Remember back to the time of Ruth. Some of you used as part of your vows, just as Little and I did, and I have often used in marriage ceremonies that I have overseen, the conversation that goes on between Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi. We have sort of spun that into something between husband and wife, which is okay, because it’s the Bible and it’s good truth. Remember that Ruth was a Moabite. In that conversation, we see this beautiful picture of the inclusion of a Gentile into the Jewish faith, because Ruth says, *“Where you go I will go. Where you lodge I will lodge. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.*”[[48]](#footnote-48) It is through the Jewish identity that Gentiles could come to God. In order for a Gentile to come to faith in Yahweh, they had to come through an inclusion into the Jewish faith and also into the Jewish national identity. When you read the Law, you see that God makes all of these provisions for Gentiles to become Jews. If you remember, David had a kind of right-hand man, who he ended up murdering, whose name was Uriah. He was Uriah the Hittite, not Uriah the Jew or Uriah the Benjamite. He was pagan. So, they would come through the Jewish people. What God had given to the Jews was so much opportunity to reach the world, not just by conquest, but long before the Messiah would come, to bring people into the faith that we would come to know as Christianity today. So, the Gentiles were left, to some degree, at the mercy of the Jews, because it took inclusion into the Jewish faith for Gentiles to come to faith and be able to worship God.

Remember, in Romans 9:4-5, Paul reminds the Jews of what came with the territory if you were born a Jew.

*“They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. 5 To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”*

So there are seven big things—six that build up and lead to Christ—that Paul is saying in Ephesians 2:11-12 that, if you are not a Jew you do not receive. He’s saying, “You don’t get the covenants. You don’t get the patriarchs.” He is saying to Gentile believers that they were alienated.

We won’t do a show of hands, but how many of us would fall into the Gentile category? All of us, as far as I know. Some of you might have some Jewish blood back down the line somewhere, but it would be a small minority of us. My family goes back to Ireland and Scotland, and I don’t think there were a lot of Jews up there in Britannia in the second century. I don’t think they made their way up there. They had more sense than to go up there where people were eating each other. So, most of us, if we were left to our national or ethnic identity, would never come to faith. So, Paul is reminding the Gentiles that they were in a desperate place. We need to be reminded that we were in a desperate place. When he says, *“You were Gentiles in the flesh,”* that is a reference to their true physical difference, but the real problem was not a problem of skin difference, or ethnic difference, but a problem of the heart.

Paul made a point that the sign of circumcision was an old order sign of the flesh and was no longer a condition of spirituality. In fact, now, circumcision was a sign of self-righteousness. The Jews looked down on uncircumcised people and considered them as ungodly. Remember, Paul told the Galatians that if they wanted to make circumcision a point of self-righteousness, they should not stop with the foreskin but should keep snipping. I know that sounds very graphic and it’s difficult to say in church, but it comes from the Bible. He said that if you want to take self-righteousness into your own hands, you should completely mutilate yourselves; if that’s what gives you righteousness, then why not go all the way with it? Because, the problem was that circumcision was part of the old order that God used as a covenant sign. It had no place in the church, in terms of righteousness. That would be works based. So, Paul addresses that mindset throughout the book of Galatians. In fact, in Galatians 6:15, he says,

*“For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.”*

He said that it didn’t matter if you were circumcised or not. It doesn’t matter if you are Baptist or not. It doesn’t matter if you are Presbyterian or not. It doesn’t matter if you are Calvinist or Armenian. It doesn’t matter if you dunk or sprinkle babies. What matters is – has the blood of Jesus through the power of the atonement, through the death, burial, and resurrection of the sinless Lamb of God, touched you, cleansed you, and made you righteous? If it has, then okay; now we can talk about differences. You can now talk about being a Messianic Jew, or an Episcopalian, or a brother in Christ who belongs to another denomination that sprinkles water on their babies’ heads. We will get along and we will be okay. But, we cannot get along if what we proclaim is that if you do this or that, or you are born into a particular family, or you have a certain lineage, or you are born of a particular nationality, that you are more righteous, or more spiritual, or better. That doesn’t work.

So, Paul is addressing this and there are three things that he says here in verse 12, about who the Gentiles were apart from Christ. We can apply these things to us. So, there are three things that are true about us before we are in Christ, according to what Paul says.

1. In the first part of verse 12, Paul says that we were Christless. He says that they were separated from Christ. There is no scarier place to be than to be separated from Christ.
2. The second thing, in the second part of verse 12, is that they were foreigners, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenant of promise. The Jewish people had a national identity but Gentiles were not part of that and didn’t have that. So, Paul is reminding them and us that prior to Christ we had no national identity in terms of messianic promise. They didn’t have a claim to the Law, or the covenants, or anything like that. It’s like a person who was separated from potential citizenship or a homeland.

I remember talking with several people one time who were from Ethiopia. We were talking about immigration and I was asking them if there was as big a deal with people in Ethiopia trying to leave and emigrate to other countries as what we have here. We have people flooding in from our southern border and also have people flooding in from other areas, so it’s a big point of discussion in our country. I wondered if in Ethiopia people were trying to get out of there and go somewhere else. This one guy said that it was very dangerous because in that part of Africa the preferred destination is South Africa. Everyone wants to go to South Africa because it is very western and there’s a fairly strong economy, but people in Ethiopia don’t have a good understanding of what South Africa is like. They think it’s a promised land, so they will buy into these schemes where someone promises them that for five-hundred dollars they will put them on a truck, take them to South Africa, and have them a job set up when they get there, making twenty dollars a week or whatever is decent pay for someone in that part of the world. They promise them stability, a job, a passport, and the ability, once they make enough money, to travel home. But, what they find out when they get there is that they are lost, and they are slaves, and they are cut off from their homeland.

That is the picture that Paul is painting here. As Gentiles, they were cut off, completely separated, alienated, people without a home or a nationality, spiritually. It was a very scary thought.

1. The third thing that Paul told them that was true of them, apart from Christ, is in the last part of verse 12. He says they were hopeless and Godless. He says, *“…having no hope and without God in the world*.” Even though the Gentiles would be blessed through Israel, as God had promised Abraham, the Gentiles didn’t know this. The same is true today; for those who don’t know the Gospel, we have to make known the Gospel to those who are living without hope.

In other words, here’s what I’m saying. People who are hopeless usually don’t know they are hopeless. It’s like telling a fish that it’s really wet where he lives. He’s like, “What’s that word mean?” They only know their environment, so the Gospel has to be proclaimed. The power of the risen Lord has to be explained and proclaimed and the hope that we have within us has to be made known so that hopeless people are given hope. But, not just that hopeless people are given hope, but – listen – that hopeless people realize that they’re hopeless. The problem is not that the people around us who are dying and going to Hell are hopeless; it’s that they don’t even know they are hopeless. They think they have hope. They have hope in the next job opportunity that is going to pay good, or they have hope in winning the lottery, whatever it is, they believe, in their minds, that they have hope. We’ve been talking about this a lot lately; hope has a direct correlation to the object of your faith. When I put faith in something, that thing will then provide me hope or it will leave me hopeless. If I put my faith in Christ, then I get hope. If I put my faith in anything else then, ultimately, I’m going to be hopeless. What the Gospel does is it exposes to us the hopelessness that we live in. So, Paul reminds the Gentiles that they were hopeless. We ourselves had no hope, but in Christ we have hope. There is nothing so sad that you will ever encounter as a person with no hope. It’s so sad.

I was watching a Ted Talk[[49]](#footnote-49). Do you guys watch Ted Talks? Some of them are good and some of them just make you mad. So, I was watching this Ted Talk by a guy in a really rough part of New York City[[50]](#footnote-50), and his talk was about what he experienced as he was with people in the hour of their death, and what was the condition of their minds. I don’t know if this guy was a Christian because he didn’t mention the Lord or the Gospel, but he has literally stood over dozens of people as they breathed their last. He said that a question he gets asked a lot is, “What do you say to people to give them hope when that is happening?” He said that, when he first started doing the job that he would find himself holding someone’s hand, where maybe they were pinned under a vehicle or a building had fallen on them, and he knew that they can’t get them out and there was nothing they can do. The person’s lungs have collapsed, their internal organs are ruptured, they are bleeding out from lacerations, and they know they are dying. He said they can see death coming even though they are conscious, and he knows he might have three or four minutes with the person. What he said was that during the first few accidents that he worked like that, he would look at the person and think that he had to give them hope. He would say something like, “You’re going to be okay. We are going to get you out of this and you are going to be okay,” but the more that life started to leave their body the more panicked they would get. The panic would be almost overwhelming for him, as an eyewitness. But, then, one day he was kneeling down by a lady who was pinned under a car, and he knew she was dying, and she said, “I have children that I don’t want to leave. Am I dying?” Then, something came over him and he said, “Yes, you’re dying. There is nothing else we can do for you. You will die in just a few minutes. You are going to pass so you need to make peace.” Then, he said, there was a completely different reaction by this woman than he had seen before.

Again, coming from someone who is not a Christian, and not knowing if he shared the Gospel with her, and assuming that he didn’t; just the reality of that person realizing their hopelessness opened them up to at least accepting what was coming. Listen, we live in a world of people who are blind, deaf, and dumb; in fact, the first part of this chapter says that they are dead. We don’t need to breathe false hope or speak false hope into these people. What the Gospel does is it exposes the condition that they are in, but it doesn’t leave them there to die. It says, “Now we can get the car off of you. Now we can breathe life into you, but you need to see the hopelessness of your situation before that can be a reality.” That’s what the Gospel does.

So, in those first two verses Paul speaks of alienation, and in the second section he talks about reconciliation, which happens through the work of Christ.

Just like in verse 4, which we read last week, *“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,..”* we see it again in this passage, at the beginning of verse 13. You were alienated, and you were hopeless, and Christless, “*But now….in Christ*.” This is sort of a parallel to what we saw last week. It’s another one of those huge, and massive, and weighty “but” statements in Scripture. This is one of the most powerful word pictures in all of history. Look at the verbs Paul uses in these next few verses. He says: “made one,” “tore down,” “abolished,” “create,” “make peace,” and “reconcile.” These are the verbs he uses to describe what Christ is doing. With “made one” Paul is talking about unifying these hostile people. He is also, I think, referencing the hostility between God and man that the Law had created for so many religious Jews, and for the exclusion that the Gentiles experienced. So, out of all of that disunity they were “made one.” You can imagine someone stepping into that Rwandan genocide on day ten and saying, “We stop now. We all come together. It’s over,” and then everyone complying. That’s the kind of power Paul is talking about; “made one,” “tore down,” “abolished,” “create,” “make peace,” and “reconcile” – what power!

In this section, Paul shifts from using the word “you,” and speaking to the Gentiles in the second person, to using the word “we.” It’s a first person unification in Christ of the New Covenant, the new Church, and the new nation, which is no longer Israel; but the nation is the Church and Christ is our head. Remember, at the very end of chapter 1, Paul said that Christ is the head over all things, *“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.*”[[51]](#footnote-51)

So, there are four things that Christ has done in unifying us. There are four things that Paul lays out in verse 13-18, in terms of what Christ has done for us at the cross. But, before we unpack these, it’s important to remind ourselves that the cross has to be central to everything in the believer’s life. We need the cross. We need to look to the cross. We need to think of the cross. When you see your lost neighbor, or friend, or family member, or when I see that lost person who may be a stranger at an airport, or in a lobby at a restaurant, or a doctor’s office, and I know that person needs Jesus, what I have to see is the cross. Because, Paul says, in Galatians 6:14, that the only boast he has is in the cross. We preached that text a few weeks ago as a standalone message[[52]](#footnote-52). So, I see through the cross the hope for the world, the power of the Gospel, and the ability of God to bring people across that dividing wall and into fellowship with himself.

You will hear some denominations and groups of “Christians” move away from much talk of the cross. But, what we need to remember is that the cross is central, not just to our faith, but it was central to Roman culture. This would be like executing someone in a shopping mall, or at the county fair, or on the steps of the courthouse, where everyone could see. It was a polarizing and a central scene or image. But, for us, as believers, the cross has to be central to our life today, and tomorrow, and next day. It has to be central. Our only boast is in the cross.

There are a few ways that we could unpack this text, and I don’t know what direction some of you will end up on Tuesday and Wednesday night in discipleship groups, but you better talk about the cross, because apart from the cross there is no hope. May it never be that I would boast in anything except for the cross of Christ[[53]](#footnote-53).

What you see a lot of times, and here’s the danger that should make the antenna go up and the radar beep, is when we are affiliating ourselves with a church or you are somewhere in life where the cross isn’t proclaimed and talked about, it’s time to move on. Because if we don’t have the cross, we have nothing but a human effort at reconciliation, which either gets us to the extreme of genocide or it gets us to the other extreme of unbelievable tolerance for the sin that Christ died on the cross to free us from.

So, there are four things that Christ has done for us at the cross in these verses of Ephesians 2:14-18, particularly.

1. First, Christ has brought us peace. Verse 14,

*“…For he himself is our peace.”*

This word “peace” is in the context of salvation. When we think of the word “peace” in our culture, we think of things like peace from war. But, listen, when the Scripture speaks of peace, what it is talking about is peace, as a sinful man with a holy God. The closest thing we get to this, in terms of our culture context, would be if you are on trial before a judge who has every bit of power to condemn you and sentence you, but somehow there is a resolution made so that you are exonerated of the charges. But, even then, it falls short because we would still stand guilty. What happens in Christ with the cross is that we experience peace with God because of Christ’s relationship with God. It’s not one of conflict, or sin, or brokenness, but it’s one of complete reconciliation. So, as we saw in chapter 1, we are brought up into the relationship between Father and Son, which is a relationship of peace. To some degree, there is not even a need for reconciliation once you are there, because Jesus hasn’t ever had to be reconciled to God. But He did, as the video[[54]](#footnote-54) portrayed tonight so powerfully. Jesus did drink the cup of God’s wrath, because He literally took into himself your sin and my sin. It coursed through His veins and was bled out. The cup of wrath that God poured out onto Christ for our sin sets us free and brings us into peace with the Father. That’s the peace he is talking about. He’s not talking about whether you have financial peace in your life, or whether you can sleep peacefully knowing that your kids are safe. We are not trying to raise safe kids; we’re trying to raise kids who will make a difference for the Gospel and a difference for the nations. I don’t want to raise safe kids—I want to raise kids who are completely and recklessly abandoned for the sake of Christ.

What is peace? “*Beware of those who cry ‘peace, peace,’ and then what comes is destruction*.[[55]](#footnote-55)” The world’s peace is not the same as the peace the cross brings. Jesus said, *“I didn’t come to bring peace. I came to bring a sword.”[[56]](#footnote-56)* So, the peace that Paul is talking about here stands in complete opposition to what the world knows as peace. It’s peace with God through reconciliation in Christ. And, when we all get there we will be good with each other then, too. We will be one big happy family! I love you, and you love me, and everybody is getting along because we are in Christ. This type of peace is tied up, probably best, into the *“It is finished”[[57]](#footnote-57)* statement on the cross.

I’m a visual thinker and I think in kind of poetic word pictures, and I have this image in my mind of when Jesus said, *“It is finished,”* this massive vortex of a vacuum sucked all of us who would become believers right up into the eternal Triune relationship between Father, Son, and Spirit. It was like \**slurp\**, when Jesus said those words, and it was *\*boom\*,* done. We were reconciled to God and we are all in it together, in this completed work that brings peace.

1. The second thing that Christ has done for us at the cross is that He has unified all believers, by His blood, and has removed all barriers.

You may want to discuss in discipleship groups, the dividing wall of hostility as a word picture. Listen, this is so like us as humans. At the temple, we know that there was a wall that was built that created an outer court for the Gentiles. Remember that? It was a dividing wall and the Gentiles could only come to that wall and no further. In fact, there was a sign that basically said, “If you come across this wall, we will kill you.” Now, isn’t it the pot calling the kettle black to realize that the Jews, themselves, couldn’t go behind the curtain? They needed a mediator, which pointed to Christ. It’s literally like two humans trying to impress God with their vertical jump, when the one can jump thirty inches and the other can jump twenty-six, and they say, “Are you impressed yet, God? Watch this!” People built the Tower of Babel[[58]](#footnote-58) and look what happened. God is not impressed with the things that we come up with to impress ourselves with. So, the Jews had built a wall around the complex to keep the Gentiles out, which made the Jews feel more righteous and more holy. It was completely unbiblical and the reality still remained that, at the center of the Temple complex the Jews could not go into the Most Holy Place[[59]](#footnote-59). But, when Christ hung on the cross and that dividing curtain was ripped top to bottom[[60]](#footnote-60), there was no more need for walls or curtains. We are the dwelling place of the Most High God. We are the temple of the living God. So, Jesus has unified believers by removing all the barriers and dividing walls of hostility.

I saw one interview between two Christian sisters in Rwanda. The one’s husband had killed the other one’s family and had gone to prison for it once the smoke cleared and they prosecuted people. Now, these two ladies live side-by-side in harmony because of the Gospel. It was a British, non-Christian, documentary and they tried to scrub the Gospel out of there, but those ladies were talking about Jesus and God’s love for them. That’s what we are talking about when we talk about unification.

1. The third thing we get through the cross is that in Christ we have received peace, and we are also to proclaim peace.

So, we receive peace and we are to proclaim peace as it has been proclaimed to us. We see that in verse 17,

*“…And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”*

When we proclaim the Gospel, Christ is being proclaimed in us and through us. The whole world needs the Gospel.

1. Number four, verse 18 tells us that Christ gives us access to God.

In Christ, at the cross, we receive access to God. We receive this amazing gift of accessibility that God gives us, of himself, through Christ.

Finally, in the last four verses, 19-22, Paul reminds the Ephesians of who they now are. So, he says, this is who you were, here’s what happened, and now this is who you are. This is for us, church, if you’re a Christian: you were this, then this is what happened at the cross, and now this is who you are. So, look at the reality of who we are now. The Gentiles and Jews both needed to be reminded of this and so do we.

This is our new identity as believers:

1. Number one, we are citizens of God’s kingdom, in verse 19a. This would resonate with them because of Roman citizenship. Remember, there is one point where Paul is about to be executed or interrogated, in the book of Acts, and they beat him. They were getting ready to beat him again and he said to this guy, “Is it okay for you to beat a Roman citizen?”[[61]](#footnote-61) And the guy is like, “Whoa! You’re a Roman citizen?,” and Paul told him he was born a Roman. The man told him that he was paying a great sum to be a Roman citizen. There was a lot of status that came with citizenship, so this made a ton of sense to them. So, when Paul talks about being citizens of God’s kingdom, it’s this idea that there is a heavenly kingdom that we get to be a part of.

Have you have ever identified with the patriotic nature of being an American? I will never forget the time on Memorial Day 1991 when I went to a Memorial Day service in Bedford, Virginia. At the time of the D-Day invasion on Omaha Beach, things were kind of divided geographically, and Bedford County, Virginia lost something like 92 of 98 of their boys[[62]](#footnote-62). It devastated that county and dented a whole generation from that county. So, I went on the 50th anniversary of that invasion and there were three of the Bedford County survivors there. One was in a wheelchair, missing a leg and an eye. Another one was missing an ear and a hand. They had been shot up but survived the landing. And I will never forget, as they rolled those guys in their wheelchairs out onto the stage, who would have been at that time in their late-sixties. The town had done it up right. They had all branches of the military there and the outdoor venue was packed. Everyone snapped to attention, and I remember as they were naming those 92 names of the men who had died that day, those survivors stood at attention, one with no hand. And when they got to the part where they recognized those three men, I remember those big ol’ Marines standing there weeping at attention, and three fighter jets came flying over. Two of the jets went straight and one peeled off and went straight up, as if going to Heaven. I remember in that moment thinking that I am a citizen of the greatest country that has ever been on this planet, and I will never take that for granted. To be an American, we should have an understanding of what citizenship is, and I’m sad that we have a generation of people who need to be taught that, because they haven’t been. It hasn’t been instilled in them.

Romans got this. To be a citizen of God’s kingdom is far greater than the pride that national citizenship invokes in us.

1. The second thing, in verse 19, is that we are members of God’s family, simply because we have the same Father. We receive adoption. When you receive the same adoption you get the same daddy. If two people are adopted by the same man there are no multilevels of adoption. We are all members of God’s family. Nobody gets special status. It doesn’t matter if you are a Hutu or a Tutsi. It doesn’t matter if you are Nuer or Dinka. It doesn’t matter if you are Jew or Gentile, barbarian, slave, or free, or American, or European, or South African. It doesn’t matter. In Christ, we are made members of God’s family.
2. The third thing, as we read earlier tonight in our call to worship, in 1 Peter 2:5, is that we are called living stones. You have to remember that there was a clear, contextual meaning for the Jews, because Solomon’s Temple stood for a thousand years, made out of stones. So, now, Paul says there is a new temple. The old one is done and there is a new temple. You are the stones and Christ is the foundation. He has already said that there is a body and Christ is the head. There is a family and God is the daddy. Now, there is a new temple and you are all stones, and boom, Christ is the foundation.

So, line up verse 19 with verses 11-12, and you can see who you were and who you are, and it will completely erase the alienation, the hostility, and the separation. It’s a beautiful picture of what the Gospel does. It does that because of who Christ is. Christ is the cornerstone. That cornerstone is a stumbling block to many who will never become stones in the great temple of the kingdom of God. They will not become adopted sons in the family of God. They will never become members and parts of the body of Christ unless they hear the Gospel, receive hope, and respond to Jesus. We have been given much, so we should then respond by giving much. Amen?

I will pray and we will worship together to close our time.

God, I pray that we will realize what a great gift we’ve been given in reconciliation. Help us to remember who we were and who we are, where we’ve been and where we are headed. I love you and I pray that we would respond to your Word and your Spirit. In Jesus’ name.

June 21, 2015

Ephesians 3 – Part 1

Brody Holloway

This is the Word of the Lord. Ephesians 3:1-13,

*“For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles— 2 assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly. 4 When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit. 6 This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel. 7 Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. 8 To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, 10 so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. 11 This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him. 13 So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.”*

Here, we have what is kind of a continued conversation from the end of chapter two. We teach students this and we break it down into a lot of details, but let’s just say that we are going to look at all of history prior to the promise that God gave to Abraham in Genesis 12. In Genesis 12, God went to Abraham and said, “In you I am going to bless all the nations of the Earth.”[[63]](#footnote-63) The word *Gentile,* in the New Testament, is a synonym for the word *nations*. It’s not a particular nationality. Oftentimes the word *Greek* would be used the same way. What it means is non-Jewish. To a Jew, the Gentiles would be nations; all people outside of the house of Judaism or outside of the house of Abraham.

So, God went to Abraham in Genesis 12 and He told him that He was going to raise up this great and massive nation out of his lineage. Then, from that nation God would bless all nations. *“In you all peoples will be blessed.”* So, if I was going to do an illustration, you would have the world at the time of Abraham, all the people of the world already divided into many nations, and then God just funnels it all down into this one little pinpoint of a moment in time. God had already done this at a previous time with Noah. He took all of humanity and He brought it all down to one man. So, then, what happened was that from Abraham the funnel began to expand again. All of humanity had come down to this one pivotal point and then through Abraham it began to spread again, particularly through his twelve sons. It’s not exactly twelve sons because there are some grandsons in there, but you guys know that Father Abraham had these twelve tribes that came from him. From there these twelve tribes, even through the slavery in Egypt, grew to be several million people. From there, it got bigger, and bigger, and bigger into a massive nation of people, and then God reined it back into one tribe within that nation, the tribe of Judah. So, God brought it back down to a man.

So, throughout history, all of history expands to include all the nations, and then it comes down to this one man, Abraham. Then, it expands within that nation and then comes back down to one man, whose name is Judah. Then, it expands within the tribe of Judah and then comes back down to one man, whose name is David. So, if you can, imagine this kind of expanding and contracting picture of humanity moving toward this one moment in history where the Messiah will come into the world. His name is Jesus and He will be the Savior of the nations. Then, He will build a kingdom that will include all nations and all people. So, humanity is really large at the beginning and then it comes down to Jesus at a singular point in time, at the cross and at the empty tomb.

So, today, what it is doing is expanding again, until we get to the scene in the book of Revelation of the throne room of God, and people from every Gentile nation are going to be there. The funnel came down to Christ and from there, and today, we are in this process of the Gospel widening to reach all of the Gentile nations. And Paul was the pivotal catalyst, the man that God used, to ignite the Gospel to the nations.

So, we are sitting here tonight, saved by the grace of God, washed in the blood of the Lamb, cleansed of sin, made righteous in Christ through the atoning work of Jesus, as Gentiles, and that Gospel was first proclaimed by the Apostle Paul. That’s what he is going to remind the Ephesians of and that is what he is talking about here. So, let’s walk through this.

What Paul does is he starts verse 1 and then he breaks away from that conversation and there is this long rabbit trail that goes through verse 12. Then, he comes back in verse 13, so that verses 1 and 13 go together. Then, the passage we are going to cover next week, which is verse 14 through the end of the chapter, kind of goes with those two verses, 1 and 13. In verse 1, Paul says that he is a prisoner for Jesus Christ on behalf of the Gentiles. He is a prisoner for Christ, but he is so on behalf of the Gentiles.

I have to tell you that I had one of the most amazing personal journeys in Scripture this week. I went back and studied through the book of Acts. I had always known that there was a lot of persecution in the book of Acts, and a lot of miracles in the book of Acts, and there was a lot of division and then unification in the book of Acts, but there is this thread that runs through the book of Acts, that starts with Paul’s initial commissioning in Acts 13. That’s not when he is first called, but in Acts 13 he is commissioned by the Church. Then, from that point through the end of the book, the one thread that is sewn through the whole story is Paul proclaiming Christ to the Gentiles and then being persecuted by Jews for preaching Christ to the Gentiles. The Romans would persecute Paul, but all of it was instigated and driven by Jewish hatred for Gentiles. I’m telling you church, during this week in my studies in Acts a lightbulb of blinding truth went off. I have studied through Acts before. It was the first book I read when I got saved. I knew the Gospels from growing up but I wanted to see what happened in the book of Acts. As a young Christian it took me a month to read through Acts. Since then, I’ve gone back to the book of Acts so many times. In fact, I preached through it, but I never in my life realized, until I read Ephesians 2 and 3, and spotlighted Paul’s mission to the Gentiles, what the weight of his words in Ephesians 3:1 and 3:13 carry. He basically said, “I’m being persecuted for you guys. For Christ, but on your behalf, I’m being persecuted.” So, I want to walk you through a few high points in the book of Acts. Acts 13:1-3,

*“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul[[64]](#footnote-64). 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.”*

This is basically a missionary commissioning service. He uses the word “called.” This is interesting because a lot of times, as a conversation starter, people will say to me, “When did you first get called to preach?” We do, oftentimes in Scripture, see specific callings laid out for people to do specific tasks. So, we see Paul called and the Church commissions him. The Church is actively involved. In the American Church, this would look like an ordination service or a missionary commissioning service, where the local church lays hands on a person and prays for them. So, after the Church commissioned Paul, he went and started preaching and he ran into some very hard resistance from the Jews. Keep in mind that the Apostle Paul is a Pharisee of Pharisees[[65]](#footnote-65). He was part of the Jewish elite; elite among elites. Specifically, his formal education and training put him in a sort of Ivy League classification among Jews.

So, Paul first went to the Jews. What you will see among Peter, and John, and Paul, in their ministries, as they go about from city to city, or country to country, on these missionary journeys, is they always go among the Jews and proclaim in the Jewish synagogues, from the Old Testament, the Gospel of Jesus. It is fascinating how they keep this one pattern, where they will go into the synagogue on the Sabbath. Paul would be dressed in his ornamental Pharisaical robes and his rabbinic attire. If you can imagine the Catholic Church, where you have a big system and organization, and a cardinal would go into the local congregation. The pastor or the father of that church would bring the Cardinal up front and ask him to address his people. So, Paul would go into the synagogues with that kind of clout. He would walk through a typical Jewish worship service and read from the Jewish Old Testament; the Law, the Psalms, the Pentateuch, and the Prophets. Then, he would say, “Oh, and all of this is talking about Jesus. This is how He came and here is what He did, so you should confess Him as Lord, and repent, and be baptized into Christ Jesus, and you will be saved.”

This was very polarizing, as you can imagine, but because the Lord had prepared history and the Jewish nation to receive the Gospel and the Messiah, every single time what would happen is that some of the Jews would believe and some of the Jews would reject. The Jews that rejected Paul’s message would become very hostile toward his preaching and toward the Jews who received the Gospel. That is the pattern you will see as you go through the book of Acts. Paul would show up and proclaim Christ from the Old Testament. He would preach with his authority and they would listen because he was an established, classically trained, educated rabbi, priest, and Pharisee. After he spoke from the Old Testament he would say, “And, by the way, it’s all about Jesus. Have you heard of Him? What they say is true. I was down in Jerusalem and talked to some of His disciples. Jesus died, and He was resurrected, and He fulfilled everything, so you should believe in Him.” People freaked out and the Jews wanted to kill Paul and this happened over and over.

So, in Acts 13, Paul preached and he brought his whole sermon down to verse 13, where he said, “But God raised Him from the dead,” and then he talked about what happened after the resurrection. If you jump down to Acts 13:42, you read,

*“As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.”*

So, there were a lot of people getting saved. In verse 44,

*“The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.”*

All the city came out. It was a big deal and you had everyone in the whole city go out to hear Paul. I think they were in Pamphylia here. Verse 45,

*“But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.”*

The Jewish leaders, who were resisting Paul, were jealous.

*“And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.”*

In Acts 13:45, Paul, at the beginning of his public missionary journey, on his first trip, stood and said, “Ok, from here on out we are expanding ministry to the Gentiles.” He then states this very distinct aspect of his calling, where he says, “I’m going to take the Gospel to the Gentiles.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

Listen, I don’t want to overlook what he says in Ephesians 3:1, when he says, *“I’m a prisoner of Jesus Christ on behalf of you..”* and then goes on in verse 13, *“…so I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.”*

Now, we are going to see in a minute that there is a specific way in which Paul is suffering on behalf of the Ephesians, but we will also see in the life of Paul that he suffers greatly on behalf of the nations. The Gospel existed on three continents, by the end of the first century, by and large because of the faithfulness of Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles. That’s why the Gospel spread like it did. By the third Century, the Gospel had spread as far as northern, modern-day Great Britain or United Kingdom. So much of the work of the early Church we owe to the faithfulness of this man who was, we would think of all people, going to be the missionary to the Jews, because of his Jewish status.

The Jews like to beat up Paul over this. There are a couple of passages where Paul talks about how much he has been beaten and what all he has endured. One of the things that blew my mind this past week, in my studying and preparation, is that most of those beatings were done by Jews who were angry because of Paul’s ministry to Gentiles. This opens a dozen other cans of worms, like issues of racism, and inequality, and elitism, and entitlement, and other things that we see very prevalent in the American church today.

So, Paul is traveling around and preaching, and people keep getting saved. He keeps the pattern of going and preaching in the synagogues and when he got to Lystra, we see that the Jews have followed him from Antioch and Iconium.

Acts 14:19,

*“But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.”*

The Jewish leaders followed Paul from the two previous cities he had been in, and they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. So, they stoned him and they beat him so badly that they thought he was dead. I’m picturing a couple of blows to the head at the end of a beating. Whatever beating took place here was severe. They left his body in the street and walked off, dusted off their hands, and assumed he was dead. They were done with him, but God was not done with him.

Verse 20,

*“But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city,”*

That’s one of those sentences where you read it and wonder how many times you have read it in the past and have just blown through it. This guy just got his head bashed in. He was kicked, beaten, and stoned, and then he just got up.

Have you ever fallen down and realized that nobody saw it? You might be hurt and bleeding but nobody saw it. Half of the thing about dealing with the pain is whether you are going to get sympathy out of it or not. I’ve told this story before, but I had a meeting with some guys at the Grove Park Inn. It’s a really elite resort in Asheville and I was having lunch with a couple of guys in a place that looked out on an area where some men were doing a roof job on a remodel. It just so happened that OSHA[[67]](#footnote-67) was on site, too. You know who OSAH is; the Occupational Safety and Health Administration that is part of the Federal government. Their job is to help cut down on injuries at worksites. So, the workers were doing everything by the book, but they had made up this scarecrow-looking guy and they took it and threw it off the roof. Well, these OSHA people were sitting in a conference room and they heard this, “w-a-a-a-a-h-h-h” as the scarecrow hit the bushes. Then, there was this guy in the bushes who was dressed exactly like the scarecrow and the OSHA men went running out there. I saw this happen. This man came out of the bushes, dusting his arms off, and he said, “That’s the third time! If I fall off this building one more time, I quit!!,” and then he just walked off. The OSHA folks were standing there with their jaws dropped. I don’t know what course of action got taken, but it’s one of the funniest things I’ve ever seen.

I can just imagine Paul getting up out of the street. He just got stoned, but he gets up, dusts off, takes a breath to see if his lungs are working, looks around to make sure he can see, and then says, “I guess I’ll go preach the Gospel.” He just keeps going. Paul is like the Energizer bunny with the Gospel. He has tunnel vision. At no point does he say, “I need a break, man. I just got stoned. My head hurts. My ribs hurt. I think I might have a ruptured spleen. I just need to chill. Hey, men, could we just maybe do a weekend retreat or a teambuilding outing? I need some support here.” Paul just gets up and goes about preaching the Gospel. Some of the kinds of things that might be once-in-a-lifetime experiences for some of us are just day-to-day for him.

Verse 20,

*“…and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.”*

How did he get there? An ambulance? No, he walked! The day after he got stoned so badly that people thought he was dead; he was unconscious in the street and bleeding out of every orifice in his head. But, he got up and thought, “I don’t think it would be smart to preach here anymore,” so they walked to Derbe.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Verse 21,

*“…When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch,”*

They went right back to where the people had stoned Paul! He went to Derbe and a bunch of people got saved and then they went right back to where the people thought they had killed him! You see this thread where Paul is suffering at great lengths for the Gentile world to get the Gospel and he is doing so, oddly enough, at the hands of Jews. Turn over to Acts 17:1,

*“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. 2 And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days…”* – for three weeks in a row – *“…he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, 3 explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ.’ 4 And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas,…”* – This is the pattern and this is not the only time we see this. – *“…as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women.”*

Now, this is important. What is making the Jews mad here, as we will see as we continue to unpack this, is not that Jews are getting saved. They are not okay with that, and they don’t like that, but what’s making them mad is that this salvation is being extended to the Gentiles. That’s what’s making them so crazy. *“A great many of the devout Greeks”* – These were devout pagans and a radical change and conversion happened. This is like ISIS or the Taliban. This is not like people who are fighting for racial equality but it’s people who are radically pagan. These are people who are worshipping pagan gods in all of their rituals and a bunch of them get saved. We saw this earlier, in chapter 13.

Verse 5,

*“But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.”*

So, they dragged this guy, Jason, out into the street and they beat him up. This mob beat him up. I’ve seen mob justice twice and I couldn’t go to sleep those nights. It will shake you to the core to see mob justice taking place.

Jump down to verse 17. Paul and his team leave Thessalonica and go to Berea.

Acts 17:13,

*“But when the Jews from Thessalonica learned that the word of God was proclaimed by Paul at Berea also, they came there too, agitating and stirring up the crowds.”*

So, the Jews are following Paul around everywhere he goes. He’s getting beaten and thrown in jail and other people are getting beaten because he is preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. Then, you get to Acts 13 and Paul goes to Ephesus, which is the city and its people that he is writing this letter to. So, we are studying Ephesians at a later time than Acts 19. Acts 19 is when Paul goes to Ephesus and the church in Ephesus is established. So, when Paul gets to Ephesus the Jews resist and here is what he does.

Verse 9,

*“But when some became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, he withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus. 10 This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.”*

When Paul got to Ephesus and the Jews cut him off, he went into a big meeting place for Gentile assemblies and he proclaimed the Gospel for two years. Every Gentile in the city got to hear the Gospel and a bunch of people got saved. Then, Paul left Ephesus. We need to thread that in because when we get to chapter 20 Paul begins making his way toward Jerusalem. What he has done is he has grabbed a team of people along the way. So, he is making his way to Jerusalem with his team, and in Acts 20:4, you will see a man, at the end of the list of people who are traveling with him, named Trophimus. Do you see that? Paul takes several men from Ephesus, so he has some Ephesians with him, who are Gentile believers, converts to Christianity, when he comes into Jerusalem.

So, then, if you go over to Acts 21:27,

*“When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, seeing him in the temple, stirred up the whole crowd and laid hands on him,”*

Remember, these guys are following him around. So, now Paul is in Jerusalem, but Jews from these cities in Asia are there and they see him in the Temple and they are stirred up, and they grab him, and they say,

*“Men of Israel, help! This is the man who is teaching everyone everywhere against the people and the law and this place.”*

So, you see that their anger is that he is proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles. Are you tracking with this?

*“Moreover, he even brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.” 29 For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple.”*

Now, Paul would go on and say, “I didn’t take him into the Temple.” Paul was very sensitive to Jewish law, particularly pertaining to the Temple. In fact, at one point Paul is being persecuted and he speaks against the High Priest, and then he apologizes for it. He says, “Oh, no. The Gospel has reached the Ephesians and I have Gentile and Greek believers who are with my team and following Christ, but I did not take Trophimus into the Temple.” But, it’s too late. They have stirred up this crowd. The Jews are worked up.

Think of some of the riots that have happened in our time, where people get so worked up that they don’t even know what they are mad about. They don’t even know what they are rioting and fighting about. It’s a crowd frenzy.

Verse 30,

*“Then all the city”* – the entire city -- *“was stirred up, and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple, and at once the gates were shut. 31 And as they were seeking to kill him,…”*

I want you to picture this. They have dragged him into the street, probably on his hands and knees. There are boots kicking in his ribs and they are probably hitting him. I don’t know if they are using clubs or fists.

Once, we saw a lady with a high-heeled shoe hitting a man in the head while other people were holding him. I don’t know what had happened but it was a case of mob justice. Guys were hitting him in the face with their fists and this man was just clinging to his bag. He was bent over with nowhere to go because of the mob around him, and they were hitting him with whatever they could hit him with; in the head, in the ear, in the face, in the kidneys, in the back, in the spine, with fists, and boots, and shoes, and sticks. They were just pounding this guy.

So, Paul was taking that kind of beating and all he had done was show up at the Temple, legally, and they were beating him.

*“And as they were seeking to kill him, word came to the tribune of the cohort”* – that’s a Roman guy *– “that all Jerusalem was in confusion. 32 He at once took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. And when they saw the tribune and the soldiers, they stopped beating Paul.”*

If the Romans didn’t show up, Paul was dead. But, the Romans showed up and they got Paul.

*“Then the tribune came up and arrested him and ordered him to be bound with two chains. He inquired who he was and what he had done. 34 Some in the crowd were shouting one thing, some another. And as he could not learn the facts because of the uproar, he ordered him to be brought into the barracks.”*

So, what happens then is that Paul ends up addressing the Jews. The Romans saved him from the crowd and handcuffed him, and then Paul says to them, “Hey, just let me speak to the crowd.” So, they let him stand on the steps with a Roman escort and he speaks to the crowd. He proclaims the Gospel to this crowd that has just beaten him and he proclaims Christ to Jews and Gentiles in the city.

As he is proclaiming Christ, he is walking the crowd through their own history and they are tracking with him pretty good, but when he gets to the part in Acts 22:20, he says,

*“And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ 21 And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’ 22 Up to this word they listened to him. Then they raised their voices and said, “Away with such a fellow from the earth! For he should not be allowed to live.”*

They said, “You want to take the Gospel to the Gentiles? You deserve to die. You should die. We don’t want to hear anything else you have to say.” To that point, he had been talking and they had been listening. He knew their Law and he knew their Scriptures, so he worked his way through it all the way up to Stephen’s execution. Then, at that point, he said, “God has called me to take the Gospel to the nations.”

It’s interesting, because in Genesis 12, God told Abraham that “through your people all the nations of the Earth will be blessed.” But, we know that these Jews don’t really care about Yahweh. They don’t really care about God’s Law. They don’t really care about salvation coming to anybody. They care that they have a system that they want to preserve, so from that point forward, to the end of the book of Acts, we don’t ever see Paul really get turned lose again. Because of Jewish hatred of Paul, and because of Paul’s commitment that the Gentile world hear the Gospel, they grabbed Paul and he ended up in the custody of Romans and he went to Felix, and to Agrippa, and he went to Rome to be in front of Caesar, and he had the shipwreck in Malta, and the whole rest of his life was altered because he went to Jerusalem and the Jews hated him for proclaiming the Gospel to the Gentiles.

But, it is precisely Paul’s obedience, not only that the Ephesians were blessed, but that we have been blessed to receive the Gospel. As much as we owe to Christ, just stop and think sometimes of what we owe to people like Paul. Would we be so faithful to the Lord that generations ahead could look back and faceless, nameless people thank God for the obedience of a generation of people who cared enough for the nations that they took the Gospel to the ends of the Earth? They sent a team to South Sudan; they went to Northern India; they figured out and manipulated situations and circumstances to penetrate the interior of Northern Afghanistan. Could Red Oak be a church that connects the dots between generations so that when all nations are surrounding the throne of Christ, in that scene in the book of Revelation, that we have literally taken part in the Gentile salvation? Because, in our text in Ephesians 3, what this is called is a “mystery.” It’s called a “mystery.” In verses 2-7, listen to how Paul speaks of the Gentiles and the opportunity to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles.

*“…assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,”*

Paul says, “I’ve been given this great responsibility that is a work of God’s grace. I get to be stoned, and beaten, and imprisoned, and shipwrecked, so that you guys can hear the Gospel.” He’s talking to the Ephesian Christians. Remember, there was a riot in Ephesus when he was there. He almost got killed there. But, how cool is it that what has specifically thrown him into this Roman prison can be traced back to the fact that he had on his team, Trophimus, a member of the Ephesian church. Literally, specifically, and precisely, it was because of the Ephesian’s salvation that Paul found himself in a Roman prison; because he had one of their own on his team. So, he can say to them, “I love you guys so much that it is, literally, for the Ephesian Christians that I am now in prison.” But then he says, “It is a great gift of God’s grace that I get to proclaim the Gospel to the nations, wherever that lands me. If it’s a Roman prison, great. If I’m hungry, fine. If I’m shipwrecked, okay. If people are mad at me, that’s alright.” Paul was okay with whatever the cost for the Gospel to reach the nations.

But, it wasn’t that Paul had a martyr complex. I think a lot of people get a martyr complex. I’ve had three or four different guys, through the years, say to me, “You’ll probably never see me again, man.” I say, “First of all, I don’t believe you, unless you just go crazy and disappear. But, the martyr complex has to go.” Paul doesn’t have a martyr complex where he’s like, “I’m just going to suffer for you guys.” Paul is rejoicing because he understands that the greater the strain of suffering he is put under, the greater the Gospel has flourished. So, Paul says, “I see God’s grace in this discomfort. I see God’s grace in this suffering and this pain. It is a great gift and it’s a stewardship that God has given to me.” In verse 3, he uses the word “*mystery*.” He says,

*“…how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.”*

When we think of the word *mystery* we think of forensic files or cold case files. When we are traveling on the road and we are in a hotel room, after everyone else has fallen asleep, Kilby and I will watch three or four episodes. We were on the road this past spring and I took Kilby with me, and two nights in a row, back to back, we watched three or four cold case files. It’s so interesting to see how they figure out whodunit, you know? But, that’s not the kind of mystery we are talking about. In the context that Paul is speaking, a *mystery* was something that was entrusted to one person, as an oracle, that was to then be revealed through that one person. So, it’s a truth given by God that is then to be declared and spoken as a revelation, or an oracle, from God to all people.

In modern times, a lot of pastors and teachers want to be clever and they want to say something so that people are going, “I’ve never thought of that! That’s groundbreaking!” But, the type of mysteries that Paul was speaking of, we don’t have those anymore. We have full disclosure of the revelation of God in the Scriptures. That’s why we read our Bibles; it’s God speaking to us. All Scripture is breathed out by God and is God speaking to us. But, in Paul’s time, we are talking about an old system of Jewish law that is now going to be replaced by a new covenant in Christ’s blood, and Paul is the revealer of the oracles of God – the *mystery*. What Paul is saying is news to the hearers’ ears. They’ve never heard this before. He is declaring these great mysteries and what you will literally see in other places in Scripture is that the word *oracle* is used. Oracles are being shared. In 1 Corinthians 4:1, for instance, Paul says we are all stewards of the mysteries of God. We are ministering servants of Jesus Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. So there is stewardship given in what Paul proclaims.

So, what Paul proclaims is this.

Verse 6,

*“This mystery is that…”*

Here it comes; he’s going to reveal what the mystery is. The people are sitting there going, “What’s the mystery?” You will have people who will read this passage and go, “Oooh, he’s going to reveal a mystery!” People love to get eccentric and overly spiritual when it comes to mysteries. But, Paul says, “Get ready. Get your pad and pencil out. I’m going to tell you what the mystery is.” And the Ephesians are holding their breath in anticipation. So, here it is.

*“This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.”*

As Gentiles, we receive the same promises as the Jews who receive the Gospel. Praise the Lord! We are not like the step-kids in Cinderella. We are not second-class citizens in the kingdom of God. We are not going to get to Heaven and see one line for Jews and another line for all the other nations of the world. The Jews don’t get a special subdivision where there is extra gold and everyone else gets to live on the lower forty. When we gather in Heaven, whatever that looks like, there will be no Jew, no Gentile, no slave, no free, no rich, no poor, no illiterate, no wealthy, no educated – we are one in Christ. He’s the head of the Body and we are citizens in the kingdom of God. Paul is saying – “That’s the mystery!” There is nothing else to figure out. Don’t get circumcised. Don’t memorize the Torah. Don’t study the Talmud. Don’t practice the Sabbath laws. We are all one people under Christ and we do this His way from now on. That’s the mystery and we are recipients of that great mystery. It’s a fantastic mystery!

Verse 7,

*“Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace,”*

He says again what he said back in verse 2. He can’t get over the fact that he gets to tell the people this great mystery.

Do you ever have someone tell you something and it is legitimately a really good secret? What do you do with that? Ninety percent of you tell somebody. I was speaking to someone recently and he said, “I was talking to so-and-so and I don’t know how people found out my secret. I only told you.” I said, “Okay, I haven’t told anybody.” I had been giving this guy pastoral counsel and I said, “I want you to think really hard. Did you tell someone else?” Then he says, “Oh, yeah. I told this one guy but he swore he wouldn’t tell anybody.” I said, “I’ll bet you he told his wife and I’ll bet you she told a friend. I bet you we could figure out how it got out. It doesn’t really matter because the bottom line is this – people don’t keep secrets very good.” Because, when you have this tidbit of information that’s a secret, you want to tell somebody just so they know. They, too, get to be in the know.

So, Paul is going, “I have this secret, but it’s not a secret, it’s a mystery and I’m getting ready to reveal it!” Boom! There it is! “Jesus came to die for all people!” That’s the great story of the Gospel. So he is revealing a great mystery that he can’t keep in and he doesn’t want them to keep it in. Proclaim it! Preach it! Share it! Tell everybody!

In verse 8, Paul says something that I think, as a church, we really need to hang onto.

*“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,…”*

That word *unsearchable* was not in biblical Greek. Paul literally made up a word to describe the riches of Christ. He couldn’t find a word good enough so he made one up. Sometimes you will see it translated as *incalculable*. It’s the immeasurable and unsearchable riches of Christ.

But, what he says in verse 8 is that we “preach Christ.” When we are preaching Christ, we are preaching a Christ who is unsearchable in terms of His wealth, and riches, and glory, and grace. So, what this means for us as a church is that every week when you come to Red Oak, and you sit in these seats, you will hear Christ preached. You will hear Christ exalted. You will not hear self-help sermons. You will not hear topical, fabricated how-to’s.

When we were in Exodus, and when we were back in 1 Corinthians, and when we were in Joshua – every Sunday night that you show up here we will preach Christ, because it’s the only subject matter that is infinite, and unsearchable in depth, and glory, and revelation, and it will never get boring. It will never get boring. If we tried to come up with a thousand little anecdotal sermons, you would get tired of it, and you would get burned out with it, and you would get sick of it. But, for a Christian, you never get sick of hearing about Christ—ever. Like, as a parent, you never get tired of that little face in the morning, saying, “Hey, mama. Hey, mama. Good morning, mama.” There’s never a morning where you are like, “Oh, my goodness. This kid is cute but I’ve had enough of it. I hate the morning thing where they just want you to cuddle and hug them and they tell you they love you!” No, we don’t do that. That doesn’t get old.

Preaching Christ should be the cry of every evangelical church, but it should also be for us as believers. We should constantly be proclaiming Christ. So, that’s what Paul says – we are going to proclaim Christ.

In verses 8-10, Paul is talking about the mystery again, and there is something that I think is really fascinating about the mystery. Throughout history, mysteries would be revealed, often from angels to men and often from prophets to people, but never has a mystery been revealed from people to angels. But, Paul kind of paints this picture in verses 8-10, where it’s like you have angels peering in and looking through the window, and they are dying to know what the great mystery is. The mystery is that the Gospel is for all people. The Messiah is for all people. Somehow, this is a great mystery revealed, literally, to the angels in Heaven.

We should not take our salvation lightly. We should not be presumptuous when it comes to the fact that we are saved and that we have been given the grace that leads to salvation. The angels are blown away by this! It’s a mystery revealed to them that, in turn, the Bible says they are longing to look more deeply into. We didn’t see this coming. And what’s really cool is that it is not only angels, but Satan and his demons, and principalities and powers, are going, “Oh, man! The empty tomb is a lot bigger deal than what we even realized!” They realize the weight of glory in Gentile salvation and the angels rejoice, and the Lord rejoices because salvation has come to the nations. It will go to all nations and we, as a church, get to be a part of it.

Then, in verses 11-12, Paul brings it back around to the personal reality that, as Christians, we have access to God through Christ, and it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or Gentile. It was so important for the Ephesians to realize that they no longer needed priests, and they didn’t need to go through the Jewish system, and they didn’t need a Jewish brother to pray on their behalf, and they didn’t need Jewish mediators to talk to Yahweh for them and pass along their requests. Literally, it’s all inclusive and the kingdom of God knows no ethnic or national boundaries. All of us can, with boldness, have access, and with confidence and faith come before the Father. Hebrews 4:16[[69]](#footnote-69) says that when we do that we come into the throne room of God and receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need, through our faith in Christ.

Paul closes it by saying, in verse 13,

*“So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.”*

“Don’t lose heart. I’m suffering, but it’s good for you that I suffer, because the Gospel is going to the nations. The Gospel is reaching the nations. I am a Gentile and the King of Jews has saved me. Praise the Lord and thanks be to God.”

Lord, tonight, we ask you to help us understand the great gift of salvation that has come to us at the expense of so many people, particularly, in this passage, at Paul’s expense. It eventually cost him his life, so please help us to understand the weight of your glory in our lives, but also, to particularly understand the great salvation that you have given to us, in Christ. I pray, Lord, that this week, as we meditate on this text and think about this passage, and particularly as we prepare for discipleship groups this week, that we would think about what a great miracle it is that people in North America know Jesus and we have been saved. Some of us can draw our own line back through a family that is not Christian, through moms and dads who don’t know the Gospel. Maybe we have to go back a few generations. Maybe it is somewhere back in the eighteenth or nineteenth century or maybe we have to go back to Europe, where someone, at some point, heard the Gospel and, as a result, we heard the Gospel. That is a mystery that baffled even angels and it blew the minds of early Jewish Christians. The Gospel is for us. Jesus, you are for us, and if you are for us who can be against us? Help us to realize that and to have a commitment to the nations so that this same passion and vision that the Apostle Paul had would burn in our own hearts and lives and that we would reach people for the Gospel and for the Kingdom. Please give us an inherent obedience that comes from the working of your Spirit in us and help us to obey when it comes to the proclamation of the Gospel and the sharing of Christ. I pray that we would be a church that really is on mission for your name and your name’s sake. In your name, Jesus. Amen.

June 28, 2015

Ephesians 3 – Part 2

Spencer Davis

I will read the entire passage we are going to go through tonight. Ephesians 3:14-21,

*“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, 16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, 21 to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

Paul starts out by saying, *“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father.”* So, he’s starting a prayer. Because these guys have been rescued he is praying for the Church. “I bow my knees,” is interesting because, usually, the posture of prayer for Jews was standing. They would usually stand and pray in their synagogues, but here Paul takes more of a position of submission. He bows his knees before the Father. Another interesting thing is that Paul is kind of going on two different themes; he’s talking about God the all-powerful King and he’s talking about God the Daddy, or God the Father. I want you to think about these two themes as we start working through this passage. God the King and God the Father are both all-powerful and intimate. This language shows both intimacy, by calling God “Father”, and it shows authority and respect when he says he “bows his knee.” We know already, from the last chapter, that Paul has said that we have access to the Father. In Ephesians 2:18, Paul says,

*“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,” – or members of the family of God.*

So, Paul says, “

*“I bow my knees before the Father, 15 from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named,”*

What’s that mean? Are there families in Heaven? What is this saying? Every family gets their name from the Father. I’ve read a lot of commentators that say that it might be better to say that God is the Father of the whole family, partially in Heaven and partially on Earth. God is the Father of every bit of the family. Every family gets their name from Him. But, in one sense, it is good to think of this individually – that your family and you daddies get your name *father* from the Father. We are supposed to be a reflection of that. Every family should be a small microcosm of a larger picture. Do you know what I mean? Every family is a small picture of a much larger reality; that God is the Father of the family. So, men, we should lead well. Paul is careful here to include all families, both Jews and Gentiles. He says that every family in Heaven and on Earth has been named from this Father, and naming has real significance when we look into the Scriptures.

Let me time out here for a second. This passage is going to talk a lot about fathers and fatherhood. Please, don’t get derailed by your earthly father as we look at this passage. Some of you do not have healthy relationship with your earthly fathers. Please don’t get derailed, because here Paul paints a picture that is so much larger than earthly fathers. Don’t get derailed if you didn’t have a dad who reflected Christ, because few do. Few do.

He goes on. He bows his knee before the Father and here is what he asks, *“That according to the riches of his glory that He might grant you…”* We talked about “according to the riches of His glory” in chapter 1. There are a lot of parallels between chapter 1 and chapter 3. When we were in chapter one, it was *“according to the riches of His grace.”* Here, it’s *“according to the riches of His glory.”* Brody showed us how this is *according to* and not *out of.* As an example, if I gave Zach’s kids a gift, it would be *out of* my riches. If I gave them a sucker, it would be *out of* my riches. But, with my own kids, I give to them *according to* my riches, which is like *what’s mine is yours*. If you live in my house and I buy milk that means that *we* bought milk. If I have a couch that means that *we* have a couch. My kids live *according to* my riches. This paints a picture for those of us who are in Christ, because chapter 1 has already told us that we are adopted into God’s family, so everything we have is according to the riches of His grace. The great Father from whom every family is named and from whom every father gets his name blesses us from that family bond. He blesses us according to His riches. So, God doesn’t just go to His vault and open it to give us a little bit of grace or a little bit of glory; He opens the door and gives us all access.

Here is how we access the storehouse and the treasure room—by praying. Paul is praying here that *“according to the riches of His glory He might grant you….”* John Stott said we can think of this prayer kind of like a staircase. Paul starts out low and then he builds, and builds, and builds, and builds over the next few verses. Here’s what Paul prays, that these people…

*“…be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, 17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth,”*

We are going to go through that more in depth in just a little bit. But, Paul is asking the King, who is our Father, that they *“be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being.”* What does this mean? Paul is praying that we might be strengthened with power through God’s Spirit in our inner being. This is linked to the next verse where he says that *“Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith.”* I appreciate Zach’s sensitivity in reading the Scripture choices and picking out songs that go with this passage, like “Dwell in me, dwell so richly in me.” These are two parallels of the same idea; that the Spirit might strengthen us with power through our inner being, the new creation, and that Christ might live and dwell in our hearts. There are two different words for live or dwell. This one, in our passage, is not one of someone coming and living in a hotel. This is a word that means someone permanently settling in and dwelling in a permanent home. Paul is praying that we might be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit in our inner being and that Christ might live in our hearts through faith.

People wonder where we get the idea of Christ living in our hearts or coming into our hearts. Here, the heart parallels the inner being. We know it isn’t the actual muscle that pumps blood throughout our bodies, but it is talking about the inner being. We can be strengthened through faith by the Holy Spirit and Christ can live in our hearts through faith. It’s a parallel—the internal work of the Spirit and the internal work of Christ. Paul goes on and says in the end of verse 17,

*“…that you, being rooted and grounded in love…”*

I love this picture because he takes one example from nature and one from architecture. He is praying that these guys might be strengthened, and that Christ would live in their hearts through faith and settle in and have His dwelling place in them, so that they would be rooted like a tree and grounded like a building, in love—that the foundation would sit on love and that the roots of the tree would be in the soil of love. He wants them to be rooted deep in love. It is interesting here that he doesn’t say that they might be rooted and grounded in theology. Right? Not primarily. Theology is crucial and knowing God is crucial because God is love. But, our theology should erupt in love. Our theology is based out of Christ’s love. It is not dead book knowledge but it is an understanding and a study of God, who is love. So, when we think “theology” we should think “love.” So, Paul is praying here that we would be rooted like a tree and built solidly on love and that Christ could dwell in our hearts through faith. See, “love” is the key word if you look back in chapter 1, where Paul talks about how we are blessed in Christ. He says this in Ephesians 1:3-6,

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” – Here’s the key phrase. --* ***In love*** *5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”*

“In love” God has chosen us to be adopted into His family, and that’s the love we are to be rooted in. When Christ dwells in our heart and when the Spirit strengthens us we get rooted deeper into the foundation of the love, which is Christ’s love toward us in salvation. It’s not an arbitrary person-to-person kind of love or infatuation; it is that we are to be rooted and grounded in Christ’s love toward us in salvation.

Verse 18 is where Paul starts picking up steam. Remember, this is a staircase, right? So, he starts out by saying *“that you might be strengthened with power through the Spirit”* and that *“Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith*” and that you might be *“rooted and grounded in love,”—*Christ’s love toward you. And now he is saying, *“that you might have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and the length, and the height, and the depth…”* Paul is talking about the love of Christ and he is getting more and more excited. When Paul gets excited he doesn’t put punctuation in. In chapter 1, it was one long sentence from verse 3 to verse 14 because Paul was so excited. And here, he is getting so excited about the love of Christ that he is saying that Christ might rule in your hearts, that you might be so rooted and grounded in love, so that that out of that rooting in Christ’s love you might have the strength that you must have to even think about comprehending, with all the saints, what is the length, and breadth, and height, and depth. It’s almost like he’s taking a ruler or a measuring stick and is saying, “Look, you need strength so you can see how long Christ’s love is, and how tall His love is, and how deep His love is.” He is saying that you will need supernatural strength to even begin thinking about God’s love; to even begin to comprehend it, and that comes from Christ dwelling in us. Paul is careful to say, *“with all the saints,”* – that you might have the strength to comprehend *“with all the saints.”* They’ve been talking about Jews and Gentiles being grafted in, so he is careful here to say, “These guys are saints just like you are.” Remember, many are mad about the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles. He is asking that we might have strength to comprehend the height, the depth, the length, the breadth of Christ’s love, and I think there is an aspect here where it doesn’t just have to do with Jews and Gentiles, but Paul is saying that we can better comprehend the love of God together with the saints than we can alone. Together, as the Church, we can better comprehend the love of God than we can by ourselves. He is saying that we might better have the strength to comprehend with everyone else, with all the saints, what is the breadth, what is the length, what is the height, and what is the depth. I love this, because he doesn’t really finish the sentence. He gets so fired up that he’s like, “Pull out a measuring stick and measure the length, the breadth, the height, the depth – oh, you can’t!! You can’t do it!! You can’t know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge!!” He doesn’t finish the thought because he is so excited. He starts telling them how to measure and then he says that they can’t even do it, but they can know the love of Christ that is too big for them to know.

This is where it gets really technical, because he is saying you can’t measure the love of Christ because they can’t even comprehend it. He is praying for them, when he starts out, “You are going to need strength in your inner being and you are going to need Christ dwelling in your heart for you to be rooted and grounded in love. You are going to be rooted and grounded in love so that Christ can give you strength. You are going to need that strength to even start comprehending His love toward you.” That’s encouraging, because we have a really small view of Christ’s love. We do. We have a small, almost bookish type of knowledge of Christ’s love. Paul says here, “To know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. To know the unknowable.” However much you know, there is infinitely more to know about Christ’s love toward you.

Let me pause a second. A lot of this is talking about family love and the love of a father toward his kids. I wrote down some thoughts here because many don’t get the connection of father-love because of their earthly fathers. That is only an analogy. The most together family here on Earth and the family that communicates the best here on Earth is still a poor, poor reflection of God’s love. It doesn’t matter if you come from a family that you think has difficulty communicating or a dad who is clearly not a good picture of Christ. The best family falls short. Don’t get hung up on that idea. If your family is a stumbling block to understanding God’s love, rather than an aid and a parable, then I pray, as Paul prayed, that for you, according to the riches of God’s glory that He might grant to you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being, and that Christ might dwell in your heart through faith, and that you being rooted and grounded in love might have the strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and the length, and the height, and the depth, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.

See, God knows that His love is beyond our comprehension. He knows that our minds can’t even begin to fathom the cross, so it is fascinating what He has done in the Scripture. He tells us more familiar stories so we can kind of get it or at least get a hint of the feeling of the love of God. Do you ever think about that? When we start looking at the cross, there are many parallels of love in the Scriptures so that we can look at each of these stories and get a hint of what the indescribable, incomparable love of God is like. What is your favorite story about the love of God? Think about it. Amy and I went on a date last night and I was thinking about tonight’s message while we were driving along. I was telling her what I was thinking about sharing with the church and what the Lord has been teaching me while I’ve been studying through the passage, regarding knowing a love that is beyond knowing. It’s such a tough concept to think about; how can we know something that is beyond knowing? So, I asked her what a story is in Scripture that she really connects with and that shows her God’s love. It was way different than what I thought it was going to be because she said it was the story of Hosea. There are so many stories in the Scripture that showcase God’s love in different aspects because God knows it is so unknowable and that we can’t fathom it, He gives us these other stories. Some are parables and some are real, actual, and historical, but they are parallels to help us see a hint here and a hint there and know a little bit of the unknowable.

So, I’m going to read Hosea 2:14-20. If you remember the story, God told his prophet, Hosea, to go and marry a prostitute. Hosea did it, knowing she was going to be unfaithful, and that is a picture of God’s love. This is the way God loves His people even though they are unfaithful. Like Hosea’s prostitute-wife who is running after her lovers, he is supposed to stay married to her and demonstrate God’s love to her. Hosea does this. He goes and finds her and Scripture says this,

*“Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. 15 And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt. 16 “And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. 18 And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.”*

It’s a picture of God pursuing after and marrying His bride. It’s a picture of the love of God that we can’t even begin to understand. He follows an unfaithful wife and loves her still. He looks for her, seeks for her, marries her, and says, “Forever. Forever I am with you. Forever.”

Maybe you connect more with a story like the parable of the Shepherd and the lost sheep from Luke 15[[70]](#footnote-70). He has ninety-nine sheep and one is missing and to his own danger he goes and looks for the sheep. When he finally finds the sheep, instead of punishing it he puts it on his shoulders and takes it back to the flock and rejoices that he finally found this one lost sheep. Maybe you connect with this parable in that God came and looked for you and He found you when you were helpless, and alone, and He rescued you.

Maybe you connect more with a story like in Ezekiel 16:6-15. God is telling a parable about a woman and He says,

*“And when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ I said to you in your blood, ‘Live!’ 7 I made you flourish like a plant of the field. And you grew up and became tall and arrived at full adornment. Your breasts were formed, and your hair had grown; yet you were naked and bare. 8 “When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine. 9 Then I bathed you with water and washed off your blood from you and anointed you with oil. 10 I clothed you also with embroidered cloth and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen and covered you with silk. 11 And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. 12 And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. 13 Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. 14 And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.”*

Maybe that’s the picture that connects with you. For me, the account that immediately popped into my mind was Luke 15 and the story of the prodigal son. When I think about the love of God, the story in this parable gets me every time. I just want to read a few verses from it because everyone is super familiar with this story. This is the parable of the prodigal son and I will start in Luke 15:11,

*“And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. 13 Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. 14 And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16 And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.”*

He had a dire situation here. This story is very familiar, where the younger son says to his father, “Give me my inheritance now. I don’t want to wait until you are dead, so give it to me now.” So, he went off and squandered it with his friends. He had a party and had a good time and then all that came to an end once his money ran out. He found himself in a land of famine and he was alone in the land. Everyone had left him and he was willing to eat what the pigs were eating because he was so hungry.

*“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18 I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ 20 And he arose and came to his father.”*

And here’s the best part:

*“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”*

I am so glad that Scripture includes the words *“and ran.”* To me it is such a beautiful picture of God’s grace. The father sees his son coming from a long way off and he doesn’t just wait back at the house with his arms folded and say to himself, “I’m going to let him come back but I’m going to give him a good talking to. I’m going to teach him a lesson with this because that was a big deal.” He sees his son coming from a long way off and he drops what he’s doing and runs! That’s beautiful.

For you, maybe it’s the story of the woman caught in adultery[[71]](#footnote-71) or the story of the woman washing Jesus’ feet[[72]](#footnote-72). Whatever it is, it is not that there are all of these stories and that you need to connect with just one of them. That’s not why God wrote all these stories. He wrote all these stories because His love is like a father with a prodigal son; His love is like marrying someone who is unfaithful; His love is like rescuing a woman in adultery. Gods’ love is like each one of these stories and still it is beyond our comprehension. Isn’t that crazy!

That’s what Paul is saying with, “That you might know the height, and the depth—No! No, you can’t fathom or measure the love of Christ. It’s beyond comprehension!” But, he is still praying for these guys that Christ would so dwell in them, and that they would be so rooted in Christ’s love, that they would start to get it just a bit. That they would start to understand that His love is beyond comprehension and He has that love toward you. Christ loves you. He loves you and that love is beyond compare. It blows away any family love. It blows away any romantic love.

John Stott says, “It seems to me legitimate to say that the love of Christ is ‘broad’ enough to encompass all of mankind, especially Jews and Gentiles, the themes of these chapters. It’s long enough to last for eternity, deep enough to reach the most degraded sinner, and high enough to exalt him to the Heaven.”

Paul is saying that you will need supernatural power to even understand how immense it is, so he prays that you will be strengthened through the Holy Spirit.

The last thing in his prayer is *“that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”* That’s a pretty big request— *“that you may be filled with all the fullness of God*.” That’s kind of a summarizing statement for all of this. Only by knowing Christ’s love can you be filled with all the fullness of God. Paul has mentioned “the fullness of God” a lot in Ephesians. If you look in Ephesians 1:23, he talks about the Church, which is Christ’s body, is the “fullness of Him who fills all in all.” He mentions it again in Ephesians 4, which we haven’t covered yet, when he says in verses 12-13,

*“…to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,…”*

So, in one sense, we are already filled with the fullness of God, and in another sense we are not there yet. It is kind of that “already/not yet”[[73]](#footnote-73) tension in the Scriptures, where God calls us to become what we are. You are filled with Christ—Be filled. Here, he is telling them to be strengthened so that Christ might live in their hearts through faith. If this happens, you will be rooted and grounded in love. Love is the prerequisite for the strength needed to comprehend with all the saints the breadth, length, height, and depth – to know the love of Christ and to be filled with God’s fullness as a result.

Notice something: every one of these things is passive. What do we do? Not a lot. If you look at it, Paul is praying that we will be strengthened, that we will be rooted, that we will have the strength to comprehend, that we will have the strength through His Spirit so that Christ can dwell in us, that we might know the love of God, and that we would be filled. It is all passive. It is interesting that God is going to do this work in us.

As I said before, it’s kind of a staircase of prayer. I want to read another quote from Stott. He says, “As we now look back down the staircase, which we have been climbing with Paul, we can’t fail to be struck by his audacity. He prays that his readers might be given the strength of the Spirit and the ruling presence of Christ, the rooting of their lives in love, the knowledge of Christ’s love in all its dimensions, and the fullness of God Himself. These are bold petitions. Climbers of this staircase become short of breath, even a little giddy.” If you look at what he is asking, this is audacity. Then, you know what he says next? God can do more. Remember that all of these verses are a prayer that Paul is asking for these people, and as he closes his prayer he says, “You know, God can do more; more than this…more…more.”

I want you to keep this thought in mind, because it’s going to come up in a second. Keep the thought in your mind of this love that is beyond all comprehension; this love that is beyond our knowledge. Keep this thought in mind because Paul is going to come back to it in a minute. All of this has been a prayer and Paul has prayed bold things like being strengthened in power through the Spirit, living through faith, rooted and grounded in love, strength to comprehend, to know the love of Christ, to be filled with the fullness of God—Paul asks for ridiculously bold things and now he says, “God can do more.” In verse 20, he says,

*“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask…”*

Paul has asked some huge things, but God *“is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask…”*

*“…or think , according to the power at work within us,…”*

What does it mean that God can *“do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to His power at work within us”*? If you look, here is that parallel phrase again. If you look, in verse 16, he said that “according to the riches of His glory” we can know His love. Here, he is making a parallel, when he says, “according to His power and work within us” He can do more than we ask or think. These are two huge realities; the one is “according to the riches of His glory” we can know the love, but then he says, “according to His power.” What does that mean? It’s not like giving someone a sucker *out of* your riches. He’s now saying “according to His power”—it’s not that God is going to give you a little drop of His power out of the big storehouse of power, but that, if you are in Him, and you are in His family, His couch is your couch. It’s “according to the power that’s at work in Him.” It’s *rendering to,* not *out of.*

So, *according to* what power? Look around. Where do we not see the power of God on display? You can see it in nature. Last week we watched the *Oceans Deep[[74]](#footnote-74)* episode of the *Planet Earth* series, created by BBC, on TV, and there is one scene that is fantastic. There is this cute and innocent little seal that is bobbing along on the surface of the water and the scene is picture perfect. It looks like a Hallmark card, then you don’t even see it coming and there is a great white shark that comes up in a slow motion shot. The little seal still looks happy and playful because, with the slow motion, he still hasn’t seen the great white’s teeth opening up around him. Then, because of the power of the shark as he shoots up out of the water, even after his mouth has closed around the seal his body continues to rise higher and higher out of the water. My kids were screaming at the incredible power that was on display. We watch these shows and we are continually amazed at the power in nature and we think about how these things are happening all around the world all the time. Everywhere you look in nature you see the power of God on display. We see the power of our infinite God on display.

You can see it in the Scriptures, too. The Scriptures explicitly tell us that God has power over lions[[75]](#footnote-75). God has power over the armies of men. God tells storms what to do[[76]](#footnote-76). He has power over angels[[77]](#footnote-77). He has power over demons[[78]](#footnote-78). He has power over oceans[[79]](#footnote-79), causing them to split or to tidal wave. He has power over the Earth. I thought of that as Amy and I watched the movie, *San Andreas*, last night. When you think about earthquakes and tsunamis and their power to destroy whole cities at a time, they are *according to* His power. He can do even more *“according to His power at work within us.”* That is the same power that not only stopped a river or split an ocean, but that stopped death. This is the power of Christ at work within you. He is more powerful than death, or sin, or the elements of the Earth, and that same power is working in us!

*“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than we ask or think, according to His power at work in us.”*

Let’s just get practical. Let me ask you this—so what do we then ask and think? If it is true that Christ loves us with a love that’s indescribable, and He has a power that’s indescribable, and He tells us that He can do more than we ask and more than we think, out of that power—what are you asking for? What do you expect? What do you hope for and dream of? If Christ tells us that He can do more than we ask or think, when we pray are we remembering that we are praying to a God with all power, and that power dwells in us and roots us and grounds us in love? Because, later on, Paul is going to say, *“To God be all glory in the Church.”* I’m not talking just about as an individual who prays and dreams. As a church, Red Oak, what are you and your family doing personally? What are you asking God for and what are you dreaming about regarding the work that He has left you on Earth to do? As a family, have you settled down into just paying the bills? As a church, have we settled down into just coming and hearing a sermon and saying, “That was good. I agreed with it. I liked how he said this and I might have said that differently.” For real, for us as Red Oak Church, is this it? Is it enough for us to sit and listen to expositional preaching, which we know is important? Is it enough for us to sit in discipleship groups and say, “Here’s what I got out of it”? If that’s so, then we are asking and thinking too little, both for the nations and for Cherokee County. We really are. Think about the need in this area; it’s huge. It really is. Stand on your porch and point in any direction and there are people who are hurting. There are families that are hurting and who are making terrible choices. To be honest, the next generation of people are the ones who are really going to be bearing the brunt of this and feeling the consequences. There are kids who are in terrible, terrible home situations. Dream big and ask big. Paul says that God can do far more abundantly than we ask as a church or as individuals. He can do far more abundantly—not just than what we ask—but even more than we even think. We cannot even imagine what God might be pleased to do in Cherokee County or the nations if we asked and expected as a church, and if we got involved and went beyond just sitting and discussing.

We have some cool opportunities coming up for us as a church. There are some cool opportunities with kids and with different programs, and we want you to ask and dream, too. Come to the church and ask what you can do to reach your neighbors. It’s not that we need more programs, but can you imagine what a church this size could do if we were sent to Yemen? Think of the impact that we would have in a small town in Yemen for the Gospel. Are we having that impact in Andrews, or Robbinsville, or Murphy, or Marble, or Peachtree? He can do far more than we ask or imagine according to this same power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead. It indwells us and works in us.

Here is how Paul ends. It’s fantastic and I love it. Paul thinks about these huge realities of God’s love that is indescribable and then he thinks about God’s power that is beyond compare. When he sees these things he erupts in doxology. Do you know what doxology is? It is speaking glory. We speak glory all the time. We see something amazing that happens and we say, “Wow! That was awesome!” For me, it happens a lot around sports. In the NBA finals, it happened a lot when Steph Curry had the ball. Especially in game five, he would do something and I would jump up off the couch and whoop and holler[[80]](#footnote-80), and I couldn’t keep quiet because he was so good. In that moment I would be thinking he was beyond compare. For some of you that might make no sense. You might have doxology statements in another area, like music, or toward a certain artist. Amy showed me an incredible artist’s work this week and I realized that artist was her Steph Curry. We all erupt in praise over different things and here is what Paul is doing as he erupts in doxology. He is looking at this first reality, where he says,

*“…So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

That’s the huge reality on this side, and then he goes to the other side and says, because of the power that is at work in Him, He can…

*“…do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think.”*

It’s like these two truths crash together and Paul can’t contain himself. He erupts in “To God be the glory!!! To God be the glory!! He can do more than we can even ask or think and He loves deeper than we could ever imagine.” In this passage, this is what Paul is praying for these Ephesian believers. That they would know and experience that God’s love is beyond comprehension. God’s power is beyond comprehension. It’s infinite love and infinite power—and He’s daddy, He’s Father. You have the King, my Father. He’s all-powerful and He’s intimate. It’s beautiful and Paul erupts with *“To God be all glory in the Church*!” God has all power, and immeasurable love, and can do far more abundantly than what we ask, to be glorified specifically in this church. To God be all glory in the Church. The goal is that through Red Oak that Christ would look great; not that Red Oak would look great. To God be all glory in the Church! Reflect this love. People should see this love in Red Oak and say, “Glory to God.” It’s our job to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. They should see the work of the ministry going on through you guys, through us, and say, “Glory to God.” To God be all glory in the Church, and the next thing he says is, *“in Christ Jesus.”* Christ seems to want to spread His glory through the church.

Verse 21,

*“To God be all glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus.”*

We give glory to God because we are in Christ. Then, Paul ends his prayer by giving all glory to God.

*“…throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”*

This is not a trend. For all eternity this is the song we will sing – “Glory to God.” Glory to anyone else—any artist, any basketball player—will be temporal. Glory to someone else for a minute, but glory to God throughout all generations, forever and ever, Amen. Glory to Yahweh will be forever. Here, Paul says, “glory in the Church and glory in Christ”—glory in the Body and glory in the Head; glory in the Bride and glory in the Groom. To God be the all glory, throughout all generations, forever and ever, Amen. Let’s pray.

Jesus, I pray that we would see your power and your love and that we would give you all glory. I pray that we would be a small picture of the larger reality that all of creation gives you glory. I pray that through Red Oak that we would dream big and ask big, knowing that you can do far more than we can ask, or imagine, or think. I pray that we would begin to be strengthened by your Spirit and by the indwelling of Christ so that we could even begin to comprehend this love that is beyond our knowledge. We love you, Lord Jesus. I pray that we would reflect on these things now. In your name I pray, Jesus. Amen.

July 5, 2015

Ephesians 4 – Part 1

Brody Holloway

If you are visiting, we are in the middle of a study in the book of Ephesians, which is a book of the Bible, in the New Testament, written by a guy named Paul. In his obedience, the Lord used Paul to write a good portion of the New Testament. Ephesians is a book that is written to a particular group of believers in a particular city, called Ephesus. So that’s just a little background for those of you who are jumping into the middle of this thing. We have been going through this book for a few weeks now, so the context is that Paul, who most of us are familiar with, has been imprisoned. He has been imprisoned specifically because of his direct association with an Ephesian Christian, Trophimus, who Paul was accused of taking into a Jewish synagogue.

We walked through that a couple of weeks ago. Paul went to jail, initially, over his association with Ephesian Christians. So, you have to think that this is a really awesome letter for these people to receive. This is not a sterile form letter. This is a man writing to people he loves and who he has formerly pastored, and shepherded, and led.

Up until this point, the first three chapters of the book have been largely theological and doctrinal in nature. The words “theological” and “theology” just mean that as we study God and something pertains to God that it’s theological. We’ve looked at a right understanding of who God is and a right understanding of who we are in our relationship with God. Paul has repeatedly used the phrase “in Christ” and he has talked about what it has taken for God to bring us into a relationship with Himself, and all of the doctrinal implications of that. So, “theological” means how we view God; “doctrinal” means that we think rightly about God according to the Scripture.

The first three chapters that we have already covered have been theological and doctrinal, as we have looked at: How do we view God? How do we view ourselves? How do we view the Scripture? What does it mean to be in Christ? So, now, we are going to transition as we start into Ephesians 4, and it’s not that it now *becomes* practical because, as Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones says about this – doctrine and theology *are* practical. Don’t say “That was doctrinal and theological and now this is going to be practical.” Doctrine and theology are practical and necessary for the believer to be rooted, and built up, and grounded in what he believes and how he lives his life. So, what we say is that this is now the practical application, whereas doctrine and theology are practical thinking about how we view God and how we perceive the Scripture. This is the application of that and that is the transition and shift that happens here.

This is the Word of the Lord. Ephesians 4:1-15,

*“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. 7 But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. 8 Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ 9 (In saying, ‘He ascended’, what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? 10 He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”*

Right now, in America, and particularly in our culture and society, there is this obsession with fitness and nutrition, and it’s such an obsession that every time you turn around there is a new program that is exploding on the scene. My brother owns a CrossFit gym, and back in 2007 he introduced me to that. Maybe somewhere else you might have a fitness craze that is based on South Pacific dance moves. All types of fitness programs all promise the same thing, and that the results are that you will be in better shape, or healthier, or whatever. There is also a lot of nutritional talk and jargon. A lot of you got a kick out of a book that I recently read, called, *Eat More Bacon and Jog Less*.[[81]](#footnote-81) A few years ago there was a big craze with the Atkins Diet and the South Beach Diet. They basically say that if you don’t eat carbohydrates that you can pretty much each what you want to eat and you will be fine. To some degree it’s effective and some people lose weight on that program. I didn’t do the research about the millions or billions of dollars this stuff sells, but the problem is that America is more overweight than we’ve ever been. So, what’s the correlation or what’s the problem? The problem is that you can have the ideas and the opportunities, but there has to be something that you know with what you do, or what you’ve heard with who you are.

If we took the American Church and we painted it with a really broad stroke, we would include everyone that the secular world would view as “Christian.” So, that would mean we would take all denominations, all people who affiliate with the Christian faith and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and lump us all together, no matter which denomination. By and large, what has happened in the American Church is that we are not doing biblical church. Whatever lens you look through at the national Christian scene, you don’t see biblical church at every turn where you see the word “church.” There are a lot of people who are not maintaining what the Scripture, particularly in our text, says is a healthy Body of Christ. So, we need to understand what it looks like to take care of the Body of Christ.

It is important that we learn this, because just becoming a Christian doesn’t mean that you automatically know how to be a Christian. Receiving the Gospel, and accepting Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit doesn’t mean that everyone is instantly going to fall in line and function the way they are supposed to function and do what they are supposed to do. For application of the Gospel in our lives daily there needs to be an understanding of how we each fit into the Body of Christ, and what the role of the Church is, and what biblical Church leadership looks like. That is why, when we started Red Oak a few years ago we went through these distinctives of what a biblical church is supposed to be.[[82]](#footnote-82) There are so many imposters and fakes out there that don’t reflect what the Scripture says the Church is supposed to be. So, just because you are a Christian doesn’t mean that you are automatically going to do church right and it doesn’t mean that you are automatically going to live your life the way that it is supposed to be lived.

A lot of us, in our testimonies, say that early on in our faith there was a season where, when you look back, you can see that God was so gracious because we were such dumb-dumbs. We did things, and said things, and went places, and thought things that were just wrong, but God was so gracious to us because He knows the ultimate person He’s going to create and the results that He’s going to bring about in our lives. God is so gracious, but He does expect for us to take what He has revealed to us, and study it, learn it, know it, and respond to it obediently. We are held accountable and we are held responsible for what the Scripture says and so we want to do this according to God’s plan.

So, what Paul is doing now is he is going to walk through this idea of how the body of Christ is to function. Tonight, in this passage, we are going to see three marks of a healthy church, and those marks are this:

1. In verses 1-6, the first mark of a healthy church is going to be that we are united. In a biblical church there is going to be unity.
2. The second mark is that we are going to be diverse. We are going to be united but we are going to be diverse. Amen? We don’t all look the same, dress the same, talk the same, act the same, listen to the same, etc. You know what I mean? There is diversity in the Body of Christ. That’s a good thing. There is great diversity, even within our church, although we are pretty culturally bound to one general area. So, there is unity and there is diversity, and then those two things are appropriated by the third characteristic.
3. The third mark of a healthy church is spiritual maturity. The overall identity of the Church is going to be that of spiritual maturity.

So, when the Church is growing and maturing and we are being built up, the diversity and the unity will look good. If not, one will outweigh the other and you will have a discombobulated picture of what the Church is supposed to look like.

1. So**,** the first mark is that we will be united, and you will find that in verses 1-6.
   * 1. In verse 1, we are united in our calling. Paul says, *“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”* So, there is a calling that we have been called to and in his appeal to the Church, Paul is saying several things:
     2. The first one is this. Paul begins this practical, applicable section of the letter with an appeal that begins with the word *“*therefore*”;* so, in light of all that he has just said. In the chapter just prior to this he addressed ethnic unity and ethnic diversity. So, Gentiles had come into the Church. Gentile salvation was a reality. The Jews had to some degree, and in some places, been admonished and rebuked to make it clear that the Gospel is made available to all people. In chapter 3, we just walked through how the Body of Christ is going to be Jews and Gentiles. So, Paul now says, “therefore…”. In light of that, he has something he wants to say in making an appeal.
     3. The second thing Paul does in the first verse is that he refers to himself as a *“*prisoner*”* for the Lord. Oftentimes, in Scripture, Paul uses the word “bondservant” or “slave,” depending on which translation you use. He would say, “I’m a slave of righteousness,” or “I’m a bondservant of Jesus Christ.” That comes from the Greek word “doulas,” which simply means “slave”; like I am enslaved to the freedom that I have in Christ. It’s a really awesome picture of who we are in Christ and how Christ sets us free. But, now we are, literally, bondservants of Jesus Christ. Paul talks about that often; how that, spiritually, we are prisoners for the Lord. But, keep in mind that contextually, in this letter, Paul literally is a prisoner. He is legitimately in prison, in what a lot of people would consider one of the worst prisons in history[[83]](#footnote-83). Paul is literally writing this letter as he is a prisoner and he is writing to the Ephesians on behalf of the Ephesians.

Think of this as a pastor who you love and with whom you have a relationship with, rather than a preacher that you just may have heard of, or listened to on TV, and you get a form letter from him. This letter from Paul is meaningful because he is a prisoner on their behalf, and yet you will see him say, “In all circumstances I am content.”[[84]](#footnote-84) As a prisoner in bondage in one of the worst prisons in history, Paul is writing to them and he is focused on their growth. He’s not asking them to rally and write to their congressmen and senators to help him get out of prison. He is writing from prison to help them reflect what the Church is supposed to be, in reflecting who Christ is. There is a lot of weight in the statement that he is a prisoner for the Lord.

* + 1. Paul “urges” them. He urges them rather than commanding them. Sometimes in Scripture you will see Paul give very strong imperatives where he is commanding on behalf of the Lord, but right here he is urging. Do you ever do this with your kid? You are beginning to give him more responsibility and you want him to make a decision, but you know you really need to urge him and sway him in the direction he needs to make. Paul, as a sort of spiritual father, understands the need, but he is not commanding them. He is urging them because he desires very much from his heart for the Spirit to work in them.

I’ve done a ton of exegetical work on this first verse and this is what Paul is getting at—he is concerned that they not become legalistic and try to become worthy of the calling of the Lord by following a bunch of rules. If we get a command, we put a plan in place to follow that command. If I have a command to follow and I follow that command I might feel really righteous about who I am. Paul is urging them to walk in a life in Christ, to love Jesus, and obey Jesus, and everything will be okay. He doesn’t want them to set a list of rules and do’s and don’ts as a kind of prescribed self-righteousness. He is urging them to follow Jesus and love Jesus. When you follow the teaching of Paul, you see him saying, “Read your Bible, worship in Spirit, worship in truth, love doctrine, love people, share the Gospel, proclaim Christ, reach the nations.” He is urging them to a life in Christ but he’s not giving a command.

* + 1. The next thing is that he is urging them to “walk.” You will see this elsewhere, particularly in his letter to the Galatians. Paul talks about “living” or “walking,” which is a word that is used throughout Scripture in regard to how we conduct ourselves on a daily basis[[85]](#footnote-85). In other words, “conduct yourself on a daily basis in such a way that…” Paul uses the word *“*worthy*.”* This is the same word that we get the word “axiom” from. Now, I’m not a math whiz and you guys know that. But, an axiom is where what is on one side of the equation carries the same weight as the other thing on the other side of the equation. For example: 4+1 equals 3+2. That’s an axiom or a balanced weight of truth. So, what Paul is saying is that our lives as Christians should reflect the calling of the Gospel on our lives. That’s an impossible command, so what Paul is doing is saying that our lives should reflect Christ in light of the last three chapters, where he told the Ephesians, “You’ve received Christ.” So, walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, by walking in Christ. Walk in obedience to Christ, not in your own strength and not in your own power. Then, that axiom of one being worthy of the other is the work of Christ that saved you will be balanced by the work of Christ to live in and through you. So many Christians feel like Jesus saves us and then we go and live our lives in our own strength, and our own power, and our own giftings, and our own ability. The idea is that the worthiness of the call is in Christ, and the worthiness of my walk is by and through Christ by obedience, so Christ is at work in me constantly.
    2. The sixth thing Paul says is that we are to walk worthy of the “calling.” We don’t walk worthy so that we may be called or saved; we walk and work in a manner that reflects the calling on our lives and our conformity to Christ. He lays out what that looks like in the next few verses. So, it’s not that we are to walk worthy and then we will be saved, it’s that in light of the fact that we have been saved we are to walk in such a way as reflects that. This will be contrasted in next week’s text over in verse 17, *“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds.”* He is contrasting verses 1 and 17 and the futility of walking in the flesh. You see this in the way that people pursue life in the flesh. “Futility” simply means emptiness or vanity. Solomon would say, “All things are vanity.[[86]](#footnote-86)” “Futility” means pointlessness, and how many people do we look around and see on a daily basis who are just pursuing pointless nothing in life? That’s the world that we live in, whether it’s fame, fortune, sexual freedom, or whatever it is, there is futility in the way that the world pursues life. Paul is saying that, in contrast to that, we walk and live in a way that reflects the calling of Christ on our lives, and specifically, the power of the Gospel on our lives.

So, now Paul is going to unpack what that looks like.

* 1. The second thing is that we are to be united in our conduct. In verses 2-3, Paul lays out some characteristics of what that conduct would look like.:
     1. The first is *humility.* This idea was completely contrary to Roman culture and human nature, and it is just as contrary to pretty much any worldly culture that we would be a part of. We are all about self-exaltation and self-esteem. We have kind of packaged self-esteem in secular psychology where they say that what kids need is more self-esteem, when in reality what a kid needs is to understand that in and of themselves they do not carry any worth or value. It takes the work of the Gospel to bring value into a person’s life. Humility was completely counter-cultural among the people Paul was writing to, but Christ identified the Body of Christ as serving one another, in Philippians 2:1-3, where He said, *“Prefer one another.”*

My wife, Little, does this cool thing that I know some of you do, where throughout the house you have these spray-on chalkboards, with cool verses or things written on them for a week, or a day, or a season. It could be a quote or a verse. I had heard this before, but one of the quotes, said, “Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it’s thinking of yourself less.” When I turn my attention, and my gaze, and my focus toward the needs of others, and serving others, and loving others, there is this humility that is projected in the life of a believer who is walking like Jesus would have him to walk. To make it simple, you are going to be more concerned with other people than you are with your own self.

We were all gathered around talking about this guy we all came in contact this week who just overwhelmed us with the joy of Christ in him. He was so interested in others. That’s what we should be walking more like as we walk in humility.

* + 1. The next one is *gentleness.* This simply means being self-controlled. We are not to be timid but bold. By the way, gentleness does not mean that you are not bold. It doesn’t mean you’re timid. Gentleness is not a synonym with timidity and it is not an antonym of boldness. We are called to be courageous and bold. You think of 2 Timothy 1:7, where Scripture says, *“God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power, and of love, and of self-discipline.”* So, power and gentleness would both be characteristics that should be seen in a Christian’s life. Really, what we are to do is to live under the control of the Holy Spirit. Living in gentleness is to be living under the control of the Holy Spirit. Living in gentleness means that I live in submission and obedience to the Holy Spirit in my life.
    2. The next one is *patience.* We live in a very demanding and impatient culture. For instance, people get angry when their phone doesn’t move fast enough and provide them with information in five seconds that five years ago would have taken them an hour to obtain. Are you guilty of that? Yes, we are all guilty of that. “3G is killing me! What does ‘LTE’ mean?! Grrrr-- I only have one bar of wifi!!” I was behind somebody the other day at McDonald’s and you would have thought this person’s clothes were on fire or that there was a hornet’s nest unleashed in their car. It was complete chaos in that car because they sat at the drive-thru window for a solid three-and-a-half minutes. That’s the culture that we live in, and we perpetuate, and that most of us are guilty of.

Patience is something that most of us probably don’t do really good with, but we also don’t have the courage or the insanity to pray and ask for[[87]](#footnote-87). We try to pray for patience, but it comes out more like, “Lord, give me p-p-p-… perfect peace that I’m in your will. Lord, help me be more p-p-p-… passionate for the Gospel.” It’s a hard thing to pray for. I know if I ask for patience that it’s going to come in like the school of hard knocks. But, think about this: 1 Corinthians 13:4 just says, *“Love is patient.”*

I think that when we think of patience we always think of this virtue that’s being cast or thrust onto us, but patience is an outworking virtue of the Holy Spirit that will most reflect itself in the way that we love people. Love is patient. Love is kind. The next phrase says, *“It bears with one another.”* Another way to say, “Bearing with one another in love” would be “putting up with one another.” Sometimes, you don’t have to be right or I don’t have to be right; let’s just put up with one another…in love. A lot of times there is this attitude we get that if we know we are right we need to make sure that everyone else knows we are right.

Do you realize that Jesus went to the cross on the word of two false witnesses?[[88]](#footnote-88) I have taken a whooping over that this week. I have taken a beating in my own personal life. False witnesses testified against Jesus and that was the thing that catapulted the illegal trial. Jesus had been arrested illegally in the middle of the night so they could do it secretly. The people loved Jesus so the authorities did it all illegally, and what gave them traction was the false witnesses.

Oftentimes, we feel like we have to prove our point or we have to prove our position, but we just need to learn to put up with one another in love. We need to be quick to extend grace. That hits home for most of us. Think of it this way. The way that a healthy marriage works is that you are willing to overlook little annoyances because of the love that you have for that person. Parenting may be the same way. You might be able to plug in close friendships to this example. In your closest relationships, you are willing to overlook an annoyance, where with someone you don’t enjoy all that much, you might be quick to pull the trigger. In the Body of Christ, we are united in Christ, so we should bear with one another in love. We should always put up with one another in love. But, oftentimes in the Body of Christ we are quick to be annoyed and angry and believe the worst of a person rather than giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Is it not true that oftentimes when we hear something about a person, our knee-jerk reaction is to believe the worst and not to give them the benefit of the doubt and believe the best? The practice of a true Christian should be that when I hear something negative about another believer, I should immediately go on the defensive and give that person the benefit of the doubt, but we are quick to believe the worst about somebody. We need to bear with one another in love. That’s a unifying characteristic. When we are quick to believe the worst that is a dividing characteristic. You could take all of these characteristics and flip them upside down and look at the antithesis to each one of them and you would see that all of those are things that will divide a church. It really only takes major failure in one of these areas to create division. That’s why Paul is going to discuss later in the passage why there needs to be structured leadership within the church to maintain unity.

* + 1. The last thing that Paul says in terms of being united in our conduct is that we are eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. The key word in this phrase is “maintain*.”* The Spirit supplies the unity that we have but we have to work to keep that unity. Just because you’re a Christian and I’m a Christian doesn’t mean that we are going to get along, does it? It doesn’t mean we are just going to get along. It is work to maintain unity. God provides it and the Spirit supplies it but then we have to maintain it through constant submission to the Holy Spirit. It is active, not passive. One of my favorite old Puritan quotes right now, which I believe was by Thomas Watson, is “Christ bled but we must sweat.” There is work and labor to the Christian life. We have to work at every turn. We need to learn to love each other and to love Jesus and that is going to be very demanding on each of our lives. We can only achieve this by understanding who we are in Christ.
  1. The third area of unity is that *we are united in Gospel confession*; what we speak. As a church—and I am particularly speaking to the members of Red Oak—we are united in our Gospel confession. We would die for this and we will live in defense of it. We believe in what we believe. We believe in what we affirm and confirm in membership classes here. We are united in that affirmation. That doesn’t mean we are going to agree completely and wholeheartedly with every little thing. The beauty of this is that there are areas where there are going to be differences of opinions, but in the major areas of confession of the faith we agree. Paul addresses that in verses 4-6. This seems to be some sort of Gospel creed of the early Church, maybe. Paul gives these seven “ones” or these seven affirmations. There is one Body, being the Church and one Spirit, being the Holy Spirit, as a uniting factor. Each one of us is saved by the Spirit of God and then these gifts are exercised by the Spirit that binds us together.

You have seen this happen, where you meet a Christian that you never knew until right then and then you instantly knit with that person in your spirit. Have you ever had that happen? It’s particularly interesting when it happens on another continent with someone who speaks a different language or a broken dialect of your own language. You meet this person and you are knit together as one. You feel this sense of companionship and this compelling bond to that person.

So, there’s one Body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call. We all share the same hope. None of us are hoping for different things. Our hope is in Christ. Then, there’s one Lord, one faith, and one baptism; one God and Father of all who is over all, and through all, and in all. What you see in this is a sort of Gospel creed with all of these “one” statements but also, within this, you see the Trinitarian work of God. Notice there is one Spirit, one Lord, and we also see the Father mentioned, so there is a Trinitarian work going on through the Body of Christ. There is this awesome Trinitarian experience here. So, Paul says that the Holy Spirit calls us to salvation, which is the word “hope” by the way. You will see throughout Scripture that hope is attached to salvation. The Holy Spirit calls us to salvation and binds us in unity and then there is one Lord. There is only salvation in one name under Heaven. We are all saved, literally, through the work and in the name of Jesus. Then, you see our heavenly Father who is over all and in all. So, there is a Trinitarian binding within what seems to be an early Church creed. So we see that we have unity in the Church.

1. The second big point or mark is that we have diversity in the Church. Tony Merida, a professor at Southeastern[[89]](#footnote-89), said this, “Unity does not mean sameness.”[[90]](#footnote-90) We are unified but we are different. Individually, we come from different walks of life and different family stories. In the Church, you have a lot of different situations and stories that are represented, so there is going to be diversity within the Church, although we are unified. Those first areas that we just worked through unify us but they also free us up to the diversity that we are going to experience within the Church. And, diversity is a great thing because it enables people to come into the church and feel like they are at home. All of us have been in a situation where when you walk into a church you instantly feel very out of place, because of the rules, or the dress code, or the regulations, or whatever. It is important that we understand that there is going to be diversity within the Church.

a. Within that diversity is *the diversity of gifts*. The gifts that we receive are the result of Christ’s good grace to us. When you see in verse 7, *“Grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift,”* that is grace as it applies to the giving of a gift.

We know that we receive grace in terms of our salvation, amen? We are thankful for that and we worked through that in chapter 2. Salvation is a gift of grace. No one earns their salvation. God gives it. He extends it through the work of Jesus, praise the Lord! Thanks be to God! We are saved because of God’s grace. But, that is not the only outworking of God’s grace. Now, God supplies the individual giftings of the Church so that as we move into this idea of diversity what you are going to find is that there are different and diverse gifts that are all gifts from the Lord. So, as Paul unpacks these different gifts, if you recognize that someone is very strong in an area of gifting you give thanks to the Father and the Lord for His grace to that person. So, there is this diversity that we rejoice in the Lord for.

Next, we read that Christ descended into the lower regions, the Earth. We read about that in the eloquent passage in Philippians. Then, He ascended on high. So, Christ descended and humbled himself and then, in His exaltation, He ascended to the throne, whereby He was exalted, and from there He blesses us with generosity. What we see is this authoritative generosity from Jesus. The gifting of the believer is a great work of the exaltation of Christ. This is what Paul is saying; He has descended, He is exalted, and it is from that position of authority and that He has done what He came to do, in that He blesses the Church with individual giftings to each believer.

We should rejoice over that. The grace we receive in that regard should bring us to great rejoicing. One thing that you will notice as we get into the next few verses and the gifts are laid out is that there are different places in Scripture where you will see lists of spiritual giftings within the Church. This one is unique but also has some of the same gifts as some of the others. So, within our diversity, the first thing we see is our diversity of gifts.

b. Then, in verses 11-12, there is a *diversity of responsibilities* as they are distributed. In conjunction with

the diversity of gifts we have a diversity of responsibility. People are acting in an area where they are

gifted and those gifts are recognized. 1 Peter 4:10-11 says this,

*“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 11 whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever.”*

So, we have different responsibilities that are given to us and Paul is going to lay out some of those specific responsibilities.

1. In these verses, Paul says, *“*apostles,” which technically, by the way, refers to the twelve apostles. When we speak of apostolic authority we are speaking of the twelve. So, when you see a billboard in Atlanta of a guy in a nice suit who has named himself Apostle So-And-So, he has gone out of scriptural context of what an apostle is. You are on shaky ground there. In the specific sense of the word, the office of the apostle and apostolic authority do not exist anymore. You will hear people say big “A” apostle and little “a” apostle, but the idea that the word would often mean “sent ones”, as in apostles are sent ones, is certainly kind of a general understanding or usage of that word, but we just don’t tend to use the word “apostle.”

We use the word “missionary” and we still use the word “disciples” and talk about discipleship. So, in the early Church there was a technical aspect of apostles. It was the same thing with prophets in the Old Testament. A prophet was legitimized by whether or not what he said came true. If it didn’t, they killed him. So, we definitely don’t have that going on today. Although, sometimes it’s tempting.

So, there is a specific context and then there’s a general context. Today, when we speak of the gift of prophecy, like when we look at Paul’s letter to the Romans and in other places, we are speaking of someone who applies the Word of God to the Church in truth. When we speak of modern prophecy, it’s not “I think this is going to happen” or “I’m saying that this is going to happen” in a kind of predicting the future. Rather, it’s taking the Scripture and applying the Word of God, in truth, to the Church. That’s what we think of in terms of a modern gifting of a prophet.

1. Then, he speaks of *“*evangelists.”We know that we are all to be evangelists, but we also know that some people are just better at this. I have friends who, when we go in public, you cannot stop them from sharing Christ. You will not get where you are trying to go because they are going to be telling everyone about Jesus. For some people it’s very natural and they are more gifted, but what you do not have the authority to say or do, if you are a Christian, is say, “Well, I’m just not gifted as an evangelist so I don’t share my faith. I leave that up to people who are gifted in that area.” We are all gifted. In fact, read Acts 21:8, Philip is referred to as an evangelist: *“On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.”* So, you have a specific calling and gifting that seems to be specific to some people, but we know that we are all called to share the Gospel and share our faith.
2. The next one is *“*shepherds,” or we often use the word “pastors.” We use those words kind of interchangeably, and another word you might see used in this context in Scripture is “overseer.” We use the words “elders” and “pastors” interchangeably a lot here. But, one distinctive of a pastor or a shepherd, according to 1 Timothy 3:2, is that he must be able to teach.
3. But then, the next gift that Paul gives is that some are *“*teachers.” A teacher is a person who is able to teach and who teaches but who is not necessarily going to be a pastor or an elder. We have many teachers in this church who are not elders, or pastors, or in a position of being an overseer. In the Old Testament we often see God, or Yahweh, painted as the Shepherd of Israel, and then prophets, priests, and kings were under-shepherds. We see all of those roles fulfilled in Christ, so that He becomes the chief shepherd or the Good Shepherd. Then, in the Church, Christ commissions under-shepherds to oversee the local body or the local flock. That’s what we refer to in the Church as when we are speaking in shepherd terminology.

So, it’s important that we wrestle through these gifts and the offices that accompany them. One thing we do know, and that is this – Jesus is the Head of the Church. In chapter 1:22, we read this, *“And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the Church.”* So of the Church, big “C” Church and little “c” church, right here at Red Oak, Christ is the Head, period.

We’ve all seen this church model that is kind of catawampus, where the church is set up sort of like a pyramid, but at the top of the pyramid there is sort of this long, skinny point with one big weight on top of it, where one man is sort of controlling it. In my mind I have this picture where there is one senior pastor where whatever he says goes. There is a catawampus pyramid where giftings are out of whack and positions are out of place and there is one guy at a joystick up on top who is controlling everything. A lot of us grew up in churches like that or we’ve been a part of churches like that. But, what we know is that the position of Chief Shepherd is reserved for Christ. So, at Red Oak we believe the biblical model of what a church is supposed to be is plural leadership with a plurality of pastors and elders. One man is not leading but there is biblical submission of each pastor, elder, and leader to one another and to the church, so that there is a safe way the church is structured. We have to work through that and those are things that, when we started up Red Oak as a church, we worked through. It is important that we understand where the responsibility lies for each of those giftings and each of those people. We ultimately understand that Christ, himself, is the Head of the Church.

So, we are diverse in terms of giftings, we are diverse in terms of responsibilities, and then Paul tells us that the reason for so many gifts in the way that people are gifted in the Church is so that the Church, itself, would be equipped to do the ministry that we are called to. So, the reason there are giftings, and the reason there are offices, and the reason that there are positions in the Church is so that you guys – we – would all be equipped to go out and do what God left for the Church to do. The Church has work to do. We finished chapter 3 last week with a prayer that “more than we could ever ask or imagine”[[91]](#footnote-91) would be done through the Church of Jesus Christ. So, we go out to do that work having been equipped through the local church.

A lot of times people view church, especially in the Bible Belt[[92]](#footnote-92), as a one hour commitment on Sunday. It’s simply a time commitment. Afterward, I may critique or say how good or bad the sermon was, and that’s about it. But, we are to come to church for the equipping of the saints. Listen, saints are not old dead people that got a special name tagged onto them after they died. Literally, the word “saint” is rooted in the idea of being “holy ones” because of what Christ has done in us and through us. We are set apart in holiness because of the work of Jesus. So, we are the saints of God. We are to be equipped to then go into the community and into the world to make a difference with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As we are equipped, that’s where the diversity of responsibilities comes into play.

So, then, in verse 12, the purpose of spiritual gifts is that everyone is to take part. Everyone has been given gifts and leaders are given to equip the Church to appropriately use the gifts they have been given.

c. So, there is unity, there is diversity, and then finally, as we come to the end, there is *spiritual maturity*. Verse 13 gives that awesome definition of spiritual manhood; *“The measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* That should be the goal for every believer. Maturing, as a believer, is literally a matter of survival.

The easiest illustration of this would be those programs that sort of track through the lives of animals in Africa. You might have a big animal, like a lion, or a cheetah, or another large predator that’s stalking a group of wildebeest. Ultimately, what it’s going to do is go after the baby because that’s the weakest one. It’s critical for smaller animals to come to physical maturity very quickly, in order to be able to run away from predators. The youngest one is always the victim. Oftentimes, in the Church, the young, weak-minded, immature Christians fall prey to poor doctrine, and crazy whims, and insane fads in the Church. If we can root and build up our members, our believers, and our people in our local body to spiritual maturity we will not be tossed about, as Paul says in Ephesians 4:14, *“by every wind of doctrine.”*

It may not be popular or it may not be the thing that draws the biggest crowd, and we might not explode to two-thousand members because we have really catchy graphics on the screen or awesome programming, but if we speak and teach faithful, biblical doctrine, people will be rooted and firm, and we will not be shaken when the winds of false doctrine, bad doctrine, disunity, attacks on the Church, fads in culture, or other demonic accusing of the brethren try to shake us. When five people in a country as big as ours make a decision that affects the whole course of our constitutional welfare[[93]](#footnote-93), we will be okay because we are rooted and built up in good, strong biblical doctrine. That is the responsibility of the Church. So, there is a need for us to mature. We expect church people to mature. That’s why some of you, as young Christians, have somebody come at you and ask, “How are you doing? What are you doing to grow and be built up?” There is no picture in Scripture of a consumer Christianity where you just show up, and sit, and wait for somebody to spoonfeed you.

So, in closing, Paul gives four evidences of a spiritually mature person**.** This is the prayer that I have for our church; I pray that we would individually and corporately have these things evident in our church.

1. The first one is in verse 13, and that is Christlikeness. Paul wants us to be like Jesus. If we live like Jesus we will grow in every way because He is the measure of manhood we strive for. The message of Romans 8:29 is, *“Those He foreknew He predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.”* So, we want to be more like Jesus. We want to be more like Jesus and grow in Christlikeness. That will lead to spiritual maturity. Jesus is the perfectly mature spiritual man, both in His life on Earth and as the exalted King of Kings as our God and our Lord. We are being conformed into His image. So, Christlikeness leads to spiritual maturity.
2. The second evidence of a spiritually mature person, in verses 13-14, is doctrinal stability. Here’s the thing; a lot of people love doctrine! Some people put John Owen[[94]](#footnote-94) on their bedside table. Some people, for fun, will read Michael Horton’s *Apologetics and Systematic Theology*. If you don’t know who Michael Horton is, you are in the same category I’m in, because you’re not reading him. It’s good stuff and there’s nothing wrong with the fact that some people like it, but there’s also nothing wrong with the fact that some people don’t naturally gravitate toward that. It’s hard work and it’s a labor to try to wade through stuff like that. I am so quickly distracted when I try to read at all. It’s all I can do to focus on reading through large portions of Scripture. A lot of people are naturally going to gravitate toward doctrinal things, but oftentimes people who will gravitate toward doctrinal things will tend to be less engaged relationally. So, whichever way you land on this, there is a need for us to work in the first area of Christlikeness so we are relational toward one another and we love and serve each other.
3. The next thing, in verses 15-16, is that we speak the truth in love. So, we are like Jesus, we are stable in doctrine, and that is going to lead us to maturity, and right thinking, and doctrinal stability. But, then it is also going to lead us to speak the truth in love. So, we need doctrinal stability so that as God’s Word is applied in and to our lives we will stand firm.

Here’s what happens. I thought of this sort of word picture; if you don’t have doctrinal stability as a foundation – a right understanding of who God is, a right understanding of man, a right understanding of sin and salvation, and death and Hell, a right understanding of Heaven, a right understanding of the priesthood of the believer, and right understanding of the authority of Scripture, and all those core doctrines that we need to have as foundations – if we don’t have those, then think of the picture in chapter 6 when Paul starts talking about the armor of God being put on. Remember David, as a young man, put on Saul’s armor and it was too big for him and he stumbled around under it. He was like, “I can’t go out and function like this.” What you end up with is you end up attaching a bunch of biblical applications to a person who doesn’t have the foundation to hold up that application. So, you can read all you want of spiritual self-help books, or try to find application, but necessarily, sanctification will be a doctrinal foundation on which is built the application of the spiritual man. Christlikeness and doctrinal stability enable you to be able to withstand those winds. Paul says, “*Every wind of doctrine by human cunning, by craftiness, and deceitful schemes*.”

We can name false prophets in our own day; guys like Rob Bell who started off so craftily luring people in and then started to weave in heretical false doctrine and false teaching. Sometimes it comes from inside the Church and sometimes it’s going to come from outside the Church. People will use the name of Christ and try to put together some new revelation or a new religion. So, as Christians, we the Church are to stand as an anchor against cultural waves of false teaching and poor doctrine. Then, when we recognize it, that third point again is that we speak the truth in love.

Speaking the truth in love is critical because, oftentimes, in church we don’t do confrontation well. We either don’t confront sin and error or we confront from a position of arrogance and bossiness. It is loving to confront things that need to be confronted as long as it is done in love, that Christ might be honored, and that the Church may grow, and that individual people may be sanctified and made more like Jesus. So, there is a need to confront and speak the truth but it has to be done in love. In the church email this week, we are going to link to a really cool article[[95]](#footnote-95) that the Gospel Coalition put out. It lists forty questions to ask someone who says, “I’m a Christian and I believe that the Bible supports same-sex marriage.” These are forty questions that, in love and without arrogance or a confrontational attitude, you can ask someone. I’ll read you a couple of them so that you kind of get an idea:

* How long have you believed that gay marriage is something to be celebrated?
* What Bible verses led you to change your mind?
* How would you make a positive case from Scripture that sexual activity between two persons of the same sex is a blessing to be celebrated?
* What verses would you use to show that marriage between two persons of the same sex can adequately depict Christ and the Church?

It goes on and there are forty questions like this where you realize that here is an opportunity to be instructed on how to confront sin and guard the strong doctrine of Scripture, and do it in love.

1. So, we have Christlikeness, doctrinal stability, speaking the truth in love, and the last evidence is in verse 16, where Paul says, *“From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”*
2. So the final point is contribution; everybody has to contribute. If you show up here on Sunday and all you do is just sit in the chair, you are not contributing. So, we contribute by sharing the Gospel, and growing together in fellowship and unity, and understanding that we’ve been given gifts, and looking for opportunities to exercise the gifts God has given us. We need to ask how we fit in and ask, “Where do I go to work? Somebody put me to work. Give me a job to do.” If nobody gives you a job to do, make up a job and start doing it. Then, someone might see that you are wasting your abilities and find you a place where you can be better put to work. That’s where the responsibility of leadership falls. Leadership appropriates gifts so that everyone is at work, sharing the Gospel, building each other up, reaching the world, and reaching our community. Then, the Church of Jesus Christ will be grounded doctrinally and will be effective from a ministry standpoint. There will be integrity from within.

Let’s pray.

Lord Father God, we thank you in the name of Jesus and your Holy Spirit that you have saved us. You have called us out of darkness and into light. All of us should no doubt feel conviction over areas of complacency and compromise in the areas of our role and our responsibility, and our active work in the Church of Jesus Christ, so please help us, God, as we particularly work through these large passages of Scripture, that tend to be overwhelming informationally. Help us to be able to hear what you are saying, and receive what you are saying, and then to thank you for your Word. God, we thank you that you don’t save us and leave us to figure this thing out on our own, but you put us together and unite us with other believers. We find ourselves bound together with people that we love like family and we thank you for that, but help us now to unify in our advance of the Gospel and help us to respond tonight in obedience. God, if there is somebody we need to go to in love and extend forgiveness to or ask for forgiveness from, please help us to do that. Help us to be unified in every way. In Jesus’ name.

July 12, 2015

Ephesians 4 – Part 2

Rob Conti

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 4:17. Just by way of an outline, as we look at our text tonight:

* Verses 17-19 show us who we were. It is a flashback to the beginning of chapter 2, where we looked at what was true of us in our sin; the way that we used to walk and live before Christ rescued and saved us out of that, and before we were made alive in Christ and seated with Him in the heavenly places by the grace of God through faith. So, we are going to look again at what was true of us and at what is true now of unbelievers, Gentiles, those who are lost and don’t know Christ. It’s a flashback to give us a clear contrast of who we should now be, how we should now live, how we should walk, and how we should conduct ourselves in the world.
* Verses 20-24 looks at how this transformation takes place and we will look at it as being enrolled in the “school of Christ.”
* Verses 25-32 will give us a real nitty-gritty look at how this literally and figuratively fleshes out the idea of putting off the old man and putting on the new self. As Brody pointed out last week, this becomes the hinge on which the book turns from being doctrinally deep and theologically informative into what becomes the practice of that. How do we take this deep information Paul is giving us? It is pretty common for Paul’s letters, which are most of the New Testament epistles, to on the front side be heavy in information and doctrine and in the second half show how that doctrine, information, and truth gets appropriated into our lives.

So that’s right where we are. We are right in the middle of that and I think it is so important and I’m so thankful for it. Speaking for myself, it’s difficult to not err on one side or the other, and this passage really helps protect us and helps us to not err on the one side of being legalistic and being driven by trying to be moral and helps keep us from going to the other extreme and the pitfall of giving into license or saying that this is all God’s work so that all that is required of me is to just bless everyone with my presence and just let it flow out of me. The danger is that we err either on the side of an over-realized view of our responsibility or going to the other side of an under-realized view where we take no responsibility for our actions and any notion of any rules, or morality, or ethics. This passage helps us stay right in the biblical balance, and it can be an uncomfortable place to balance sometimes. It is not like we learn to do that on our own, but this passage helps us stay right there. So, the passage is turning from position to practice. This truth that we will learn tonight will guard against legalism and license.

So, let’s jump right into verse 17. Hopefully, if you are friends with Red Oak on Facebook you saw the encouragement to read Colossians 3, which Shawn read during our call to worship. It’s a sister passage to our passage tonight and we will look at it a couple of times because Paul is writing in the same vein there that he is here. Beginning at Ephesians 4:17,

*“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do…”*

Remember back last week when Brody was preaching from verse 1 of chapter 4? Paul said, *“I, therefore, a prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”* This is a similar idea, and Brody really emphasized that this is an urge; Paul is urging and pleading with them. When Paul uses that language it is not that it necessarily carries less authority, but you see his pastoral heart. He is imploring them as somebody who cares about their growth and their sanctification. He loves them so much that he wants them to live a life that is worthy of the Gospel. I think, in that same vein, he is coming back to that in this verse when he says “I testify in the Lord.” He is calling Jesus as a witness. It’s like he is saying, “Jesus is here and I am telling you…” We still see the pastoral heart but it is supported by an apostolic spine. Do you feel that? This is more than, “I really want you guys to do good.” Now, Paul is saying, “You cannot, you cannot. It is not allowed. With Jesus as my witness, and with Him among us as the ever-present God, I’m telling you that you can’t go back to your former way of life! You can’t live like somebody who doesn’t know Jesus. You can’t act like Ephesians chapter 1 didn’t happen to you. You can’t act like Ephesians 2 isn’t reality and that you weren’t made alive in Christ and that you haven’t been adopted into the family of God. You can’t keep acting like He hasn’t made you wholly blameless in love. You can’t go back and act like you don’t now know that God loved you before the foundation of the world and that He adopted you as His son or daughter before He ever created it. That was His purpose. You can’t go back and you can’t act like you don’t know that!” Christ changes you.

*“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk…”*

We’ve seen that a lot in Ephesians. “Walk” refers to their way of life, their attitudes, and their actions.

*“You must no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.”*

The emptiness of their minds, the darkness of their minds, the perverted view of thinking and viewing life, and the way of viewing God and themselves is all twisted, and perverted, and meaningless.

*“In the futility of their minds they are darkened in their understanding,”*

This is a picture of a cloud that covers their ability to see reality and know what life is really about. They are in darkness.

*“Alienated from the life of God…”*

They are cut off, separated, and estranged from the life of God. What is “the life of God”? What are we talking about? It’s knowing God, being loved by God, and loving God. It’s being who you were created to be. They are alienated and separated from God and they have no way to bridge that gap.

*“Because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.”*

It is because of, or due to, their hardness of heart. Why is their thinking wrong, perverted, and empty? Why is their mind darkened so that they cannot perceive reality? Why are they so cut off from their Creator? It is because of their hard heart.

*“Due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity.”*

Turn over to Romans 1. We are familiar with this kind of language. This is a sobering look at the reality of mankind. In Romans 1, you know that here Paul is about to launch into the awesome doctrine of justification by faith. He is going to explain it first in order to give the good news. We need to know the bad news and Paul tells us that from the beginning things went wrong. This is what is now true of all humanity because of it. Romans 1:18,

*“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.”*

“They” is human beings.

*21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”*

We see this tragic exchange, where mankind exchanged the truth about God for a lie. He exchanged the worship of the one true God for the worship of creation. That’s where we hardened out hearts. That’s where our understanding went into darkness and our thoughts became empty, and perverted, and twisted.

Paul is telling us that we can’t go back to that. We are not allowed to. He’s not telling us this so that we feel self-righteous. Ephesians 2 has already dealt with that. It is not of works lest anyone boast. This is the grace of God.[[96]](#footnote-96)

Here, Paul is writing in such a way that it is easy to look at the lost world and, if we are not careful, to set ourselves above them. Because, like Ephesians 1:17-18 says, the eyes of our understanding, of our heart, have been enlightened. By the grace of God’s love toward us, He has pierced that calloused, hard heart with the truth of the Gospel. He has ripped that hard skin off and given us a new heart that is sensitive to His Word, that loves His Word, and that loves Him. It is easy to look at them and be disgusted at what we see going on in even our own culture.

We need to be clear. Paul is being very black and white and he is not interested right here in being balanced in how he talks about unbelieving people. He wants us to see the contrast and know that it’s off limits. We can’t be that anymore; we can’t live like that; we can’t think like that; we can’t give into our old attitudes and actions; we can’t be motivated by the same things that motivated us before Christ. But, there is a place for stepping back and recognizing that this world and it’s lost people were made in the image and likeness of God. That is why there is value in all human life, right? That is why we are grieved to the deepest part of who we are when we think about the realities and the horrors of things like abortion, genocide, and murder. When people are gunned down in the street it should affect us on the deepest level. Why? Because these are human beings made in the image and likeness of God. There is value in who they are. That’s what makes it all the more tragic that they are estranged from God and that they have hardened their hearts to who God is.

For our own application, this is not exactly what Paul is saying here, but when we think about the lost we shouldn’t just think about the mass of humanity who, by and large, have rebelled against God, are enemies of God, and who hate the Gospel; but, if we could step back and then zoom in on individuals, Paul is telling us that we can’t go back to that. That is not who we are anymore. We need to be separated from the attitudes and the actions of a lost world, but not the people in it. Paul is saying, “Don’t live like unbelievers—for the sake of unbelievers.” Our prayer is that they would see the love that we have for one another and our unity and be drawn to the One that unifies us. We need to pray that the lost around us would see our good works and glorify God, and that they would see our love for Jesus in such a way that they would be drawn to Him. May the lost see the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in our lives so they would feel and know their own need for salvation. Let us not be self-righteous legalists so as to push people away and let us not take license to sin and lose our testimony of the Gospel. This is not a call to look down on the lost and separate ourselves from them and hide behind these walls. We should separate from the sin that defines them but let us not separate from the call to reach them.

Let’s step back and see that this is awful. They hate God and they are enemies of God, and they do all kinds of wicked things—but so did we. This is the transformation that we are about to look at; when we look back at who we used to be.

Shawn talked about in his prayer earlier of what God saved him out of. The man Shawn used to be is not anymore. That transformation should give us a deep compassion, not just toward other believers, but a deep compassion for all mankind.

The point of verses 17-19 is that we cannot live and walk as if God has not saved us. There needs to be a continued effort on our part to put into practice the position that Christ has given us. So, verse 20 says this,

*“But that is not the way you learned Christ!”*

I’m going to back up to verse 17 again and read it in context. Ephesians 4:17,

*“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Paul says, *“But that is not the way you learned Christ! – assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus.”*

This is where I said that we are going to look at “enrolling in the school of Christ.” I just couldn’t get away from this analogy. When I first read it, I thought “school of Christ” was kind of cheesy because I thought of a school situation that we would be familiar with, like sitting in a classroom, and sitting on the front row and learning about Jesus. But, we know that is not how school was done in Paul’s day, right? It was done through discipleship. But, all the commentators use this imagery and after a while it stuck with me, and I think it’s good, because that’s what Paul is talking about here. Paul is saying, “That is not the way you learned Christ!” It’s not just the idea of learning facts about Christ. Listen to what the passage says:

*“Assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus.”*

See what’s happening here? We are learning in the school of Christ. The truth is in Jesus, we are in Jesus, and He is the one teaching if we have heard from Him, heard about Him, and heard in Him. Christ becomes this all-encompassing reality that we now live in. This is more than just facts and information; this is personal transformation. This is where we get our idea of what discipleship should look like. It’s the idea that we are being discipled directly by Jesus in our inner person. This is not simply information about Christ, but Christ himself. It’s a process of not merely getting to know a person but so applying the knowledge as to walk differently from the rest of the world. It is a knowledge and a relationship that transform us.

We have heard the illustration that, in a relational sense, I don’t approach my wife by gathering information. I don’t go and read a book about Sarah Conti and then think that I’m a good husband. That’s not how I build intimacy with my wife. Right? We know that. We have to be relational, and spend time together, and share experiences, and have conversations. But, even that falls short of what this picture is. The picture Paul is laying out here is that I am in Christ and He is in me, and as I am learning He is transforming who I am in my nature, my character, my attitudes, and my actions. Christ is taking over.

John Stott sees three important facts here about what he calls the “school of Christ”:

* First, Christ is himself the *substance* of Christian teaching.
* Second, Christ is not only the substance of the teaching; He himself is the *teacher*. We have heard Him. Paul assumes that through the voice of the Christian teachers that believers have actually heard Christ’s voice. Thus, when sound, biblical, moral instruction is being given, it may be said that Christ is teaching about Christ. We know this. *“My sheep hear my voice and they know me.”[[97]](#footnote-97)* Whether that was two-thousand years ago and people, literally, with their ears, heard the audible voice of Jesus, or it is today, when the words of Christ are read. We hear His voice and we are learning from Jesus, in Jesus.
* Third, they have been taught *in Him*. Christ, in addition to being their teacher, and the teaching, was also the context, even the atmosphere, within which the teaching was given. When *Jesus Christ is at once the subject, the object, and the environment of the moral instruction being given*, we may have confidence that it is truly Christian, for truth is in Jesus.

Brody talked a little bit about this last week. Often we have a wrong view of theology and doctrine; even those of us who hold fast to sound, biblical truth. We love doctrine but somehow we disconnect that from this relational aspect of what our Christianity is. What we need to realize is that when we are learning truths from Scripture that this is how Jesus builds a relationship with us. He is the one teaching us and giving us that knowledge and transforming us by it.

Listen to this: Theology and doctrine, if only factual, creedal information about God; if it is only that, then it is not biblical theology or doctrine. True theology and true doctrine are taught in Jesus, by the Spirit, to the glory of the Father. It is relational. It’s transformational. If the study of theology and doctrine leaves one cold, proud, detached from the love of God, with no compassion towards mankind, then it is either false doctrine or it has been learned in a school other than the school of Christ. True theology and true doctrine are understood only when taught in the language of love. If Satan speaks lies because it is his native tongue, then Jesus speaks truth, in love, because that is His native language. Right doctrine always leads to worship. True theology always leads to unity of the Church. Right beliefs should always product right practice.

That’s the point of the Bible. Do you guys know what the Bible is? The B-I-B-L-E? So many of you want to sing it. “Yes, that’s the book for me. I stand alone on the Word of God, the B-I-B-L-E.”[[98]](#footnote-98) Why do we love the Bible? Why am I pausing in this sermon to talk about theology and doctrine? It’s the Bible! Let’s not take for granted what we have here. What is the Bible? Whether in narrative, in poetry, in prophecy, or wisdom, or letters, or end-time warnings—what is it? Ultimately, what it is, is the self-revelation of God to us. Right? Ultimately, what this Bible does is it tells us who God is. We hold fast to the truth that all of the Bible is ultimately about Jesus. It reveals Jesus. The teachings of the Bible and its doctrine reveal Jesus, not so that we would be proud, or haughty, or just be informed, but so that we could go from death to life, as we learn from Jesus, by Jesus, who Jesus is, and then by that knowledge Jesus transforms us to be like Jesus. He takes the truth of who He is, as we hear the truth of God, and He conforms us into His own image and likeness. We should love doctrine and theology, not so we could be smart, but so that we could know what love is. It’s the only way to know what love is. We should love it because it is where we get to know Jesus and be transformed by Jesus.

Verses 22-24 are the teaching of the Lord for Christians who have been awakened by the voice of Jesus and given an eternal life within themselves and who are now in the school of Christ and are waiting eagerly to be taught how to live, no longer like the Gentiles, but like those who have been transformed by Christ. So, let me read this again. Verse 20,

*“But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus,…”*

So, Paul says that is not the way you learned Christ. Then, he stops and says, “Assuming that you have.” “Assuming that you have” is a confidence but it also leaves room for all of us to examine ourselves. There is room for examination when you hear someone say, “Assuming that you are all believers…” Why would I say that? Because I’m leaving room for you to think, “Okay, is that me? Should I examine myself against the truth being taught to see if I am in Christ?” I think that’s what Paul is doing. But, underlying this statement is the confidence that Paul has that they know the truth. He knows this church and he knows the ones who have gone there to teach them so he knows that they have heard who Christ is.

So, after he says, “Assuming that you have heard,” Paul goes back to what they have learned about Christ. Again, he’s saying, “You can’t live like this anymore. That is not the way you learned Christ.” So, now he is going to tell us the way that they learned Christ. This is the lesson. This is Christianity 101 in the school of Jesus Christ.

Verse 22,

*“To put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

So, what’s the lesson? The lesson is that if you have been taught about Christ, and have learned of Him and been transformed by Him so that it is no longer true of you what is true of the Gentiles, then put it off. Put it off. Put off who you used to be and be renewed in the spirit in your mind, and put on this new self, this new man, this new humanity. Paul is saying to take off who you used to be--your old nature--and who you were before Christ saved you. Your old attitudes and actions need to be put off.

It’s real interesting language here. Why doesn’t Paul just say, “Do better”? Why doesn’t he just say, “In this school here are the top ten things not to do? Here are the top ten things you should do and if you can keep to this you will be alright.” Well, that’s not the school of grace. That’s not the school of Jesus. That’s legalism. That’s self-righteousness and God hates self-righteousness. Plus, we can’t actually attain righteousness in and of ourselves. So, it has to be by grace. But, it doesn’t leave us in a place where we say, “I have no responsibility here.” We can’t say, “If I have these desires it must be from God because I’m a Christian. So, I will simply be.” No, we err on the other side. We have responsibility and we have work to do. There is a striving for the believer. I am to put off my human nature from Adam—fallen, sinful, and hostile—not just in nature but in attitude, and action, and word; the me that was crucified with Christ. For me, the guy who died some time in 1998, on 4820 Chelsea Way, in my aunt and uncle’s bonus room, which at the time was my bedroom, in front of the TV while some old guy was reading out of the Bible. I died in Christ and now I need to put that off.

The language here where Paul talks about being renewed in our mind is continual. It’s interesting because it is continual and it is also passive. Let me read this to you, which may be a little nerdy. If you have questions, see Zach. This is from a commentary by a guy named Lincoln[[99]](#footnote-99):

“So, the new person is not yet totally new. The present tense of this infinitive underlines the continuous nature of the renewal that is still required, and the passive voice suggests that this takes place as believers allow themselves to be renewed. The present focus for renewal is not the body but the inward person, the mind; although as the next verse makes it clear that this has consequences for external actions. There is to be a consistent development of a believer’s reception, which will result in practice in their ability to choose the good.”

So, I don’t technically know what all that means, but here’s what the big picture is. There is this place where we need to live our lives, where we work hard to make sure that we are taking off the old attitudes and actions by submitting ourselves to having our minds renewed, so that we can put on who we are in Christ. Then, here’s the passive part; we already have it. Jesus has already done it. But, we need to continuously, in this life, apprehend what Jesus has already given us, so that our position, what is eternally true of us in Jesus, will day-by-day become more of a reality, as by the Spirit of God we are conformed to His image and likeness. The language here is just awesome.

Turn back to Ephesians 2. I’m going to start in verse 4, primarily because it’s so good. I really want to get down to verse 10, but why would we cheat ourselves of those earlier verses? Ephesians 2:4,

*“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

Keep that fresh in your mind and turn back over to Ephesians 4:24,

*“And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

Here is a tension of “How can I do this? How do I put off the old man so that I don’t repeat the attitudes and actions of who I was before Christ? How do I not live like a Gentile, a lost person, an unbeliever? How do I not get sucked into the cares of this world and get entangled by them, so that I am not running this race the way that I am created to run it?” Paul says that you can’t earn it. It’s not of works so there is no boasting. We can’t produce it. You are His workmanship. You are designed and created anew by God.

We said earlier that the old man I’m putting off was in Adam. The new man I’m putting on is Christ. Just like Adam was formed, and molded, and had life breathed into him, so now, in Christ, we are being molded, and formed, and are having the breath of God breathed into us so that our lives look like the life of Jesus. We are being conformed to His image. We are His workmanship. But, now we come back around full circle to do what? For what? Just to float? No, to work; to do the work that He prepared beforehand that we should do. It was God’s plan before the foundation of the world to rescue us from sin when we couldn’t rescue ourselves and to give us new life in Christ when we were dead in our sins and trespasses. For what purpose? To serve Him.

Why did God make Adam? Why did He put him in the Garden? God made Adam in His image and likeness, to love Him, to worship Him, and to serve Him. God put Adam in the Garden and He put him to work. Is it really any different for us? Here is what is hard because we are so fleshly. Here’s why it is so hard for us to get it—we are carnally minded.

Here’s what hit me last night. Everything is like this. We are dependent on God for everything. Think about it. What do we create? What do humans create? Kahuna[[100]](#footnote-100) used to have a funny saying about what we can create; actually it was about what the Devil could create. Kahuna used to say, “The Devil can’t so much as create a booger in your nose!” I forget what his point was but I’m sure it was good. But, what can we create? Think about it. When we say that somebody is creative, what are we saying? We are really saying that there is this residue in them of being made in the image and likeness of God, because really, only God can create. You can take gold and fashion it into something. Beautiful artwork is done in jewelry but all the person is doing is taking the resources that God put into the Earth, and then they are mining that out and fashioning it with what? The energy and strength of a human body that God gave to them and that Jesus, right now, sustains. They are using their imagination that God gave them, right? Songwriters and poets artistically take words and music to produce images and thoughts in our minds and to evoke emotion, and what are they doing? They are using the gifts that God has given them. What do we have except that it has been given to us from God?[[101]](#footnote-101) We can’t do anything apart from God, and His will, and the ability that He gives us. Whether we are a believer or a lost person we are dependent on God for everything; for life, for breath, for strength, for thoughts.

The tragedy is what Paul said in Romans 1; we didn’t worship God as God. We weren’t thankful. We started acting like we were doing all this on our own. We started acting like we could work things out on our own and be our own gods. We wanted to determine right and wrong and build monuments to ourselves, create our own religions, and decide what life is about and how we are going to live. That’s the issue. That’s what’s so wrong about the Gentile way of life—it doesn’t honor God as God. The danger is that that would bleed over into how we do Christianity. The danger is that is how we would view God as believers: “God got me going and now I have to work. He initiated it and now it’s up to me.” That’s not sanctification and that’s not Christianity. Christianity is recognizing that I work – I pick up my Bible, I study, I tell people about Jesus, I pray, and I am involved—but I am totally dependent on God to move on me, and act on me, and renew my mind. I can’t do that myself. God has to renew my mind and He has to change the way I think. He has to change my attitudes and my actions.

Let me read this to you: The new creation, the believer, is already in principle, and is becoming in practice, part of God’s new creation; a combination of God’s gracious initiative and human responsibility. The new person is created by God and must be put on by the believer.

Colossians 3:9 has the same thought,

*“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.”*

*“Put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.”*

Philippians 2:12-16, says this,

*“Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*

Who is doing the work there? Be careful before you answer. It’s a trick question. Listen to verse 13,

*For it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.”*

The same man who just said that last line, *“So that I may not have run or labored in vain,”* who also said this – *“I work harder than any of them, nevertheless, it was not I but the grace of God which is with me.”[[102]](#footnote-102)*

So, what do we do? We can’t escape that question, right? Do you feel the tension? Put off the old man, put on the new man. How do you put on what God has already created? He’s doing the work. It is finished. We are forgiven, and redeemed, and righteous. We are adopted as sons and daughters. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit. We are alive with Christ and, as Paul said in chapter 2, we are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places. So, how do we actively take off something in a passive way? Here is the tension in the Christian life that forces us to still live in the same way that we came to Him for salvation; we live by grace through faith. We work hard and we ought to go to desperate measures to take off sin. We will sacrifice time and energy to put ourselves in a position to have our minds renewed, knowing that we are totally dependent on God, but fully confident that this is God’s plan and that the good work that He started in us He will complete in us until the day of Jesus Christ.

So, what do we do? We have read it over and over. Ephesians 4:23 is the key:

*“Be renewed in the spirit of your minds.”*

*“Be renewed in the spirit of your minds.”* Listen to the way that it’s said in Colossians 3:1. This passage is awesome because it’s bookended with this reality.

*“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.”*

You have been raised with Christ, so seek it. You are there, so look for it.

*“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. 3 For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

Then, jump over to verse 16. Here is how we do it. In Colossians 3, Paul has listed off the things we are to take off and not do anymore. These practices and attitudes and actions are sinful. Then, he says to put on all these virtues that only Christ can produce. Then, he says this; this is how we do it.

Colossians 3:16-17,

*“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

This is like the writer of Hebrews, who says, “Consider Jesus.” “Look to Jesus, the author and the perfecter of your faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.”[[103]](#footnote-103)

How do we do it? What is our responsibility? It is that we wouldn’t be carnally minded and that we wouldn’t set our thoughts on the things of Earth and that we wouldn’t allow the way of the world’s system to bleed over into how we do Christianity. It is that we would live by grace through faith. How do we do that? We set all of our attention and affection on Jesus and we allow Jesus to renew our minds. We stay in school. We never leave school, and we allow the Holy Spirit to take the Word of God and let it dwell in us richly. That is why there is no scoffing or mocking how important it is to be in the Word of God. Is it a discipline? Yes, and it is a grace. It is God’s grace that I would be able to take God’s Word and understand it and have it transform me. I’m not just gathering information. I’m spending time with Jesus, trusting that by His grace He will transform me from one degree of glory into another.[[104]](#footnote-104) So, then I can go and live a day of taking off and putting on. We are to spend time in prayer. Is that something that I do? Yes, but it is by God’s grace that I can boldly approach the throne of grace to receive the grace and mercy I need right here and right now. It’s not my work. I can’t boast in that. I’m totally dependent on God. I am fully dependent on Jesus, who made the way for me.

In the two minutes I have left, I’m going to read the last handful of verses, because this really is where we see it. Paul says this.

Ephesians 4:25,

*“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.”*

Paul says, “Therefore,” because you have been created in the image and likeness of God, in true holiness and righteousness – that in Christ God has made you holy and righteous – put that on. You can do that because God has done that in you. Don’t lie to one another. Speak truth. Be angry and do not sin. Do not let the sun go down on your anger.

There is a place for righteous indignation. We should be angry at evil things. We should get angry when sin is committed, and people are violated, and when God is mocked. Should it stir up anger in us? Yes. Scripture says, “Be angry and sin not.” In God’s grace, God gives us a limitation, which isn’t so much about a span of time as it is perspective. There is a place where we either need to be reconciled or just trust God’s wrath and God’s justice. Romans 12:17-21 says this,

*“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” 20 To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

There is a place where it needs to be handed over to God. When anger goes from righteous anger at an evil to where it would turn into bitterness in your own heart, and choke out joy, and choke out hope, it needs to be let go of. Trust God because only God can handle it from that point.

In “Give no opportunity to the Devil,” Paul is saying that if you let bitterness grow up in your heart that you are giving strategic advantage to Satan in your life; and not just in your life but in the Church. Listen, if we don’t do this with anger—put off anger and put ourselves in a place where our minds can be renewed by the grace of God, and we allow anger to grow into bitterness in our hearts, and we harbor something against a believer – we are giving strategic advantage to the Enemy. When we get to chapter 6, what will Paul have for us? Fiery darts. Satan will attack because he wants to cause division. He wants to sow discord in this church. That can’t happen. There is no place for anger in the life of a believer, when it turns to bitterness.

Ephesians 4:28,

*“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.”*

It’s transformation. Jesus changes people, so let Him. Submit to Him. The thief would no longer steal but would, in fact, provide for those who don’t have.

Verse 29,

*“Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.”*

Let there be no corrupting talk. In Colossians, the sister passage, it really talks about obscene language. Here, it’s the idea of language that has spoiled. It has the idea of drinking in soured milk or biting into meat that is rotten. Think of rotten fish and biting into that. Corrupting words are spoiled. That would be unpleasant, but what Paul is saying here in the context, is that the words he is telling us not to have ultimately spoil and corrupt the one whom we are talking to. Paul is saying, “Don’t do that. Put that off and in place of it speak timely truth and only what is good for building up and that fits the occasion, that you might give grace to those who hear you.”

Verse 30,

*“And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

Don’t be hostile toward one another. In fact, the grace that God has poured out on you, bend it toward one another. Because, ultimately, the putting on of the new man is not so much a new me as it is Christ. The new man that I am putting on is Jesus, as He does His work of conforming me into His image and likeness. This new work of creation in me is that I take part in it. I am becoming more and more like Jesus. The new man I am putting on isn’t the new and improved Rob—it’s Jesus. It’s becoming more like Jesus. Every day I should look less like who I used to be and more like who I am becoming – Jesus. By His grace, through faith, trusting that the day is coming when I will be made like Him because I will see Him as He is.

Pray with me.

Lord Jesus, God, I love you. God, we need you. I pray that you would use this message to bring conviction into our hearts. God, for those of us who have been lazy or carnal in our approach to you, we pray that you would rebuke us and that we would put ourselves in a position to be renewed in our minds and to be transformed by you, to hear from you, and to love your Word, not for information’s sake but to know you. I pray for those of us – and I confess that I am both of these people, so often – who are self-righteous and find our identity in what we do rather than in what you have done, I pray that we would learn submissive obedience and that we would live by grace through faith. God, I pray that we would not return to who we used to be but that we would be constantly transformed to your image and likeness for your glory. I pray these in Christ’s name. Amen.

July 19, 2015

Ephesians 5 – Pt. 1

Brody Holloway

Turn to Ephesians 5. We are going to backup and catch a few verses at the end of last week’s text. If you recall, the chapter and verse breakdowns in your Bible were not in the original text but were added later. Sometimes, it helps to read through that in understanding a text, so we are going to back up and grab the last two verses of chapter 4, and we are going to be reading down through Ephesians 5:7.

If you are visiting with us, we go through books of the Bible verse-by-verse. That’s ninety-percent of the way that we teach at Red Oak. We do that for a couple of reasons. First, we think that’s the most biblical way to handle the Scripture. Then, also, it’s the safest way to handle the Scripture. It really helps reduce man’s imposing his ideas or preaching or teaching to felt or perceived needs or according to social or political atmosphere at the time. We go through books of the Bible and allow God to deal with the things He needs to deal with.

That being said, we have gone through Ephesians at a blistering pace; a far faster pace than any of our pastors have been comfortable with, because there is a heaviness and depth to the text we have tackled. We had laid out a series of thirteen sermons, but as we are getting into the execution of all of the doctrine that we have learned in the first three chapters, and are on the side of the book where we are receiving a lot of commands and instruction, we are going to slow down and we are probably going to add two weeks to our series. We will take what would have been tonight’s text and we will break that in half, and we will do that with maybe one or two more texts. So, that will add two or three weeks. So, if you were expecting that we would get through verse 21 tonight, we are going to slow down and only go to verse 7. Next week, we will overlap and start with verse 7 and go to verse 21. That is also coming from feedback from discipleship groups.

If you are here and you’ve been coming to Red Oak, I would like to encourage you to get plugged into a discipleship group. We have those on Tuesday and Wednesday nights in people’s homes. That’s where you will really get to know people. It is hard to connect really well just on a Sunday, even though after church it isn’t like everyone clears out quickly and it’s just like a ghost town. I have literally preached in churches before where someone started flickering the lights while I was trying to visit with people afterward. We like to hang around after church and enjoy fellowship with each other. But, we also invite you to look at a midweek discipleship group. We’d love to have you plug into one of those if you are not already.

So, Ephesians 4:31. This is the Word of the Lord.

*“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.*

*Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7 Therefore do not become partners with them;”*

Lord, I pray your blessing on the reading and the exposition of your Word. Now, please speak to our hearts and bring conviction, exhortation, rebuke, and reproof, for your glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

The backdrop, if you remember, when we did the intro to the book of Ephesians, is that the city of Ephesus was like much of the Roman Empire at that time. They had a lot of sexual immorality and there was industry that was driven by that sexual immorality. It looked a lot like modern American society or pretty much like modern society just about anywhere you go in the world today. Sex tends to drive a lot of industry. I asked Zach Mabry for some stats because he’s been teaching a breakout session this summer on the pornography industry. These stats are two years old, but listen to them. This is America in 2013.

* Boys don’t know the difference between porn and sex.
* The average boy watches fifty porn video clips per week.

We are talking school-aged boys. This is not even looking at the data on girls, but let me just say to you moms and dads; it is rampant among teenage girls and is rampant even among married women. There is this cultural ideology that we have believed in times past, when it may have been a little more true, that porn, and promiscuity, and sexual fornication was kind of a guy thing, but it doesn’t even make sense mathematically for that to be the case. What we have seen in student ministry is that it is almost as prevalent with young women as it is with young men. So, this data has been collected on the male side of things, but it would be very similar on the girls’ side. The boys watch fifty pornographic video clips a week.

Spencer uses a quote from a John Piper sermon, where he talks about how looking at pornography in today’s culture is easier than going to the kitchen to get a snack. There was a time in our lifetime, even if you are a teenager, where you had to at least work at it a bit to watch porn. But now, with mobile devices, you can literally, without moving from the couch, or without getting out of the car at the gas station or grocery store, consume and be consumed by pornography. It’s that simple and that accessible.

* The porn industry makes $15 billion annually! It is the fastest growing industry in America; faster than anything in the technology sector of industry.

A stat from 2010 really puts it in context.

* In 2010, more money was made off of pornography annually than the NFL, Major League Baseball, NASCAR, hockey, baseball, basketball, football, UFC, all the major league sports combined!

Pornography makes more than all of those combined! We can’t completely put that in a framework that we can swallow and digest mentally, but it at least gives us an idea. This is an overwhelming problem in our culture.

* For every 400 movies that Hollywood makes, 11,000 pornographic videos are produced.

Literally, the brains of young men and young women are being digitally rewired for change, novelty, excitement, and constant arousal, and experts will tell us that sex addiction is a stronger addiction than heroine, meth, or any other drug or pill that can be crushed, snorted, shot up, consumed orally or any other way, because of what it does to the brain and the stimulant that it provides.

So, before we unpack where Ephesus was, we need to know if there is a timely message for our culture and our society, that it is this message that addresses and confronts the sin of sexual immorality and fornication, and literally calls to the table the repercussions of this in terms of salvation. We should be sober-minded when we read, in verse 5, *“For you may be sure of this,”* – you may be confident of this – *“that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”* That is reflected in other passages; in 1 Corinthians 6, in Revelation 1, and Galatians 5.

So, there is this sobering warning to us that sexual sin leads one down a path of destruction, not just in this life but, literally, eternally. It is that kind of grip that it takes hold on a person’s life.

Now, we believe as a church, in our soteriology[[105]](#footnote-105), our belief in what it takes for a person to be saved, in our doctrine of salvation; we believe that when a person is brought into the family of God by the awakening of that spiritually dead person, whereby the Spirit of God regenerates and renews that person, much like when Lazarus was dead in the tomb and Christ called him out, that salvation is Christ’s calling us out of spiritual deadness. When that happens, that man or that woman will endure to the end in their salvation. But, that does not negate the fact that Scripture lays out warnings like this. These people will not inherit the kingdom of God. We need to be sober-minded in the way that we approach this. We don’t take our doctrine and our soteriology and write blank checks for how we live our lives. We have to walk carefully.

The city of Ephesus was the home of the worship of the goddess Diana. This was a very sensual experience even within the worship structure of that goddess. The physical features of that goddess were very sensual and sexual. The statues and images of her were very erotic and sensual. So, in the temple to Diana there were cult prostitutes and in the corporate worship services there were open sex acts. Part of paying tithes would be paying for the services of prostitutes. There were sexual acts and orgies that were offered up as offerings to Diana. It was a complete perversion of everything that God had ever intended for sex to be.

This should make sense to us because that is exactly and precisely where we read in Scripture how a man and woman come together in the deepest, most sacred, and intimate of unions, and they somehow reflect to us and point us to the depth of relationship that we can have with God, in Christ Jesus. So, it makes sense that in the perversion of worshipping God that sex would be dragged into it.

It is also clear, in the Ephesian culture and the Roman world, and also in our world today, that those who don’t pursue Christ and have their eyes on the pursuit of the Lord, those who are not regenerated, people who are not saved and don’t know the Lord – some of you came out of this and some of you have friends and family in this – sex is sort of like the pinnacle of experience in the human body. That is the ultimate thing and the pursuit that a person would be after. So, it makes sense that in a world that is unregenerate, and broken, and fallen that people would pursue their highest pleasure in sex and sexuality. That’s why it should not be thought random that we have come to a place in our own nation’s history where, not only are people now turning to mankind’s definition of what sex and sexuality should be, but we are allowing this to creep into the Church, so that, literally, whole churches and whole denominations, and large percentages of “Christians” are now not only giving their credence to this act of homosexuality and promiscuity, but also they are trying to use the Bible and Scripture to support it.

So, we find ourselves in a culture much like the culture in Ephesus, and when we walk through this text I think it is going to be very convicting and very sobering to see that this is really for us. The jump from exposition to application is just a very short arc, because we are there as a society.

But, we start in verse 31, where Paul says,

*“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander…”*

Just to define some of those words. He says, “wrath and anger.” To differentiate, “wrath” would be sort of like indignant outbursts or a hot loss of temper. Think about road rage and how a person loses control instantly.

“Clamor” simply means public shouting. You would see this in the Ephesian culture with people yelling back and forth. Remember when Paul was in Ephesus and was pastoring and leading a church there for several years, there was a massive riot that broke out. People were screaming at each other and the riot was so obnoxious that the fear was that the Roman authorities and officials were going to come in and squelch it lest it became an uprising. “Clamor” is this yelling back and forth. What we will learn throughout Scripture is that in the Church of Jesus Christ there is to be order. We don’t yell at each other, we don’t scream at each other, and we don’t call business meetings and bark back and forth. We maintain order because we don’t do things as the world does things. So “clamor’ is that idea of public shouting.

“Slander” is abusive language that hurts someone. “Slander” would be right along the lines of gossip, but then taking it a step further to a point to where we are attacking a person’s integrity or calling their character into question. That should not go on in the Body of Christ. That should never happen. Let me address this. When a person is out of line – maybe that person is living in open sin and maybe that person is living in blatant disregard for the Word of God – there is a biblical process for confronting that sin. Slander is not part of that process. You may say, “I ran their name in the ground because they are committing adultery, or they abandoned their family, or they are doing this thing or that thing.” But, there is a proper procedure laid out for us in Scripture for how the Church, as a body, is to confront that sin. Even when a person is guilty it isn’t our job to slander that person. It is not your job to gossip about that person or to sow seeds of discord. In fact, one of the Proverbs[[106]](#footnote-106) says that one of the things that God absolutely hates is someone who sows discord among the brethren or the Body of Christ.

“Malice” is just hostility.

So, what Paul is saying is that in the Body of Christ you shouldn’t have a combative, hostile, slanderous, gossiping atmosphere. Let me stop right here. We are a young church. We are a three-year-old church. We are babies, but let me just ask you something, and by a show of hands just answer this in your head, have you lived through that church in your life? Have you been there? I have. Whether it is a church split, or whether it is a church that functions in an unhealthy manner, or a church that is led in a dictatorial way, or a church that is controlled by a strong group of people, kind of like the five members of the Supreme Court that seem to control our country right now. That kind of control by a small minority of people is not a biblical church. But, a lot of us have experienced that and been in those situations. So, we know that in the Body of Christ, if there is going to be order maintained it has to be maintained with part of that order being proper behavior between believers.

On the other side of that, Paul says,

“*Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

Instead, be kind to one another. We could really try to unpack this, but I’m not going to go deep into these words. Just think about this, “*Be kind to one another.*” This is one of those things where the Lord convicted me in sermon prep, back earlier this week, that I don’t really need to explain this. Just read it. We don’t need a lot of explanation of this passage. It’s not where you have to say, “Well, in the Greek, what it means to be kind to one another is to wash each other’s feet.” We don’t need to make this more powerful. We should just be kind to each other. We should say nice things to each other, church. Christians should love each other in word and deed. Men should be kind to the ladies. It’s okay that culture has rejected this with the rise of feminism and the effeminacy of our culture. It’s okay for men to be gentlemen and to speak kindly to their wives and daughters and other ladies in the Church. Brothers should be kind to brothers. Ladies should be kind to one another and should not say ugly things about each other behind each other’s backs. Just be kind to each other. We should be a church where, when people come in here they feel the love of Jesus, and it’s not just extended toward them. I think that, a lot of times, when visitors come in here we think that we have to reach out to them and make them feel loved. But, listen, when we love each other well they will feel that. Jesus says, *“This is how the world will know...by our love for one another.”*[[107]](#footnote-107) We should be kind to each other, man! Be kind to each other.

We should be “tenderhearted.” Another thought there is that we should give each other the benefit of the doubt. In other words, when you hear something ugly about another person, maybe your first reaction would not be the natural human reaction of, “Yup, not surprised.” Nothing shocks you anymore. Maybe your reaction should be, “Whoa, whoa, whoa! I don’t know that I believe that.” And, I’m certainly not going to jump to conclusions and knee-jerk because someone told me something about some other person, when you can probably look at the source and realize there is a common denominator and track record of how that person tends to slander, and gossip, and talk. We should be kind to one another. We should love one another. We should give each other the benefit of the doubt.

In that, there will be times when, as a body of believers, we will have to confront sin through the biblical process of church discipline. That comes in different levels. At lot of times, I think that when people think of church discipline they think of this one certain procedure. When we read Scripture, church discipline fits right into whether we are loving each other? Are we kind to one another? Are we so trusting of one another that there is at times personal confrontation and interaction between believers, where we are sharpening each other, and watching over one another’s lives in love – not for an opportunity to gossip, but for an opportunity to pour into that person in sanctification, and to help them become more like Jesus. I should also submit myself to the Body of Christ so that I can become more like Jesus.

Be kind to one another. How do we do that?

*“Forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven us.”*

Paul tells us how to do it. There has been this pattern of the word “walk.” Remember that? Remember back in Ephesians 4:1, Paul says, *“Walk in a manner worthy of the calling.”* Then, in chapter 4:17, he says, *“Don’t walk as the Gentiles walk.”* So, Paul has used this word “walk” several times and we know that it means your pattern of living or the way you live your life. Your “walk” is the consistent pattern of your life. In verse 2, he says we are to walk in love, and if you go down to verse 8 you will see that he says we are to walk in light. That just means to walk in the light of truth, in the light of the Gospel, in the light of God’s Word. We are to live in the light, not in the darkness. Go down to verse 15 and Paul says to walk *“not as unwise, but as wise.”* We are to walk in wisdom. We are to walk in discernment. Paul tells the Corinthians that the spiritual man, who has the Spirit of God in him, has a sort of discerning spirit in him, so we should walk in the Spirit and with discernment.

There are three patterns of walking that Paul lays out and the one we are going to look at tonight is the first one, in verse 2, where he says, “walk in love.” How do we do that? How do we walk in love? We walk in love by the power of the Gospel. The way that we walk in love is the same way that Christ walked in love, in forgiving us. In Ephesians 4:32, *“Forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.”*

We walk in the Gospel. We walk humbled by the fact that we’ve been forgiven! What should dictate the attitude of our hearts toward other people is the fact that we are wretched sinners in need of a Savior! We are not just undeserving of grace, but ill-deserving; in fact, deserving of wrath! Yet – *“But God, being rich in mercy---,”* Paul told us in chapter 2. Being rich in mercy, God snatched us out of that! He extends to us forgiveness in Christ Jesus. That’s the way we are to walk in love. It’s not that we sort of strain, and grit our teeth, and clench our fists, and say, “I’ve got to work through this and love this person.” No! I walk in recognition of what I’ve received. There are those moments in my life where I am most in tune with the fact that I have received the forgiveness that comes through the shedding of Christ’s blood!! Christ goes to the cross and I am no longer a drug addict, a pornographer, a child abuser, or a victim of someone else’s sin!! I am redeemed! I am washed! I am cleansed! There is no condemnation because Christ has saved me!! That’s how I walk – and when I walk like that, how dare I to look at another person in a condemnatory or condescending way! I walk as one who has just been redeemed. I’ve been saved by the Gospel – by the power of the Gospel! How would I slander another believer when I walk in the recognition that I am in need of a Savior and apart from that I am destined for Hell and the wrath of God is on my head. Christ saves me. That’s how I love other people and that’s how I walk in love.

Paul says we are to “walk in love,” but he also says in Ephesians 5:1 that we are to imitate God. Now, how do you imitate a God that you can’t even fathom? Listen to what Job says, in Job 11:7-8; he says this,

*“Can you find out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limit of the Almighty? 8 It is higher than heaven—what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?”*

How do you walk in imitation of a God that is unfathomable? Ephesians 5:1 says to imitate God; to be imitators of God. How do you imitate a God who, according to what Job says, you can’t even fathom? Remember in Isaiah 6, when Isaiah peers into the throne room of Christ, and He is seated on the throne, and even the angels that encircle the throne are covering their eyes, and there is a mystery surrounding the throne. We see Isaiah kind of cry out and say he doesn’t even know what is going on because it is unfathomable. Or, when Paul writes in Romans 11; we sing about it as a church and it’s one of our favorite modern hymns: *“Oh, the depths of the riches, and the wisdom, and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His truths? How unknowable are His ways? Who has known the mind of the Lord? Who has been His counselor? Who has given a gift to God that he might be repaid?”* How do we imitate a God who is unfathomable, unknowable, unattainable, and unreachable? Paul tells Timothy that God literally dwells in unapproachable light[[108]](#footnote-108).

How do we imitate that God? Three ways:

Number one – as sons. Our adoption as sons makes us imitators. Now, think about this. Remember Ephesians 1:4-6,

*“Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”*

So, we are dearly loved sons. How do you imitate God? That’s what dearly loved sons do. There’s a certain element of it that we don’t even have to think about it. Think about this. You can do this one of two ways. If you are a parent, maybe you have a more recent illustration. If not, go back to when you were a little kid. If your dad was a construction worker, what did you want? You wanted your own tool belt, didn’t you? If your dad was a police officer, you wanted your pistol and your badge. I can remember walking behind my dad in the snow and jumping to hit his foot tracks. Imitation by a child of a father is natural. We see it play out in a negative way, too, don’t we? When a dad is an abuser, and a hater, and an abandoner, we see that perpetuate itself in the next generation. Imitating a father is the most natural of childlike actions. How do we imitate an unknowable God? We know Him as a Father through our adoption as sons. He makes himself known by coming and getting us. And how does He do that? Through the incarnation of Jesus. The Gospel brings us into a relationship with God, whereby we become sons and daughters. We can literally cry, “Daddy! Papa! Father!,”[[109]](#footnote-109) the Scripture tells us.

Number two – we know Him because His Spirit dwells in us, enabling us to know Him and thus imitate Him. When we walk in the Spirit, as Paul tells the Galatians to walk in the Spirit and they won’t carry out the desires of the flesh. Also, in Romans 8, we are “led by the Spirit.”

Number three – I’m created in God’s image. Remember this. Initially, God created man in perfect union and fellowship. Remember that? We read about that in the first couple of chapters of the Bible; in the first couple of chapters of Genesis. So, in redeeming us through this great work of grace and regeneration, what God does is He brings us back into the fellowship that man once knew. It was made possible by the work of Jesus. So, we are created in His image, the Spirit dwells in us, and He has adopted us through regeneration and redemption. So, we imitate Him as such.

We have also been given the amazing gift of Christ as an example, so when we look at what Christ did, and we walk in what Christ did – Paul says, “*Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us*.”[[110]](#footnote-110) Christ has set the example. So, we look to Jesus, who is the Author, and the Finisher, and the Perfecter of our faith. We look to Him because He has set the example for us, and we know what that example was. The example is the Gospel. It is what saves us. So, we look to Christ for the ultimate example, first as Jesus walked in obedience to the Father, and second as Christ gave himself for us we are to then give ourselves away. So, to be imitators of God and to walk in love is to be one who gives of himself and gives himself away.

*“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

If we go to Isaiah 53, which was our call to worship reading tonight, right in the middle of that, in verse 10, it says this,

*“Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;*

*he has put him to grief;*

*when his soul makes an offering for guilt,*

*he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;*

*the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”*

When a soul makes an offering for guilt, Christ is literally portrayed, in Scripture, as an offering; and we are to live our lives in such a way – and we are to see the Scripture call us to this – that they are an offering to the Lord. We are to live as those who have been put on the altar and who are empowered by the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. So, we walk in love.

Now, this is interesting – Paul is going to make a contrast to this idea of the love of Christ that takes Him to the cross; where Christ says, “I will humble myself and make myself as nothing. I will go to the cross and die for the sins of the people.” This love that is the ultimate act of humility is Christ dying for sin that He never committed, receiving the wrath of God for something He never did, and absorbing that for us. Christ has given us the ultimate example of what love is. But, then what is going to happen in verse 3, is that Paul is going to contrast that love with lust. The opposite of Christlike love, which is the giving of one’s self, the serving of others, and the laying down of one’s life, is going to be lust. That’s why he brings in this idea of lust and sexual immorality and ties these things together; because lust is the opposite of love. Love says, “What can I give to this other person.” In the marriage relationship, as Paul will say later in this same chapter, we are to love our wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. In a marriage, love is asking ourselves the question, “How do I give to this person so that this person receives? ” But lust says, “How can I take from this person, for myself? What can I get for myself?”

This goes back to the epidemic of pornography in our society. It’s no wonder that has led to gross, rampant, large-scale sexual sin, where infidelity in marriage is widespread. I tried to look for data on that and the numbers were all over the place. It’s crazy the percentage of people who are unfaithful in marriage. I tried to look at sources where I didn’t think I’d get in trouble, but what you find is that the percentages of people who confess to extramarital affairs and fornication are now the majority in some circles. It’s no wonder, because our culture is saturated with the worship of sex, and what feeds and fuels that is lust, which says, “What do I get, what do I get, what do I get?!” It touches every part of our culture, from the controlling, dominate, power-hungry person, to the wounded, beat up little boy or little girl, who grows up feeling needy because of what was taken from them. “I need to get for me so I will feel better,” or “I need to get for me so I feel stronger,” or whatever it is. It is the exact opposite of the love that put Jesus on the cross. It wasn’t about what He did or did not do. He knew He was sinless and He knew He was perfect. That is precisely why He went to the cross; because He was the only offering that could be fragrant and perfect.

Lust demands what it wants – “Give me! Give me! Give me!”

If you go to 1 Corinthians 13 and you read “The Love Chapter,” right in the middle of the chapter, which we are all familiar with, to verses 4-7, listen to this,

*“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”*

Now, if we just take that and remove the word “love” everywhere you see it, and put in the word “lust,” and add the negative, it would read like this:

“Lust not patient. Lust is not kind. Lust does envies and it does boasts. It is arrogant and it is rude. Lust insists on its own way. It is irritable and resentful. Lust rejoices at wrongdoing; it does not rejoice with the truth. Lust does not bear all things. It does not believe all things; it does not hope all things; it does not endure all things.”

You can see the contrast between love and lust, and we live in a culture that is saturated with lust. Ephesus was much the same way. Then, in verse 4, Paul says,

*“Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.”*

For the first few days that I was studying this text, I was wrestling with where that fits into this. I think he’s talking about sexual humor, and crude joking, and coarse talk. If you think about where we are, as a culture, you can turn on any television program and ninety-percent of the time one of the main lines of humor is going to be sexual crudeness. It’s the same thing with stand-up comics and it’s the same thing with comedic movies; it’s crude, coarse, sexual talk. Sex has not only become the ultimate fulfillment for the human existence – that high, that rush, that “How do I get for me?” – but it’s also become the main talking point for humor. It makes sense that one thing that God has made as sacred would be the thing that has become spun, and perverted, and worshipped in the wrong way, and joked about in the most unsacred way.

So, here is what I think Paul is getting at. The quickest way to numb yourself to the sacred nature of marital, biblical sexuality, is to start joking about it outside of that context. When it becomes the joke around the water cooler, or in the locker room, or on the school bus, or on the assembly line, then what we are doing is we are desensitizing ourselves to this great gift that God has given to us. Because, here’s the reality; sex done God’s way, on God’s terms, according to Scripture, is the only sex that is fulfilling. It is the only sex that truly brings pleasure, and what the world does is it spins the lie exactly the way Satan spins the lie, that says we get to do this on our terms.

Let me kind of step out of preaching mode for a second and get into living-room mode. This is Wednesday night and we are sitting around the table having coffee. Think about this: Isn’t it interesting that when we hold to a biblical definition of love, we are accused of being haters by society. “You’re intolerant. You hate. You hate these people. You hate this group of people.” When you stand for the biblical definition of marriage, love, and sexuality, you are called intolerant and hateful. But, look at this; what actually happens in the text is that Paul does the opposite. He says that the most hateful, unloving thing that a person can be is to be sexually immoral. It’s the opposite of love. It’s not love at all. Be not deceived, church; ten, and fifteen, and twenty years from now there are going to be more broken people, more destroyed lives, and more wounded relationships because of the climate that we are in right now, socially, than there has ever been. And, wholescale denominations and churches are turning to this in such a way as it speaks from Romans 1. That’s where Paul speaks of that great, dark exchange, whereby homosexuality becomes the champion cause of the day. He says this at the end of Romans 1, verse 28,

*“And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done.”*

People say, “Man! The judgment of God is coming!” But, the judgment of God has already arrived when the people are given up to their depravity and their debased minds. That echoes Romans 1:29,

*“They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice.”*

Where did you hear that? In tonight’s text.

*“They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.”*

Where do you see that? In our culture today and, sadly, also oftentimes, in the Church today.

*“32 Though they know God's righteous decree…”*

Paul is talking about professing believers. Now, listen to this:

*“Though they know God's righteous decree…”*

They have a formal knowledge of God’s righteous decree.

*“… that those who practice such things deserve to die,…”*

They know the truth. They know the condemnation that comes against man. They know that man is born into condemnation and that condemnation rests on this fallen world. Though they know that…

*“…they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”*

What is Paul saying?

We are at this point in our society where professing Christians are giving wholescale approval to the very thing that Scripture has said is an act of hatred toward what God has offered as true love. There is no love in fornication and sexual immorality.

I heard a prostitute being interviewed in a documentary recently. She said, “What we do is not the making of love. It is violent. It is selfish.” She said, “I can’t imagine what it would be like to have someone love me, take me to themselves sexually, provide for me, serve me, and care for me.” She said, “That’s a foreign idea.” It was a pastor who was talking to her.

Lust takes. It takes. It takes. And, we are at a place in society where a majority of people, whom you would talk to on a day-to-day basis, would say, “I’m not in that lifestyle but I approve of that. People should be able to love as they want to love.” It’s not love! It’s not love!

1 John says this,

*“God is love.”[[111]](#footnote-111)*

Anything that doesn’t flow from the nature and character of God is not love. It’s just not. And, the most unloving thing that we can do is approve of sexual immorality.

Let me wrap up one thought from verse 4. Sexually filthy speech gives way to a mind that thinks on those things that lead to sexual sin. I think that what happens is that when people begin to joke, and talk, and have this disrespectful way that they view sex and sexuality, it desensitizes them and makes it easier for them to go down that path. I think that’s why the warning is there.

Covetousness is synonymous with idolatry. Here, it is synonymous with sexual sin and impurity. Think about this; adultery and sexual sin, of whatever nature, is a result of a coveting heart, “I want that for me and for my own selfish gain.” It goes back to that definition of lust. He says that the way that we combat that is with thanksgiving. We recognize what God has done for us and what He has given us and we are in a constant state of thanksgiving. Then, Paul ends with the sober warning in verse 5. It is important to guard ourselves against sexual sin. There are other places we see this. Earlier, we referenced 1 Corinthians 6. Listen to this; 1 Corinthians 6:9,

*“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”*

And Galatians 5:19-21, says this,

*“Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”*

And, in Revelation 21:8 we get the same sort of warning. So, you go, “Okay, what happens when a person falls into this sort of sin.” Well, falling and walking are two different things. As believers, we know that it’s possible to fall into any sin. *“Let he who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.”[[112]](#footnote-112)* “There but for the grace of God go I.”[[113]](#footnote-113) Many of us, as believers, have fallen into sin in such a way that relationships were damaged. Maybe marriages were even brought to an end. So, falling into sin is not the same as walking in sin. We go back to Ephesians 4:17, where Paul says not to walk like the Gentiles walk, in a pursuit of lust, and sexual immorality, and the things the world offers. There is a consistent pattern of living that the believer should reflect in his life. Verse 4:6 says,

*“Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”*

Then, Paul ends with this really neat, but powerful, contrast. He says we are to walk as imitators of God and to walk as sons of God, and now, in verse 6, he contrasts that. There are two categories of people – sons of God and sons of disobedience. As imitators of God, sons of God walk according to their Father and imitate their Father. Children of God are going to, as we already saw, imitate their Father. It’s natural to do that. Sons and daughters of disobedience – those who are not Christians, who are not believers – are going to walk according to a heart of disobedience. It is going to be evidence of the fact that they are not sons and daughters of God.

So, Paul says in verse 7,

*“Therefore do not become partners with them.”*

That’s a sober warning to us, as a church, not only that we hold fast to the truth of Scripture, but that we don’t cave in to social pressure, even if it means pastors going to jail or the church losing our non-profit status. What if our church members don’t get a tax break for tithing to the church? If that had happened to Paul and Peter would they have quit? Oh, no. But, seriously, we need to realize what verse 7 is saying; it’s the contrast to that last verse of Romans 1. Some of the people don’t practice these things but they give freedom to it. But, Paul says, “Don’t have anything to do with that.” You see in 1 Corinthians 5, where a man is living in sexual sin and committing incest, and Paul says, “Cut him off from the Church and have nothing to do with him.” If you do that to people today, people say, “You’re so judgmental!” Listen, the most loving thing we could ever do is practice what Scripture tells us to practice and be obedient to the Word of God. That’s love—that’s love!!

So, what is the hope that we have? The hope is the Gospel. It’s laid out in the first verses of chapter 5, where Christ, as an offering and sacrifice to God, has given us salvation so we can love others as we ought to love them and not hate them in our actions, and our speech, and the way we treat them. We can love them as Christ would love them while maintaining sexual purity in our thoughts, and our lives, and our actions; and we can in every way honor the Lord because of the salvation that Christ has given us. Then, when we fall we don’t walk in that failure but, by the grace of God, we continue in the course of sanctification that God has called us to.

So, we will close with these verses from 1 Corinthians 6. We read verses 9-11, where Paul said, *“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?“*

Let’s read it again,

*“Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”*

Then, Paul goes on to instruct us in how to flee sexual immorality. The thing that will enable to us stand as believers, even when we fall, is the fact that we are being sanctified, made holy by the work of Christ in us. Not by our ability to stay righteous, because we could never stay righteous, but by the ability of the Holy Spirit to make us more like Christ every day of our lives. That’s who we were – this is who we are now. It’s the same thing we have been looking at all through this letter to the Ephesians; it’s who you are in Christ. Be who God created you to be. Walk in the identity that God’s given us. That’s what this is all about; being the people God has called us to be. We are sanctified and we can follow Christ because of that. Praise the Lord!

Lord, I pray that you would help us to understand our responsibility to the Gospel, and as this time of worship comes to a close, and we honor you with our fellowship, and prepare to go to our jobs, and go to our homes, and continue conversation about either the things that matter or don’t matter, I pray that our speech would honor you and be pleasing to you. I pray that this week we would live under conviction and warning from your Word. Lord, we love you and we worship you because of your great love for us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

August 2, 2015

Ephesians 5 – Pt. 2

Spencer Davis

If you are new to Red Oak, here we walk through books of the Bible, and right now we are midway through the book of Ephesians. Tonight, we are going to be in Ephesians 5 and start in verse 7. Hopefully, we will finish out the end of the chapter. Let’s dive right in.

Ephesians 5:7-21,

*“Therefore do not become partners with them; 8 for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light 9 (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10 and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. 13 But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’ 15 Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. 18 And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, 19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, 20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, 21 submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*

We will stop there in verse 21. You could preach eight sermons on this portion of the chapter. If you look at it, you could preach a sermon on walking in the light. You could preach a sermon on exposing the darkness. You could preach a sermon on being wise. You could preach a sermon on drinking. You could preach a sermon on the filling of the Spirit. You could preach a sermon on worship. You could preach a sermon on thankfulness or on submitting to one another. But, tonight, I’d like to just offer an appetizer plate, like a sampler. If you go to Longhorn or somewhere you might get a sampler plate with several different things on it. So, this is going to kind of be a sample plate and I hope you go home this week and read through this passage and feast, and you are able to, in small groups, to think about it, and that as you lay down you will think about it, and think on this passage and the truths that are in it.

So, I’m going to cover this and walk quickly through it. Paul starts out and says, “Therefore, don’t become partners with them.” Who is he talking about? Remember, two weeks ago, when we were in the first part of chapter 5? We need to go back and get a little context for who Paul is even talking about. In Ephesians 5:1, Paul said,

*“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. 3 But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. 4 Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5 For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”*

“Therefore, don’t become partners with them.” Here, Paul is looking back in the chapter and saying, “There are people who walk in darkness. There are people who are darkness and this is the way they act.” We talked about that a couple of weeks ago. So, he says, *“Therefore, don’t become partners with them, for at one time you were darkness but now you light in the Lord, so walk as children of the light.”* Don’t become partners with them. Don’t become partners with the sexually impure; those who have no inheritance. Don’t become partners with those on whom the wrath of God is coming; the sons of disobedience. It is reminiscent of 2 Corinthians 6:14, where Paul says,

*“Don’t be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?”*

None, right? Can light and dark exist in the same space? No, the light always exposes the darkness. It’s like they are mutually exclusive. It’s like two heads of a coin. When you flip a coin, it’s either heads or it’s tails; it’s not both. So, someone is either darkness or they are light, in this verse. That verse in 2 Corinthians goes on and says,

“What agreement has the temple of God with idols?” For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

*“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 17 Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”*

What a fantastic statement! *“You shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.”* It goes back to the theme of sonship. Two weeks ago, we looked at the first part of chapter 5, where Paul says, *“Be imitators of God as beloved children.”* Because we have been acted on, because we are sons, because we are daughters, and because we are beloved, then we act like the Father. Here, we act because we have been acted upon. It’s the same thing here. It’s the second walk. The first walk is in chapter 5, where he says, “Walk in love.” Now, he says, “Walk as children of light.” He says that something is fundamentally changed about us.

In verse 8, he says, *“At one time you were darkness.”* It doesn’t say you were in darkness. He says that this is what was fundamental about you – you were dark. At one time you were darkness, but now you aren’t *in* the light, you *are* light. *“So, walk as children of light.”* This verse doesn’t say to walk in the light and you will become children of light, it says that because the Lord has taken you from darkness to light, act like it. Act it out. We have been made light so we can’t hide again in the dark. We are totally different.

And this word “partners,” when he says “don’t be partners with them” is only used two times; once here and once back in Ephesians 3, where he is talking about the Gentiles. He says that the mystery is that the Gentiles are *“fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”* He’s saying that the mystery is that the Gentiles are family. They are joined with us now. The Gospel is for everyone; for Jews and for Gentiles, and now we are all together in one big family. We are partners together. So, here Paul is saying not to be that with darkness. Don’t be family with darkness. Don’t be joined together or be family or partners with darkness. Don’t share an identity with darkness—because you are different. You are fundamentally different from the core.

Everywhere in Scripture where you see God’s activity, or the Word, or Christian activity, they are represented by light. There are so many verses, and I just want to read a few that talk about God’s activity, or the Word, itself, or how we are supposed to act characterized by light. I want to read just a few of them:

* Psalm 18:28, *“For it is you who light my lamp; the Lord my God lightens my darkness.”*
* Psalm 27:1, *“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?”*
* Psalm 36:9, *“For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.”*
* Psalm 56:13, *“For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God*
* *in the light of life.”*
* Psalm 118:27, *“The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.”*
* Psalm 119:130, *“The unfolding of your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.”*
* Proverbs 4:18, *“But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn which shines brighter and brighter until full day.”*
* Proverbs 6:23, *“The commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life.”*
* Matthew 4:16, *“The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”*
* Matthew 5:14-16, *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”*
* John 1:4-5, *“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”*
* John 3:19, *“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.”*
* John 8:12, *“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*
* John 12:36, *“While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.”*
* Romans 13:12, *“The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.”*

All throughout the Scripture we see light…light…light…and this is us now. We belong to that same light. If you are in Christ, Christ has shined His light on you and now the deepest part of you is not darkness, but is light. There is forgiveness and light in Christ and there is so much hope in that.

So, when Paul tells us to walk in the light, what does that look like? What does it look like to walk in the light? In verse 9, he says,

*“For the fruit of light is found in all that is good, and right, and true.”*

So, walking in the light is the natural fruit. He is saying to bear fruit. Show that you’ve been changed fundamentally from the inside. So, what does walking in the light look like? Here, he says it is having a life that is characterized with everything that is good, everything that is right, and everything that is true; those things that reflect God’s nature should be true of you. In verse 10, he says,

*“And try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.”*

So, try to discern what is good, and what’s right, and what is true. Because we’ve been changed and because the deepest part of us is now light, we need to walk in that light. What is that light? Whatever is good, whatever is right, whatever is true. So, in verse 10, he says to try to figure that out. Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Seek out what is pleasing. It reminds us of Philippians 1:9-10, where Paul says,

*“And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ,”*

Approve what is excellent so that you can discern what is pleasing. If we are walking in Christ and we are walking in the light, we will want to do what is good, and right, and true; but here he says that we are going to need discernment to even figure out what that is, because the world is dark. There is so much darkness in the world. So, in verse 11, Paul says,

*“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.”*

Don’t act like a partner with the darkness, but expose them. It’s a theme of light and dark. So, how should the light act toward the darkness? I would say that we should shine the light of Christ on them by the way we act. Doing a little internal check, these chapters of Ephesians are highly practical. The first three chapters we went through were really theological, telling us who we are in Christ. We are holy, blameless, sons and daughters, adopted into the family, and chosen. Now, he is telling us that as a result of all these things and as a result of being made light, here is what we need to do. The world is still dark and we need to shine the light of Christ into it. And here is how he says to do it; by exposing the unfruitful works of darkness.

So, how do we do that? There is kind of a negative and a positive to it. Paul says to take no part in the unfruitful – that’s the negative – but instead, expose them – that’s the positive. So, is it two things to do or is it one thing to do? In one way, you could think of it as one thing. The way we live should shine as the light in the life of unbelievers. But also, this has to do with us speaking up and saying something to expose the darkness.

Brody talked two weeks ago on the passage about sexual sin. That’s exactly what Brody did standing right here – he exposed the darkness of sexual sin in our culture. There is so much darkness that needs to be exposed. Y’all see the news, right? You look at what is trending on Twitter, or you look at FOX News, CNN, or wherever you get your news from, and all the last four weeks has been about Planned Parenthood[[114]](#footnote-114) and the abortion stuff. I think how we’ve known for years that we are killing babies and killing children, and now it comes out that maybe people are selling their parts for profit. This is dark. These are dark days, and part of the darkness is how we, as a culture, are focusing on other things, like a dead lion. I’m sure y’all have seen this. There is a man who has maybe poached a lion in Zimbabwe, I think it was named Cecil the Lion[[115]](#footnote-115). If he poached a lion, do you know what should happen? He should go to jail or be fined. He should carry his punishment. But, our culture is so outraged at Cecil the Lion being killed that people are raising hundreds of thousands of dollars to go to foundations to protect lions. Great, we should protect creation and we should be compassionate toward animals. We absolutely should. But – our culture is yawning at the fact that we are killing babies by the millions. We are yawning at it. The Empire State Building, this week, was lit up with an image of Cecil the Lion[[116]](#footnote-116). No joke. Should that man be punished? Yes, if he poached he should be. But, what about the millions of babies we are killing? There is darkness in the world and we have to expose it.

But, I want look at how we expose it and why we expose it. Because, it’s not just for the sake of going, “Aha! I got you!” That does nothing. Oftentimes we expose sin and then offer no hope, so people see us as judgmental; and they should. Or people see us as condemning, if we just say, “That’s bad. That’s bad. That’s bad,” and we offer no hope. That is not truly exposing the darkness with the light of Christ. Verse 12 says that it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. It is. There are some dark things that some of you guys have experienced, or seen, and you are shameful to even speak of them. But, we have a duty, as the verse says, to expose some of the darkness. It is shameful to speak of some of these things because the darkness hides the ugliness of sin. Right? But, when the light of Christ shines on it we see it for what it really is.

There are some things that we, as parents, need to be wise about how we expose our kids to them. There are some things that kids aren’t ready to see. There are some dark things in the world that they are not ready for. Our family went to the infantry museum in Fort Benning[[117]](#footnote-117), and if you have never been please plan a trip. It is awesome. It is unbelievable. I went with my family and I didn’t know how my kids would react to it, you know? But, for the most part it is just great and honors the troops. But, there is this one part of the Vietnam War Memorial where they say, “Nobody under seven should go in here.” It says that there is some graphic stuff in there. But, I’ve talked with my kids about how guys have died for their country, and how awesome it is, and how we should honor these men. So, we paused outside that door and I said, “Listen, I’m going to go in there and I want you all to stay out here, because you aren’t ready for this.” So, I went in and it was more gory and graphic than I imagined. Then, I went out the other side and my daughter asked, “Why couldn’t I go in there?” I told her, “Someday I’ll take you in there but, not right now.” I couldn’t really think of how to explain it. Then, I said, “Remember how we went backpacking last week? While we went backpacking, I put all the heavy stuff in my pack and I gave you the really light pack with just your jacket and a Capri Sun in it. In reality, it’s a great hike, but my pack was just too heavy for you to carry.” Then, I said, “What’s in that room is too heavy for you to carry, right now.” So, I think that, sometimes, what’s going on in our culture is too heavy for our kids to know, so we need to be wise in the way that we expose the darkness to them. We can’t put blinders on them. We can’t pretend that the world isn’t dark and then all of a sudden have them stumble out into it in college and go, “What?! It’s like this?!” That would mean we have not done our job. We need to wisely, compassionately, expose the darkness to unmask it. We need to shine the light into that dark corner.

Why are we to expose the darkness? If Paul says that some things are so shameful that we shouldn’t even talk about them, why does he say to shine a light on them so that everyone can see them? I think the key is in verses 13-14. Look at this. This is a confusing verse, by the way:

*“But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light.”*

What? First you read, “*When anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.”* Okay, I’m tracking with that. If we turned the lights off in here and made it pitch black, and then we took that spotlight and shined it here on the piano, we would see that when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible. We can’t see the piano and then, when all of a sudden it is exposed by the light, now we see the piano. When anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible. But, then, Paul says, “*For anything that becomes visible is light.”*

Well, anything that becomes visible is visible, or anything that becomes visible is lit up and we can see that it is there; so it makes some sense light-wise. But anything that is exposed by the light *is* light? Here’s the thing. When you break it down and you study it, it’s not just exposure, like “Aha!,” but it’s hope. Because, the hope is that the light that you shine by exposing the darkness, will not only expose but actually be used to transform darkness into light. This is it! When we are exposing the darkness of the world, whatever it might be, when we are exposing the darkness in people’s hearts, as a society, we are not just going, “Aha! Look!,” but we are exposing it with the hope of the Gospel; in hope that anything made visible will become light, and that it will be transformed by the power of Christ. So, we are not just holding out picket signs minus the hope of the Gospel. We are holding out the hope of the Gospel. We are holding out the transforming light of the Gospel. This is what happened to us – we were exposed. Remember the song we sing, “Out of the darkness and into the marvelous light.[[118]](#footnote-118)” It is so good! The song begins with the idea that I was afraid that I would be exposed and known but then I walked out of the darkness and into the light. It’s so good. That is the hope that we are holding out to the world. We are holding out Christ and the hope of the Gospel.

This holds out hope to you and to me, because everyone in this room is a sinner. We can’t put people into categories and say, “All of that is darkness and I have the light,” because this says, “Remember you were dark. You were darkness and then Christ shined His light on you and said, ‘Awake! Live!’” There is forgiveness and there is hope no matter what you’ve been a part of. No matter what kind of darkness you’ve been tangled up in. There is shame in darkness, but Christ removes shame. He’s powerful.

Exposure, or saying, “This is bad” alone, without the hope of the Gospel, is negative, judgmental, and condemning. We have to hold out the forgiveness of Christ. And, it’s interesting to note, as we read that verse at the beginning that said, “*Come out from among them and be separate*,” Paul is not saying to not associate with those who are in darkness. He’s saying to not partner with them, or family together with them, or share identity with them. He is not saying to not associate with them, because to do that you would have to leave the world, right? You’d have to start some sort of Christian-only community, whatever that would look like. Paul is saying to expose darkness by the light but to also hold out the transforming light of the Gospel.

Remember John 17, when Christ is praying, He says, *“I’ve given them your Word and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, just like I’m not of the world.”* Listen to this. This is Christ praying about us, “*I don’t ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just like I’m not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your Word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.*”[[119]](#footnote-119) We hear the verse quoted, “*Go out from their midst and be separate*,[[120]](#footnote-120)” and we might be tempted to wall ourselves off into a totally Christian community, and we would be totally missing it. Because Christ is saying, “I sent you into the dark to hold out the light and the hope of the Gospel.” Jesus gives us a tangible picture of what that looks like, because when He comes onto the scene He doesn’t do what we would expect Him to do, by hanging out in church and synagogue all day. He hangs out in sinners’ houses, and eats with them, and talks to them, and attends their weddings. He holds out the marvelous light of the Gospel in the darkest corners, and that is what He has called you and me to do; to expose the darkness with the hope and the light of the Gospel. Hope says, while we are not just *in* darkness but we *are* darkness, “Live! Live in the light.” In verse 14, it says,

*“Therefore, it says, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.’”*

This is good. This is what happened when we came to Christ; the dead came alive. The light of Christ shines on the dead and the sleeper awakes. It is so cool how, oftentimes, when Jesus would encounter a dead person in the New Testament, a person would say something like, “Oh, my son is dead,” and Jesus would say, “No, they are just sleeping.” Jesus isn’t dumb. He knows they aren’t sleeping, but that they are really dead. But, He also knows that His light would shine on them and it would wake that sleeper up. That’s what happened to us. *“Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”*

Just out of curiosity, that verse begins, “*Therefore, it says*…” What says that? Have you ever wondered about that? Usually, when an author in Scripture says, “Therefore, it says,” they are quoting from another spot in the Bible, but this verse isn’t in the Bible anywhere else; “*Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you*.” I don’t know and the commentators don’t know. Some think that Paul is taking Isaiah 60:1, which says, *“Arise, and shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you.”* Huh? Maybe? That might be a little bit of a stretch. There’s another verse in Isaiah 26 that says something similar. Most commentators believe that this is maybe an early baptismal hymn or a song that the people sang, or something they proclaimed. Maybe it was made out of these two Isaiah passages. It may have been an early hymn that they sang at baptisms. When we baptize someone, we might say, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Buried in the likeness of His death and raised to walk in newness of life.” So, they might say something like, *“Awake, O sleeper, arise from the dead and Christ will shine on you.”* That’s really cool. It’s awesome. So, every time they read this they might be reminded of their own baptism, when they came from death to life.

This chapter is all about acting out who we really are. If you remember from chapter 1, we forgive because we’ve been forgiven. We love because we’ve been loved. We shine the light of Christ because that light has been shined on us. But now, Paul kind of switches tones. He gets real serious and gives us almost a prep for battle speech. He says, “Since you are alive. Since you have the light, there is darkness out there and you have to expose it with the hope of the Gospel.” Now, he gives us words with a real sense of urgency, “Here’s what you’ve got to do! Wake up!” It reminds us of a speech like we see in 1 Thessalonians 5:5-11, where he says,

*“For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness. 6 So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. 7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night. 8 But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. 9 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”*

This almost sounds like a pre-battle speech. “You are sons and daughters of light, so here’s how you should act.” So, in Ephesians 5:15, Paul goes into another sort of prep for battle speech, when he says,

*“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,”*

This is how we walk in the light. He is laying out how we walk in the light, how we expose the darkness, and how we live in light of what’s been done in us. *“Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise.”* Here’s another one of those “walk” phrases. Remember, he’s already said, “Walk in love…walk in light.” Now, he says, “Walk in wisdom.” It’s a really Hebrew way to say, “Live.” So far, Paul has told the Ephesians, “Walk in good works,” “Walk worthy of your calling,” “Don’t walk as the unbelievers, in the futility of their minds,” “Walk in love, as Christ,” “Walk as children of Christ,” and now he says, “Walk as the wise…walk in wisdom.” And, this last command to “walk as the wise” is preceded with “Take care…be careful to do this.” Because, the reality is, you don’t stumble into wisdom. You don’t. Just because you get older doesn’t mean you get wiser. Just because you grow, doesn’t mean you grow spiritually. Just because your body matures, doesn’t mean that you mature. You don’t stumble into being wise. Paul is saying that you have to take care to make sure that you are walking as the wise. He says that this is part of walking in the light. Part of walking in the light is growing in wisdom, and wisdom is a theme that Paul has already mentioned in Ephesians several times. *“Christ lavished the riches of His grace in all wisdom.”* Paul prays that the Ephesians will have wisdom to understand the calling and the riches of His inheritance. Then, Paul continues this theme of wisdom in verse 16.

*“…making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”*

Wisdom uses time well. It maximizes these dark days, by redeeming or buying back the days. Life is a vapor and it’s good to be reminded of that. Life is a vapor that passes by very quickly and you can’t ever get time back. I have a seven-year-old, a six-year-old, and a four-year-old, and all the time we will be doing something like hanging out on the couch, snuggling, and watching a movie, and I say, “Can we just freeze time for a little bit, so for like two years y’all will stay the same age and I can just soak it up?” And one of my kids will say something like, “You can’t stop God’s plan!” I’m like, “I know, but I really would like to just freeze time for a minute and maximize these days.” Here, the Scripture is saying that the only way you can maximize these days is by wisdom. If you are not wise, you waste days, and you waste time. You can’t get that time back. It’s like you have a limited amount of currency and when it’s gone, it’s gone. Don’t spend it on garbage. You can’t make any more. You can’t freeze time or slow time down and you can’t redo it. You have to take what you have now, and invest it, and improve it. Maximize your days. That’s the way a wise man acts. That’s the way a wise woman acts.

We know some sure-fire ways to waste our time. I’m sure you could come up with a billion ways, because there is no shortage of those ideas. Unfruitful works of darkness would be a waste of time. Complaining is a waste of time. Backbiting is a waste of time. Tearing others down is a waste of time. Gossip is a waste of time. You could think of a trillion other ways to waste the days that are so precious, and you will never get this one day back. You never will. Make the most of these days because they are dark. In verse 17, Paul continues his thought,

*“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.”*

Here is another whole sermon – what’s the will of God? How do I understand what the will of the Lord is? I think that wisdom understands the will of the Lord, and if you are doing the will of the Lord you know that you are maximizing your time. In Ephesians, we have already seen that we know the will of the Lord, generally. Even if you look at verses like 1 Thessalonians 4:3, where Paul says,

*“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality…”*

So, we know, in general, that God’s will is that we be sanctified. In Ephesians 1, Paul says that God works all things according to His will. We know, generally, that God’s sovereign will is at work. God does what He pleases. No plan of God’s can be thwarted. We know, in general, the will of the Lord takes wisdom to understand. God is in control of all things. It takes wisdom to understand that.

But, what about the rest? I trust that God is in control but what about college? Am I supposed to buy this house? Are we supposed to move? What about the rest? Wisdom – that’s how we’re supposed to understand the Lord; we are supposed to walk in wisdom. We mentioned this a few weeks ago – so many of us, when we are thinking about the will of God, not in a general “God’s in control” sense, but in a smaller, more specific, “Should I buy this house” sense, take wisdom, put it to the side, and say, “How do I feel? Do I feel good about it? Do I feel at peace about it?” But, feelings are so fickle that they change depending on what you eat. Think about it. You eat biscuits and gravy and it’s like a tranquilizer; you’re like “I don’t feel like doing anything. I’ll buy the house later.” We can’t rely on feelings, or impulses, or things like that. Paul tells us to walk as the wise, walk in wisdom, and make the best use of your time. Don’t be foolish. Understand the will of the Lord.

How should you understand the will of the Lord? Man, God has given us books of the Bible dedicated to wisdom, how we should get it, and how we should seek for it. We should ask for it. We should pursue it. This is how wisdom looks. This is how wisdom acts. Pursue wisdom and you will know and do the will of the Lord.

Here, the will of the Lord is more of a summary statement. Knowing God’s will – both in salvation in chapter 1, and God’s will as dictated for everyday decisions – will help you to walk in the light. Not knowing God’s will, grasping it, or understanding His will, both in salvation and in daily walking, will result in walking in foolishness. The way we know that is by wisdom. Then, there is verse 18. Paul goes on and says,

*“And do not get drunk with wine,”*

The first time I read this, I thought that this seemed out of place. Because here Paul is talking about maximizing the days and understanding the will of the Lord, and then all of a sudden he says, “And don’t get drunk.” I think that’s a good standalone thing for us to understand. We know that we should not get drunk with wine, right? If there are some of you, or some of us, who are getting drunk with wine, stop. Don’t get drunk with wine. But, I think Paul is saying something more than that. Because, Paul has been talking about wisdom, and talking about maximizing the days, and being wise, and this verse is kind of tying a few truths together. He says,

*“Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,”*

We hear “don’t get drunk with wine,” even in Proverbs 20:1, where Scripture says,

*“Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.”*

So, this verse is continuing the theme of wisdom. Wisdom doesn’t get drunk. If you get let astray by wine, you aren’t wise and you can’t be wise. You won’t be wise if you’re being led astray by wine. If you are drunk you won’t be making the best use of time. You don’t have full control of your faculties to be able to walk in wisdom. Drunkenness is a waste. That’s what the word “debauchery” means; it’s a waste, without moderation, improper or excessive. Getting drunk is a fruitless work of darkness. This is a compare/contrast statement. He is saying don’t get drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit, so Paul is comparing and contrasting these two realities. Obviously, don’t get drunk with wine because that’s unwise, not a good use of your time, and it’s debauchery, and a waste of time, but be filled with the Spirit. It’s a comparison and a contrast with the Spirit’s work, because, like wine, the Spirit fills and takes control of you. If you drink a lot of wine it fills and takes control. You are out of control now. Like wine, the Spirit fills you and takes control of you. Also, by comparison, if you drink a quantity of wine you will get drunk, and if you drink in a lot of the Spirit from the Word you are filled with the Spirit.

We will talk about being filled with the Spirit here in just a second. There are some differences in this compare/contrast because Paul doesn’t say, “Don’t get drunk with wine but get drunk on the Spirit.” There are some differences between wine and the Spirit, right? Unlike wine, the Spirit brings life. Wine slows and dulls; the Spirit awakens and brings life. Unlike wine, the Spirit brings change. Wine brings a temporary alteration but you will wake up out of that. You will be back like you were the night before. The Spirit brings permanent, deep change, unlike wine. Unlike wine, the Spirit brings clarity.

You know, a lot of times we tend to think of the Holy Spirit as just a mystical entity, but in reality the Holy Spirit’s job is never to create mystery, but is to bring clarity. Scripture says that the Spirit will take Jesus’ words and explain them to us. The Holy Spirit brings clarity, unlike wine. It dispels mystery. He explains Jesus’ words. Wine doesn’t bring things into clarity. It brings things into mystery. We hear “*in vino veritas*,[[121]](#footnote-121)” but that’s only true to a degree. Unlike wine, the Spirit brings life, brings change, and brings clarity.

So, what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? We will not go into everything like the baptism of the Spirit, and how Paul uses it, and how Luke uses it, and what that means, and what that doesn’t mean, although that sermon is here to be preached. We will not go into all of those details. Paul is talking more about walking in the light and walking in wisdom, so here he says, “*So, don’t get drunk with wine but be filled with the Spirit.”* Here, this filling is like a continual filling. Be continually filled with the Spirit. It echoes language back in the last two chapters. In Ephesians 3:19, Paul told us,

*“…And to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

Then, in Ephesians 4:13, he says, to grow into the fullness of Christ.

“The fullness of God,” “the fullness of Christ,” and “the fullness of the Spirit” – it’s Trinitarian language all throughout. Be filled, ongoing, with the Spirit. Paul is getting ready to tell us what that looks like. First, I want to read a parallel passage in Colossians 3. Paul says,

*“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which, indeed, you were called in one body, and be thankful. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly; teaching and admonishing one another, in all wisdom, singing songs, and hymns, and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your heart to God.”*

This parallels the passage we are in because it says to be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another with songs, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, and being thankful. So, it’s a real parallel passage here. “*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly*” is in the place of “*be filled with the Spirit,”* so maybe he’s saying they are linked. He is saying, “You have been sealed…be filled.” I don’t think this is talking about a second type of baptism in the Spirit that is characterized by us speaking in tongues and healing. I don’t think that is what he’s hinting at. I think he’s talking about an already/not yet type[[122]](#footnote-122) of situation. He’s saying that you are filled with the Spirit, sealed with the Spirit, adopted, chosen, and filled with the Spirit, so now be full. Be filled.

Peter O’Brien says, “The goal is to attain to what, in principle, we already have in Christ; fullness and spiritual maturity.[[123]](#footnote-123)” Act out what is already true. You are light, so walk in it. Walk in what is true and being completed in you. If we are filled with the Spirit, we will not only prep for the battle, like he has been telling us, with wisdom, but we will do the following things. In the last three verses that we will go through, Paul tells us in the next section what it looks like, in part, to be filled with the Spirit. It talks about speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks, and submitting. So, look at verse 19. It says,

*“…addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,”*

I’ll be honest. The first time I read this it was like I hit the brakes. It was like……*whoa!* Speaking to one another with songs? It almost seemed to not even fit here.

When I was a kid, my parents made a big effort to make my sisters and me all well-rounded. So, we did gymnastics, and we did things like singing and performing shows. We took manners classes … I can set a table really well. We took piano, and guitar, and all the sports, and all this stuff, and I really appreciate now that they exposed us to all this different stuff. Some of it I liked and some of it I really hated. It was good for the most part. We would get dressed up really fancy and I would go on a date with my mom. We’d go to a very fancy restaurant and I’d have to do all the manners stuff with my mom, and we’d go out to all these really hoity-toity shows. We’d go to the Fox Theatre in Atlanta and we’d watch musicals and stuff, and I don’t like musicals. We saw *Les Miserable* and the *Phantom of the Opera*. You know, I’ll be real and open with everybody; in that context, I appreciated it. The songs were sweeping, and huge, and it was interesting, and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed being there. You know they are actors and you know they are going to sing and act and when it’s over you think it was great. But, the movie, *Les Mis[[124]](#footnote-124)*, came out a few years ago, with Russell Crowe and Hugh Jackman in it. So, we rented the movie because I’d seen the play a long time ago. I hadn’t seriously thought about it being a musical, so I don’t know what I was thinking. But, I’ll be honest, the first time that the Wolverine[[125]](#footnote-125) started singing to the Gladiator, it weirded me out. It wasn’t the larger-than-life, sweeping songs but it was everyday songs, like “Would you open the door?” I thought, “What the heck is going on?” I couldn’t get into it. On the stage, I thought, “Yeah, that’s what’s supposed to go on onstage, with props and stuff,” but in a movie, in our house, it was so strange.

That’s what happened when I read this verse. I read, “Speak to one another in songs, and hymns, and spiritual songs,” and I thought, “Whaaa? How does this even work?! Am I supposed to sing to my friends? I don’t sing. I don’t sing in the shower. I don’t sing in the car. And I’m supposed to sing psalms?” Some of the psalms could be sweeping, like, “Break the teeth of mine enemies!! Let the slugs dissolve in their slime!!” That’s a real Psalm; Psalm 58. So, what does, *“Address one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs,”* mean? Surely that’s not what it meant. It has to tie into walking in the light and walking in wisdom.

The first part of the verse is interesting. It tells *us* to address *us*. It says, “Address one another.” Then, the second person it tells us to address is in, “Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” I think this is really important for us to think about. Does it mean to just sing to one another personally? Maybe. Maybe that’s in there. But, remember that he is talking to a church, a community of people. So, part of the mutual edification, instruction, and encouragement in the Church should take place musically. It should. So, what does, “*Address one another in song*” mean? Think about it. Some of the songs that we sing aren’t directly like, “You, O, Lord…I praise You,” but they are calling one another to action. If we are talking about that one song that says, “Great is our God,” we are singing to one another about our God. Right? So, we are addressing one another in song.

The second part of the verse says, “*Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.”* I think, even though it is coupled in two phrases, it is likely the same activity. Right? The songs that we sing should magnify the Lord and edify the Church. That’s why we sing songs. The words that they use for songs are really interesting. A lot of people try to dissect these words. You have songs, and you have hymns, and you have spiritual songs. What are these like? So, tonight, Zach and I met ahead of church, and did you notice that tonight we sang, *I Sing the Mighty Power of God*.[[126]](#footnote-126) We sang one song that addressed one another in song. Then, we sang Psalm 62, a psalm. Then, we sang, *Marvelous Light[[127]](#footnote-127)*, which would be a spiritual song, speaking about this very passage. Then, we sang, *Be Thou My Vision[[128]](#footnote-128)*, singing a song to God. We addressed one another with songs, and hymns, and spiritual songs.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, song, hymn, and spiritual song, were the three titles they used for Psalms. So, they would have a “psalm of David,” or a “hymn of David,” or a “spiritual song of David.” They were used interchangeably in the Psalms. So, Paul isn’t telling us, “Every time you come to worship you must sing one psalm, one old hymn, and one spiritual song,” but he’s saying, “Make it diverse. Edify the Church with these words. Declare to one another the greatness of God, and then declare to God His own greatness.” That’s why we sing. We don’t sing for filler. We don’t sing just to get everybody ready. We are edifying the Church and this is part of what we are commanded to do. We are being built up together and we are praising the Lord together, as a group, as one body and one voice to the Lord. We are all baptized into one baptism and one Spirit, together. So, why are we singing with our voices and making melody, which refers to instrumentation? We are supposed to play skillfully and sing well. We are supposed to play and sing. Why?

It’s like just one illustration of God’s love is not enough to encapsulate it, which we talked about several weeks ago. God’s love is like a father and a son. It’s like a husband and a wife. Just like one illustration of God’s love isn’t enough to contain it, one avenue of praise is not adequate to contain all that the Lord is. There are some truths that are so robust, so deep, so soaring that we have to sing! It’s not enough to just say, “I-walked-out-of-the-darkness-into-His-marvelous-light.” That truth is so big, and soaring so far overhead, that we add in music so that every bit of our emotions, our bodies, our instruments, our guitars, our drums, soar to the heights and express this huge reality. We sing, and make music, and edify one another with these songs. It’s not just prep for a sermon; it is trying to reach with the deepest part of us, to magnify the Lord so He can be seen for who He really is. This is part of what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. Be filled with the Spirit so address one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs—various songs and styles. Sing and make melody to the Lord with your heart.

This isn’t an internal, unspoken praise. It’s not making melody in your heart and to yourself. This is with all of yourself. Sing with the deepest part of you. It reeks with the reality that singing ropes in our emotions. Right? When we sing, our emotions can be really engaged but we also need to have our intellect engaged, because this whole chapter is wrapped up in wisdom, wisdom, wisdom. You can’t turn your brain off and just sing for emotion’s sake. You can’t have one and not the other. You can’t solely have intellect and no emotion in it, and you can’t have solely emotion and no intellect in it. Here, Paul is saying, “Out of what Christ has done, realize where Christ has taken you. You were dark but now you are light, so sing!! Proclaim it!! Tell one another and encourage one another. Praise the Lord with songs, hymns, and spiritual songs.”

Verse 20,

*“…giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

When we look back at what’s true of us in Christ – that we are holy, faithful, recipients of His grace, chosen, adopted as sons and daughters, forgiven, with the riches of God’s grace lavished on us – we will give thanks. Here, he says to give thanks constantly and to give thanks regularly. Give thanks always and for everything. It’s going to take wisdom, and intellect, and a really robust view of God’s sovereignty to give thanks in everything. Giving thanks in tough times and in trials is a different way of giving thanks. It is not a silly, surface-level view of God’s sovereignty that can give thanks for sickness or death. We give thanks for everything regularly to the source; we give thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks in the name of our mediator, our source, and our rescuer, Jesus Christ. So, Paul ends it with the last thing, after telling us what walking in the Spirit looks like – singing to one another, making music, giving thanks – by saying that walking in the Spirit looks like submitting to one another.

Verse 21,

*“…submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*

The final thing that the filling of the Spirit causes us to do, here in this passage (there are many other things the filling of the Spirit will cause us to do) is to submit to one another. First, we must have fear or reverence for Christ and that fear or reverence will motivate us to submit to one another. Submitting is, literally, to arrange yourself under another. You would consider others more important than yourself. You yield to one another and serve one another. This applies to all of us – we submit to one another because we are filled with the Spirit.

This verse is also an intro to the next section, because Paul is getting ready to talk about how submitting looks in a marriage and how it looks in a work environment. What does submitting to one another look like? It flows out of, not only reverence for Christ, but out of being filled with the Spirit and walking in the light.

Let’s pray and then we will be able to sing and encourage one another with psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, and we will also get to give thanks to the Lord through Jesus Christ.

Jesus, we love you and we thank you for your Word. God, I pray that you would just cause us to be a church that magnifies you in worship and that magnifies you by holding out the hope of the Gospel in this dark world. Lord, I pray that we wouldn’t just expose darkness for exposure’s sake, but that we would hold out the light and the hope of the Gospel to the dark world. God, I pray that Red Oak would be a church that is characterized by walking in wisdom, and walking in the light, and holding that hope out for our community. We love you, Jesus, and we worship you together. In your name we pray, Amen.

August 9, 2015

Ephesians 5 – Pt. 3

Rob Conti

During the weeks leading up to tonight, while reading through the text and knowing that this message was coming, and now as we are about to walk through this text together, I have thought about how we have to intentionally check our baggage. We have to intentionally step back, and look at, and examine our own baggage that we would carry into a text like this. Let’s read it together and then say that again.

Ephesians 5:21-33

*“…Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.*

*25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body.*

*31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”*

So, let me say again that it would probably be good for all of us to back up, before we walk through this text, and examine what baggage we bring into this. What perverted image of marriage or misunderstanding of submission and headship do I bring into this? For me, personally, it is hard to read, “*Wives, submit to your husbands*,” and to not have an image in my mind that smacks of oppression or an abusive male, dominant figure that would suppress a woman’s intellect, and will, and emotions. It is hard to not feed into that my own understanding of marriage based on my childhood, my upbringing, and what I experienced in my own home. Maybe that would be similar for you; where you saw a perverted image of what it means to be a husband, what it means to be a wife, or what submission looks like. Maybe, for you, it would fall in the other direction, where you had a home where the wife led by force, manipulation, or coercion. Maybe you come to this text with a lifetime of being educated in a secular environment. Maybe it’s a lifetime of the way that entertainment shapes the way we view male and female, and husband and wife. What’s sad is that what is so easily lost is the beauty of the Gospel in this passage and the beauty of what marriage needs to be.

So, what we need to do is to step back, examine what we bring to the table (e.g. What do I think and what do I feel when I see these words?) and try to set that aside, and press into what God is saying here. What is God, by His Word and by His Spirit, communicating to me about what it means to be a husband and what it means to be a wife? We don’t want to miss this huge, beautiful picture of the Gospel that we have laying in front of us tonight.

I think it’s important to look back at where we have just been last week. Verses 15-21 are really one sentence in the original language, but it is essential for understanding our passages, as we go into what the Church has known for a long time as sort of house rules, or the way that a home, or a family, or a church would be ordered. This becomes very practical as we see what we do with all of the theology that has been laid on us in the first part of the book. How does that translate to how I live my life? How does that translate into how I function in the Church? Or how I function as a husband and father? Or how I function as a worker with superiors or bosses?

So, look back at verses 15-21, and the key to understanding that whole passage is where it says, “*Don’t be drunk with wine, which is debauchery.*” Don’t be filled up with that. Something you drink shouldn’t control the way you think, feel, and act. Don’t do that. It’s not a standalone principle in Scripture, but Paul is using it to emphasize what follows; “*But be filled with the Spirit.*” How we think, act, and live should be controlled by the Spirit of God. Everything else that is commanded in these verses is linked back to that. So, when Paul comes to verse 21, at the end of that sentence, and says, “*Submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ*,” that submitting to one another is only possible as we are submitting to the Holy Spirit and being filled by Him. The only way that we are ever, in a general sense, going to humble ourselves to look out, not primarily for our own well-being, but primarily for the well-being and best interests of others, and overcome our flesh, which is the part of us that does not want to submit to Christ but wants to prefer our own needs and our own desires above everything else, is to be in submission to the Holy Spirit and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. The parallel passage to this in Colossians 3 describes the same results by letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

How do we submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit? What does that look like? What does it look like for a man, a woman, or a child to come underneath the filling of the Holy Spirit? Is this some hyper-spiritual thing going on? Yeah, it’s pretty spiritual, but it’s not mystical. It looks like letting the Word of Christ daily dwell in you richly so that what then flows out of you is the Word of God.

So, it’s imperative to have that understanding because, really, in verse 22, the word “submit” is not there. The word “submit” is not there. It is assumed from the earlier sentence that the rest of what follows, with wives to husbands, and children to parents, and then servants to masters is all dependent on this idea of submission from verse 21. So, when Paul says, “*Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord*,” we need to have a biblical picture of the Gospel-saturated understanding of what submission is. This is not oppression. In fact, in this is perfect liberty. Three times in our text, Paul will repeat the charge, “*Husbands, love your wives*”; in verses 25, 28, and 33. The husband is to lead like Christ led. He is to demonstrate love the way that Christ did it, right? What more clear picture do we have of Christ’s humility and submission to people who are unworthy than in Philippians 2? Right? That’s us—and Jesus, in His love for us, would humble himself from the throne of Heaven. He alone is worshipped because He alone is worthy and He alone is God. But, He didn’t consider being equal with God something He had to hold onto, but He emptied himself to become one of us, so that He could serve us with salvation. He humbled himself to becoming a servant and, more than that, He humbled himself to serve us by taking the death that we deserve. He humbled himself by going to the cross and dying on our behalf. Christ set the pattern for what this submission was going to look like, and the husband is called to follow that pattern of submission. It’s not abusive.

I would also say this; we are not wishing that we could turn back the time to the good old days, right? No, we are not. Also, in your mind don’t bring this baggage to the table – that *Leave it to Beaver[[129]](#footnote-129)* is what we are aiming for. We are not trying to get back to the fifties in our country: “Oh, if we could just turn back the clock and people would understand biblical masculinity or what it means to be a woman. If we could get back to that, where the wife stayed at home all day while the husband worked, and she met him at the door so he could fix the lightbulb, because she surely didn’t know how to accomplish that task.” Not that kind of thing. That’s not our goal. That’s not our aim. We’re not trying to get back to a patriarchal system. That’s not the point. The point is that we would press into God’s Word, to see His sovereign, divine plan for marriage, and how as male and female we fulfill those roles.

So, I will never love my wife, Sarah, sacrificially, selfishly, or with the ultimate picture of her glorification in my mind, unless I’m being filled with the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Sarah will never submit to my leadership or headship until she is submitting to the Holy Spirit. So, the word “submit,” as used here, simply means “to arrange under.” This submission is according to the authority and order established by God. Andrew Lincoln said this about submission: “It demands readiness to renounce one’s own will for the sake of others and to give precedence to others.[[130]](#footnote-130)” “What does it mean to submit? It is to give oneself up to somebody. What does it mean to love? It is to give oneself up to somebody, as Christ gave himself up for the Church, thus submission and love are the two aspects of the very same thing; namely, that selfless giving that is the foundation of an enduring and growing marriage.[[131]](#footnote-131)” In our text, we see that the wife is told to submit to her husband and the husband is told to love his wife. These are two aspects of what it means to give yourself to somebody else for their ultimate good.

Still on the idea of what it means to submit, we will get into this, but it’s not going to look the same for everybody. Lord willing, I think that is going to be freeing here in a minute. What we will see is that submission isn’t so much a bunch of rules that every wife who has ever lived has to follow, so that it has to look exactly the same. Or, that headship has to look just like this for every man who has ever taken a bride. But, I think that what frees us is that there is a general attitude that is Christlike. It submits itself to Christ and therefore takes on the characteristics of Christ, and then it plays out uniquely and beautifully home by home. There will be the same principles that govern how I lead my family and how Sarah submits to my leadership. Those same principles should be the same home to home, but how it fleshes itself out is going to look different.

It can sometimes look vague when the Lord gives us that freedom. What is submission? If it’s not abusive and it’s not a crushing of a wife’s will underneath a boot; if it is not that she is not allowed to ask questions, or contradict, or bring concerns and ideas, or that her abilities don’t matter because the man is the head of the house – if all that is not what it means, what does it mean? What does it look like? Submission looks like respect. It looks like reverence. It looks like regarding her husband, honoring her husband, preferring him and esteeming him. She defers to him, loves him, and admires him exceedingly.

God has established certain leadership and authority roles within the family, and submission is a humble recognition of that divine ordering.

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church…”*

It’s interesting in the original language. The way that it’s written is so that the wife would understand that this is voluntary. This is her willful response to the Lord’s command and the husband’s position. It is so intentional by the Lord. This is anti-oppressive. Right? This is liberating – for a woman to be who she was created to be; to use her abilities within the context that God has ordained. It’s a willing submission.

So, *“Wives, submit to your own husbands….”* You don’t have to submit to somebody else’s. That’s good news. *“…as to the Lord*.” This is freeing as well, because if Sarah’s submission depends on me to perfectly lead, or to love her like Christ loves the Church, then it all fails and crumbles because I can’t provide that. I will fail. She is not called to submit to me because of something that I’ve done for her. She is called to submit to me because of who Christ is and because of what Christ has done. Submitting “*as to the Lord*” frees her. It frees you. Your obedience is to Jesus. To seek to obey a passage like this is to obey and be filled by the Holy Spirit, and submit to God, so that you can fulfill the role and the position that the Lord has given to you as a wife.

Obviously, not everyone in here is married, so let me say this – keep coming to Red Oak and we will preach the whole Bible. Right now, we are in this passage on marriage, and it’s the Gospel. The Gospel is what is on display, and in your singleness, to learn how to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ is the same principle. It’s not going to change; it’s only going to intensify. It’s the same principle; only marriage will give moment by moment opportunity to expose whether you are surrendering to the Holy Spirit, being filled with the Holy Spirit, and letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. Because, if you’re not, your marriage will expose it in a moment.

“…*as to the Lord.”*

This motive is essential. If your submission is dependent on your husband to love like Christ, then there will be failure all around. Wives, your submission is primarily to the Lord, and out of that submission you will be filled by the Holy Spirit to show respect, honor, regard, and esteem toward your husband. Your husband will fail you. Christ will not. Christ, in His victory and in His steadfast love that we read about just a few minutes ago, will not fail you. In the way that He nourishes and cherishes His body He will not fail you, and when your identity primarily flows from your relationship with Christ, that will free you to not see or treat your husband as a failure. That’s huge. If you look to your husband to be your savior, and you look to him to perfectly love you the way that only Christ can love you, he will fail, he will feel it, and he will know that you resent him for it. But, if you look to Jesus and His steadfast love, that will free you to not primarily see your husband’s failures, but to encourage him in his victories, to encourage him as he submits to the Lord, and as he shoulders the ginormous responsibility of playing the role of Christ in your marriage.

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”*

The husband is the “head.” Here, in its context in Ephesians, as we have seen in chapter 1 already, it is used like ruler, leader, authority, master, and Lord. Again, we need to defend against the tendency to import earthly, temporary definitions to those words. Because, the definition for these words flows from how Christ is the authority over the Church and how He is Lord. Not like the Gentiles, right? It’s the Philippians 2 Jesus; the humble servant Jesus. That’s how He leads and exercises authority. Not just for His own glory, although He does, but so that we share in that glory for His glory and our good. That’s how He serves us and how He leads us. Allow those definitions to fill up these words, as we think about how the husband is the head of the wife.

In part, this is the creative order, right? Let’s do this. I want to read a couple of passages. Go to Genesis 1:26, first.

*“Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*

Now, go over to Genesis 2:23,

*“Then the man said, ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. 25 And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”*

So, God creates man in His image and His likeness, and He’s having this Trinitarian conversation, *“Let us make man in our image and our likeness.”* He’s not talking to angels. Angels are not made in the image and the likeness of God. God is having an inner Godhead conversation that we’re privy to through the Scriptures, and He is saying, “Let’s make them together, male and female, in the image of God!” Then, we have the picture where God has created man and then causes this deep sleep to fall on him, takes part of his side, his rib, and fashions Eve, and breathes life into her.

*“‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother…”*

This is because God said, *“It is not good that Man be alone.”* It’s not good that man be alone, so in the created order we see that woman was made from man, after man, and for man.

Second, we see the redemptive purpose.

*“Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior.”*

So, this part here is obviously unique to Jesus. Let me read this again.

*“Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”*

Jesus, alone, is the savior of the Church. Right? So, I am not Sarah’s savior. God is not calling me to somehow add to Sarah’s salvation or somehow further secure her salvation. But, I should glean from how Christ, in redemption, has rescued His Church, in how I am to serve my wife. It will continue to unfold in our passage.

*“Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.”*

“The Church's submission to Christ means looking to its head for his beneficial rule, living by his norms, experiencing his presence and love, receiving from him gifts that will enable growth to maturity, and responding to him in gratitude and awe. It is these attitudes that the wife is urged to develop as she submits to her husband..[[132]](#footnote-132)”

As the Church looks to Christ, that same attitude should be adopted by the wife to her husband, in everything and in all things. It’s not qualified. It’s in everything, in every area of life; it’s all-encompassing. The motivation for doing this is a true and godly reverence for Christ. By God’s design, husbands and wives are one flesh and the divine intention is that they should function together under one Head, not as two autonomous individuals living together. It anticipates God’s ultimate intention in bringing back all things into unity in Christ. That’s kind of wordy, huh? It’s saying this; husband and wife have become one flesh and it’s not that her identity gets lost any more than we should say that the husband’s identity is lost. But, in the marriage, there is a new identity as the two have become one, in Christ. And, the wife’s role is to submit in everything and her attitude toward her husband should be submissive in everything. The wife’s obedience to the Lord in this does not depend on the husband, in the sense of his perfect leading. A godly wife will submit even when the husband doesn’t lead well or doesn’t love like Christ. That’s huge. The reality is that, whether the husband leads like Christ and loves like Christ is not a qualification for submitting to him, because it is as to the Lord. It is *“as to the Lord”* and out of deference to Christ.

Some translations use “fear”—and “fear” is a closer word than just the idea of reverence, but it is a picture of an understanding – not a fear as in a sense of condemnation – but Christ is taking up the mantle from the Old Testament, where it says, *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”[[133]](#footnote-133)* The fear of Yahweh should change the way we live and purify us. Christ is taking up that mantle, and fear of Jesus and His holiness, His judgment, and His examination of our lives should motivate us in how we fulfill these divine, sovereign roles that He has given us to play out.

However, -- I have some howevers for you:

However, this does not mean that a wife should obey her husband even if it means sinning against God. Right? This doesn’t mean that she submits without a voice or without a will and that she just follows blindly even if it means that her husband leads her into clear sin. Scripture speaks to this, right? I mean, we are supposed to submit to the government up to a point where it tells us to disobey God. In a similar vein, I would say, “Wives, submit to your husband up until the point where he would lead you in disobeying God.”

However, it does not mean that she should allow herself or her children to be abused physically, sexually, or emotionally. Submission does not mean a doormat, right? Submission doesn’t mean that you are signing up for abuse. Again, she’s not without a voice or reason. Some of the things that we just mentioned quickly become crimes and they should be treated as such. A wife should not be silently submissive as her husband abuses her physically, or molests children, or rapes her. That is not what Christ is calling us to. That is not submission. That is abusive. That is oppressive. That is chauvinistic. That is not…that is not…that is not how Christ loves the Church. That is not Christlike leadership. There is clear enough Scripture to know that this isn’t a blank check for a husband to run roughshod, however he wants, over his wife and family. He will answer to God for that. That was kind of a harsh example, right? Hopefully, it’s an unrealistic one for everyone in this room, but I wouldn’t dare assume that. If I could step back to that harsh reality, if that’s you, if you are a wife in an abusive relationship, you need help. You shouldn’t be silent. The Church should be able to stand in the gap for you. You shouldn’t stay silent.

The next however, is that it doesn’t mean that she has to stay quiet about the husband’s abuse of headship or lack of leadership. So, maybe he’s just not a good leader. He just makes bad decisions. He just won’t lead and is lazy. Maybe he just runs headlong and doesn’t listen. He’s threatened by your opinions, your gifts, and your abilities. It doesn’t mean that you have to be quiet. It doesn’t mean that you have to take that. It’s perverted and twisted. But, it will always mean that how you approach your husband, and the subject of correcting it, should always be in a submissive attitude. It should always be with respect, and honor, and esteem, and love. It means that a wife doesn’t get to manipulate to get her way. It doesn’t mean that if he is lazy and doesn’t lead that the wife is like, “If you are not going to do it, I will, and I’ll leave you in the dust.” That’s not a submissive attitude that flows from submission to the Holy Spirit. You can have those conversations.

I listened to a John Piper sermon. Last night, Sarah and I got the kids into bed and I suggested that we listen to this sermon. I had listened to it a long time ago before the first wedding someone asked me to do. I thought presiding over a wedding would be awesome but had no idea what to say at a wedding. I listened to this Piper sermon on marriage, which is so good. It’s called, *Lionhearted and Lamblike: The Christian Husband[[134]](#footnote-134)*. I encourage you to go and listen to that. So, we listened to it last night and had a great conversation afterwards. I love a situation like that when I can glean from Sarah’s insight into the text. It was awesome because Piper pointed to this and he said that some of you wives have husbands who don’t lead, and you are demanding that they do, and you are rebuking them for not doing it; but by that very act you are insuring that they never will, as you point out their shortcomings and their failure in a harsh way, as you highlight it and you demand that they change. Even if they did, it would be because of your leadership. If that’s your attitude, you are just insuring that it never will change. But, set time aside when emotions aren’t high and go in a loving, submissive, respectable manner that honors him, ultimately out of your reverence for Jesus, and pour out your heart about how you would love to see him lead the family. You absolutely have the right to do that, and you should.

Communication is essential. We need to communicate. When I counsel a couple that is about to get married, or they are young in their marriage, or things aren’t going well, things generally come back to communication. It doesn’t mean that you have to communicate everything. Wives, it doesn’t mean that you have to voice everything.

Proverbs 29:11,

*“A fool gives full vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back.”*

Proverbs 15:1,

*“A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”*

Communication is essential, but let’s be wise, right? It works both ways. Not everything has to be said, but when it is said, it should be said in a spirit of gentle humility. That’s going to save a lot of arguments. It’s going to keep a lot of conversations from turning into arguments.

I wasn’t going to read this, but I should,

Proverbs 27:15-16,

*“A continual dripping on a rainy day and a quarrelsome wife are alike; 16 to restrain her is to restrain the wind or to grasp oil in one's right hand.”*

Not that that would apply to anybody here.

Ephesians 5:25,

*“Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”*

So, for the husband, we have a clear picture to follow; to love our wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her. That’s how he demonstrates his love. Again, I can’t save my wife. I can’t, by my spirit, bring her to repentance and faith. I can’t change her from one degree of glory to another. I can’t do that and neither can you. This is unique to Jesus and the Gospel, but what we are to take and glean from it is crystal clear. First and foremost, if I’m going to love my wife sacrificially and selflessly, in a way that gives myself wholly to her for the purpose of her ultimate glorification, and if I’m going to aid in Jesus’ reason for saving His church, so that on the last day, when He marries His bride, He can present her to himself in splendor, free from impurity, free from perversion, without spot or wrinkle, but presented to himself in splendor – if that’s His goal for the Church, that’s His goal for my wife. I can’t go to the cross for her sin but I can do everything in my power to submit myself to the Holy Spirit, so that I’m filled by the Holy Spirit, so that the Word of Christ is dwelling in me richly, so when I see Jesus in the Gospel and how He sacrificially loves His Church, I can say, “That’s how I provide for her. That’s how I protect her. That’s the attitude in which I speak to my wife, and I encourage my wife, and I build her up.” Why? So that I can aid in Christ’s ultimate goal for her life – her glorification. So that on the day when she is presented spotless and blameless to Christ, because of the work of Christ, that I would have been a vessel, a tool, and a part of how God accomplished His ultimate purpose in her life. What an honor, what a privilege, and what a huge responsibility.

So, what is Jesus’ love like? Jesus loves the Church in the most glorious way; a way that takes away shame, that bears guilt, and that suffers and bleeds.

Time out. It would be awesome if we were all just amazing, godly men, wouldn’t it? I wish I was. I fall so short. Think about where you were when Jesus saved you. We have the grand picture of the Church in view here, and we have our picture of marriage, but let’s back it up to Jesus saving you. What condition were you in when Jesus saved you? What condition were we in before the foundation of the world, even? But, He chose us to be holy and blameless in Christ. How did God demonstrate His love toward you? While you were yet a sinner – while you were yet a sinner – guilty of your own sin, and covered in shame and disgrace, with nothing to offer, and your righteousness like filthy rags – that’s where you were. That’s where we were. Then Jesus came and removed our shame and removed our guilt.

The context of Ephesians is such that we could spend series upon series going through all the different scenarios in it. The context of our passage is about husbands and wives who are believers. How dare I – how dare I – heap guilt or shame on my bride that Jesus took off of her! How dare I see her through her insecurities, and her fears, and her sin, when Jesus has removed those from her! How dare I try to go to the cross and rip those things off the cross and put them back on my wife! How dare you! In a moment or an instant we can do so much damage with our words, or a look, or a glance. Remember how we started? This all depends on, *“Don’t be drunk with wine*.” Don’t do that; but be filled with the Spirit. Submit and let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. How backward does it seem when God says that you get to play Jesus to your wife in everything that you do, in every conversation that you have, in every family devotion, and in every outing in the car? Every time you get home late and she barely opens her eyes, you can push her toward Jesus in sanctification. You can help wipe the shame off from that day. You can help remind her that the weight of that guilt is no longer on her. What a beautiful picture, that we would get to partake in one another’s sanctification!

Christ loves His Church in a way that heals, that comforts, that protects, that builds up, that encourages, and that forgives; in a way that strengthens weaknesses; in a way that is longsuffering and patient; in a way that is slow to anger and takes joy in the relationship; in a way that offers hope in the darkest of hours; in a way that provides for physical, emotional, and spiritual needs; in a way that is dedicated to seeing growth through to the end; in a way that is humble and strong; in a way that serves; in a way that prefers; in a way that shares in pain and in happiness, and in sorrow and in joy; in a way that faces Hell in order to save; in a way that shares glory and rescues from all fears and anxieties. Jesus loves the Church in a way that will never end. Man! That’s how Jesus loves us. We have to renew our minds to be able to love one another like that; the way that a wife should submit to a husband and the way that a husband should love his wife. Go back to verse 21 and how we should submit to one another out of reverence. Basically, we are just talking about discipleship, but specified in a marriage relationship.

Single people, how should you love each other? To this end. How should you love your friend or your roommate? Does it depend on how they treat you? No. Out of reverence for Christ, serve one another. Submit to one another. Push them toward the grace and the mercy of God in Christ Jesus.

So, for the husband, love is going to manifest itself in the way that he provides and protects, and his leadership as a whole, in both physical needs and spiritual needs. We’ve got to lead. We’ve got to lead by submitting to the Lord and having the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, so that we can lead our families, and provide physical needs – home and food at the bare minimum; but, also to provide spiritually and to protect.

Verse 26,

*“…That he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,…”*

So, we see how Christ rescues and how Christ loves His church. Now, we see to what end and in more detail; *“That He might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word*.” This is all about our salvation, identity, purity, and purpose. So, Paul says…sanctify…cleanse…splendor. In this context there is debate depending on which commentator you read or whose podcast you listen to. Does sanctification here mean how we typically see it used; is it the one degree of glory to another? Is it the moment by moment outworking of my salvation in my daily life? I don’t think that’s absent here, but the word “sanctify” here seems to be more of the setting apart to God. Something has been sanctified; it’s a done deal; it has been set apart to God.

Regarding the washing and the cleansing, is this the Old Testament picture of how a bride would go through a cleansing ceremony before the marriage? Is this an allusion to Baptist and creedal statements that would be read during the baptism? Is it just the picture of the Gospel being proclaimed and the purifying work that the Word of God has in our hearts, and our minds, and our souls? In a sense, I want to say “yes.” Right? Because that’s all part of the Gospel here. I don’t have time now but I encourage you to go read Ezekiel 16. It is an awesome picture of God rescuing, maturing, cleansing, and clothing in splendor and majesty, His bride. Unfortunately, that bride was faithless, but it gives us a glimpse into what happens with the Church that won’t be faithless, because of the perfect work of Christ in sanctifying her and cleansing her by His Word and by His Gospel.

Verse 27,

*“…So that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish..”*

Stott says this, “Splendor….The word may hint at the bride’s beautiful wedding dress, since it is used of clothing (Lk.7:25). But it means more than this. ‘Glory’ is the radiance of God, the shining forth and manifestation of his otherwise hidden being. So too the church’s true nature will become apparent. On earth she is often in rags and tatters, stained and ugly, despised and persecuted, But one day she will be seen for what she is, nothing less than the bride of Christ, ‘free from spots, wrinkles or any other disfigurement’, holy and without blemish, beautiful and glorious.[[135]](#footnote-135)”

Revelation 19. This is good, y’all, this is good! This is bigger than our momentary marriage, right? This is what Christ is doing for His Church. This is us. Did you hear that? Did you feel it? Don’t sit there and think, “We just got through week ten.”[[136]](#footnote-136) So did I. Listen to me. This is awesome! This is amazing!

In this life and in this world, how does the Church so often appear? Beaten, weak, persecuted, destitute, and marginalized; but that is not what God is working out. That is not what this is all driving towards.

Revelation 19:6-9,

*“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,*

*“Hallelujah!*

*For the Lord our God*

*the Almighty reigns.*

*7 Let us rejoice and exult*

*and give him the glory,*

*for the marriage of the Lamb has come,*

*and his Bride has made herself ready;*

*8 it was granted her to clothe herself*

*with fine linen, bright and pure”—*

*for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.”*

Man! This is a picture of the marriage supper of the Lamb. When He brings His Church to himself, He is going to clothe her in splendor and majesty. This passage is so awesome. The righteousness that she is dressed in is, as it says, the righteous deeds of the saints. But, we know from the rest of the Bible that those righteous deeds only come from the work of the Holy Spirit, as He works out our salvation that He put in us. It’s His righteousness and He clothes us with it.

So, in my marriage, what does that look like as the head and as the leader? How do I serve my wife? It means, as I lead spiritually, that I don’t sit back and wait to be goaded or spurred, but as I lead that I can intentionally lead my wife in such a way that I am heaping, not shame, and not guilt, but I am heaping this picture on her – that she is clothed in the righteousness of Christ. She is pure, she is undefiled, she is a daughter of the Most High, she is part of the eternal Bride of Christ; she’s been purified, sanctified, and set apart to serve God. I can heap the truth on her and I can lead her in her sanctification. In fact, men, the reality is that if you are not pursuing sanctification, then you are hindering and stifling your wife’s sanctification. This is true. It’s the way God designed it. There may be times when she outruns you, but if that lasts long you will hold her back and trip her up, just by your inactivity. It’s a huge responsibility and an awesome privilege that, as we pursue Jesus, we set the pace and the pattern for our home and we sanctify our wives by leading them to Jesus.

So, what’s your goal for your marriage? Raise some kids and not be alone? Survive? We must think about how we love our wives. How does the way that I interact with my wife reflect the loving sacrifice of Christ to sanctify, cleanse, and present perfect His Bride? How does my servant leadership aid in accomplishing the same goal for my wife as Christ for His Church? There will be some strong similarities home to home but there will also be uniqueness to how this love looks. This is your job, husband, and your job, dad. Love like Jesus and lead your family by providing physically and spiritually, and by protecting physically and spiritually. It will look different home to home. The danger is that if I’m not in submission to the Holy Spirit, and I’m not letting the Word of Christ dwell in me richly; if my identity isn’t secure in who I am in Christ, then the reality is that I will either be lazy and not care, or I’ll be insecure and I’ll be threatened by my wife’s gift, and I’ll be intimidated. I will. I’ll be intimidated or threatened by her personality, her intellect, and her gifts, and her vision for our family. That’s wrong. Headship isn’t suffocating but headship is bringing that out and using it, and applying it, and making sure that it has its function in our home, and in our church, and in our society. When I’m secure in Christ I will be a husband that leads like Jesus, that sees the gifts of the Holy Spirit in my wife, and I’ll fan that flame.

The picture of the Gospel is awesome. If you don’t have a high view of Jesus and you don’t have a high view of the Gospel then wives won’t submit to their husbands like they should. If you don’t have a high view of Jesus and the Gospel and if you are not daily reminded of what He saved you from, and what He’s saving you to, and how He’s using you, then as a husband you won’t lead your wife like you should. You won’t fulfill what headship means. You will be left to do it on your own and it will be twisted, and perverted, and it will look like chauvinism or cowardice. We have to submit to the Holy Spirit first and foremost, so that we can submit to one another.

At the end of the passage, it tells the husbands to love your wives like Christ loves the Church, and tells wives to respect their husbands. It is not saying for husbands to not respect their wives and it’s not saying for wives to respect but don’t love, but it is telling us what our love for one another should look like. My love should look like selfless sacrifice that would rather die than to have a weight and a burden laid on my wife. Sarah’s love toward me should look like she esteems me, honors me, and submits to my leadership. If we do that, we will proclaim the Gospel through our marriages and our relationships. Let me pray.

Lord Jesus, we love you. God, we thank you for this time that we had to look into your Word. God, I thank you that in this church that there are so many godly marriages to look to as an example to help us understand what this is supposed to look like, and that they are governed by the same principles, although it plays out so differently house to house. God, I pray that we would be a church that holds a high view of the Gospel and a high view of marriage, so that people would see you clearly and that people would be drawn to you. God, I do pray for the marriages in this room right now that are struggling, that are hurting, and where things are backward and twisted; where they have been more influenced by the world and the world’s system than they have been by the Gospel and your Scriptures. I pray that you would bring healing. I pray that there would be awesome conversations tonight, with humility and respect towards one another. God, I pray that you would continue to raise up out of the singles in this church, godly marriages, and that in their singleness that they would submit to one another out of reverence for you, and that they would push one another toward you and that they would serve one another toward the end of seeing each other live lives for your glory. I pray this in Christ’s name. Amen.

August 16, 2015

Ephesians 5 – Pt. 4

Brody Holloway

This is going to be a difficult subject matter tonight in light of where we are as a culture, so turn to Ephesians 5 and we are going to pick up where Rob left off last week. This will be part two; just further thoughts and exposition on Ephesians 5:22-33. We will finish up in Ephesians over the next two or three weeks, I think, and will move into the next thing that the Lord has for us, which we will share with you guys next week. But, we are going to wrap up chapter 5 tonight, and if you weren’t here last week I would encourage you to listen to that. That podcast is up, so go back and listen to that message that Rob brought last Sunday night, because the two are going to tie together. Really listen through that and try to connect the two.

One of the things I’m going to try to do tonight, as we approach the text – every time I say this it ends up not working out this way – but I think it is going to take more of a teaching, lecture approach. I’m not much of a teacher/lecturer; I’m more of a preacher, so some of you chuckle when I even say that. But, I’m going to try to just walk through some things. There is going to be a lot of content and I’m going to read a lot of it. So, before I even read the text, I want to point you to the bulletin and the Red Oak Facebook page, where there is a link to an article on complementarianism and egalitarianism[[137]](#footnote-137). Don’t freak out if you don’t know what those words mean because we are going to go over that tonight a little bit. There is a link to an article that covers those two stances. We, as a church, take the stance of complementarianism; we are complementarian in our approach to the roles of men and women in marriage and in the Church. I would encourage you to go read that link because I think it would be really helpful if you read through that, not just in light of tonight’s text, which addresses men and women in marriage, but also in light of the way the Church is to function. Because, it’s kind of a two-sided coin when we talk about the roles of men and women in the home, in marriage, and in relationship to the function of the Church. Tonight, because of where the text takes us, we are just going to be looking at complementarianism in terms of how it relates to marriage and family in the home. It is definitely a broader scope than that and it covers a lot of how the structure of church government is set up here at Red Oak.

So, if you are still with me and you are not already thinking that this is going to be dry and boring, let’s go to Ephesians 5 and let’s dig into chapter 5, in God’s Word, which is never dry and boring for the believer. Amen?

So, we will walk through the text again. I want to welcome you, again, if you are here and visiting. I am one of the pastors here. The one last thing I want to say before I dive into this is, where we are culturally right now – I will never forget something from a few years ago. We were going through the book of John and somebody asked me what we were going to do on Easter and I said we are just going to continue to preach through the book of John. That’s what we do as a church. We preach through books of the Bible, or occasionally we do a more topical series, such as one we did on the functions of the Church or one we did on the functions of pastors and elders. But, I remember saying that wherever we were in John was where we would land on Easter. We do the same thing a lot of times at Christmas, although this year we will finish up a series just before Christmas and do a four-week Advent series, so we are excited about that. I remember when we were in the book of John and it was coming up on Easter and all of a sudden it was Easter Sunday, and in the book of John and the message was the crucifixion or the resurrection of Christ. It is really cool how the Lord does that.

But, one of the things that we wrestled with, as pastors and leaders in the church, was when it was mid-summer and we had a hundred extra college kids coming here every Sunday who were working at Snowbird[[138]](#footnote-138) for summer camp. We wrestled with whether we should jump out of Ephesians and address the situation we are dealing with right now, culturally, and as a society, concerning the same-sex marriage decision[[139]](#footnote-139) that got handed down. We didn’t do that because we knew that we would get to that when we got to Ephesians 5. So, tonight, that’s one of the things that we are going to unpack in this text.

So, tonight we have a small crowd here because of Snowbird staff being on vacation. I don’t think that’s random because God doesn’t do random. We are just going to walk through this and trust the Lord to address those issues that are really hot topics, right now. Also, be reminded that, as a church, we are a people and individuals who hold to the Scripture; not to public opinion or to political decisions, and we also don’t freak out when things don’t go exactly the way we think they ought to go.

Ephesians 5:22-33,

*“Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. 25 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. 28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, 30 because we are members of his body. 31 “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” 32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. 33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.”*

I remember, as a kid, there were several TV programs that I liked to watch and now, as an adult, I like to watch those with my kids. One of them is *The A Team* and we like to watch that on Netflix. But, I remember that, as a kid, my parents liked to watch TV programs that were popular when they were kids. The one that I always remember was a show called *Leave It To Beaver*. At the beginning of *Leave It To Beaver* there was this dorky music from the fifties that sounded like carnival ride music, and it showed each of the family members, and what *Leave It To Beaver* portrayed was this family called the Cleavers and the kid’s name was Beaver Cleaver, of all things. It was horrible and that, in and of itself, would never fly today. The kid’s real name was Theodore Cleaver and he was called “The Beaver.” He had a brother named Wally, so it was the adventures and exploits of Wally and The Beave. This family was the quintessential family of the fifties. Dad worked and mom stayed home. She was always wearing an apron and it was this quintessential idea of what family life was supposed to be. It’s kind of like *Mayberry*, only the main character had a wife. Remember, in *Mayberry*, Andy’s wife had died, so you didn’t have quite the same dynamic. But, again, you had all these TV shows that tried to portray the American family the way it should be. So, now, when people politically talk about “American family values” or “traditional family values,” what they are talking about is what was portrayed by fifties’ television programming. That is usually what they are talking about. They are not typically talking about biblical family values or biblical marital values. They are thinking of a better time and a better place when their grandpa and grandma were growing up or how their parents talked about their childhood. The reality is this; sin existed in the fifties but it was just more edited. There was a stronger filter on what came through the television. There was much more protection in terms of what we saw and brought into our homes just from the general public. But, families were still dysfunctional in the fifties. Still, we would be sticking our heads in the sand to think that things were the same then as they are now. Certainly, as a culture and as a society, we are on a downward spiral, and we see that in the degradation and the declination of the home, but the fifties were not the golden era of marriage and family. They just simply weren’t.

So, what we have in Scripture is a biblical standard of what husbands are supposed to be, what wives are supposed to be, what sons and daughters are supposed to be, and what families are supposed to look like, that stands the test of time, culture, continents, languages, wars, famines, persecuted Christian families in Syria today, affluent Christian families in the suburbs of Atlanta today, rural farming communities in Iowa, and all points in between. They can hold to biblical teaching when it comes to what husbands and wives are supposed to be, what sons and daughters are supposed to be, and what moms and dads are supposed to be. So, we look to the Scripture to see what our standards of marriage, family, and relationships are. So, the text that we are working through addresses those things.

Before we start to unpack the text, I want to give a couple of thoughts. First, Red Oak is a pretty family-focused church. We challenge our men and we have strong men in the church. I think that we have strong families in the church but let me say something before we unpack this. Because you homeschool, or do Christian school, or because mom stays home, or mom cooks and has supper on the stove, or because dad has two jobs so mom can do that, or because dad leads family devotions at night, or because, because, because…none of those things mean that we are doing family right. Submission does not equal a domesticated wife. Leadership does not equal dad opening the Bible and reading to his family at night. I bring that point out because the danger for us, as a church, is that we say, “We’ve got this thing down. We’ve got this right. Mom stays home and the kids are homeschooled so we have it right.” Domestication does not equal submission. A wife with supper on the stove and a clean kitchen counter does not equal biblical submission. A man who opens the Bible and says, “Hey, kids, gather around while I read the Scripture tonight,” does not mean he is leading in all the other avenues of life that he needs to be leading in. A dad who opens the Bible and reads to his kids but yells at their mother has completely lit a time bomb in that home. A wife who puts food on the table but backbites, or nags, or dominates, or controls her husband, has lit the fuse on a time bomb that will explode in that family, and great will be the fall thereof.

I hate to beat up on television families, but do you remember the shows from the seventies, *The Partridge Family* and *The Brady Bunch*? I’ll never forget being devastated when I realized that in real life that all the characters of both of those shows were like the most dysfunctional people in the world. Then I realized, “Wait a minute…they are actors! That’s why they made us think they lived in good families. That’s what actors do.” What we might do, oftentimes, if we are not careful, is that we will take the Scripture and create our own set of rules and then pat ourselves on the back for being good at following the Scripture, when really what we are doing is following our own set of rules.

Before we go into this I just wanted to lay that down. We don’t need to go into this text tonight and come out going, “Am I doing x, y, and z”? We need to go in and come out going, “Does my marriage reflect the Gospel? Does the way that I am leading my wife point my kids and other people to Jesus? Does the way that I’m submitting to my husband point my kids and other people to Jesus?” Because, ultimately, marriage is the ultimate best tool and platform that married people have for evangelism. If you want to proclaim Christ and point people to Jesus, do it by getting this right!

In our society, “submission” is a dirty word. We are living in a time where police have no respect. You turn on the news and you see media coverage of things going on all over our country, where people don’t respect the police and people don’t respect elected officials. In the home, we have bought into the lie the last thirty years that kids should be able to express themselves, and that’s turned into defiance and disobedience. We’ve bought into a lie, going back to the late sixties and early seventies, called “feminism,” where for so many years so many people held to a more traditional view, where men controlled and dominated, and then coming out of that we swung all the way across both lanes and landed ourselves in the other ditch, where we have taken it and reversed it and we are no better off than we were to begin with. So, everything is sort of dysfunctional, and when we think about what God created in the Garden, here’s what He created in terms of order of authority: God, man, woman, creation. What happens at the Fall, in Genesis 3, is that everything is inverted, and the deception that the Serpent brings is to say to the woman, “You’ll be like God.” So, creation is worshipped, the woman controls the situation, the man doesn’t lead as he should, and God is placed on the bottom of the totem pole. The problem is that that won’t work. God won’t stay there—in fact, He won’t go there to begin with. So, we have a dysfunctional scene from day one, in Genesis 3, where, when the Curse comes in and God says that there are going to be repercussions from this, the family is under attack—from day one.

I want to continue, now, by showing you how we, as a church, hold to a complementarian view of marriage. So, before we walk through the back half of this text, I feel like I need to do some groundwork in helping you understand what the complementarian view of marriage is. As pastors, we felt like this is necessary. We have a lot of new people coming in week in and week out and we have a lot of new members, so I want to make sure that you understand where we line up as a church, especially if you are thinking about joining Red Oak.

So, the complementarian view of marriage; here’s a definition from Wayne Grudem. If you know Wayne Grudem you already know where we stand. In this view, Grudem says,

“That God created man and woman equal in value and personhood, and equal in bearing his image, but that both creation and redemption indicate some distinct roles for men and women in marriage and in the church*.[[140]](#footnote-140)”*

So, then, in the complementarian view, in the context of the home, men and women have distinct and different roles and neither is higher or of more value. In the home, men have distinct roles and women have distinct roles. If you are here and you are single you should especially be paying attention to this. Do not check out and go, “What’s this mean for me?” It means a lot for you, because you’re in a position where you can do this right the first time around. This is opposed to a traditional or feminist view. I want to walk through a brief overview of the complementarian view as it applies to this text and we will unpack the remainder of the text where Rob left off last week. This happens to be a key text in understanding the complementarian view and that’s why we are landing here. I want to give an overview and summary of the complementarian view of marriage. Again, reference to the link on the article that we’ve put both in the bulletin and on the Facebook page[[141]](#footnote-141).

So, here is a broad and basic overview of the complementarian position of men and women and their roles in marriage:

1. God Created man and woman to be equal in essence, yet distinct in their roles. Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that both man and woman are created in God’s image. Genesis 2, however, gives us distinct roles in terms of the positions that man and woman hold in the union of marriage. So, when you read through Genesis 2, what you’ll find is that God gives Adam certain responsibilities before He even brings Eve into his life. When there is a breakdown of those responsibilities being met, in Genesis 3, sin enters and that is when the Fall occurs. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul addresses this, also. 1 Corinthians 11 is a lengthy text covering the distinct roles of men and women in the Church. So, as we go through this, I’m going to point you to supporting passages and texts. 1 Timothy 2 also points out how this plays out in the Church.

Again, the fact that God creates men and women equal in essence but different and distinct in roles is not a result of the Fall. That existed before the Fall. In Genesis 1 and 2, God lays out that they are both created in God’s image and they have distinct roles. The Fall comes about in Genesis 3. What a lot of people say is that after sin came into the world everything got mixed up so men and women then had to be given these new roles from God. No, God intended in the beginning that they would have distinct roles but they would both be equal in essence. Okay? Evidence that this was God’s original design is found throughout Scripture.

Now, I want to give you several other places in Scripture where we can see this. There are about five other references and we will land on our text for tonight.

1. We’ve already said that the first reference is in Genesis 2. There are at least four features of Genesis 2, which support the idea of male headship; that is male, God-given authority of the husband over the wife.
2. The order of creation, with male created first, indicates God’s design of male priority in the male/female relationship. This is also Paul’s observation in 1 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2.
3. God gives instructions to Adam before the creation of Eve not to eat fruit from the forbidden tree. Implied in this is Adam’s responsibility to instruct his future wife and guard her from violating this prohibition, hence the significance in Genesis 3:6, that the woman gave to the man, who was with her, showing that he failed to guard his wife as he should have. Remember in Genesis 2:15, God said to Adam that his job was to protect and provide for his wife, so he was to work and keep the Garden, and protect and provide for Eve. Adam failed in that. We see that in Genesis 3:6, when she is deceived and she sins Adam is there with her.
4. The third thing that we see in Genesis 2 that is a feature of this idea of male headship is that Eve was created to be Adam’s helper. We have to be careful with that word “helper.” It’s not in the sense of daddy’s little helper or a little elf that helps Santa. This is the idea of a companion who complements. We see this same word used to describe the way the Holy Spirit works in the life of a believer and the way that Yahweh would lead Israel and work in and through Israel. It’s a powerful role in terms of the role that the wife would play with the man.
5. Fourth, in Genesis 2, Adam’s naming of Eve indicates, in an Old Testament, cultural context, Adam’s right of authority over the one whom he named. Interestingly, Adam named his wife twice; first, when she was formed from his flesh, in Genesis 2:23, and second, after they had both sinned, in Genesis 3:20, indicating that his rightful authority over her continued after sin had come. That’s a mouthful.

Now, here’s what we have to be careful of. There are a couple of things on this first passage in Genesis. Male headship should bring a man to a place of responsibility, not tyranny. This means that man who speaks down to his wife or who bosses his wife around, or a man who considers himself of higher value to the family than his wife – Look, in my home, one of the things that I want to make sure that my kids understand is that there is one person who is preeminently valuable in this house, and that’s Mama. She is of highest importance. We protect Mama. We serve Mama. We love Mama. We want to do whatever it takes to make Mama happy, not because of the old chauvinistic idea of “When Mama ain’t happy, nobody’s happy,” but because we love her, and she’s valuable, and it’s God’s plan for us to love her, and as children to obey her, and as a husband to lead her well, but also to do that by serving. So, a healthy, biblical understanding of the male role in marriage will lead, not to tyranny, or abuse verbally, emotionally, or physically, but it will lead to a loving, caring, compassionate, serving of that wife, with our example in our text tonight of how Jesus loves the Church. When you go to Ephesians 5, the idea that a man dominates or controls his wife is thrown out of the window. Every time as a husband you speak to your wife harshly, conviction should hit you in the back of the head instantly, because it’s so un-Christlike. It’s not the way Jesus treats His Bride. He speaks firmly at times, because we also have to remember that, while we have Christ as the picture of the head of the Church, we have God as our Father. So, there is a further example of a loving Father who disciplines His sons and daughters. So, men are to take this as a kind of trembling warning that we are representing Christ in the way that we lead and serve our wives.

1. Genesis 3:1-7. This is the second of five of these places in Scripture where we see the complementarian view laid out. Eve was tempted and deceived by the Serpent and ate the forbidden fruit. Again, we see the inverted order; the Serpent and the fruit, then the woman, then the man, then God. She gave it also to Adam. Eve sinned first, but despite this fact, God sought out Adam after their sin, to inquire why they were hiding, in Genesis 3:8. God approached Adam, not Eve, as the one ultimately responsible for the sin. Likewise, Paul clearly teaches that the line of sin in the human race clearly begins with Adam. You see that in Romans 5:12 and in 1 Corinthians 5:22. But, He does this in full recognition of the fact that Eve sinned first (1 Timothy 2:14). Adam only rightly bears responsibility as the head of the sinful human race, even when Eve sinned first, because he is viewed by God and Paul as having authority and ultimate responsibility over the woman.
2. The third reference is in Genesis 3:16. Sin brought about, not the beginning of a male and female relational hierarchy, but a disruption of the God-intended roles of male headship and female submission in the male/female relationship. Most complementarians understand the curse of the woman in Genesis 3:16 to mean that sin would bring about in Eve a wrongful desire to rule over her husband, and that in response Adam would have to assert his rule over her. This understanding comes from comparing the sentence structure in terms of Genesis 3:16 with Genesis 4:7, where God tells Cain that sin is seeking to destroy him. He says, “Sin’s desire is for you, but you must master it.” This means, of course, that sin’s desire was to rule over Cain, but in response Cain must rule over sin. The exact sentence structure is found in Genesis 3:16, where Eve is told, “Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you.” This means, in light of Genesis 4:7, that Eve’s desire will be to rule illegitimately over Adam. Note that sin certainly could not be credited with giving Eve a loving or caring desire for Adam. In response, Adam will have to assert his rightful rulership over her. Most complementarians hold, then, that sin produced a disruption in God’s order of male headship and female submission, in which a) the woman would be inclined to now usurp the man’s rightful place of authority over her and b) man may be required, in response, to reestablish his God-given rulership over the woman.

Think about these three things right here; where we see this disruption in the flow of what God created for man and woman to be in the home. First, there are those times where a woman will usurp authority over the man, and what this turns into is a relationship where the woman is the clear and defined head of the relationship and the man sort of walks along like a whipped dog who does what he is told and politely stays in his place. That might be the struggle that some of us have in our marriages, even here tonight. The second disruption would be that the man would be inclined to misuse his rights of rulership, by simple abdication of his God-given authority, acquiescing to the woman’s desire to rule over him, and so fail to lead as he should; or by abusing his rights to rule with harsh, cruel, and exploitive domination of the woman. The other side of this coin is, rather than the woman sort of controlling the man, you end up with these abusive relationships that we’ve all seen, where you go, “Why does she stay with him? Why would she marry him? He speaks to her that way. He’s verbally abusive and she keeps her head down.” I’ll never forget a couple of situations all the way back in high school. These beautiful, attractive girls that I went to school with were dating these guys who would control them and they would just do what they were told. As an unregenerate, lost person in my teenage years, who didn’t know Jesus, I never connected the dots that this was a disruption of what relationships were supposed to look like. You end up with situations where men just don’t lead because they are passive and weak, or where men control, and dominate, and manipulate, and speak down, and rule with an iron fist. Both are perversions and distortions and inversions of what God created in the roles of men and women in the complementarian view. We see that in Genesis 3.

1. The fourth reference that we will look at is our reference from tonight, in Ephesians 5:22-33. In this text, we see that wives are to be subject to their husbands in their response to their submission to the Lordship of Christ. The reason for this, says Paul, is that the husband is the head of his wife as the wife is the head of the Church. Keep in mind from Ephesians 5:24, “*Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands,”* so we are all to be under submission. One of the things that God has done in the Church is that He has established submission to authority for all people; men, women, boys, and girls. Everyone is under the authority of the Church and under the authority of Christ. Everyone submits to one another, even as we saw in the text a couple of weeks ago. The key notion here is the parallel of the headship of the husband with the headship of Christ. In our text tonight, the Church submits to Christ as the one who has rightful authority over her; so the wife is to submit to her husband as the one who has rightful authority over her. Husbands, for their part, are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church (vs. 25-29). When husbands truly love their wives and wives submit to their husbands we see the sinful distortion of the male/female relationship defeated and returned, then, to what God intended in His creation of man and woman.

I think we have to be careful, here, again, as a church that holds very closely to the Scripture—we don’t manipulate the Word of God, we rightly divide the Word of truth, we stand in fear before the Lord in the way that we handle Scripture—it would be really easy to think we are doing this well. It is also worth noting that we live in a culture and a society where, if we are not careful, this could be one of those teachings that we will try to evade when we are talking to non-believers. “Ahh..umm..it’s not like submission like *that*…it’s like..uhh..” – we try to make an excuse for Scripture. Again, it’s important that we understand biblical submission because biblical submission doesn’t teach that mom has to stay home with an apron, homeschool the kids, and feed the chickens, but if you teach this complementarian view, that is the imposition of the world’s view into your life. When people hear that we believe a complementarian view of what Scripture teaches about men and women, they immediately think that mom is home spinning all the kids’ clothes. Is it wrong if mom does that? No, I think that would be pretty awesome. If you know how to do that, that is pretty sweet. I heard one pastor say, “We buy our toothbrushes; we don’t make them out of corncobs.” There is this idea that if you hold to this culturally antiquated view of marriage and the roles of men and women, that the wives are all barefoot, and pregnant, and doing only what their husbands tells them to do. That’s simply not true. We live in a day and age where women have rights like they’ve never had before in terms of professional pursuits and higher education. We do well to remember that it was Christianity that liberated women to even be able to do those things in the first place. Christ is the one who came along and shattered cultural norms. Little girls didn’t get to go to school, women didn’t get to vote, and their testimonies weren’t admissible in a court of law, and yet Jesus built a team of women. Even within the complementarian view, we can hold to Paul’s teaching that empowers women within the Church to do great things for the sake of the Gospel. We can sort of tiptoe around this and sort of dodge it, but there is going to come a point when you have this conversation where you better know what you believe Scripture teaches about this because, in the end, we believe that God calls wives to submit to their husbands, and He calls husbands to lead their wives well.

Now, the clear teaching of this would prohibit or forbid a wife from submitting to an abusive husband. We would never, ever call a woman to stay under that type of abuse, or domineering leadership, or control. We wouldn’t teach that and that is not what Scripture teaches. So, the husband that leads in a dysfunctional manner, a husband that doesn’t embrace the responsibility that God gives him, a husband that is verbally abusive to his wife, or emotionally abusive to his wife, or that rejects his responsibility as a man of God, and his wife fears for her life or the lives of her kids; there is nothing in Scripture that teaches that she needs to stay under that control, under that manipulation, or under that dominion. Nothing would teach that.

1. The fifth reference is in 1 Peter 3:7,

*“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”*

Husbands are called to be very careful and protective of their wives. I’ve only known one couple ever where the wife would beat the husband up regularly. It was a bad situation and the bad thing is that I’m not sure if he could have stopped her from doing it. But, typically, when we talk about men and women, one things that’s fairly inarguable is that, as 1 Peter 3:7 refers to women as the weaker vessel, men, for the most part, are stronger physically than women. So, the danger is that men would impose their will forcefully, and Scripture prohibits that. The clearest prohibition would be the fact that, if we are to be as Christ is, as husbands, then that is the prohibition. The second half of this verse stresses the equal honor accorded to women along with men.

1. The last reference would be the overall biblical reference of a Trinitarian analogy. Complementarians understand the Trinity to represent an analogy to the male/female relationship as God designed it. God is one in essence and three in persons. The three persons of the Godhead are absolutely equal in essence; so we believe that God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and they share fully, simultaneously, and without division in the one divine essence. But, they are distinct in function. So, the Trinity gives us a really good picture of this. A lot times I’ll talk about this in wedding ceremonies, where in the Trinitarian existence of God you have distinction in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but they are one in union. There is this Trinitarian picture when the man and the woman become one flesh. We are going to get into the one-flesh teaching in just a second, but it points to the Trinitarian existence of God. In that submission that we talk about the wife submitting to the husband, we have as an example Christ in His submission to the Father. He’s equal to God, yet He submits for the will of the Father and the advance of the Gospel. So, with an understanding of complementarianism, I think it’s important to look at the different places in Scripture that would give support to that.

So, back to our original outline under this broad and basic overview of the complementarian position, the first big point is that God created man and woman to be equal in essence, yet distinct in roles.

1. Sin and the Fall disrupted God’s initial and original design (Genesis 3:15-16). We see that there is going to be this mutual enmity that exists between man and woman from that point forward. Marriage is this one institution where these two people love each other enough to pledge their lives to each other and yet they will get at each other like nobody else. I don’t know how many times that Little and I have sat down to counsel a couple and it’s like, “Why are you mad at him?” “Grrr….I don’t know! I just am!! I’m just tired of it!!” “Tired of what?” A lot of times they can’t put their finger on it, you know? That one person can just push every button. You see this tension in a lot of marriage relationships where it doesn’t reflect at all the relationship of Christ to His Bride. What this relationship reflects is like a little brother and sister that are bratty and at each other all the time. It’s very uncomfortable if you are ever out to eat with that couple. Little and I were out recently with a couple that is a part of Red Oak. I never felt so uncomfortable that I felt I needed to intervene, it was just not relaxing. There was just a constant tension.

So, you go all the way back to Genesis 3 and you see that when sin came into the world, it came into the first marriage. That was where the door opened and sin came in. So, now there is this tension between the man and the woman that exists, and literally, in Genesis 3, God says that there is going to be enmity between the woman and the Serpent, and the woman is going to try to usurp this authority over the man, and there is going to be a tension and enmity that will exist. So, number two under this basic overview of complementarianism is that sin and the Fall disrupted God’s initial design. We believe that God’s initial design was disrupted when sin came into the world. We believe that’s why the Gospel matters in marriage. The Gospel restores what was disrupted and broken. That’s why Gospel marriages don’t just survive, they thrive. A couple can stay married for seventy years, but that doesn’t mean they had a Gospel marriage. I think of people who go the distance in marriage. A generation or two ago, people would stick it out; they’d just live in opposite ends of the house. They’d just coexist, then, after sixty or seventy years of marriage people would think they were the picture of an ideal marriage. Maybe they weren’t. Maybe it was a picture of two people who hated each other learning how to function in the same house. So, there was this disruption that happened in the Garden.

1. There is a restoration of the role differentiation through redemption in Christ. So, we believe, as complementarians, that first God created man and woman equal in essence and distinct in roles. Second, sin disrupted that. Number three, the Gospel fixes it!! The Gospel fixes it here and now and it points to a future forever fixing of it. The Gospel fixes it, so there’s a restoration of the role differentiation through redemption in Christ. Our text tonight shows us how the Gospel, in Christ, brings restoration to these roles and relationships between men and women, particularly in marriage. This is why we must get marriage right in a biblical context. Where marriage is concerned, the Gospel is at stake.
2. Marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life. This is the last point under our basic overview of complementarianism. This is the biblical view—one man and one woman for life. It is important to note here what the Bible teaches about homosexuality and so-called same-sex marriage or relationships. I point you to a book by Kevin DeYoung that has just come out, called *What Does* *The Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality[[142]](#footnote-142)*. We have a pile of copies of these and we will make those available at cost next week. This is the most precise and concise handling of this matter that we are dealing with in our country today. I don’t want to get into where we are as a nation, and repentance, and all of that; I just want to talk about why Scripture clearly speaks about this subject and this issue. Because, one of the things that has happened today in our Church culture is that whole denominations and churches are moving to a position where they no longer say that they hold this view or that view, but they say that the Bible condones this. So, we need to understand what the Bible says about same-sex relationships, and this fourth point under our complementarian overview is that marriage is to be between one man and one woman.

So, under this fourth point, I want to give you five basic reasons from the Genesis 1 & 2 definition of marriage, that show that God established marriage from the beginning to require one man and one woman. So, as a church, we believe what we believe based on Scripture, not based on cultural influence, not based on popular media influence and not based on human sentimentality, like, “These two people love each other, so God would not want to rob them and deprive them of that love,” or “These two people are basically moral so they should be able to be together.” We want to look at what Scripture says, and this is covered under the basic overview of complementarianism, in this fourth point that marriage is to be between one man and one woman for life. So, here are five reasons from Genesis 1 & 2, to think that God established marriage, from the beginning, to require one man and one woman; not one man and two women, not one man and four woman, not one man and one man, or one woman and one woman. Here’s what Scripture teaches.

1. The way in which the woman was created indicates that she was the man’s divinely designed complement and/or counterpart. Eve is *like* the man and was *taken from* the man. John Stott comments on the relationship between man and woman by God’s design, in his commentary on Ephesians. He says this: “The biblical perspective is to hold simultaneously the equality and the complementarity of the genders. Partnership is a good word, too, *(In other words, Stott is referencing where God would make a ‘helper suitable’; another word would be a ‘partner suitable’ for man)* so long as it is remembered that the contribution which each brings to it is not identical but distinctive. Hence a man finds himself by being a man, and a woman finds herself by being a woman. Genuine self-discovery and self-fulfillment do not come from striving to be somebody else or from initiating the opposite sex.”[[143]](#footnote-143) Eve is distinct and different from the man in Genesis 1 & 2. In Genesis 2:20, when God says, "I will make a helper suitable for him,” what we take from that is that the helper is suitable for him in the sense that the helper is not an animal and it’s not another dude.

In Genesis 2:20, here’s the scene. Adam is in the Garden and he is naming the animals. The animals are passing by and there’s a chimpanzee, there’s a turtle, there’s a possum, and there are all these animals that Adam is giving names to, and there is no helper suitable for him. So, we can necessarily then say Adam had looked and seen that there was no helper suitable for him in the created order, so a distinct partner would be made for him. It is not an animal that is missing and it is also not another man that is missing. When God makes that partner for Adam, what He creates is a woman. God creates a woman who is very distinct, both physically and in essence, from the man.

1. The nature of the one-flesh union presupposes two persons of the opposite sex. The second reason that we hold to a biblical view that speaks against homosexual marriage is this: The nature of the one-flesh union presupposes two persons of the opposite sex. The phrase “one flesh” is a reference, by the way, to sexual union. Don’t look over that. The phrase “one flesh” is a reference to sexual union, in Genesis 2:25. How can we deduce that? Because the next thing God says is that they were “naked and unashamed.” There was complete sexual freedom between these two people. In 1 Corinthians 6:15-16, Paul addresses this.

*“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, ‘The two will become one flesh.’”*

So, you have this reference saying that the idea of one flesh is a sexual union idea. So, when two people come together sexually, what Paul is saying is that those two people become one flesh. DeYoung says this in his book, which I think is really helpful, “Mere physical contact, like holding hands or sticking your finger in someone’s ear, does not unite two people in an organic union, nor does it bring them together as a single subject to fulfill a biological function. When Genesis 2:24 begins with, ‘Therefore,’ or ‘For this reason,’ it connects the intimacy of becoming one flesh with the complementarity of a woman being taken out of a man.” We have this in English, where it is “man” and “wo-man” and those are direct translations from the Hebrew words that are the alliterated *ish* and *ishshah.* That is what Adam originally names the woman, which literally means “from me,” or she is taken from man. So, what happens is that they become one flesh because theirs is not just a sexual union but a reunion. A reunion that is the bringing together of two differentiated beings with one having been made *from* the other and both made *for* the other. So, in sexual union we presuppose the nature of one flesh being two people of the opposite sex. You don’t get that with two guys and you don’t get that with two ladies.

1. Only two persons from opposite sexes can fulfil the procreative purposes of marriage. God is a creator and He creates plants, vegetables, animals, and fish. He then tells the man and woman to be fruitful and multiply. This can only happen by a man and woman being image bearers of God, with creative abilities. So, even with the reproduction capability of a man and a woman, with two opposite genders coming together, you see the creative nature and hand of God in those image bearers.

Here’s another thought. In Deuteronomy 25, you have this teaching on the Kinsman Redeemer, which is this teaching that says if a man and a woman are married and then the man dies before they have had a child, the man’s brother is to take the woman as his wife and he is to give her a child. Then, that child basically takes the spot of the father in the lineage. Okay? So, God is so serious about this reproduction, and lineage, and procreation that requires a man and a woman, that He institutes the law of the Kinsman Redeemer.

1. Jesus, himself, reinforces the normativity of the Genesis account of one flesh between man and woman (Matthew 19:4-6; Mark 10:6-9). DeYoung says this, “Moreover, monogamy makes sense within the Genesis understanding of marriage. Apart from the complementarity of the two sexes there is no moral logic which demands that marriage should be restricted to two people. I’m not arguing that the acceptance of same-sex marriage will lead inexorably to the acceptance of polygamy, but once you’ve accepted the former you no longer have a consistent intellectual case to reject the latter. It’s because God made the woman *from* the man that she is also *for* the man and vice versa. And, it is because the two, male and female, are divinely designed, complements each for the other, that monogamy makes sense and same-sex marriage does not.
2. The redemptive, historical significance of a marriage, as a divine symbol in the Bible, only works if the marital couple is a complementary pair. Ephesians 5, our text tonight, is the strongest support for this. A man and a woman reflect Christ and the Church. Two men do not reflect Christ and the Church and two women do not reflect Christ and the Church, in those distinct roles and those distinct positions. DeYoung[[144]](#footnote-144), then, finally says this on that point, “The mystical union of Christ and the Church, each part belonging to the other but neither interchangeable, cannot be pictured in marital union without the differentiation of male and female.” No Supreme Court, no president, and no king can undo this. So, we do not bow to the powers that be when they contradict what Scripture teaches.”

So, now, back to our text. That was a lot, I know. We are in the home stretch here. What does this all mean for us? In light of our text, in Ephesians 5, it is important to walk through that. There are times where, as a church, we need to pause and walk through things to make sure that we understand where we corporately stand. A lot of people are gone tonight that will be here Wednesday night and Tuesday night in discipleship groups, and these are discussions we need to have because, as a church, we have to be unified. Here is what happens. There are certain things we can disagree on and there are other things that we absolutely have to be willing to die for. When it comes to the biblical view of marriage, particularly between a man and a woman—that is a hill to die on, because to pervert that is to pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and we won’t do that; not as a church.

When God created Eve in Genesis 2, He didn’t take her from the ground as He had with Adam. He took her from Adam and in that creation of the first woman you have the breaking of the man’s body. Remember that? God opened up Adam’s side and He removed a rib and He closed up that bloody flesh. So, you have the breaking of the man’s body for the woman and the first marriage is forged in the self-sacrifice of the man. So, husbands, long before the Gospel narrative pointed us to Christ, marriage was initially forged in the breaking of the man’s body in a selfless act, to give of himself so that woman is from the man and for the man, and the two are for each other. In essence, she is made different from the man so that they can then be joined back together as one flesh. The Bible tells us in our text, tonight, that this is a mysterious reality. It’s not just a romantic nicety; it’s a mystery. It’s a mystery.

Now, here’s the thing about a biblical mystery. I’m going to read from Stott again. Listen to what Stott says concerning the word “mystery.” “A ‘mystery’ is a revealed truth, and the profound ‘mystery’ here, namely the church’s union with Christ, is closely akin to that of Jewish-Gentile unity in the body of Christ, which had been revealed to him and of which he has written in 3:1-6.”

Tucker and I watched a “Mission Impossible”-type movie the other night, where you have to figure out who is the bad guy and who is the good guy, and who did what, and it’s a mystery. You try to figure it out and that’s what we think of as mystery. Maybe you like to read mystery books or maybe you like to watch TV crime dramas. When we think of a mystery, we think of trying to solve the whodunit of a story. Right? Was it the butler? There was about a year when my family was on a kick where we would play “Clue.” Actually, we played “Clue, Jr.” because it was a lot faster. We like mystery and suspense, but that’s not the biblical understanding of what a mystery is.

You remember where Scripture says that pastors, and preachers, and prophets will speak the oracles of God. It is a revelation given to man from God so that there is no longer a mystery. It’s a revelation. It’s something that is revealed. Maybe, at times, it’s been hidden for ages and it is now revealed. So, what Paul is saying is that it was a mystery but now it’s not, and yet it’s still mysterious. It’s been revealed but in our fallen state we don’t completely get it. But, here’s the revelation—a man and a woman become one flesh and in that it is a picture of Christ’s body broken for the Church. In verses 28-29, Paul gives us a good example to help us understand the mystery and I will close with this example. *“A man should love his wife as he loves his own body,”* and this is a much bigger idea than we think. This is not just, “I love my wife like I love my body. When I’m hungry I should make sure she gets to eat first.” This is bigger than that, okay? This is bigger than us driving down the road and I am sweating because it’s eighty outside, and yet, for some reason the heat is on in the car. This happened last week. We went swimming in a pool with eighty degree water and I was in the car and getting that claustrophobic feeling that I just needed the air to be on. At least, let me put my window down.” I need to love my wife as my own body”—it’s bigger than that. That’s not what we are talking about. Now, should I defer to her? Yes, until it got to a point where I told Little that we had to pull over because I had to breathe and we had to work through it. This is bigger than that. Don’t deduce or reduce this down to something like that. Does she get the outside edge of the cake, or does she get the window seat on the plane? Yes, do all that; that’s great. Prefer your wife, but this is bigger than that. This is way bigger than that. This is how do I speak to my wife? How do I talk to her? How do I treat her? How do I look at her?

The understanding in verses 28 and 29 is this: My wife *is* me! If we are one flesh, and she came from me, and we are reunited in sexual union, in covenant union, and in Gospel union—she *is* me! I must not think of my wife as another. When I do that I will try to maintain control of her. I will try to always be right. I will actually begin to compete with her. She is me and I am her, and that is the great mystery of one flesh. She’s me. I’m her. No other relationship offers that. If I’m the head, she’s the body. If Christ is the head, we are the Body. We’ve been hearing throughout Ephesians that we are in Christ and He is in us.

I heard one pastor give this illustration that made so much sense. He said that if you were being robbed and you lashed out against that robber, that would make sense. If you took your knife and you started stabbing the knife of that robber who has reached into your car window to grab your wallet and defend your possessions; what if, in doing that, you realized it was your own left arm that was trying to steal your wallet? That doesn’t make any sense. Yet, when we attack our wives, men, we are attacking ourselves. So, what does this mean, spiritually? If any message is clear in Ephesians, it’s the message that: I am in Christ and Christ is in me. To love and care for my wife is to love and care for myself. Now, think about this. Paul says in verse 25 that her sanctification is my goal, but listen; when I invest in her sanctification, what I will realize is that I am also investing in my own sanctification. To love her well and to give to her is to give myself away in the right way, because she is me.

Think of this practically. If I’m struggling in an area of my life, I should give to my wife of myself, and I will find renewal in this. In a mysterious way, I will find that I will grow and find fulfillment when I am giving to my wife. Paul finishes by saying this in verse 32, *“This is a profound mystery and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church.”* In that sense, we have an amazing opportunity, through our marriages, to point others to Christ and to point our own spouses to Christ, daily. In other words, our marriages should reveal the great love of God and the great salvation that is ours in Christ. Our marriages should be evangelistic. They are the married person’s greatest platform for the Gospel.

So, history begins with a marriage and then a Fall. It is woven together with a picture of a restored union between God and man, seen in marriage, and it all will one day end with a great wedding. I’m going to read from Revelation 21 this beautiful scene of what’s going to come in that day.

*“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*

I’ll close with this thought. I could try to unpack, and teach, and instruct, and be technical, but you guys know that I’m not the technical pastor here. I’m the football coach pastor. But, we’ve got to get this right, and if I could challenge you with anything as you go into your week, whether you are single or married, it’s to hold to a biblical view of marriage. In your singleness and in your marriage, hold to a biblical view of what God says marriage is supposed to be. Young people, get this right, now, not later, and so much hardship will be spared in your life. If we can understand the great love that God shows us at the cross then we will understand the great opportunity that we have to reflect that love in our own lives. Love each other well, man. Men, don’t talk to your wives like they are your pet dog and you are mad because it messed in the floor or got in the trash. It’s wrong. It’s sinful. It’s utterly despicable to speak to your wife like that! It’s a mockery of the Gospel! Who do you think you are to speak to your bride in a way that Christ would never speak to His Bride?! Who do you think you are to speak down to your wife and down to your kids?! Who do you think you are to try to redefine the messianic headship of our sacrificial Savior, who displays and portrays himself in Scripture as a husband to a bride that He sacrificed himself for, and abuse the position of headship that God has given to you? Who do you think you are to call your wife to submit to that kind of leadership? No wonder she doesn’t and no wonder she shouldn’t, because that’s not what Christ has taught at all and that’s not what He intends at all. Women are to feel the freedom that comes from being loved by a husband who shows them how Jesus loves, and who leads them how Jesus leads. That’s what we are supposed to do, men. If we do that, this church will be strong, this community will be strong, and the Gospel will be on display, and our families will perpetuate a legacy of godliness that will still be mattering and making sense fifty years from now and fifty generations from now. Ladies, don’t settle in your singleness for anything short of this. Men, don’t settle in your singleness for anything short of this. And, husbands and wives, let’s live as Christ would have us to live, and reflect the Gospel as He would have it reflected in our lives. I’ll pray.

God, I pray that as we respond to your Word, in its clarity, that we would do so, not from a position of human sentimentality or political opinion; that we wouldn’t hold fast to labels, and words, and positions, but that we would just love the Bible. I pray that, as your Word teaches us, that we would submit to one another, submit to the Church, and submit to Jesus. Husbands are to be the spiritual leaders in their homes. I pray for men that would pray with their families but who would also live out biblical manhood in front of their wives, and sons, and daughters. I pray for the young men in this church, that they would see examples of godly, biblical manhood, and become the men that you want them to be. I pray that we would turn to you. We repent for the sins of our nations and the sins of our people. God, not just the sins of our political leaders or our court judges, but God, we repent as a nation of people who have turned from your ways, and we ask your forgiveness, and I pray that it would begin in our homes, and that we would be faithful the way that you intend for us to be faithful, and that we would get marriage right for the sake of the Gospel, and for the advance of the Gospel, and for the glory and the world conquest of the Gospel, and for the good of our wives, and husbands, and sons, and daughters, and for your glory. In Jesus’ name.

That was an awesome night of worship. It was a difficult subject matter but a glorious subject matter, because of the work of Christ. I want to read a passage from Hosea. Listen to this. This is God speaking to His bride, Israel, and this is under the Old Covenant. If you are new to church and Christianity, the Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. That word, “testament,” means covenant. You know what a covenant is; it’s a contractual agreement. So, the Old Covenant was written on tablets of stone. It was a law that God wrote and gave to man that pointed him to a New Covenant that would be fulfilled in Christ. Under that Old Covenant, listen to how God speaks of His Bride.

Hosea 2:14-23,

*“Therefore, behold, I will allure her,*

*and bring her into the wilderness,*

*and speak tenderly to her.*

*15 And there I will give her her vineyards*

*and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.*

*And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,*

*as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.*

*16 “And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me ‘My Husband,’ and no longer will you call me ‘My Baal.’ 17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. 18 And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.*

*21 “And in that day I will answer, declares the Lord,*

*I will answer the heavens,*

*and they shall answer the earth,*

*22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,*

*and they shall answer Jezreel,*

*23 and I will sow her for myself in the land.*

*And I will have mercy on No Mercy,*

*and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’;*

*and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”*

This is a beautiful picture of God saying that there is coming a day when everything will be put right. That’s in the Old Covenant. That’s before Christ came and put things right between man and God, and I want us to remember the big picture of what Christ has done tonight, to save us and to put things right between man and God. Remember that, as Christ has prepared a Bride for himself that we have the opportunity to reflect that in the way that we love and serve each other. The picture in Revelation 21, of this bride being adorned and being brought into this wedding ceremony, is what we are working to build and reflect in our own marriages.

So, let’s do that well this week through our own submission to the Lord and to one another. Now, I’ll read tonight’s benediction from 2 Thessalonians 3:16,18,

*“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”*

Amen.

August 23, 2015

Ephesians 6 – Pt. 1

Brody Holloway

This is a really practical piece of Scripture and there are two things I want to preface with before we read the text. One, we are going to try to get through nine verses tonight, but we will see how our time is. We may stop at the end of verse 4, depending on how it flows. I think, in my mind, I put it together where I think it will flow smooth and quick, but that’s the first disclaimer; we may have to come back and finish this next week, which is no surprise. We don’t ever do anything according to schedule here. But, the second disclaimer is not actually a disclaimer, but the second thing I want to say as an intro before we dive into the text is this; going back four weeks ago, Hank Parker, Jr. came and spoke to us on fatherhood—the fatherhood of God and fatherhood in Scripture. Hank kicked off chapter 5 and the first part of chapter 6, which talks about family structure and the family unit. We have a lot of families in our church. We tried to count up how many kids we have that are ten and under and it’s crazy, but it’s exciting. Somebody asked me how many people we have attending our church and I’m terrible at this; I really don’t know. I have no idea how many people come here on a normal week, so I said a thousand because I grew up Baptist. Whatever number it was I came up with, the person asked me how many of those were kids. They actually asked if we count the kids, and I was like, “What kind of question is that?” First, because they are people, and second, because they come to church. So, yes we count the kids. Again, because I grew up Baptist we count every head that we can count.

But, I want to say this; in a church the size of Red Oak we come from a lot of different backgrounds when it comes to how we were raised. So, going back to Hank’s message a few weeks ago, some of you fall into the category, where he talked in his forty-five minute introduction, which I thought was fantastic, about varying types of fathers. It was so good because I felt like he covered pretty much everyone. You couldn’t have been sitting here and he not have hit on your situation. Some of us grew up with good dads. Some of you grew up with dads that were, maybe, morally good, and present, and active, at least to some degree, in your life. They came to your Little League games or they did the basic things that a dad should do. They bought groceries; that would be good. They put a roof over your head; that would be good. A lot of kids don’t have those things, so that would be one category. Another category might be that you had a really good dad; a biblical dad who instructed you in the way that Paul is going to speak to us tonight from Ephesians 6. He raised you in the instruction, and the discipline, and the admonition of the Lord. Maybe you grew up with a dad like that. Maybe you grew up with a dad that you can now emulate. Some of you grew up with no dad. So, you grew up without a dad and that part really stung when Hank talked about that a few weeks ago. I know that, for a lot of you, that was a weighty, heavy message, because you grew up without a father or without a father present. Some of you maybe grew up with an abusive dad or an adulterous dad. Whatever category you fall into, when we go into this text there are a couple of things we need to know about fathers.

One, with the word “father,” I believe Paul is targeting the men in our midst who are fathers. But, also, there are other places in Scripture where this word is used to refer to parents. So, if you are a single mom, these principles apply to you. Also, if you are a single mom, we want to be a church where you can trust that your child or children will be raised with strong men who will speak into their lives. But, if you are a single mom, this applies to you in much the same way that it would apply to a family, in terms of how dad and mom are to work together to do this.

Now, here’s the big picture and I’m done with the intro. Regardless of what you grew up with, or in, or what your situation was, nothing that happened to you as a child, at the hand of your father, gives you an excuse to not be a biblical father or mother. If you got beat, you don’t have an excuse to smack your kid, and you’re in a church that will hold you accountable for that. We will not tolerate that from our men. You are in a church where strong men will step in. I’m not talking about big, tough men; I’m talking about spiritual church leaders who will step in. Men in this church care about the children of this church, so we will see to it that that is not the way people are treated in this church. But, if that was your upbringing, or if you are a mom who grew up that way and your tendency is to lash out at your kids or to try to dominate and control your husband—we talked about that a little last week. The attitude could easily be, “I’m not going to let a dictator rule our house because I grew up in that.” So, in rebelling against that you run out of that ditch and you cross both lanes and you hit the other ditch, and you find yourself doing basically the same thing. If your dad was an adulterer, or an abuser, or whatever, there is no excuse for you to behave, or for me to behave, in a way that is not reflected in Scripture. So, if you grew up in a nasty situation and Jesus has saved you, you are no longer in a nasty situation. You are redeemed, regenerate, and you are a new creation.

So, we have come to this place in the book of Ephesians where we understand all this talk of who we are in Christ. So if you are a dad, or you are a mom, or you are a kid, regardless of what happened in your past, now you are simply “in Christ.” So, as husbands and wives we want to honor the Lord. As sons and daughters we want to honor the Lord.

Also, if you had a father or mother who raised you in this way, be thankful for that, and utilize that, and be thankful for what you were taught, and praise the Lord that you had godly parents. But, also understand that you would be in the minority. You are very gifted and fortunate to have been raised with godly parents. If you had a mama and daddy who functioned the way two parents were supposed to function, and they treated you the way that parents are supposed to treat their young people, you are in a sliver of a percentage of very few people who will ever grow up in that kind of situation. So, let’s cultivate in this church a biblical model of family and marriage and what that’s supposed to look like.

So, coming out of chapter 5, we have looked at so many different things; the way husbands are supposed to treat their wives, the way wives are supposed to treat their husbands, and what God expects in complementarian marriages. So, now we come to our text for tonight and we are going to look at children, and parents, and then also at employers and employees.

Ephesians 6:1, this is the Word of the Lord.

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” 4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*

Let’s stop there and let’s go ahead and unpack those first four verses. The first thing I want to do is talk about the background of Judaism in terms of parenting and family. In the Greco-Roman world that the Church in Ephesus was functioning and surviving in—in this city that we’ve been learning about over the last few months—there was a very worldly influence coming into the Church. But, in the Jewish background there was a strong sense of family. One of the things that God had done in raising up a people is that He had raised up a people who were very family-centric. So, dads had distinct roles and moms had distinct roles. All the way back into the Old Testament, education was to be done in the home, and in the community, and from a position of faith in the Church, and that set them apart from most other cultures. So, there was this long background on the side of the Jews, where passages like Deuteronomy 6 instructed that in the home the Word of God was to be central, and we should teach the Scripture to our kids, and we should raise them in such a way that they know the Law of God, the know the Word of God, and they are obedient to the Word of God. Children were expected to be obedient to parents, in fact—listen, young people—if you disobeyed or were defiant to your parents, at some point, you could be stoned and executed for that. But, we are under a new covenant now and that no longer applies. You’re welcome, teenagers! But, there was a very strong sense of family and a strong sense of obedience on the part of kids. Then, moms and dads were supposed to raise these kids in such a way that they learned, literally—listen—that they learned through the Law, in the home, and that led them to an understanding of who God was—who Yahweh was. So, in the home, through mom and dad, kids would learn about their Creator God, much the same way it should happen in the Christian home. But, you had in the church at Ephesus a lot of people who didn’t grow up with that Jewish background and you had a lot of people who were marginal Jews, I’m sure. So, they had this really messed up view, in the Roman Empire, of what family was supposed to be. One of the things that was very prominent was sexual promiscuity amongst married people; a lot of adultery, a lot of affairs, and a lot of prostitution and things like that. So, it was a very broken culture much like our culture today. So, raising a kid in that culture, there needed to be some good, biblical parameters and guidelines. There needed to be instruction on how to do this because the pressure from the outside needed to be withstood by pressure from the inside, and that would hold it up. That’s the way our homes need to look; the inward pressure needs to brace and bar against the outward, cultural pressure that bears in on our marriages, and our children, and our families.

So, what Paul is doing is he is giving instruction to these people. A lot of them had no Old Testament context of Deuteronomy 6 or Proverbs 22. You guys are probably familiar with that verse in Proverbs. This was a common practice, or promise, or instruction for how Jewish people would raise their kids. Most of are probably familiar with Proverbs 22:6, that says this,

*“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”*

*“Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.”* You guys are probably familiar with that. There are a couple of things that I want to point out in that verse that I think are helpful for us, but that also really tie the Old Testament understanding of parenting to the New Testament understanding of parenting. Here are a couple of thoughts on this. First, in Proverbs 22:6, when the writer says “train up a child,” the word “train” would be very similar to the words in our text, like “raise,” “nurture,” “admonition,”; it’s raising children, rearing, and nurturing them. But the word “child” in Proverbs 22:6 is really interesting. If you look at the words “child” and “old” in that verse, what you have is a really neat overlap in the way a child would be raised. It is saying to instruct them from the time they are born until they reach adulthood. So, from the time when you are holding that little infant – for those of you who are single or who are newly married and don’t have kids yet, begin now praying for your children.

One of the things that I am so grateful that Little and I did that God was gracious in guiding us to do and we didn’t even realize the implications of what we were doing; but, from the time we were engaged we started praying for our kids. We were married six years before a kid came along, but I can remember praying over children who would one day come. I encourage you to do that and to do it consistently; not just on Mother’s Day, or Father’s Day, or at Christmas. A consistent pattern of praying for your future children will really be helpful with the time comes for you to raise kids.

So, pray from the time that child is born until that child is an adult. And in the context of our society a legal adult would be eighteen but, culturally, adulthood in our society would be more like twenty-two because most kids go to college on their parents’ dime. Most kids are under some degree of authority from the home until then, and I’m not saying that’s a bad thing, it’s just culturally more realistic for our structure. So, zero to twenty-two is probably more like we are talking about. So, “train up a child,” zero to eighteen, or twenty, or twenty-two. The next phrase is “and then when he’s old” and the word “old” has to do with adolescence on up. “When he is old he won’t depart from it” is this really neat promise that, from the time a kid is twelve, thirteen, or fourteen years old, if you have done your job early, there is an overlap of “child” and “old.” If you do what you are supposed to as young parents, when your child is zero, two, and six, they will “not depart from it” as they grow into adulthood and beyond. Now, we know that is one of those teachings in Scripture that is not automatic; it’s not that no child that is raised in a godly home will never rebel against the Lord. We know that there are good families, good moms, and good dads who do a good job raising their kids, and they still have a child that goes astray. But, in principle and in theory, as we are going to see in Ephesians 6, when Paul says that you will have long years on the earth, those are principle teachings. It’s not a specific promise that says that if you obey your parents all the time that you will just live to be old.

Susie, yesterday, was on her lawnmower; we love Susie but she does not need to be on her riding lawnmower tractor. So, we need men who will step in and do whatever we need to do to take care of that hill. Susie, don’t ever get on that tractor again or you’re going to be in big trouble with me. Understand? So, I’m pulling up at Susie’s house and she’s sitting on her tractor on the side of the mountain and it is about to roll down the mountain. We got her off of it and got her dug out of that situation, then I said, “Susie, were you real obedient to your parents when you were young?” and she said, “Why?” I said, “Because the Bible says that if you obey your parents you will have long years, and based on your actions I don’t know how you are alive right now! It doesn’t make sense to me so there must be something supernatural going on!”

When you see these principles like, “When a child grows old he will not depart from his parents’ teaching” or “When a child honors his parents he will live long”; those are principles that have solid, biblical, Scriptural theory behind them. If you do these things, this is what will most likely happen.

One of the things that we do in student ministry is we sometimes take secular principles that come from the world of secular psychology and sociology and we apply these here. If we lay these over Proverbs 22:6, there is a real popular teaching in secular child psychology where they talk about the cop, coach, and counselor phases of parenting. It basically is this; when a child is very young we are to function in sort of a police officer/judge-type role for that child. So we provide the law and we enforce the law. It is critical that we do that when they are young. Some people say, “Well, I just have a strong-willed kid.” Well, to some degree every child is strong-willed; some, of course, more than others. But, all kids need to have their wills broken and brought into submission, while not breaking their spirits. We are going to really unpack that in a minute. So, they need their wills broken but their spirits not crushed. We have to apply the right pressure so that we break the will of that sinful, little reprobate, but do not crush their spirit. So, how do we go about that? Well, the cop phase is critical for this. We instruct them and we discipline them. You will see throughout the Proverbs, mom and dad, that the spanking needs to be felt, but it should not leave lasting marks. It also needs to be received in the proper location, geographically, on the body. The mouth, face, and ears are not the locations. But, we also don’t let the world and secular psychologists teach us how to discipline our children. Amen? We won’t let Dr. Spock teach us how to do that. I’ll never forget someone saying to me one time, “You know, you shouldn’t spank your child with your hand because it teaches them to hit.” I was like, “Oh, it’s better to teach them to hit with a belt, I guess?” You are going to run into backward psychology so you have to look at biblical principles. I’m not saying you have to use your hand and you can’t use a belt; I’m saying don’t receive counsel from the world but receive it from the Scripture, and throughout the Proverbs, what you will find is that Scripture supports a good understanding of the role and the importance of discipline in a child’s life. As a parent, your task is to break the sinful nature in that child, because if you don’t do that, how will they ever understand what it is to submit to God? A kid that at age five won’t submit to a thirty-year-old mama is not going to, at age fifteen or twenty-five, submit to God. It’s not going to happen. So, understand that your role in disciplining that child in that cop phase, if we can borrow from psychological terminology, it is to impose the law.

Now, we are going to get into some principles—not a lot, because we have talked on this at length in the past—tonight, of a few principles of discipline. We are not going to labor it very long. But, there are a couple of things to think about when it comes to these principles of parenting. The ages where we would be imposing the cop phase would be, typically, on average, zero to eight. Now, you may have a child that by age four, seriously, is regenerate, prayed to receive Christ into their heart, and is acting as a disciple of Jesus. That child may just begin to flourish and you may find that you are not having to enforce the law. You are not being inconsistent if you are dealing with your eight-year-old in a different way than you dealt with your older child when he was eight. That is where, as a parent, you need to understand the personality, and the makeup, and the disposition of that child. If you are applying a certain type of discipline to a five or six-year-old now, you are not being inconsistent if you apply different methods to your next child at that age. If you’ve raised more than one kid you know what this is like. If you grew up with siblings, you know that you are not all the same. There are some kids that you can look at cross and they will just melt. But, some kids, if you look at them sternly they will clench their fists and stick their chest out. So, we have to understand that principles have to be consistent, and what Scripture gives us is principles that can be consistent across the board. I can raise each kid with consistent, biblical principles but the practical application of that may vary, especially when it comes to discipline.

So, when a child is young, there are a couple of things that I need to make sure that I’m doing. In terms of that cop phase, it’s enforcing the law and enforcing the rules. Maintaining obedience is my job. I can’t be frustrated when a kid doesn’t obey at age four. I’m not going to be frustrated at that. Mom, you’ve been there all day, I know. They’ve painted the walls again, broken stuff, lit stuff on fire, clogged the toilet with Tonka truck tires, scalded the dog with the French press coffee, tried to gouge out their little brother’s eye; they have bit and screamed all the while with doo-doo in their pants. I understand that you have had that day, but you know what your job is; be consistent and don’t freak out. He’s acting like a three-year-old because he’s a three-year-old. Your job, your task, is to enforce the law, do it consistently, do it lovingly, and do not let that child control your emotions. That’s your task and that’s your job. I know it’s easier said than done as a dad, no doubt, because I’m not there all day. I understand that, but I’m saying that, biblically, this is what Scripture teaches. Okay?

So, at zero to eight we are playing cop. Then, somewhere between eight and twelve, depending on that child’s progression, we are going to slip into that coach phase. I’m still instructing and I will still discipline, but I’m beginning to turn over responsibility to that child. Here’s what can happen; people get these backwards. They make suggestions to three-year-olds. You don’t make suggestions to three-year-olds. You can make a suggestion to that three or five-year-old if you are setting them up for complete success and there is no way they can Charlie Brown it. If there is no way they can mess it up, I will give them an opportunity to do something where they make a decision and I know they are going to get it right so I can praise them for it. If you want to do that, great. But, just understand that you are not their coach when they are two, and four, and six. You are the police officer in their life. You can do that lovingly but you are not their coach. Here’s what happens; parents coach their kids through their toddler years because they want to let them express themselves and have freedom. “Oh, my child’s creative!” No, your child’s defiant. They’re creative in their defiance. They think of new ways to defy you. Yes, they are creative and you need to deal with it. If you try to coach them through the cop years, here’s what’s going to happen—you are going to find yourself trying to play cop with a fifteen-year-old that weighs a hundred-eighty pounds, and who has a will of his own, and says, “You’re not my boss. You’ve never been my boss.” So, if you get those cop and coach phases backwards it is going to be disastrous. It’s not good when your fourteen, sixteen, or eighteen-year-old daughter walks out of the house looking like a delicate, tasty treat for all the teenage boys to experience. But, then, you can’t rein that in because now you are trying to play cop to a runaway teenager, who is ramped up on hormones, who has watched a thousand hours of YouTube videos, and spent another thousand hours on social media; and now you want to play cop. We have to do it right the first time through because we don’t get another chance at it. We have to shape the pot while it’s on the wheel and the clay is wet, because once it hardens you can forget it. It’s past, and gone, and done.

If we get that right, we get to the third phase, which is hopefully, and prayerfully, somewhere between fourteen and eighteen. Maybe it’s somewhere between eighteen and twenty-two, but that’s when we enter into the counselor phase. Then, for the rest of your lives, you should be able to play that role in your kids’ lives. Some of you have sons and daughters in their twenties, thirties, and forties, and you are able to speak truth into their lives, and give them counsel, and help them. Then, if you are a child, you are able to look to that parent for the rest of your life for that counsel, and input, and insight. It’s very important.

So, that was kind of the background of understanding how to raise a kid in the Jewish faith. The idea was that we have to bring them to efficient adulthood early. You guys know the Jewish history; if by age twelve, if they weren’t going to continue their education, they went into skill and trade labor, where they learned a skill or a trade and they began to help with the family business or whatever.

Now, back into our text in Ephesians 6, Paul says this in the first verse,

*“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”*

Young people, there are two reasons that you should obey your parents. Let me say this; little people, if you are here tonight and you are five years old – any five-year-olds in the room? six-year-olds? seven?—I see those hands, we are having decisions tonight! Listen to me little people. Let’s say you are a teenager and down, right now, listen to me; the Scripture says that you are to obey your parents. Okay? The Scripture says you should obey your parents, and the Bible tells us that there are two reasons that we should obey our parents. The first reason is that it’s the right thing to do. It’s the right thing to do, and you see that in verse 1. *“Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.”* John Stott[[145]](#footnote-145), in his commentary, says this is the natural reason. It’s the natural law; it’s naturally right to do this. It is the way that God created the system to work; that a child is raised by a parent, and the right function in that relationship is that the child obeys the parent as the child is growing up.

Here’s what you will find in societies, and cultures, and nations, and counties, and towns, and communities, and churches; where children are generally obedient to their parents, and family structures are intact, and these things look like they are supposed to look, those are strong cultures and societies. But, also, Paul says in Romans 1—right alongside a lot of really nasty sins, he says that when God turns people over to reprobate depravity, and they begin to spiral downward in their sin—Paul lists right beside homosexuality, and terrible crimes like murder, and rape, and debauchery—God says, *“disobedient to parents.”* One of the signs of a horrible degradation in a culture and in a society is when kids don’t obey their parents and when kids are defiant to their parents, and that’s the condition we are in, as a nation, right now. But, it should not be the condition that we function in as a church, and it should not be the condition that you are okay to function in, in your home.

So, first, kids obey your parents because it’s right. That’s natural law. The second reason they are to obey their parents is in verse 2; because this is a commandment from God. So, it’s divine law. The first reason is it is natural law and the second reason is because God said do it. There will be times in your lives, young people, where your parents will say “do this” or “don’t do that” and you’ll say “why?,” and they will say those magic words, “Because I said so….and I know better than you right now.” I know that in your fifteen or seventeen years of life that you have figured everything out that there is to figure out. In fact, you have hit the pinnacle of knowledge accumulation and life experience, but just humor your parents for two reasons. One, they know what they’re talking about, if they are seeking the Lord. In just a minute, we are going to touch on what to do if you don’t have Christian parents. Number one, because it’s right, and number two, because God commands it. If you want to obey God, obey your parents. If you want to obey God, obey your parents. This is important and it’s in verse 2.

Then, in verse 3, Paul says *“that it might go well with you.”* In verse 2, he says that this is a commandment with a promise and in verse 3, he says,

*“…that it might go well with you and that you might live long in the land.”*

Now, a couple of thoughts here. If you are growing up in a home and your parents are not Christians, or they don’t love the Lord, or they don’t honor the Lord, and they don’t honor you, and your mom and dad don’t honor each other, or maybe they don’t even live together and you live in a dysfunctional place, and your parents don’t instruct you in the way that Scripture teaches; what you can do, young people, if you live with rebellion parents, is you can honor them. It may not be fruitful for you to obey them in certain areas, such as if they instruct you to do something that is contrary to what God would have you to do, but you can honor them. And, the way that you can honor them is so simple; with a gentle spirit, a soft voice, don’t be combative, don’t be debative, and don’t be confrontational. Bring peace and gentleness into the relationship with your parents. You have to be a child who rises above the pressure of the environment you are living in. Just because your mom is a psychotic drug addict who beats you and hits you, do your best to honor her by not getting sucked into that combative lifestyle. And, kids, if you are in a position where it is not safe, you need to talk to someone here tonight and we will get you out of that situation. There are strong men and women who will rescue you from that situation. But honor, and speak gently, and don’t be combative. That’s not going to solve anything.

Paul says, “It will go well with you and you will live long in the land.” Again, this is a principle. This doesn’t mean that if you obeyed your parents growing up and all of a sudden you find yourself dying at age thirty or forty, you think, “I was a good kid so what’s going on here?” We believe that this is under the sovereign plan of God for our lives and, in principle, kids who obey their parents are typically going to make better life choices. Parents who fulfill that sort of cop, coach, counselor role are going to instruct and guide their kids through the difficult seasons of life, like the adolescent years. Kids who are obedient to their parents are going to be obedient to the law. They aren’t going to be drag racing out on Airport Road and wrap their truck around a tree, or they will be less likely to. It’s just common sense, is what Paul is saying. Make sense? Yeah, it makes good sense. It’s just common sense. Do what your mom and dad tell you because they know. They know that this or that thing will keep you out of trouble. When you go out from under their authority, it’s dangerous in this world. That’s “that you may live long in the land.”

By the way, the word “honor” also applies to us, as adults. So, if you are in your thirties and your mom and your dad are still living, by God’s grace, we should honor our parents as adults. We should be kind to them and we should honor them. When they become so old or in such poor health that they can’t take care of themselves, we shouldn’t stick them in a home somewhere, if we can in any way avoid that. We shouldn’t ignore them and turn our backs on them. We should honor them to the end.

My mom fell and smashed her head open and broke her foot on two different occasions several months apart last year. When she was twelve she was clumsy; when she was twenty she was clumsy; and when she was forty she was clumsy. It’s not an age thing, you know; it’s a my mom thing. So, she broke her foot and then a few weeks later I got a text with a picture of a gash in her head. She got something like seventy stitches. It was a massive gash and so what happened? She fell backstage at church at the Christmas play practice and hit her head. She had stepped over a stage prop in the dark. So, I texted her and said, “Hey, listen, don’t worry about it. I’m going to send you a brochure on a couple of really nice facilities that we’ve been looking at. I think one of them would be a great fit for you.” I’m always kidding her about that, but Little and I have told both of our moms, “Listen, we’ve got you! We’re going to take care of you.” We need to honor our parents to the end, so we need to be thinking, “How can I honor my parents?” Always.

So, we come to verse 4 and this is sort of the meat of it all,

*“Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”*

Paul breaks it down into, basically, a negative command and a positive command. The negative command is “Do not provoke.” In Colossians, Paul says, “Don’t discourage.” So, don’t provoke and don’t discourage. The two things, as parents, we need to try not to do is provoke or discourage our kids. I want to give you a couple of things that I think are supported from the text, but they are especially supported from the whole counsel of Scripture. As dads, these are things that will provoke and discourage your children. It might not provoke them to anger; it could provoke them to sexual promiscuity; it could provoke them to tampering with drugs; it could provoke them to pornographic addiction; it could provoke them to the pursuit of an atheistic worldview. We could discourage them when we beat them down and they have no self-esteem, or identity in Christ would be a more biblical way to say that; they lose their focus on who they are in Christ.

1. Inconsistency. The one source of consistency in your kids’ lives needs to be their mom and dad. If you are a single mom, it needs to be mom. If you are a single dad, it needs to be dad. You are their source of consistency and you cannot be inconsistent, whether you are applying discipline, or whether you are saying you are going to do something and you don’t do it, or you promise a certain reward and you don’t follow through with that promise. You have to be consistent. You need consistency in your leading them in the study of Scripture and church attendance. Be consistent in everything you do. Go to church consistently. Pray as a family consistently. Study the Word of God consistently. Have some consistently to your schedule. For us, it’s crazy, but when school starts tomorrow, we will typically have supper at nine o’clock at night because we want to be consistent and we want to do it together. Could we feed everybody at six? Yeah, we could feed everybody at six except one of our kids, and we’re not going to do that. We’re going to sit down together as a family, and we are going to have a meal together as a family, and it’s going to make the night a little bit cramped, and a little bit squeezed, but it’s going to bring consistency in the home. So, we need to think of things that we can do, practically, and then also in the way I speak, in the way I act, and in the way that they see me function emotionally. They need to see me bring consistency, not inconsistency; that will discourage and provoke them.
2. Second, don’t take into account the fact that they are kids. We said earlier, when the three-year-old spits his food out, deal with it, but don’t blow your stack. Don’t freak out, like, “Whaaat is he thinking!?” Well, right now, he’s thinking, “A good idea would be to spit my food out,” because that’s what three-year-olds think. “A great idea right now would be to go number one on the side of this city sidewalk while my mom is putting groceries in the car.” “Whaaat is he thinking!?” He’s thinking, “A whole new world has been opened to me since I potty trained! This is wonderful!” If he’s three or four don’t treat him like he’s eighteen. Just think that through, because that will discourage and provoke.
3. Next, don’t compare your child to others. “Why can’t you be like so-and-so?” This is so destructive to kids and it will discourage and provoke. Don’t you dare, as a mom or dad, compare your kid to somebody else’s kid. Don’t even do it in a positive light, guys. Listen, church, don’t even say, “Man, I want to encourage you that you are leading, and you are doing this, and doing that, and you are not like so-and-so.” Immediately, you begin to breed an attitude of condescension into your child. They look down on other people and have a sense of entitlement. “So-and-so lives in that neighborhood or they live in that part of town.” Don’t ever breed condescension into your kids and also don’t compare them to other kids, like, “That kid scored more touchdowns,” or “That girl made the honor roll more times than you. You need to be like her. I heard that she does her homework like this, so why don’t you do it like her.” Don’t do that; it’s destructive and discouraging. Know your children and know your responsibility in raising your children, not somebody else’s kids. You are not supposed to raise somebody else’s kids.
4. Failure to express approval, even over small accomplishments. Approve them, encourage them, and make a big deal over the little things. Little things are big things to a seven-year-old. What you will find is that little things are big things to a seventeen-year-old, too—and to a twenty-seven-year-old, and to your wife, and your husband. Words of encouragement go a long way, in all of our lives. Don’t you like to be encouraged? Don’t you like for people to say, “That was awesome, what you did there. I appreciate that you did that. It was good that you did that.” For that little mind and that little heart that is being shaped, this is where, as a church, we should speak positive things into the little people that are running around in this room after church tonight. We should all take part in that, and encourage them, and say things that make a big deal out of that little coloring page that they bring up from kids’ church. They have completely marked that piece of paper all over the place, but you tell them it’s the most beautiful thing you’ve ever seen, and you put it on the refrigerator.
5. Failure to express love or speak love into their lives. They don’t just assume that you love them. You need to show it and you need to say it. Show it and say it. “I love you”; it’s not hard to say that. I had a guy tell me one time, “Those three words are hard to say.” No, they’re not—not if Jesus lives inside of you. Maybe, in a secular mindset, if you grew up in a house where love didn’t abound, it would be hard. But, if Jesus is in your heart, 1 John 4:8 says, “God is love.” Speak these things.
6. Force my goals onto them for their lives. You are obsessed with your kid going to this institution or that institution, or studying this or that, or performing in this sport, but maybe your kid just wants to graduate high school, and get a job at the mill, and tell people about Jesus. Listen, if your kid is obsessed with telling people about Jesus, you’ve done your job. If they are obsessed with worshipping and obeying Jesus, you’ve done your job. If they want to raise another godly generation, you’ve done your job. How dare you be disappointed because they don’t want to go to the college you picked for them, or because he can’t run the forty-yard-dash as fast as you want him to run it. What in the world are you doing? It is not your goals for them that will change their lives. You pursue your goals as a mom and a dad and they will catch onto that. “I want to be a godly mom,” “I want to be a godly dad,” “I want to speak life and I want these principles to be real by the way I parent.” Do that, and they’ll get it.

Listen, if we follow these principles our kids won’t grow up and want to be failures in this world. That’s a promise from Scripture. I’ve been in student ministry too many years. I’ve had about five-thousand conversations with kids when parents….. Listen, let’s not take the high ground here. The conversations I’ve had that are most hurtful are not the ones with kids who don’t have parents who are in church. The ones that hurt are the conversations I’ve had where a fifteen-year-old girl’s mother is pressuring her with body image and how she presents herself, physically. She has her counting her calories and is making her run x-number of miles a week. The ones who are destructive are the dads who are talking to their sons in such a way that no matter what that boy does, even though his dad’s a deacon or elder at church; no matter what that boy does on the soccer field he won’t live up to his dad’s expectations. Those are the kids that are hurting and I don’t know what to do about them.

Where a kid comes from a situation where mom’s a prostitute and she never met dad, we can do something about that. We can say, “You know what? You have a heavenly Father who is bigger than your situation.” But, when you have kids whose parents are touting Christianity as their faith, and they are making a mockery of these principles, that’s really difficult. So, as a church, we need to get this right. So, the flip side of that coin is to not ignore his or her goals. You guys know about this; sometimes it’s just humoring them. Your fourteen-year-old is going to tell you that they want to do x, y, and z, and by the time they are eighteen they will change that nine times. They will change majors five times their freshman year of college. If they tell you, “Here’s a goal I have for my life,” just get excited about it. “I want to be an astronaut and go to Mars.” “That would be awesome!! Take me with you!! Let’s watch *Gravity*.” That’ll break them of it! This is one of those principles that, as Christians, I think we mess up a lot of times. Help them pursue the goals they have.

1. The last one is to make fun of or belittle them. Negative comments, snide remarks, and belittling them will destroy them. That will discourage them and provoke them. A dad who does that to his daughter will provoke her to sexual promiscuity so fast that you will wonder how it happened. Where did that come from? It came from the fact that you belittled her.

The second command is a positive command. *“Bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”* How do we do that? There are a few principles.

1. Give them Jesus. Every day, every meal, every ballgame, every drop-off at the front door of the school—give them Jesus. Speak Jesus into their lives. Worship Jesus in front of them. Talk to Jesus in front of them. Lead them to the throne of Christ, His throne of grace, where you pray with them, and have family worship, and you center conversations around the sermon from church. You don’t rely on their small group leader to instruct them first and foremost in the way of the Lord. Speak Christ to them and teach them the Gospel at an early age. Then, go back and teach them the Gospel over, and over, and over, and over. Don’t think that because you taught them something when they were seven that it is going to still be sticking with them when they are seventeen. There are a few basic things we need to teach through with our kids, and every time we come back around and go through them, we are going to go deeper with them.

As one of your pastors, I’m going to encourage you and tell you, if you have small kids, you need to teach your kids about sex sooner rather than later, because we don’t live in Mayberry, and this ain’t the 1950’s. Little girls are having their periods at age ten, and younger sometimes; and little girls are getting pregnant at age eleven. So, if you think you can wait until he or she is a teenager, you’re fooling yourself. He’s already going to know and he’s going to be able to tell you something. We need to teach biblical sexuality and we need to instruct our kids. So, we give them Jesus, we give them the Gospel, and we teach them the most important and critical aspects of life. We don’t let the world do that.

Listen to this from Tony Merida, who is a pastor and a professor of preaching at Southeastern Seminary. “Give your children Christ-centered instruction. As you walk with them, drive them places, play with them, have meals with them, talk about Jesus. Talk about His incarnation. Talk about His death, His resurrection, His lordship. Danny Akin advises parents well, “Have fun and talk about Jesus a lot.” We are to lead our children to the truth that is in Jesus. Ultimately, so that they may submit to the Lord Jesus. He is their highest good. Speak to the hearts of your children as you teach them about Christ. Behavior flows from the heart (Proverbs 4:23; 23:26; Matt 12:34). Talk about values, beliefs, feelings, and motives. Talk about sin, repentance, grace, and the cross. Talk about becoming a new creation in Christ Jesus. Talk about the end for which they were created: to glorify God. You will need to have dialogue, not just monologue, to do this. Ask them questions! Know what they believe or doubt. Know their fears. Discern matters of the heart (Proverbs 20:5). Speak to their hearts affectionately with lots of encouragement. Celebrate successes and small victories. Warn about dangers of pride, laziness, and folly. And pray with them regularly.”[[146]](#footnote-146) Those are good words. We have to bring them up in discipline, and nurture, and admonition.

So, I want to close by giving you some principles of how to do that. So, we will close with these five practical thoughts on raising children that this text encompasses. I want to give you some thoughts on how we can practically leave out of here and go act on it.

1. We should value our kids. In the Greco-Roman culture, this was somewhat counter-cultural and in our society we see that children are under-valued as well. Examples would be the number of children who are neglected in a number of ways; whether it’s physical neglect, or emotional, psychological, or spiritual neglect. Also, the volume of kids who need foster care. Right now, as a church, we are really getting excited about ramping up in this area and trying to help eradicate the need for foster care in this county. There are, right now, over fifty kids in Cherokee County, and there are about the same numbers in Graham and Clay counties, who need foster care. And, on average, there are about one-fourth to one-third that number of certified foster families in each of those counties. So, they are sending kids to homes, or they are sending them to Greensboro, Charlotte, or Raleigh, and we don’t know how many of those families who are fostering are Christians, and who are going to bring those kids in and have influence in their lives for a week, a month, or a year, and it is going to be completely non-Gospel focused. So, we need to culturally look at the value we should place on those who are orphaned in our society and our culture.

Also, look at the abortion industry. Look at how dogmatically, with clenched fists and gritted teeth, they are digging their heels in and are saying, “We don’t care.” It has been very sobering to realize how evil, demonic, and diabolical the abortion industry is in this country. Maybe, before, you could say, “Some people just don’t get it,” but now, nobody has an excuse[[147]](#footnote-147). We are without excuse, as a nation, and this does not fall to political leaders to fix. Don’t get mad at your congressman because he can’t get this fixed. This is the moral degradation of a culture where the unraveling began in the home, because the principles of Ephesians 6 are not in place. We see that kids are not valued in our culture. They are seen as a nuisance and that’s why the abortion industry thrives. It was the same way in the Roman culture. Listen to what John Stott says, “It was ‘a radical change from the calloused cruelty which prevailed in the Roman empire, in which unwanted babies were abandoned, weak and deformed ones killed, and even healthy children were regarded by many as a partial nuisance, because they inhibited sexual promiscuity and complicated easy divorce.”[[148]](#footnote-148) Sound familiar? Yeah, welcome to America 2015. That’s right. So, we need to value kids.

1. The second thing that we take in raising kids, as a church and as families, is that we must not idolize them. The ways that we have to guard against this are:
   1. Don’t live vicariously through your kids. You didn’t get a college scholarship and it’s okay if your kid doesn’t. He may not have a real good batting average because he may not be good at baseball. It might not be the coach’s fault that your kid isn’t starting; it may be that you kid isn’t good enough to start—and it’s okay. It is your job to make sure that you kid is not devastated by that. How many dads have destroyed their kids by idolizing them? It’s not that they have devalued them; it’s that they’ve idolized them because the kid has become a sort of trophy of the mom or the dad. Little and I have so many conversations where mothers—and this is church people—where mothers are trying to get their daughter to dress more seductively, and they use the word “cute.” It’s not cute! It’s not. It’s’ not cute for her to find her value in that kind of acceptance. I’m not saying that we need to do this, but if your daughter can’t put on a dress that hits her mid-shin and go to school looking like an Amish girl every day and just be okay with that, then you’ve not taught value into her. She ought to be able to laugh that off. “But, I want her to be cute!” You want her to look like a hooker? That’s not cute. Prostitution is not cute. What are we idolizing here? We are applying pressure to our children so we can live vicariously through them and they don’t have the ability to withstand it. “Put that cookie back; you’ve already had one.” Let her eat the second cookie. She’s burning eight million calories a day because she’s fourteen. That’s her metabolism.
      1. Obsess over their achievements or physical appearance. I already did that one. I got ahead of myself.
      2. Bowing to their whims and demands. You guys see this, right? Some of you are guilty of this. We are all, at times, guilty of this. “I don’t know, what do you think?” We let the kid be the boss. Remember the cop, coach, counselor thing. We don’t idolize them to the point that we let them be the dad or the mom.
      3. My kid does not need another buddy. They have buddies at school. I’m not their buddy. I’m their friend. I want to be their friend. I’m talking about “buddy” in quotation marks; don’t try to be the cool mom or the cool dad just so their peer group thinks you are cool. “Your mom doesn’t seem her age.” Who cares what sixteen-year-olds think about you? Don’t be the parent who is obsessed with what your teenage child’s teenage friends think about you. Seriously! Seriously.
2. Set an example for your kids.
   * Things like work ethic, integrity, honesty, respect for the law, respect for others, tithing, giving, giving of yourself to the Church, giving of your resources to missions, set an example for them. Pray for missionaries. Talk about the things of the Lord.
   * Mom and dad are to love each other in such a way that it reflects the principles of Ephesians 5 and the way that wives and husbands are to treat each other. And listen, single parents, if you are here, live in a way that you show your kids what it means for a single mom or a single dad to trust the Lord for everything. Show them that. We have seen so many kids come through this ministry who were raised by faithful, single moms.
   * Give them a love for the Church. Let them see you express thankfulness to God and don’t reflect an attitude of covetousness. “Man, I wish we had a bigger house. Man, we need to get a new car. I wish…I wish…blah, blah, blah. We cultivate covetousness.
   * Minister to others together as a family. Look for people you can target, as a family, and go minister to these people as a family, together.
   * Be relational. If you are relational with them and you are relational with your spouse, it teaches them to be relational with other people.
3. Spend time with them. Dads, have man-time with your sons and dates with your daughters. Moms, same thing. Dads, it’s easy to do this when your little girls are little. It’s easy. Let me tell you; when they are younger than eleven or twelve years old, this is not that hard to do. It’s easy to take a seven-year-old little girl on a date. You can make-believe or do role play. Pretend you are this or that or whatever. But, if you will do that, and enjoy it, and make much out of it when they are that age, then when they are fifteen, sixteen, or seventeen, they will be cool going and having coffee with you. And that’s where you are going to need to have those conversations. It’s going to be critical that you are having those conversations. In fact, in the teenage years it’s a complete game-changer. You talk about boys, gossip, peer pressure, their future, and all those things. You need to be discussing those so spend time with them one-on-one and don’t be too busy for that.
4. Make disciples of our children. Our number one task and responsibility, in verse 4, is to make disciples out of our kids. We need to discipline them effectively. We are not going to talk about discipline tonight so much, because we’ve addressed this in the past and we can point you to some other resources. But, it comes down to two reasons to discipline your kids; willful disobedience and defiance. Dishonesty, lying, and things like that come under defiance. So discipline effectively:
   * Consistently
   * With a goal of restored fellowship, not to get revenge on that kid. So, be sober-minded in the way you discipline and know that your goal is to restore fellowship.
   * Swiftly and sharply, not lingeringly and aching. Not a long, lingering, dull ache. Maybe you had a dad who would ignore you for three days. That’s not healthy.
   * Spanking is the right answer, sometimes, but not always. Don’t get stuck in the rut of one means of discipline. Time-out is the answer, less frequently, but there are times where it should work. So, we need to know when and how to apply that.
   * Work to bring true repentance and then work to remove shame. Your goal in disciplining that child is to bring repentance into that child’s life. The way you go about that is that you have a relationship with them, because what brings repentance between you and the Lord is when you see in the Lord that you have disappointed Him, and you’ve sinned against God, and it hurts you because you hurt your heavenly Father. So, if we have that kind of a relationship, then we work to bring true repentance by walking through that disciplinary process with them, and then we work to remove shame. When they are repentant, we take shame and we are done away with it—east to the west. As far as those two things are from each other, that’s how far we take the shame away from them, as parents. We take away the shame that comes from the sin that they have committed.
   * Next, have a short list of rules and keep it simple. House rules should not have amendments, and articles, and sub-points. Keep it simple. Teaching freedom the correct way is as valuable as imposing rules and prohibitions is. Teach them freedom in Christ and freedom in the home. One of the ways you can do this is to tell stories at suppertime. Sit around at night and tell stories from your day. Laugh, tell jokes, be funny. If you are not funny, find a funny YouTube video and show it to the family and laugh together. Create a place of laughter. If you can’t laugh together, figure something out. Figure out what will make that kid laugh and then work to bring that into the home. Make home a place of joy, and abundant love, and renewal when wrongdoing occurs, and where discipline has a purpose and a goal that reflects the Gospel. And, kids, obey your mom and obey your dad. Let’s be a church that reflects godly families.

I’ll pray, and we will close with a song together.

Lord, I pray that you would help us tonight to understand the role that you have for us as moms and dads, and sons and daughters. I pray that, tonight, if there are parents here who want counsel or need help, or if they need instruction in this area, that we would be able to sit down and talk and help them understand what you expect out of us as mamas and daddies. This is a big, heavy subject. Whole conferences are given to this. Volumes and volumes of books are written on this subject. Men have built a lifetime of ministry behind this one topic and this one text, and to take an hour and to try to unpack it, I pray that you would supernaturally give us principles and convictions. God, we confess to you, all of us. I, as a father, confess failures to you. As fathers in this church, and daddies, we confess shortcomings to you. We confess to you that we lose our temper and we lose our cool. Maybe we are shortsighted. Maybe we are not slow to speak. Maybe we are not slow to wrath. So, forgive us, convict us, and change us. I pray that mamas would see in their kids the value that you give them and that they would not be caught up in idolizing their sons and daughters. A mother’s love is so strong and so powerful. I pray that they would love their kids but that they would also support the discipline that your Scripture and your Word teach. So, help us, as a church, to respond to this text. Help us, as families, to respond to this text. And, help us to be families that are strong, so that when families that aren’t strong come into this church, we can help them, we can grow them, we can steer them, and we can give them a place of safety. We love you. In Jesus’ name.

Anybody in this church can tell you how to have a relationship with Jesus. We would love to do that. If you need help, as a parent, as a mom, or a dad, we would love to provide counsel or care in any way we can, as a church. It’s a convicting and heavy message, and ultimately here is what it boils down to; as parents, we can’t make our kids follow Jesus. Because, only God can draw them to himself, convict them of sin, and move in their hearts. You can’t do that. So, at the end of it all, the pressure is not on you to convert your child, or to change the path of your adult son or daughter. But, in principle, we have to do these things so that we can give an account for how we’ve done what God has called us to do, as moms and dads. Then, it’s not a failure on my part if that child walks away from God. One of the hardest prayers I pray is, “God, if one of my five children wanders from this path, you do whatever you have to do to deal with that, and we will receive it. We will work through it and get through it.” Ultimately, it’s God’s deal.

Also, ultimately, some moms and dads may need to go home and apologize to their kids tonight. We need to examine ourselves. Y’all, this has been two heavy weeks for me. That message last week—y’all might have just shown up and listened—but that was hard. Because, I think that a lot of times we think that because mom cooks supper she is a submissive wife. That is not what submission in marriage looks like. And just because you spank your kid doesn’t mean that you’re a good parent. Or if you don’t spank your kid that doesn’t mean that you’re a good parent. We have to dig deeply into the Scripture, and if you are eighteen, or twenty, or twenty-four, or thirty, you need to examine how well you are doing at honoring your parents. Let’s respond to God’s Word tonight and let’s do our best; I’d say that all of us can walk away from this and let the Holy Spirit make adjustments in our lives. So, let’s do that and know that, ultimately, the lives of our kids, and our husbands, and wives, are in the Lord’s hands, and we want to do everything that we can to encourage what God would have us to encourage.

I want to read, in closing, not as a benediction, but to close, and then I’ll pray. I’m going to read this and then I’ll pray. Psalm 127,

*“Unless the Lord builds the house,*

*those who build it labor in vain.”*

You can follow the best principles in the world, but if God is not driving that and building that home, we are doing it in vain.

*“Unless the Lord watches over the city,*

*the watchman stays awake in vain.”*

You can stand over your teenage daughter—you guys know—you can vigilantly stand watch and stand guard, but if God is not moving in that heart and working in that heart, rebellion will ensue. We can’t watch over them the way we would like to, so we do our part and we entrust them to the Lord.

*“It is in vain that you rise up early*

*and go late to rest,*

*eating the bread of anxious toil;*

*for he gives to his beloved sleep.”*

Are you freaking out because you don’t know how you are going to pay rent? Are you freaking out because you don’t know how you are going to buy clothes for your kids for school? God’s got it under control.

*“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, (from Yahweh)*

*the fruit of the womb a reward.*

*4 Like arrows in the hand of a warrior*

*are the children of one's youth.*

*5 Blessed is the man*

*who fills his quiver with them!*

*He shall not be put to shame*

*when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.”*

I heard one preacher say, “Arrows are no good unless you let them go and you release them.” We should be raising sons and daughters with the mind and the goal of releasing them into this world, and doing it with God’s blessing and favor. So, let’s do our part this week to respond to God’s Word and to be obedient. It was in chapter 4, where we saw that we are to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, and forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us. That should be reflected in our homes, for sure.

So, tonight, I’m just going to pray, in closing, over our families and our marriages and ask God to bless our church in that way. If you need to talk to a pastor, please, afterward grab one of us.

Lord, we thank you that you have—of all the families of the Earth—you have shown us what a family is to be, in your fatherly love toward us and in your affirmation and approval of your Son, when you said, *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”* May we speak that affirmation into our kids’ lives. Lord, while your Son was perfect in every way, ours are not, because they have imperfect fathers and mothers. So, help us to discipline and lead with love and reconciliation as our goals; to shape them and to mold them and to grow and build arrows that will be released when the day comes, into this world to make a difference and make an impact. God, I pray for the young people in this church. Right now, God, every kid in this church is going to be heading off to school this week. I pray that you would use the young people of Red Oak Church to impact the schools in Graham, and Cherokee, and Clay counties. I pray that we would see other families impacted because we are raising up young men and women who will make a difference for the Gospel. I pray that you would bless our teenagers and our young people as they go to small groups now, and I pray that you would bless our families, and our marriages, and our homes, for your glory. In Jesus’ name. And all God’s people said, Amen!!

August 30, 2015

Ephesians 6 – Pt. 2

Rob Conti

I don’t know about you, but the last couple of weeks have been awesome in church, but it’s been hard. I know that from just reading the text, studying it, getting to teach some of it myself, and then sitting under the exposition of the Word of God, that it’s been hard for me. It’s been hard not to examine myself and just see glaring areas where I fall short; and as a man, as a husband, and as a father, to see that I don’t measure up. I fall so short, and it would be easy to be beat up by that and to dwell too long on our own shortcomings. So, tonight, we are going to look at another passage that should be encouraging and challenging, but pointed, concerning where we live our lives on a daily basis. Again, we will have Christ as the ultimate example, which is encouraging, but again, we are going to fall short. Spoiler alert—you’re not Jesus! We fall short of the high calling and the high standard, but this is where we have to just be biblical in the way that we think. We have to be Christian in the way that we think. Because, here’s what God is so gracious to do; He is so gracious to, through His Word, and by His Spirit, shine His light on the areas of our lives where we do fall short, where we are sinful, where we are weak, where we are not pursuing the Lord like we should, and where we are being rude, or harsh, or selfish, or lazy. God is so gracious to shine His light in those areas to expose to us our areas of weakness. But, this is where we have to be Christian and biblical, because God, in His grace, doesn’t want us to keep our eyes there, right? God, in His grace, doesn’t have the point of just leaving us there to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. God, in His grace, always redirects us to set our minds on Him, to see that we fall short and be reminded, daily, that we are in just as desperate need of the grace and the mercy of God as we were the day that He first saved us. I’m just as desperate to have the righteousness of Christ imputed to me as I was when He saved me. That should free me, then, to receive the rebuke and to repent, and know that I have to redouble my efforts to move forward, but to then it should humble me to receive His grace and His mercy afresh and anew. That, then, also frees me to bend it toward everybody else in my life, when I see my friends and my family fall short. I can’t put the spotlight on them and then leave it there for them to be full of shame and guilt, but I am to pour out the same grace that I have received into their lives. That’s what God does; He is so gracious. So, I hope you’ve been encouraged and I hope that the Lord has brought you through these cycles of conviction, and repentance, and absolute joy in receiving His grace and mercy.

So, that’s where this thing started, right? The whole theme of Ephesians is that we have been reconciled in Christ. You and I, together and individually, have been reconciled in Christ and together have been united in Christ. That’s what we have been, week-in-and-week-out, looking at; this amazing reconciliation and this amazing salvation that we have in Jesus. We are unified together in it. This is the “mystery.” There is not Gentile and Jew, but we are all one, in Christ. There is not slave and free; we are one in Christ.

So, look back at Ephesians 1. If you will indulge me, I’d like to read Ephesians 1:3-14, to be reminded of the grace, and to be reminded that this is how Jesus sees me. Do you fall short as a husband? Yes, so do I. As a wife? Yeah. As a mom, as a dad, as a worker, as a boss? Yes, we are going to see, tonight, that we fall short. But, let’s be reminded, from the outset, that this is how Jesus sees us. This is how God, our Father, sees us. This is our identity.

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.*

*11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.”*

Man, that’s awesome! That’s so good. That’s what’s true about us; that God gets to define us. He has the authority to define who you are and to say what’s true about you, and He says that you are holy and beloved. In love, He predestined you. He adopted you as a son or a daughter. He’s forgiven you, He has redeemed you, and He has reconciled you to himself. You stand in the perfect righteousness of Jesus. You’ve been saved by grace. Right?

Chapter 2. We are saved by grace, through faith. That is not your own doing; that’s not work. God has saved you. We were enemies and we were dead in our trespasses and sins, and following the course of this world, and God, in His grace and His mercy reconciled us. Because of His great love toward us we stand in salvation. If we could just stop and believe it—know it and believe it! God loves you. God loves you. Almighty God, who would have every right to consume us in His wrath, because of His great love demonstrated through the life, and the death, and the resurrection of Jesus, loves you. You’re His son and you are His daughter. He’s not done with you. Do you fall short? Yes. Husband, wife, father, mother, man, woman? In your singleness do you fall short? As a friend? As a minister? Yeah, but He’s not done with you. Because all of these things are true He has sealed us with His Holy Spirit. He’s promised us this inheritance that we have in Christ, and He’s made promises like this: “I’ve begun this work in you and I’ll complete it.[[149]](#footnote-149)” God’s purpose, before the foundation of the world, in saving you, was to conform you to the image of His Son, and that’s what He’s doing. So, yes, God’s Word is going to shine light on our areas of weakness. There should be guilt, but that guilt should remind us of the price that’s already been paid by the blood of Jesus, and that guilt is not something that hangs over our head like an ax, but it is the instrument that lifts our chin, to see the glory and the goodness of Jesus.

It’s good. The Gospel is good. He goes on in this letter, again, telling us that we are reconciled in Christ and we are united together in Christ. It doesn’t matter what race, or background, or social class—we’ve been united and put in one body, in Jesus.

I want to look real quick at chapter 4 and this all will come together. Ephesians 4:17 is where we saw in this book, and as we are coming to the conclusion of this book, where our position needs to meet our practice, right? What is true about us, in Christ, needs to flesh itself out.

*“Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. 18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. 19 They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. 20 But that is not the way you learned Christ!— 21 assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, 23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, 24 and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”*

This is true about you, and it is grace, and you didn’t earn it, and you didn’t deserve it, but it’s been poured out on you. But, because it’s been poured out on you, God’s plan and desire, then, is that you would work it out. He created you, in Christ Jesus, for good works. So, put off the old man and be the new. Don’t let your life be characterized by the sinful desires of your flesh. Don’t let your thinking be dominated by the course of this world. That’s not who you are. But be the new man, in holiness and righteousness. May your life be characterized by the life of Jesus; by the person and the work of Jesus.

So, in chapter 5, Paul opens and says, in verse 1,

*“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. 2 And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

He’s saying, like a little boy would imitate his dad, you imitate God; and love one another like Christ has loved you. Show grace to one another like God has shown grace to you. Imitate your Dad. He knows us. God, who is writing this letter to us, knows us. Within our own ability, this is impossible. It’s impossible. So, God is gracious again. Verse 18.

*“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit…”*

God tells us how to do it. He says, “You can’t do this. Don’t be controlled by alcohol, but be controlled by the Spirit of the living God. That’s how you imitate your Father. That’s how you live like Jesus. That’s how you love like Jesus. That’s the way that you offer forgiveness the way that God has forgiven you.” You have to be filled by the Spirit and the natural outcome of that will be Ephesians 5:21.

*“…submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*

That’s where we’ve been the last few weeks. As we seek to imitate our Father, and the way that He has loved us through Jesus, we need to be submissive to the Holy Spirit, so our minds, and our words, and our deeds are controlled by the Spirit of God; and when that happens we will submit and we will prefer one another out of reverence and fear for Christ. That phrase “fear of Christ,” which we will see again in our text, rewords the same truth from the Old Testament—that the beginning of wisdom, and the beginning of understanding, is in the fear of the Lord, in the fear of Yahweh[[150]](#footnote-150). Paul is saying that here is all of this awesome doctrinal and positional truth and it needs to flesh itself out in your relationships. That will happen as you fear Christ. If we have a proper view of Jesus, and a proper respect and awe of who He is and what He’s done, and a fear of His holiness and His justice, that should result in wisdom, right? Not wisdom like knowing a lot and having the ability to philosophize. That’s not biblical wisdom; that’s the Greek idea of wisdom. The Hebrew idea of wisdom was different. For the Hebrew, wisdom was knowing truth and living it. You’ve read this in the Proverbs. Who is the greatest fool?—The one who knows to do right and doesn’t do it. That’s the greatest fool. The one who doesn’t know anything and lives like a moron; well, he’s just simple, but the fool is the one who knows the truth and doesn’t do it. So, what should take this from being a head-knowledge to being the way that we actually live, is a proper fear of God and seeing Jesus for who He is. That should be what all of this hinges on; to turn from knowledge to living it out in how I treat my wife, treat my kids, shepherd a church, love my friends, and minister to the lost. The right view of Jesus becomes the foundation for everything else Paul is about to say, right?

*“…submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*

We looked at what that should look like in the marriage relationship, between wife and husband, and husband and wife; and also children to parents, and parents to children. So, now, we find ourselves in Ephesians 6:5. This is still under the same heading; imitate your Father, submit to the Spirit, and submit to one another out of fear of Christ. That same heading that has dominated this chapter is flowing into Ephesians 6:5, where Paul says this,

*“Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free. 9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.”*

So, here’s a disclosure. My initial intention was to spend just a few minutes here and say that we are not going to dive into the ancient practice of slavery here, but that the best way that this passage relates to us is regarding bosses and employees, so here are some practical things that this passage says about how you should work and how you should lead. That’s appropriate, but what I was going to do that would have been inappropriate, I think, is that I was going to jump over the context to get there. And, I think we would all be on the same page of understanding the difference between ancient slavery and what we experienced in this country for a long time, and in what we are today. But, this is a thought that changed my mind: to handle Scripture like that; to come to a passage like this and just jump into modern application without dealing with the context, is the same message that a false teacher has to use. Right? I thought about, what if somebody approached me and said, “Well, you updated your interpretation of servants and masters to fit today’s context. So, why don’t you do that with how you talked about husbands and wives? Why don’t you do that with the way that Paul talks about why women can’t be pastors? Why don’t you update your interpretation for today?” And, I said, “That’s a great point, inner-Rob. I’m glad this isn’t somebody else asking me, right now.” So, is that a legitimate question? Yeah. “Why haven’t you updated your view of gender and sexuality?” Because, that’s happening in spades in our culture, right? There is good reason why we haven’t, and we have defended that biblically. Not socially, not our opinions, not our thoughts—but the role of husband and wife is rooted by the created order that God established. That’s why we believe the husband is to lead like Christ and the wife is to submit like the Church. This is rooted in creation and redemption that goes beyond the Fall. The reason why Paul says that women can’t be pastors is tied to creation. It’s God’s created order. It was that way from the beginning. God established those roles and we don’t have the authority to change that. We have clear, direct commands dealing with those issues; dealing with homosexuality, dealing with gender. It’s clear in Scripture. That’s not the same thing that we have going on here. Slavery was real. It was real.

The difficult part of this passage is the question we might have if we just read it or listened to it. Paul is telling slaves, in their context of slavery, to obey masters. I don’t think we would have a person in this room who would for a second say that slavery is okay. It’s evil. We can’t talk about how back then slavery was more like indentured servanthood, where people would enter into contracts. You couldn’t get on Monster.com and fill out applications to send out everywhere to never hear back anyway, so you wonder why you are even doing that. That wasn’t an option. You couldn’t go down to Lowe’s and show off your knowledge of drill bits and impress the manager and hope to get a job. It was different back then. Absolutely, it was different. It was not the same kind of slavery that we saw in the western world and its atrocities, but it wasn’t good. It wasn’t good. These people that Paul was writing to didn’t have rights as if they were normal human beings. A master could kill a slave for whatever reason; the slave was his property. That’s how these people were viewed. It wasn’t good. We can talk about different degrees of evilness in slavery, throughout the history of the world, but the bottom line it is all bad. It is all evil. It is the result of being in a fallen, sinful world, where people don’t love, and don’t cherish, and don’t show grace, and don’t prefer other people. Slavery is the result of sin.

So, the natural question is, then, why doesn’t Paul say, “Release your slaves, masters!”? But, maybe I’m alone, but I was going to do the easy thing as just kind of step over those questions, and just say, “Work hard and be nice to your employees, and now verse 10.” But, that’s not fair to the text and that’s not fair to the why of why Paul wrote this section. Are we okay? I’m not questioning God’s goodness. I know He is good, so what’s going on here?

Remember the story in Philemon about Onesimus? The only reason the book of Philemon was written and the only reason it is in the Bible is because this guy, Onesimus, who is a slave, runs away, and he ends up with Paul. Paul leads him to faith in Jesus and Paul writes to Onesimus’ master, Philemon, and says, “Hey, listen, man. I want to keep this guy here with me because God has radically changed his life and he is ministering with me. He is profitable for the Gospel in ministry. He is serving here and it is awesome having him. But, I don’t want to offend you, so I’m going to send him back. But know this; you aren’t getting a slave back, you’re getting a brother back. If he owes you anything, you take it off of my account, and I’ll pay for it. Oh, and by the way, you wouldn’t be a Christian if it wasn’t for me.” Remember that part? Paul just sort of slides it in there at the end. He’s like, “I’ll pay you back. Oh, by the way, I told you about Jesus. Don’t forget that.” Why didn’t Paul just say, “Hey, man, slavery is jacked up! What are you doing?!” Philemon was a leader in the Church. What is going on? This is hard, isn’t it? It’s hard. It’s not right and it’s not good. So, why weren’t they just told to release their slaves?

Let’s do this briefly. In the Old Testament slavery is talked about and dealt with. Let’s be clear that God didn’t ordain slavery. It was not part of creation or God’s ordering. It was because of the Fall and because of sin, but it exists. Right? At the time of Paul’s lifetime, people estimate that there were somewhere around six million slaves. In the Greco-Roman world, one of out of every three people would have been a slave. I’m getting this from a guy named Borgman. One in three people was a slave. This was a social institution. That’s huge. Every country, every government, everyone’s financial stability was built on slavery. So, the Bible talks about it and deals with it, but we need to be careful how we think about it and how we talk about it. The Old Testament recognized and regulated slavery in Israel. It recognized it and regulated it. The buying of slaves, the selling of slaves, the freeing of slaves, and how you treated slaves was regulated, and there was a difference between Hebrew servants, bondservants, and the idea of going into contract and selling yourself to somebody as a slave, to work, and in what we would call a POW, or a prisoner of war, who would enter into servitude. There were laws for release of slaves, such as in the year of Jubilee, when slaves would be set free and debts were forgiven. There were laws for runaway slaves; they were not to be returned. At the Exodus, God prohibited the stealing of human beings to go into slavery. There was either voluntary entering into slavery as a means to be able to take care of your family, to provide, and to have work, food, shelter, and basic needs to live, and then there were prisoners of war. There were people who were conquered who entered into slavery.

I was watching Bill Maher[[151]](#footnote-151) years ago, when he had a show where he would bring people together and just be really inappropriate and mean, especially about Christianity. I would watch it if was feeling especially happy, and then I would be mad. I think that was the purpose of watching that show. Bill Maher, is a raging, liberal, hates-Jesus, comedian; I think that’s what his Wikipedia pages says. So, I remember that, years ago, he had this panel on his show. Jerry Falwell[[152]](#footnote-152) used to go on the show every once and a while, when I was at Liberty, and he would be like the voice for Christianity. Of course, it would be six against one, but he was a giant of a man, so he could hold his own. So, they were talking about slavery and there was this one guy who, I think, was a really liberal priest, and he was bashing Paul, by saying that all the Bible does is try to sanitize slavery. And, this is what we need to be careful not to do; this is why it is worth wrestling with texts like this, to know what we believe and why we believe it—because what this priest was doing was saying that the Bible was antiquated, that it was not good enough for today. It’s like Paul, and the Old Testament, said that slavery is bad but you should just treat each other like this, even if you are master and slave. This guy’s was saying, “That’s not good enough. That won’t fly anymore. Slavery is evil.” And, to the world, it sounds like this guy is right, so what follows from that? Well, it how we view homosexuality, and how we view gender, and how we view roles within the Church. What will be next to go? It is important that we realize that we need to view the Bible correctly here, and what the Bible’s intention is, and the context that these things are written in.

So, in the New Testament, it assumes slavery and regulates it as a domestic institution, but with Christian distinctions. The New Testament actually affirms equality between slave and master in Christ. Galatians 3:17-28,

“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

There were no other politicians, or philosophers, or religious leaders saying anything like this. This was out of the box. This was revolutionary, that Paul would say that, in Jesus, there is no distinction between master and servant. We are one in Christ and there is equality in personhood between male and female and between different races. In Christ, we are equal. We are equally in need of salvation and we are equally undeserving of His grace. We have received it and we are on equal ground. We talked about how that doesn’t erase the distinction of roles. That’s revolutionary.

So, we are still at the same question, right? I haven’t eased off any tension yet. We need to think correctly about the context. If God hates slavery, why didn’t He eradicate it when He started His nation? Why didn’t He eradicate slavery? I think this will help us to think about it correctly. Okay? Why didn’t God already eradicate wars? Why didn’t He eradicate murder of any kind? Why hasn’t He eradicated the persecution of Christians? In fact, if we are just going to talk about Paul, how come Paul doesn’t write a letter saying, “Hey, quit persecuting Christians! That’s evil!”? Why didn’t Paul do that? Why hasn’t God erased all the sin in the world? If I could get ahead of myself, I’d say this; He is. He is. God is eradicating slavery, and murder, and war, and all injustice. He’s going to eradicate the practice of abortion. He’s going to do away with all sin and evil, and He is doing it right now, through the Gospel; through rescuing individuals through Jesus. Is feeding Christians to lions evil? Yes, it’s evil. Then, why in the world would Peter say to show respect and honor to the king? The emperor? He doesn’t seem like an honorable dude, does he? He is writing to Christians. We have to think correctly about the context. God did not give us the Bible to one by one fix social issues that sin has grown up and taken control of. Are you tracking with me? God has given us the Bible to show us how to be free, ultimately, from the slavery of sin. Hear me, because that’s the bigger issue. That’s how God is going to eradicate all the evils of the world. It’s through the Gospel.

So, yes, Paul could have stood up and called for the six million slaves to be released, but no one would have listened. Or, Paul could have done what he was supposed to do. From his platform, he preached to masters and slaves, that this is how you treat one another in Christ. Because, as the world sees Jesus transforming your life through the Gospel, that will change the world. In fact, in a large part, in the history of the Church we see that where the Church went it relieved so many evils as it crashed into societies and cultures, where women were oppressed or slaves were held. Unfortunately, not all of them. In our own history, there have been men who called on the name of Jesus who did horrible things to other human beings. I don’t know how they justified it and I won’t try to justify it for them. That’s not my job. But, as far as Scripture, the Bible, there are lots of things that God says that He hates, but He hasn’t eradicated them yet. Even on a smaller scale, does God want anybody, ever, to be divorced? No, but then does He give us regulations on how to handle divorce and how to treat people who are divorced? Yes, He does. He’s gracious. He’s gracious. I think that’s what He is doing in the church at Ephesus and in this letter; He is helping us to think correctly. Could God have called for all the slaves to be released? Yeah. But, there is a deeper slavery. Hear me, slavery is evil in all of its forms, but there is a deeper slavery. In fact, for God to help us understand what a horrible, desperate place we are in, as sinners, He uses slavery as an example. We are slaves to sin. God does not like slavery. He died to eradicate it. And, He will.

So, for us today, no one in our church is either a master or a slave. So, what are the principles that we can look at in this passage, and apply to our lives? Now we can do that. Truly, for us, the closest picture is employees and employers, so we should glean from these principles.

*“Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, 6 not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,…”*

So, Paul is talking to slaves and he says, “Obey your earthly masters.” Obey. So, the first thing Paul points out, if we are going to take these principles for us, is that those of us who have supervisors, bosses, or superiors, are told to obey. Listen to them and follow their instructions. You think that is so elementary, and yet it is so hard to do, right? Again, back up; he is saying this in the context of trying to imitate our Father. We should be filled by the Spirit so that we can submit to one another out of fear of Christ. That’s how we do this. This is how we are a good employee; by submitting ourselves, primarily, to the Holy Spirit—and then obey. Obey your master with fear and trembling, as to Christ. So it comes back to the fact that my fear and trembling is not to be of my boss, but it is ultimately to honor Jesus and to respect Jesus. Paul says, “With a sincere heart.” The word “sincere” or “frankness” has the idea of honesty; honest attitudes, and words, and actions. I believe it is where we get the phrase “An honest day’s work.” From this passage, the Bible is calling us to work hard and honestly. Paul then says you are not to be doing that just when your boss is looking. It’s not just to manipulate your boss, and to be a kiss-up, when all the other employees know that you are cutting corners, but when the boss comes around you are buddy-buddy. You wear his favorite team’s apparel and you talk about the game. If you try to manipulate him, that’s not hard work, because the reality is that when the boss goes back around the corner you go back to slacking off. Paul is saying that you work for the Lord. The real boss sees your full day’s labor. He knows your actions, and attitudes, and why you are doing what you are doing. Paul is saying, don’t just do it to please your immediate supervisor; you are doing this unto the Lord. So, put in an honest day’s work, with sincerity.

That’s convicting; that’s so convicting. For those of us with bosses, Paul says this three times to us. Paul says it three times; as to Jesus, as to Jesus, as to Jesus. How easy is it, when pressure gets put on your shortcomings, in any area of life; what is the easiest thing to do? Point the finger right back at them. Oh, I can find some faults in some jokers. Right? You want to point out somewhere where I am falling short? Well, what about this? Even if I don’t say it to your face, I’m thinking it; and I’m going to say it to somebody else’s face when your face isn’t here anymore. Right? How easy is that? But Paul says, “As to the Lord.” It removes any justification to complain and any justification or rationale to backbite or to gossip. There’s just no place for it. It’s so easy, and in the moment you feel so justified, but all it is, is sin and an offense, not just against your boss but an offense against the holy character of God. He says, don’t do this. Respect Jesus enough not to do that. Don’t complain, don’t slack off, and don’t backbite or gossip.

I was talking to Brody and he sent me his notes from what he studied on this passage, and he has simplified it so well. He said, “Ultimately, to employees, what this is saying is ‘Work by the power of Christ; work by Christ’s example (humility, diligence, etc.); and work for the glory of Christ.’” Right? If we could boil it down, we work by the power of Christ, by the example of Christ, and for the glory of Christ. The real boss sees and hears everything. The world is watching our testimony.

Just in addition, yes, the world is watching. Some of you have the privilege—and hear me—some of y’all have the *privilege* of working in a secular environment. You have the privilege of doing that. The world is watching. You represent Jesus; represent Him well. Represent Jesus well. Other believers are watching, so we have the opportunity for accountability and discipleship, right? Those of us who work at the camp[[153]](#footnote-153) that so graciously lets us use this building, and electricity, and water—I’m not just talking about those above you, but all of us. Set an example for one another; that’s accountability and discipleship. This is how we should respond to authority. In my role at camp, I’m in a great mid-level management position, so I can practice this and, hopefully, set an example. What a privilege.

Colossians 3:17,

*“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

Bosses…

Ephesians 6:9,

*“Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.”*

You’re not the real boss—Jesus is—and He is your example of how to lead with authority. Show grace, humility, and meekness. “Meekness” is such a great word; I love the word “meekness.” I think, in part, I feel like I have to defend the word “meekness,” because we use it all wrong. We say, “Oh, he has such a meek spirit.” Did your skin crawl when I said that? Mine did. Somebody said this about somebody close to me one time and I wanted to punch the guy for him. He said, “Ahh, he’s just a meek kid,” and I thought, “I know what you’re saying and that’s not nice.” That’s not meek. Jesus is the example of meek. Literally, it means power under control. Right? It’s like Jesus, who, when they came to arrest Him, could have destroyed every one of the guards and soldiers, but in His meekness He told Peter to put his sword away, and He healed the man’s ear, and let them take Him away. At that moment—what meekness! What power under control by the grace of God! It’s a pretty good example to follow in how to handle authority and power. Acting in meekness and grace, knowing that I could crush somebody’s security, that I could crush their spirit, that I could crush their identity right now by a few sharp words leveled at them from my position of elevation; but, rather, not doing so but rather encouraging, and training up, and teaching, and showing grace.

Paul tells masters to show respect. He says to not threaten but to show respect. He also says for bosses to have integrity and honesty. Again, looking at Brody’s notes, “Lead by the power of Christ; lead by the example of Christ; lead for the glory of Christ.” Man, this idea of mutual submission within the distinct roles that we have in all of our relationships; wives to husbands, husbands to wives, children to parents, parents to children, employees to employers, back and forth; is all governed and controlled by the Holy Spirit. What a picture of the Gospel in the midst of a broken world. God’s going to do away with slavery, but the fact that He told masters and servants to treat each other like this should have been a megaphone for the culture that they were in. Jesus changes lives. The Gospel is for real. Jesus rose again and He transforms everything about you. A master who would no longer beat and threaten and take advantage of, but would love and serve those under his care. The Gospel transforms every relationship we have.

We will preach verse 10 next week, and it’s going to be awesome, but can I give you a preview? I’ll give you a preview—a sneak peek. “Finally”—in conclusion. Ephesians has been awesome: our identity in Christ, our unity in the body, our ability to live out of the new man and not the old; by the power of the Holy Spirit that would transform all of our relationships and have a clear testimony to the world.

I don’t know if y’all remember, but when we introduced the book we saw that there was not a clear occasion for the letter. A lot of times, if you have a study Bible or you read commentaries, they are going to tell you the occasion for the letter. There’s not a clear one for Ephesians. In the rest of this chapter, whether we finish it in one week or two weeks, it doesn’t matter; we are just going to keep having church until Jesus comes back. The occasion is that we are in a war. We are in a war, right? We saw all the things that we just celebrated at the beginning of this sermon and all the things we have in Christ, so what’s Satan going to attack? What relationships is Satan going to drive at the hardest? Where is he going to try to get a foothold? His strategic attacks and his tactical, diabolical attacks against Christians—where are they going to hit? Your identity, our unity, our willful submission to the Holy Spirit, how we treat one another as husbands and wives, and parents and children, employers and employees. Where is Satan going to attack? We need to remember that we are in a war. So, Paul has painted this awesome picture of what we have in the Gospel so that he can remind us that we are in a war. So, this week, remember—Christianity—this is wartime living.

We come together to be encouraged. Yesterday’s Men’s Cookout/Shootout was awesome. Women, we are going to do a ladies’ night soon. We want to pretty much do the same thing; shoot guns and provide good food. We figure that you are the type of women who would marry these type of men, so why wouldn’t we? It was good fellowship and when we come together it’s so encouraging. Right now, we are about to sing to Jesus again. We fellowship with the saints, to worship God, and to sit together under His Word. Don’t go out and forget that this is wartime living. It’s wartime living. So, be careful and be strategic with how you live your life this week. Glorify God in everything that you do and in all your relationships; at work, at home, how you view and take advantage of recreation, and in all of it, it’s wartime. We have an enemy, but greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world[[154]](#footnote-154). If we will live our lives in submission to the Spirit then we will see God do awesome things.

Pray with me.

Father God we love you. We thank you for this time that we could look into your Word and be humbled by your truth. We are encouraged by it and we look forward to the day when slavery will be no more, murder will be no more, and all the evils will be forgotten. God, I pray that we would be faithful with the platform that you have given us and that we would speak out against evils and injustices; that we would speak out against abortion as long as we have a voice to do so. But, God, we trust that you will right all these wrongs and that you will use us, ultimately, to help rescue people out of slavery to sin, and death, and Hell; to see them set free by the Gospel. I pray that you would guard us this week as a church and that you would protect our holiness and our pursuit of you. God, I pray that we would be vigilant and not give the enemy a foothold into our lives and that we would not give our flesh opportunity, but that we would submit to you and see you do awesome things for your glory. I pray this in Christ’s name.

September 6, 2015

Ephesians 6 – Pt. 3

Rob Conti

Because of who Christ is and what he’s already done, we have everything that we need for life and godliness. Christ has provided everything.

So, open your Bibles to Ephesians 6, and we are going to pick up where we left off last week in verse 10. If you haven’t been with us, we’ve been walking through the book of Ephesians, chapter by chapter. It’s been an amazing journey that starts in chapter 1, with God telling us who we are in Christ. It’s all about our position in Christ; because of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and because He identified with you and me and what it means to be human, and He identified with us in our sin, and our shame, and our guilt; although He, himself, was tempted and never sinned, He could identify with us all the way to the point of dying on the cross for our sin. Because of His resurrection, we get to identify with Him and we have been placed in Christ, to the praise and the glory of God. We are in Christ, so we are forgiven, we are redeemed, and we are adopted as sons and daughters, having been predestined according to God’s purpose and His love for us. He has brought us into this family and united us together, and the repercussions are that we have gone from being spiritually dead and enemies of God to being the objects of His divine love, having been made alive; not just resuscitated and made alive again but we have been made new creations in Christ. Not only have we been made alive but we’ve been seated with Christ, where He is right now, in the heavenly places. Ephesians 2 says that we have been made alive in Christ and we have been seated with Him, so that everything that’s true about us, in Christ, is secure. We are secure in our relationship with Christ and with the Father. We are in Him and we are where He is. I don’t mean to go all like time-travel on you, but we are there. We don’t need to flip on the flux capacitor—we are there. What is really true about us is that we are already in Christ, and He is in Heaven, exalted at the right hand of the Father; and that’s where we belong. All the privileges of the relationship that Jesus has with His Father are ours, in Christ.

Because of that, Ephesians tells us that we should walk differently. We should no longer walk like people who follow the course and the thinking of this world. We should no longer act like people who are in bondage and in servitude to Satan, but we should walk like men, and women, and boys, and girls, who have been freed by the Gospel. We should walk worthy of the Gospel and we should live lives that reflect the power, and the freedom, and the grace of the Gospel, so that we can become imitators of God. Like little children who want to imitate their parents, we should imitate God and be filled with His Spirit, and in being filled with the Spirit it will free us to submit to one another in relationships and to serve one another in relationships. All of our relationships should be controlled and marked by the grace of the Gospel that we’ve received, whether that’s in marriage, or in work, or in parenting, or in being a child, or in singleness; all of our relationships should look like the Gospel.

So, we come to this passage and he says, in chapter 6 and verse 10,

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”*

It says, “Finally.” With all that in mind; all that we’ve learned and all that’s true about us, in Christ, positionally and practically, daily, how it should flesh itself out in the most mundane of circumstances, how we should live our lives—he says, “Finally.” It’s as if Paul has been telling us all of this so that he could get to this moment to say, “Finally, be strong in the Lord.” Why? Because we’re in a battle. Because we are in this war. Because everything is not like it seems.

I like conspiracy theories, somewhat. Actually, I like the movie *Conspiracy Theory*, with Mel Gibson. It’s an underrated movie. Think about the movie *National Treasure*. Was it the Illuminati behind the scenes in that movie, or the Freemasons? There is the universal struggle of the Illuminati, and the Freemasons, and the other ones, like Skulls and Bones, right? Have you ever heard of those guys? Apparently, they’ve been controlling the universe for a long time. Do you know about these people and these theories? The Illuminati, Skulls and Bones, Freemasons, NOW and the Justice League, are all vying and pulling the strings of world powers like it’s a game of *Risk*. It’s silly to think about, right? I mean, you can get sucked into it if you start reading the wrong webpages. The next thing you know you are thinking, “The Illuminati are watching me, right now. My mom might be Illuminati.” You can get sucked into that mess, right? But, you can kind of step back and think, “I can kind of get it.” As silly as it is, and I’m sure there are those groups of people who get together and talk about the world and then play Bingo; I don’t know. But, there really are forces pulling the strings of world powers. Right? We talked about this is Ephesians 2. Look back at it.

Ephesians 2:1-2.

*“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—“*

Yeah, there is a god of this age—Satan. There are demonic powers and forces that really work in the world. They aren’t running around with pitchforks, and pointy ears, and hissing at people, but there are real spiritual powers in this present darkness and this evil world system. Somebody is pulling strings. We will see that they are not ultimately in charge, but there are evil forces at work in the world; large scale, small scale, individual, and global. Wars and rumors of wars have raged since the beginning of mankind; since we have fallen and rebelled. The authority that God gave to us when He created us, and gave us dominion over this planet; in succumbing to temptation, we handed that over to the usurper. We handed that authority over to Satan and we have been warring with each other ever since, globally. You see it in the smallest level of how children interact with each other out of selfishness. There is a lot going on, but I’m getting ahead of myself.

Back to chapter 6.

*“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.”*

We’re in a war. We’re in a battle, and this isn’t just for people in ministry. This isn’t just for the folks that we are praying for, who are missionaries. I don’t care if you are seven or eight years old; if you are a believer, and you are a follower of Christ, you have an enemy. You’re at war. The enemy will attack you and use your flesh and the part of you that doesn’t want to obey Jesus, and he will bait you and tempt you. It doesn’t matter if you are retired from work; Satan doesn’t ease off. We have an unrelenting enemy who is constantly waging war against Christians and he is constantly waging war against the Church.

Paul has laid out in this beautiful letter all the things that are ours in Christ Jesus. So, where do we think Satan is going to attack? Why does he emphasize our identity in Christ, in chapter 1? Where’s the enemy going to attack you? What does he do to make you doubt? What insecurities does he want to play on? Paul is reinforcing that this is how God sees you and this is what’s true about you in Christ. Is it important that we know that? Is it important that we drill into those doctrines about what God has done for us in Christ and what He says is true about us in Christ? Is it important that we set aside time to meditate on that? Absolutely. Because, where is the enemy going to attack you? Your identity, your purpose, your security, and your sense of value, and worth, and why you should be breathing, and living, and having relationships. Satan is going to attack our unity in the Church and he is going to try to sow division between believers. Why is it important that this is so clear? It doesn’t matter what race you are, whether you are a Jew, or a Gentile, or what color your skin is, or whether you come from privilege or poverty—none of that matters. None of that matters in Christ. Whether you are male or female doesn’t matter in Christ. We have been unified. We have been united in Jesus. We have been made one body and one people. Why does Paul emphasize that? Because, where is the enemy going to attack and where does he want to sow division? Not just individually, to sideline us in our own mess, but corporately Satan wants to attack us. We can’t give up any ground. We can’t yield ground for the enemy to launch his campaign against us; to sow doubt and discord. *“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might.”*

Our position of strength is in the Lord and our source of strength is in His power. Paul says it this way in 1 Corinthians 16:13. He says,

*“Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. 14 Let all that you do be done in love.”*

Here, the emphasis is that our strength is not from within. We must draw our strength from the Lord. This word has the emphasis of “be strengthened and be empowered.” God is not telling us to suit up and go do our best! He’s not giving us spiritual weapons and telling us to go win the war. This is not the picture of God arming us and then sending us out to go win the battle. That’s not what’s happening. That’s not the picture here. Right?

This morning, this made me think of the story of David and Goliath. Do you remember that story? It’s one of my favorites. It’s been one of our favorites in raising our kids. We tell them that story and draw pictures of Christ from that conflict. Do the kids in here know the story of David and Goliath? Remember, the Philistines are on one side and the Jews are on the other. They are both on hilltops with a valley between them but there is no war. No one is fighting, why? Because the Philistines have a giant on their side. Goliath would come out every day and you could hear his footsteps as he stomped his way out into the valley and just mocked the armies of God. He would say, “I’m a Philistine. I’m a man. Let’s not have a war, but one of you will go one on one with me. If you win, we will be your servants, but if we win you will all serve us.” Goliath defied their army, and he wasn’t just defying the men in the army, he was really defying Yahweh. He was saying, “Y’all can’t win!," but in their minds, they knew that he was saying that their God couldn’t give them the victory.

Then, Jesse sent his son, David. Little David had already been told what was going to happen in his life, but he was just being faithful and watching his father’s sheep. Then, Jesse called David and told him to go to where the standoff was happening, and take some bread and cheese to his brothers. David was faithful and when he showed up, he wondered what was going on. He wondered why nobody was fighting the giant. Goliath went down and made his charge and they were all just standing there. They drew back and David wondered what was going on and why nobody was fighting him. He asked what would happen if somebody fought the giant, Goliath, and the people were like, “Well, you get to marry the king’s daughter.” David said, “Alright! I’ll fight this joker.” His brother rebuked him, but some of the other guys heard him and they took him to King Saul. Saul said, “You can’t fight Goliath! He’s been a man of war since his youth and you are just a kid.” Remember what David said? He said, “Listen, when I was watching my father’s sheep and lion or a bear would come and snatch one of them up, I would chase after that animal. I chased down a lion and grabbed him by the beard and I struck it down dead! I killed it. God gave me the victory over a lion and a bear. Some uncircumcised tall guy is not going to get the best of me!” I can read it to you. Right?

Remember what Saul did, then? Saul put his armor on David, and what did David say? What did he look like? He was swallowed up by Saul’s armor. He couldn’t move in it and he said, “I can’t go fight in this. I haven’t tested it. I don’t know how to use this armor.” Then he said, “Yahweh—God—will deliver the Philistine into my hands!” Then, David goes out there; but he doesn’t go out in the armor of Saul, he goes out in the armor of Yahweh. He goes out to battle confident that God would give him the victory. He is confident that God is his strength, God is his shield, and God is his sword. So, David faces off with Goliath. Goliath said, “You are coming at me with a stick?! Man, I’m going to feed you to the birds!” and David says, “Shut up! I’m going to cut off your head and feed *you* to the birds!,” paraphrased, right? And he does. Goliath charges him and he runs out and slings that rock right into Goliath’s forehead. He picks up the man’s own sword and chops off his head. He picks it up and shakes it and the Philistines run away and the Jews shout for joy. You can hear them chanting, “Oy, vey! Oy, vey! Oy, vey!” They celebrated because God gave them the victory. David’s confidence was not in the armor; it was in the Lord.

That came to my mind so clearly this morning, because God is not suiting us up and telling us to go win. God is saying, “I have already won! The battle is mine! I have the victory and I am going to put my armor on you. I’m going to dress you in my righteousness.” We are going to get there, but I’m getting ahead of myself. God clothes us in His armor. He is already victorious. He says, “Go win the battle that I’ve already given you victory in.” But, you’ve got to fight, right? This should take us back to another Old Testament story. Anyone who has been at Red Oak for a while will remember this. It’s Joshua. We walked through Joshua. What did the Lord tell Joshua? “That land is yours. I’m going to give it to you. I’m going to go before you. I’ll fight; it’s yours. The victory is a done deal.” Then, what did he tell Joshua? “Be strong. Be courageous. I’m going to use you to go take the land.” What’s happening here? God gives the victory. God gave them the victory. They marched around a wall and it fell down. Yes, but then they had to take their swords out of their shields and go in there and fight. It was hard. They waged campaign after campaign.

God gives the victory but we have to fight. We have to be engaged in the war. But, the danger for us is that we are complacent, we are sidelined, and we don’t take our enemy seriously. We can talk about the flesh, but I’m not going to tonight. Not because it’s not real and not because it’s not our main enemy, our closest enemy, the insurgent inside of us, but this passage is talking about how there are powerful, spiritual forces outside of us that, on our own, we cannot defeat. Y’all know that, right? Paul is saying, be strong in the Lord because we can’t win this battle. Personally, I can’t stand up to demons and Satan. So many of us don’t see that. We are not taking our enemy seriously, so we are unarmed. We are not being strong in the Lord. We are not preparing ourselves for battle. We are just living life, going through our day, having our devotions, reading some Scripture, and then being bombarded by the fiery darts of the evil one and the schemes that he has, not just against you, but against us. Right? We need to start seeing it that way. It’s not just that Satan is attacking *you*. Do you get that? There is more on the line than just your personal sanctification. You are a part of this body, and if you give place to Satan it is not just your life he is attacking. He is attacking this church. We are one. We are unified. Right? If he attacks me, he is not just attacking me, he’s attacking my marriage. If I give him place in my life, I’m not just giving him place to me, but I’m giving him opportunity, within my own walls, to attack my wife and my children. If I do that, I’m giving him opportunity to attack everyone in this room and to cloud our witnesses to those outside of this room. This war is real and it is raging 24/7. Paul says, “Be strong in the Lord.” We have the victory and we need to walk in it.

So, let’s talk about this power and this strength of the Lord. Turn back to chapter 1, and I’m going to read verses 15-23. Because, really, when we talk about the power of the Lord and the strength of His might, we can’t measure that, right? We can’t know the unknowable. There is no limit to the power and the strength of God, so we can’t measure it. But, we can look at the example of it and we can see the repercussions of it on display.

*“For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, 16 I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, 17 that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, 18 having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might…”*

What does that power look like? Give me an example. What does it look like in real life? It looks like this.

*“20 …that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22 And he put all things under his feet and gave him (Jesus) as head over all things to the church, 23 which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”*

What does that power look like? It looks like the power that raised Jesus from the dead, after He made propitiation for our sins, satisfying the wrath of God. He rose again. That kind of power. The kind of power where Jesus ascended from this Earth into the very presence of God, to sit exalted at His right hand; where He sits right now, exalted. In real time, Jesus is enthroned. And then Paul says, “Oh, yeah, by the way, His footstool is the throat of all the enemies that are waging war against us.” Jesus is reclined back with His feet on the necks of these powers, these authorities, and these rulers; the god of this age, the prince of the power of the air. Does he have power? Does he have authority? Yeah, Satan can wreak havoc but he is ultimately and finally defeated. His days of thrashing are numbered.

I remember Sarah, years ago, reading an article about this missionary family, somewhere where they have huge snakes. They had this giant snake in their house and they called a local guy who came out and chopped off the snake’s head, but the article said that they spent the rest of the day outside as the body of that snake destroyed the inside of their house. It was dead. It no longer had a head but it just destroyed their house. Its body was still acting out and thrashing. What a crazy illustration. At the cross Satan was dealt with. The death blow has already been delivered to Satan, and he is thrashing, and he can wreak havoc, but he is a defeated enemy. Jesus’ foot is on the neck of Satan. Satan bruised His heel. Satan injected all the venom that he had toward us, into Jesus. He poisoned Jesus. But, if I could be crude—Jesus spat it out and crushed Satan’s head. Satan is a defeated enemy. So, for us, is he more powerful than you and I? Yeah. Can he wreak havoc in our lives? Yes, if we give place to him; but not when we are being strengthened by the power of Jesus’ might.

So, put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the Devil. “Stand” becomes a theme. “Standing” becomes a theme. Now, I’m not going to do a systematic look at demons and Satan. That’s a valuable thing to do and we should know our enemy, but that’s not the main point of this passage. The main point of the passage is that you and I stand. Not only that we withstand the attacks of the enemy, but that we stand, and persevere, and remain faithful.

Listen to this:

“The decisive victory has already been won by God in Christ, and the task of believers is not to win but to stand, that is, to preserve and maintain what has been won. It is because this victory has been won that believers are involved in the battle at all. They are in a decisively new situation in contrast to their previous condition described in 2:2, 3” (slaves, following the course of this world and following the prince of the power of the air) “where there could be no battle or resistance because they were in total bondage to the enemy.”[[155]](#footnote-155)

We can fight in this battle because we are free. We can stand firm. We cannot give ground. And that’s the picture here. There are other pictures in the Bible that speak of us in military terms, like taking the Gospel out and storming the gates of Hell. But, here, the picture is that Christ has won everything. There is no more ground to win. He’s done it all. On the cross, He said, “It is finished,” and then He rose again to put an exclamation point on it. Right? The victory is there. When we are standing, it’s not like the enemy is attacking us and we need to fight him off and move forward. In this picture, it’s that the enemy is going to attack us and we need to withstand. Don’t give him any ground. Don’t give him ground in your own mind when he attacks your identity in Christ. Don’t give him ground. When he attacks the unity of this body, join up, lock arms, focus on Christ, and don’t give the enemy any ground. In your marriage, don’t give him any ground. In your singleness, don’t give the enemy ground. At work, or wherever else, do not give the enemy any ground. The picture is that, if we show up unarmed then we are giving him opportunity.

Again, look in Ephesians 4. Paul talks about the old self and putting on the new self. The armor becomes that same idea, just intensified and drilling down a little bit deeper into these truths.

Ephesians 4:25,

*“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. 26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger,”* and here it is in verse 27 *“and give no opportunity to the devil.”*

Here, specifically, he mentions anger, but really, in all of this we are about to read, we are not to give opportunity to the devil.

*“Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. 29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths.”*

Don’t give place to the devil. But only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

*30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. 31 Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you.”*

Don’t give place to the devil.

*“…along with all malice. 32 Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”*

Don’t give place to the devil. Don’t give place to him in your own life or in this church. God is building something here. Right? Call us a little church, but God is building something here; and it’s not because of anybody’s personality and it’s not because of anybody’s gifts. It is because the Holy Spirit has redeemed a group of men, and women, and boys, and girls, and He has called us to one calling—to proclaim the name of Jesus—to one another, to the edification and the building up of this body, to Andrews, to Marble, to Murphy, to Robbinsville, and all the places in between, and to Leh[[156]](#footnote-156), to the Middle East[[157]](#footnote-157)…to proclaim Jesus. God is building something and we need to be reminded, daily, that we are in a war and we are in a battle. Don’t give up any ground.

Is it so important that we are in the Scriptures and we are praying? Yes. And we are going to look at that next week. What is this armor and how do we put it on? How do we live in the victory that we already have? We are going to look at that next week. It’s imperative. There is a lot going on here; in your own life, your own marriages, in your own relationships, and in what God has called this church to be.

The whole armor of God. The full armor is both defensive and offensive, as we will see next week. But, what I want to emphasize here is that it is of God. One thing that’s pretty cool is that I taught through Ephesians when I was a youth pastor for a couple of years. I went back and looked at my notes from when I taught it. I still had them in emails, so I pulled up chapter 6. It was pretty cheesy, but by every bullet point, instead of a bullet or a number, I either had a Roman sword, or a helmet, or a belt as a bullet. I didn’t have a wife or kids then, so I had the time to not only make an outline but find special bullets for my outline. But, in those notes I had a picture of a man who was re-enacting a Roman battle with a big shield, and I think that’s appropriate. In sermons, we hear things like, “No doubt, Paul, in his prison cell as he penned this, was looking at his Roman guard as he began to put on his armor….” Probably. Most likely that happened and I think it’s appropriate to illustrate that, but one of the commentators pointed this out and it sent my mind spinning. Let’s remember that all throughout the Old Testament, God is introducing and revealing himself as a warrior. God is introducing himself as the one who fights our battles, right? Like the passage we read in Psalm 18. I want to walk through a few of these passages, because, was Paul thinking about a Roman centurion? I’m sure, but was he also thinking about Yahweh’s armor and Yahweh as a warrior? Yes, I think more so.

Listen to these passages:

* Isaiah 11:4­5, *“But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. 5 righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.”*
* Isaiah 59:17, *“He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak.”*
* Psalm 35:1­3, *“Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me! 2 Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help! 3 Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers! Say to my soul, “I am your salvation!”*
* This is a little different, but you can see where it connects. Isaiah 52:7, *“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’”*
* Psalm 18:1­3, “*I love you, O Lord, my strength. 2 The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. 3 I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.”*

The Roman armor is cool. Brody is preaching next week and I don’t know his sermon, but I’m looking forward to it. But, how cool is this picture? Shawn pointed this phrase out to me earlier—we are being outfitted in the battle-tested armor and weaponry of Yahweh. That’s our armor: His righteousness, His truth, His salvation, His sword, His Word. It’s already won and done. He slayed the dragon, He killed death, and He made a public spectacle of our enemies. He put them to shame and He outfits us with His armor that we may stand against the schemes of the devil.

Stott points this out about the Devil, “Sometimes he roars like a lion, but more often is as subtle as a serpent. We must not imagine, therefore, that open persecution and open temptation to sin are his only or even his commonest weapons; he prefers to seduce us into compromise and deceive us into error.”[[158]](#footnote-158)

Ephesians 6:12,

*“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”*

I think the way the Lord directed my study of this was not to focus on Satan here. We are to know our enemy, but that’s not the focus of the passage. The focus of the passage is the standing in the victory of Jesus. Some people read this passage and they start a diagram of the hierarchy of satanic and demonic forces. You have Satan and then you have this and that level of demons; it’s like *Screwtape Letters[[159]](#footnote-159)*, where you have a chain of command of demons. Is that his point? I don’t know, there may be that, but what it seems to be saying is that our enemy is real, pervasive, and wicked.

These are three things that I want to briefly point out. Stott, in his commentary, points these three things out.

* First of all, what we should take away from that verse, is that our enemy is powerful. Rulers, authorities, and cosmic powers—the word there for “cosmic powers” is this idea, in the ancient pagan mind, of how they assigned gods to planets. And, it’s crazy how we have the same stories. You watch *The Avengers[[160]](#footnote-160)* and you see the same stories of gods in control of planets and they are wielding their powers and pulling the strings of the universe. It’s the idea that there are cosmic powers that shape the destiny of man, like we are pawns in their hands. I think what Paul is saying is that they are real, and they are powerful, and what we need to feel the emphasis of is that we can’t beat those enemies. They are powerful.
* Two, they are wicked. They are ruthless in their pursuit of their malicious designs. They hate the light and they love darkness and falsehood.
* Three, they are cunning. The schemes of the devil have the idea of tactical shrewdness. E. K. Simpson says, “A twofold infernal policy: intimidation and insinuation alternate in Satan’s plan of campaign. He plays both the bully and the beguiler. Force and fraud form his chief offensive against the camp of the saints.” He’s saying this; sometimes it’s a head-on attack, where you say, “The enemy is attacking me.” But, we need to guard against two errors that we make in the Church. We’ve kind of talked about ignoring it and acting like it’s not real, but we also don’t need to go to the other extreme, where we have a demon of everything. We have the demon of the flat tire that made you late for church, so the enemy was attacking you with a flat tire, which gave place to the demon of road rage, which is why you flicked somebody off. You say that it wasn’t really you, but Satan made you do it, right? It was the demon of road rage.

I think I’ve told you this before, but I remember as a young believer when I was starting to go to church, but I was still watching a lot of religious stuff on TV. I remember one pastor, who I won’t name, Rod Parsley, and he was preaching. He’s a phenomenal communicator and I remember him preaching about demons and he was talking about depression. No lie, I found myself on my knees with my hands raised, and I think somebody was holding out a handkerchief, and I was touching it through the TV screen, and I was rebuking the demon of depression. And, I looked over and saw that my mom had come into the room. Within about twenty-four hours she had gotten me a MacArthur Study Bible. Thank you, mom.

We don’t want to go to that place where we have a demon jumping out from every crack and corner to waylay us. It’s not that. Here is the reality; here is an evil, wicked, powerful foe that, in our own strength, you and I cannot handle, but that Jesus has already destroyed. He has already destroyed him, so be strong in the Lord. Walk in the power of His might. Don’t give place and don’t give ground. Don’t give up what Jesus died to eradicate in your life. Don’t invite that back in. Don’t go into your kids’ room and pray over them at night and ask the Lord’s blessing and then go click on something or turn on something that is giving place to the enemy in your home. Don’t do that. Don’t leave tonight, and shake hands, and bless one another in the name of Jesus, and then be ugly to your wife on the way home. Don’t do that. Don’t give place to Satan.

I’m going to read the passage again and give some final thoughts.

*“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore take up the whole” –the full, the complete—“armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”*

Stand firm in the victory that Christ has already given us. Right? We said that. In chapter 2, we saw where Jesus has victory and we are in Jesus. We are in the heavenly places and you and I are already victorious over Satan and demons. If we are seated with Christ then our feet are on their necks. We do not have to yield to the flesh and to Satan. Will we? Yeah. I want to make this point. No doubt there are many of us in this room who have gotten our butts kicked recently, and maybe for a long time. Maybe it’s been years since you opened your Bible and sat down and had intimacy with Jesus. Maybe it feels cold to even think about doing that right now. You might be sitting there thinking that you haven’t put on the armor in a long time and you are getting waylaid. You are thinking, “No wonder this relationship is poor. No wonder I’m having issues here. I’m unarmed. I’m not living and walking in the victory that Christ has provided.”

I want to say this—here is not how God operates. I remember being a little kid in church and someone wrote God’s name and then drew a little stick figure and said, “If you don’t feel as close to God as you once did, guess who moved.” Remember that? Did anyone else go to that church? Maybe it was flannelgraph for you, and you slowly inched away. That’s helpful and it’s true; God hasn’t changed His mind about me. My position in Christ hasn’t changed but I might feel distance in the relationship. But, here’s not what God does—God doesn’t sit there with His arms crossed so when you feel convicted when you sit in a sermon like this and say, “Lord, I’m sorry,” God doesn’t say, “Alright, start crawling your way back to me. It’s going to take a long time and it’s going to be Hell. Crawl through it and you will get here one day, maybe.” God doesn’t do that. Right? We know the parable. What parable came into your mind? The Prodigal Son[[161]](#footnote-161). In that parable, what does the father do? Man, he runs to his son! Maybe that’s you tonight, and you’ve been distant, and it’s been cold; and you feel like you have to grovel, and beat yourself up for a while, and heap shame on yourself for a while. You think you will need to have three months of unmissed quiet times and then, maybe, you will be where you need to be. No. Right now, in repentance and confession, you are where you need to be, and then you simply get up and stand in the victory that Jesus has already won. There is no shame and no guilt for you. Jesus took it on the cross and naked He absorbed the wrath of God. It is done. It is finished. He is not pouring out any extra wrath on you. He took it all, so stand up and walk worthy of the Gospel, because Jesus is already victorious, and we are in Jesus. Your identity, and your security, and your hope, and your forgiveness, and your redemption are as secure with the Father as the love that the Father has toward the Son. God the Father will never look at Jesus and be displeased. He will never look at Jesus and despise Him. The Father will never look at Jesus and tell Him to get out of His Heaven; and because we are in Jesus, God loves us. He loves us. So, stand up and receive His grace and His mercy. Be strong in the Lord.

Yes, tomorrow should be different. It should be different. Your emotions may take a while to catch up, but that’s true in human relationships, right? Right, men?

*“Honey, I’m sorry, I’m an idiot.”…*

*“You are correct.”…*

*“I’m sorry.”…*

*“I forgive you.” …*

*“Awesome! Do you want to have some popcorn? Oh, you’re not ready yet. Okay. That’s alright. Are we good?”…*

*“Yeah, we’re good.”*

Our marriage is strong, but sometimes it takes emotions a while to catch up. Absolutely. So, yeah, stand firm and get up tomorrow and tomorrow should be different. Does that mean that tomorrow morning, if you don’t open your Bible, and the heavens sing, and God gives you some new revelation, that God is still distant? No, it doesn’t mean that. It means to give it time, and to stand firm in Christ’s victory, and pursue Him in the grace that He affords you that is yours in Christ.

Pray with me.

Lord Jesus and God, I love you. Thank you for the Gospel. Thank you for saving us and thank you for giving us your victory. I pray that you would find us faithful, not just tonight, but until the end. I pray that you would fortify us in our own minds, and in our own marriages, in our own homes, and in all of our relationships; that this church would not give ground to the enemy, so that we would be faithful to the end. I pray that this church would be faithful in reaching the lost, and in taking in widows and orphans, and loving them, caring for them, and proclaiming your Gospel. God, I do pray for those that are hurting, that you would pour out your grace and lead them to repentance. And God, don’t leave them in their shame and their guilt, but raise them up and put the robe on them, and put the ring on them. God, that we would all celebrate together just how good and how rich your victory is in Christ Jesus. Lord, we love you. In Christ’s name.

I’ll read this to you:

“Stand firm, Oh my soul.

Do not cower.

Though we are exiles, we are elect exiles;

Chosen by God, rejected by man.

So endure, for He who promised is faithful.

With His flesh the veil was torn;

By His blood our conscience cleansed.

In His death our inheritance guaranteed.

And through His resurrection our victory won.

Do not cower, oh my soul.

Stand firm.” – Sarah Conti

How do we stand firm? How do we stand in the victory that God has given us? How do we wage this war? Come next week and find out.

1 Thessalonians 5:23,

*“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

September 13, 2015

Ephesians 6 – Pt. 4

Brody Holloway

If you are visiting, it’s a joy for us to have you here with us. I hope your time here is fruitful and I hope the Lord speaks to you through His Word. I also hope that people are kind to you. I have one disclaimer; there is a ton of people here that are not regular members of Red Oak. We always have a lot of people coming in and out because of the ministry here at Snowbird[[162]](#footnote-162). So, just make sure if you see someone you don’t know, to talk to them and be nice to them. Particularly, Red Oak members, you need to really target people you don’t know and make them feel welcome.

So, it is always a bittersweet thing to finish up a study of a book of the Bible. As a church, we go through books of the Bible and when we come to the end of a book it is always bittersweet. It’s bitter, in the sense that you’ve kind of fallen into sort of identifying with the people that the book was initially written to. You kind of get absorbed into the book and in the letter that Paul has written to the Ephesians. I know that I have felt totally absorbed into that over the last several months. Then, it is bitter in the sense that I’d like to keep going. I wonder what happened after Paul wrote this letter. I wonder what happened when they received this and how they responded to it. But, it’s sweet because there is this completion that comes, and it’s always exciting to finish something and start something new, especially for those of us who are not good at finishing things well. A lot of us fall into that category. A lot of you guys are really good at starting something but you are really bad at finishing it. You start with good intentions, and you have big vision, big passion, and big ideas, whether it’s diet and exercise or saving money for a particular item. A lot of people are good at taking off but aren’t good at landing.

I remember when I was a kid there was a show on TV. Some of you may remember this, but probably not. If Netflix knew what was good for them they would get a hold of this show and it would take off. It was called “The Greatest American Hero.”[[163]](#footnote-163) Does anybody remember that? Here was the premise of the show; this guy stumbled across a superhero suit. I don’t remember exactly, but instead of a person coming from outer space, like in Superman, a suit came from outer space somehow. Well, this guy puts it on but he doesn’t have the instructions, so he’s really strong and he can fly, but he’s really terrible at landing. It only lasted a couple of seasons; I don’t know why because in third grade I thought it was fantastic primetime television. Apparently, a third grade audience was not enough to carry the ratings. But, I remember that, in the show, the ongoing comic relief was that he couldn’t land. So, he would fly into the side of a building or the police would be on the scene and he would be coming to the scene to help the police, and all of a sudden he would slam through the windshield of a police car. He could take off and he could fly but he couldn’t land.

One of the things that we want to be able to do each week in the sermon, and also when we go through the course of the study of a book, is we want to land it, we want to land it effectively, and we want to land it in a way that is practical for you. I’ll tell you that, as a preacher and a teacher, most guys will tell you this; once you are into the meat of a text and you are walking through the text, you can usually roll pretty good, but taking off and landing are the most difficult parts in my personal experience, with preparing a sermon and delivering a sermon. It’s just hard to do. But, I think that a lot of times that just portrays human nature. We are good when we are in the thick of something, but starting and finishing are shaky a lot of times.

We are going to finish strong this week and I’m excited about where we are going after this. It’s going to be awesome. We are looking at our next series taking us through Christmas and ending with the Advent and the coming of Christ. Then, in January, we are going to go through a four week study of the book of Titus, and we are going to get back into looking at what the Church is supposed to be and talk about leadership in the Church. So, I’m excited about the next several months. It’s been an exciting past couple of years, as we went through Exodus, and Joshua, and now, Ephesians. We also went through those Ten Distinctives of the Biblical Church[[164]](#footnote-164). So, it’s been an awesome season, but tonight we want to land this thing effectively. So, I’m going to pray again before we go into the text and ask God to help us set it down in such a way that we are charged and excited going out of Ephesians, as we walk away from this book corporately; and also that its impact, and effect, and influence on our lives will be permanent. I pray that tonight that we are able to be excited about what God has given us in the Christian life through this awesome but tiny little letter that has, in some ways, changed history. So, let’s pray once more and ask for God’s help on the exposition and the hearing of His Word.

Lord, please take your Word, your Scripture, I pray now, as we come to the close of this amazing book, and I pray that you would help us to hear from your Word. Give us ears to hear. I pray that we would be able to focus, and that distraction would be left at bay, and that you would guard and protect your Word, tonight, and that your Spirit would speak through your servant and to your servants, and that we would honor you in our worship of preaching and hearing. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

By the way, if you weren’t here last week, go back and listen to last week’s sermon. If you haven’t subscribed to the Red Oak podcasts, you need to do that[[165]](#footnote-165). Tonight’s sermon will be up tonight. We are on top of it. Go back and listen to last week’s sermon. It was fantastic. Rob walked us through the first four verses of this portion of text, in Ephesians 6:10-13. We read through that tonight, also, because we are going to link up these two sermons, as a kind of part one and part two of this larger text. But, I want to point your attention to the word “finally” in verse 10, again. We did this last week, but be reminded that what we are doing here, is that we are coming to this last big, driving point. If you remember anything from grammar, English, or literature; wherever it was that we learned this—I had to take a lot of classes growing up, did y’all? It was half a dozen classes a year or something. They make you sit through those classes and it’s called school. Anyway, I remember that when there was an order of things in a sentence, with commas, you were supposed to pay attention to the last thing in the sentence the most. That was the worst thing that you could tell a student like me because I just skipped the whole sentence and read the last phrase and I figured that would work.

In the Scripture, we don’t ever want to do that. We want to walk through it word by word and verse by verse. But, what’s happening here is we are coming to a sort of final charge, and what you will see a lot of times in Scripture are letters, and chapters, and even breaking it down into verses, where the Lord will sort of give instruction; maybe it’s doctrinal instruction or foundational instruction, and He will follow that with a charge, or a command, or an instruction as to how you go process, act, and do based on what you’ve heard. So, when Paul says “finally,” in verse 10, he is going to start giving these imperatives. Imperatives are commands and calls to action. So, Paul is going to start giving these imperatives that, as Christians, this is telling us how we are to live, what we are to do, and how we should respond to the Word of God. So, Paul walks us through this great passage, that all of us are familiar with, about warfare.

I want to say something about the war that we are in, and it is this; I don’t think that any human being alive, from the vilest of men to the greatest of pastors, and teachers, and theologians, and seminary professors, would argue the fact that we live in a broken, fallen, destructive, and evil world. Amen? Do you agree, church? The world we live in is broken. It is broken. Homes are broken, marriages are broken, businesses are broken, governments are broken, and court systems are broken. We live in a fallen state, as mankind and as individuals, and that brokenness comes to each person so that each of us is in need of salvation. Everyone needs Jesus and everyone needs the Gospel, but collectively, the world is in a constant state of decay. Science even tells us that. But, we know that morally it is even more so.

There is this downward spiral where things are not getting better but they are getting worse. Technology doesn’t help, it worsens. It makes things worse in the long run. It might make things more comfortable but the longer history progresses the more we see the depravity, and the immorality, and the brokenness of man. Science is not helping things get better. Technology is not helping things get better. The advancements in civilizations are not helping things get better. The urbanization of the Third World is not helping things get better. People are going from rural communities, where they are starving and killing each other, to where cities are exploding all over Africa, and Asia. Cities are tripling every decade in some places. People are running to the cities because there is more industry, more technology, and there is more opportunity for jobs, and yet there are more wars, more diseases, more depravity, more brokenness, more kids in foster care, more kids in need of adoption, more adulterous relationships, more drug addicts and addictions, and pornography is soaring. The industry is booming. Pornography in America alone outsells NASCAR, NFL, Major League Baseball, and UFC fighting. It outsells it all every year. The number of pornographic films made in this country alone, compared to those films made in Hollywood, is immeasurable in ratio, because we live in a fallen and broken world. And, there is no question that evil abounds. Evil is prevalent. And the only thing that is going to enable us to be able to overcome that which is evil, and powerful, in this world, is a power and a force that is stronger, greater, more willing and able to withstand that evil; but not only to withstand it but, indeed, to crush, and conquer, and destroy, and take back that ground that has been taken by Satan and his demons, and by this fallen world, and by the sin in our very own hearts. That force, and that power, and that greater good is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and it is that Gospel in which we stand. Paul told the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 15:1,

*“Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved,…”*

The Gospel is the only hope for mankind. It is the only hope for eternity, and if we are going to win this war we are going to have to identify the enemy and we are going to have to identify whose side we are on, which means we need to know our king. We need to identify the enemy, and know the enemy, and know his tactics. Paul tells the Corinthians, “You need to be aware of Satan’s schemes.” He’s creative and he’s crafty. Genesis 3 tells us that Satan is not a dumb-dumb and he’s not aloof. He is very crafty and yet he is not omnipotent; he simply studies human behavior and he knows God really well. So, he strategizes, and plans, and manipulates, and connives, and destroys, and the Scripture says he is an “accuser,” and he is a “destroyer,” and he is a “liar,” and he is a “divider,” and he is somehow the “prince of the power” of this air, and he is the prince of the power of this world, and he is the prince and the power of all things that are dark. Every one of us has been in places in our lives where we feel the anxiousness and the darkness of sin caving in on us, and in those moments the one hope that we have is that when Satan accuses us that there is a Truth that is greater than his accusations. Satan accuses but Christ intercedes. He lies but Jesus is truth. He comes against us but Jesus stands for us. The Scripture tells us that, “If God is for us, who can be against us?”[[166]](#footnote-166) Jesus did not waste His crucifixion, He did not waste His resurrection, He did not waste His exaltation and His ascension, and He does not waste His dominion over all things so that we can simply get by in the Christian life facing defeat, after defeat, after defeat at the hands of an enemy that we have the power in us to overcome, and conquer, and overwhelm.

We live in a Church culture today, Red Oak, that is soft, and beaten-down, and medicated, and over-therapied, and over-counseled, and over televized, and over technologized—I’m making words up but do you feel me? Do you see where we are going? If you are new to this church you’ve gotta know that I make words up. We are inundated with a thousand things other than the power of the Scriptures in our day-to-day lives. What we need is not just a Gospel that saves, but a Gospel that sustains, and enables us to fight, and wage war, in the good fight against an enemy that is already conquered by the blood of the Lamb and the power of our testimony[[167]](#footnote-167). We need to take up the sword of the Spirit and we need to wage war against that enemy for our families, for our marriages, for our church, for our community, for the least of these[[168]](#footnote-168), for the orphan, for the widow[[169]](#footnote-169), for the drug addict, for the pornographer, for the kid at Andrews Elementary, and Andrews Middle, and Robbinsville High School, who do not have the Gospel planted at home, and who do not have the Word of Truth implanted in their hearts. We need to stand in the gap, fight our own sin, and then be a light, and a beacon, and salt in this world that is broken.

What Paul does in this text as he brings to culmination this amazing letter of our identity in Christ, is he says, “Stand firm and go to war!” It’s a war, Red Oak. Get in the fight or sit on the sidelines, but the war will not wait for you. It will consume you or you will go to battle, and that’s the Word of Scripture that we open up tonight. So, the first thing that I want to do is I want to understand what it is to know our enemy. We need to know our enemies. Our enemies are twofold and we are going to break both of these down. The first is that we need to know that Satan is our enemy and the second is that we need to know that we wage war against our own sinful flesh or nature. So, we are going to unpack both of those.

First, we need to know that demons and Satan are real. You hear pastors, and teachers, and C.S. Lewis talked about this, and anybody who has ever done a message on Satan talks about this, but there are two ditches. The one ditch sort of turns Satan into a cartoon character and makes a bit joke out of it. He’s the little guy on my shoulder who makes me do evil, and we say, “Satan made me do it.” The other ditch is where we try to swing too far the other way. Rob did a good job last week, and I was sincerely laughing hard at how he illustrated it, but he was talking about how people will blame Satan for flat tires, and runny noses, and everything under the sun. If anything is wrong it’s Satan’s fault. So, there is that ditch, too. But, if we are not careful we will overcorrect the wheel, cross the highway, and we will find ourselves in a ditch where we ignore the fact that he is even real. A lot of people want to step into an academic Christianity where they totally eliminate the idea that Satan is real. Satan is real. Do you know that your Bible tells you that Satan is real and demons are real? So, we need to know our enemies and we need to know they exist.

So, here are a few things that I think will help us do that. It’s just sort of an overview. You could do a really neat, systematic theology, where you walk through the Bible and see everything there is to know about Satan, but we are not going to do that. We don’t want to give him that sort of attention but we want to know him so that we know his tactics, because in our text, over there in verse 16, we are to, “Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.” Like where Paul told the Corinthians to be aware of Satan’s schemes. So, we want to be aware of his schemes. Paul also says, in the first part of our text, going back to what we looked at last week, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood.” It is good to know his tactics and it’s good to know, in general, his strengths.

So, we go back to Genesis 1 and here is what we see. In Genesis 1:31, it says,

“*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.*”

So, God creates the world, and the universe, and the Bible says that the heavens declare the glory of God, and everything reflects the glory of God, and it is very good. But, then, only two chapters later, in Genesis 3:1, it says,

“*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.*”

So, somewhere between Genesis 1:31 and Genesis 3:1, there was this great fall, and the Scripture teaches us that Satan fell into pride and into sin, and he was driven out from Heaven. So, that must have occurred between Genesis 1:31 and 3:1, if you are going to do a timeline in creation history. The way that we know that, if you will listen for just a second to what Peter says in 2 Peter 2:4, he says,

“*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.*”

So, we know, going back to the beginning that these angels sinned against God. They were created beings so there are a couple of things that we can deduce from that. Number one, because they were created, they are not God’s counterpart or coequal. It’s not like yin and yang or good and evil. We are the ones at war. Christ is victorious. So, Satan is our enemy and he has been subdued. He is on a leash and he submits to the authority of Yahweh. Satan is not omnipotent and he’s not omnipresent; he’s doesn’t know everything and he’s not everywhere. He doesn’t read your thoughts. He’s not reading your mind but he does study human behavior. He is very crafty and I believe with all my heart that he can watch the way a person moves. I believe that Satan and demons are so real and that those in the spiritual world can pay attention to the way that we behave and craft attacks, and temptations, and those things that would allure us away. That’s why we have to be vigilant and that’s why the Scripture tells us to be vigilant. In Jude 6, it says this,

“…*the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day*.”

So, from the beginning, we know that there was this fall that occurred. Revelation 12 gives a kind of picture of this and also gives us some really good insight on how we are to combat the effects of the Fall. Listen to Revelation 12. I’ll begin with verse 1.

*“And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. 2 She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth. 3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems. 4 His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she bore her child he might devour it. 5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne, 6 and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which she is to be nourished for 1,260 days.*

*7 Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, 8 but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. 9 And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. 10 And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. 11 And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. 12 Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”*

So, you have this account of this war that breaks out, and we know from passages in Isaiah and Ezekiel that Satan was this created being who would make an effort to exalt himself to the throne of the Most High and overthrow God. So, the result of that was a war and that war led to him being cast out of Heaven and down to Earth. What we read there is that he is seeking to just do destruction, and make accusation, and bring evil to completion and fulfillment in people’s lives.

In the Old Testament there seem to be territorial demons. Daniel records[[170]](#footnote-170), you will remember, a twenty-one day battle between a demon that was called the Prince of Persia and the archangel. Then, in Jesus’ ministry on Earth, He routinely conquered demons that were controlling individual people[[171]](#footnote-171). Then, in the end, in Revelation 20:7-10, sort of records the final scene with Satan, where he is bound and cast into Hell where he will spend eternity, forever separated from God’s people, under condemnation and wrath.

So, sort of understanding where it started, and where it’s going, and what’s gone on in between, the important thing is not to focus on the enemy but to just be aware. We just need to be aware so we can understand the tactics. Here is what we do know from Scripture about Satan and demons.

1. Sin originated with Satan. You read that in Genesis 3:1-6, in the Fall between Adam and Eve, that Satan is the originator of sin. We know that he is also the “father of lies” and that would be rooted in that Genesis 3 passage. Jesus tells us that in John 8:44[[172]](#footnote-172). Satan has sinned from the very beginning, and we see that in 1 John 3:8.[[173]](#footnote-173)
2. The second thing that we can know about Satan and demons is that they oppose and try to destroy the work of God. 2 Corinthians 4:4; let me just read this.

*“In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*

So, there is this effort and work to oppose and try to destroy the work of God. One of those tactics is to try to keep people in darkness and to keep people blinded to the Gospel. In the Bible, we’ve seen demons who have used doubt, guilt, fear, confusion, sickness, envy, pride, slander and any other means possible to hinder the Christian.

1. The third thing that we can know about Satan and demons is that they have limited power and they are under God’s authority. If you will remember the story in Job, where Satan comes before God, as the angels are having to give an account before the Lord, they have to ask God’s permission[[174]](#footnote-174). There is this kind of interaction between God and Job where we see the authority of God. In James 4:7, he tells us, likewise, that Christians can resist Satan and demons by the authority given by Christ. They cannot know our thoughts and they cannot read our minds, and though they do observe, and study, and strategize, we can resist them in the power and the strength that God gives us and in the authority that He has given us.

So, we need to know our first enemy and that is Satan. The second enemy we need to know is the flesh. We need to know the flesh and our sin nature. The flesh can be identified this way: The body that we live in, currently, with all of its impulses and cravings that have not yet been redeemed. Our body, in its current state, with impulses and cravings that have not yet been redeemed. In Romans 7:24, Paul describes it this way,

*“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”*

In this passage of Scripture, that you may be familiar with, Romans 7, most theologians that we would believe or concur with believe that this is an explanation of the inner struggle that would go on between a Christian and that sin nature, that flesh, that is warring, and that Paul talks about in Galatians; the war between the spirit and the flesh that goes on in each man’s and each woman’s mind and heart. There is this war that is going on and there are times when we fall and times when we fight well, but Paul says that, ultimately, I’m a wretched man wrapped up in wretched flesh.

The picture is actually really graphic. When he says, “Who will deliver me from this body of death,” in Romans 7:24, what he is saying is the “body of flesh,” literally. In the ESV, I think it says “body of death,” but with “body of flesh” what Paul is painting a picture of is a dead body being dragged around. There are actual documents and documentation where one of the sentences that would be handed down to a murderer would be that the person that they had murdered would be attached to them[[175]](#footnote-175). They would strap that dead, decaying body to that murderer, who had to drag it around, and ultimately the decay and disease would oftentimes kill that person. It’s a really graphic picture that Paul is painting. So, everywhere I go I am bringing with me that which is decaying in me. It’s a really strong, strong word picture that Paul is painting.

Paul gives several lists of fleshly impulses and desires. You will see it throughout Scripture, but particularly I want to look at Galatians 5, starting in verse 16,

*“But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh….”*

Here’s something interesting about that word, “gratify,” that has always stood out to me and been really helpful for me, in my Christian life. God, in His grace showed me this and it is one of those nuggets that has meant as much to me in my life, oftentimes, as many other things that I’ve ever been shown by the Lord. God, practically, showed me this really neat thought that, if you take the word “gratify,” in some translations the word “fulfill” is used there, or “complete,” “perfected,” or “end.” “End” is used as in Romans 10:4, where Paul says, “Christ is the end of the Law to all who believe.” What Paul is saying is that Christ brings the Law to completion. Christ brings the Law to completion, so the word “end” is used. When you will see in this text that Paul says, “…you will not gratify the desires of the flesh,” those two words would be interchangeable, as they come from the same Greek word. What Paul is saying is that you will not bring to completion and perfection the desires of the flesh. In other words, they will not have dominion over you. They will not control and manipulate you. Really, what is so good for me, personally, is to see that when Christ is on the cross and He says, “It is finished,” and He quotes that *tetelestai[[176]](#footnote-176)*, it’s the same word group. What Jesus is saying is, “It is brought to completion,” “It is fulfilled,” or “The work and will of the Father is gratified.” At the crucifixion of Christ, that leads to Him on the cross, and He says those words, He is saying, “It’s a done deal,” “It is over.” He has conquered.

So, for us, when we walk by the Spirit and we don’t walk according to the flesh, then we are not going to bring to completion and fulfillment the desires of the flesh. Listen, Christian, that’s a promise for us; that’s good news for us. When you are beat up, and beat down, and run into the ground, and you keep falling, and you keep messing up—and we are going to see in a minute in Satan’s accusations that he wants to keep holding that stuff over your head—isn’t it glorious to know that if you will just walk by the Spirit, as Paul tells the Romans in Romans 8, “*All who are being led by the Spirit, these are the sons of God,*”—if we will walk by the Spirit we will not bring sin to its completion and fulfillment in our lives. We simply will endure to the end. We will persevere. That’s one of the glorious and beautiful doctrines of the Gospel that we love so dearly. We will not gratify or carry to fulfillment the completion of the desires of the flesh, even though we fall at times. To quote the great theologian Chumbawanba, “I get knocked down but I get up again.”[[177]](#footnote-177)

Galatians 5:17,

*“For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. 19 Now the works of the flesh are evident….”*

Then, Paul gives this list of works.

*“…sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. 22 But the fruit of the Spirit is…”*

In contrast to those fruits of the flesh…

*“…love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.”*

The reason there is no law against such things is that those things are fruits of the Spirit. They come from the Spirit of Christ in us. There is no law because Christ fulfilled the Law. There is no judgment against the work of Christ in us.

*“…And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.”*

So, what Paul is showing us there is that the Spirit drives us into the direction of that which is holy but the flesh will drive us into the direction of that which is unholy, so our second enemy, just like our first enemy, wants to steer us off course so that we don’t follow after Christ; so that we don’t pursue holiness, and righteousness, and goodness. Our flesh wants to drive us toward that which is unholy, but we remember from chapter 1, that Paul tells us, in that first passage, that before the foundation of the world God’s predetermined purpose for you and I is that we should be holy and blameless. So, we walk by the Spirit and we are driven in the direction of that which is holy, and we resist, and we are not driven the direction of that which is unholy, which is where the flesh would take us. So, the biggest battle and the greatest enemy is internal.

For all of us, reiterating what we heard last week, our big war with Satan is not our biggest war. For every one of us, the biggest war, and the biggest battle, and the greatest enemy is that which is internal: the battleground of the mind, the battleground of emotion, the battleground of lust, and evil desire, and materialism, and pride. That’s where we’ve got to fight and that’s where we wage war.

Now, in understanding our two enemies, there is one more thing I would say about that. Christ has conquered and defeated both, soundly. So, they are already defeated foes. It’s not like we are waiting for Christ to defeat our enemies. He has defeated them. He defeated Satan repeatedly. It must have been so frustrating for the serpent, because Christ comes into the world and Satan tries to kill him while He is a baby. Remember that? Herod sends out an edict, an order, to have all the babies killed[[178]](#footnote-178), but Christ not only escapes but He fulfills a lot of prophecies when He does it; as if He just drives that knuckle sandwich straight into the mouth of the serpent. So, He escapes, and then throughout the time of Christ’s life on Earth, we see Satan come against Him in other instances. The one that is probably most familiar is in Luke 4 and Matthew 4, where Satan tempts Jesus in the wilderness. I want to make sure that we understand that His temptation is not just physical; it is first and foremost spiritual. Satan may use Christ’s hunger and he may use Christ’s physical thirst, but what he is appealing to is the human, fleshly part of Jesus, that is not fallen, remember, because He is that second Adam, born of the Spirit, and who has not sinned. But there is a human, physical side to who Jesus is, and Satan is appealing to that which he thinks might allure pride, or seduce lust, and draw Christ into that battle that He would lose. But, in the wilderness, through the annunciation, that proclamation of the Scripture, the Word of God, Christ defeats Satan yet again. Then, when Christ goes to the cross, Satan does everything he can in his power to destroy the King of Glory, but in the resurrection and the empty tomb Satan is defeated, as sin, and death, and Hell are poisoned, and Christ is the conquering King, victorious in coming out of the grave. So, Christ defeats at every turn our first enemy, Satan. And the beauty of Christ’s time on Earth is that His humanity was necessary so that in physical form and in human flesh He could conquer, so that we could be conquerors as well. As we have seen throughout the book of Ephesians, we are “in Christ…in Christ…in Christ…in Christ”; that’s where we live our lives.

So, the second big idea is that we need to know our King. We need to know our enemies and we need to know our King. One of the beautiful teachings in God’s Word is the doctrine of what we call union with Christ. Have you guys ever heard of that? It’s a beautiful doctrine that simply says that we are in Christ and He is in us. You see this doctrine prevalent throughout the book of Ephesians. It’s broken down into four aspects in terms of our relationship to Christ. This is an amazing and beautiful picture of God’s grace because we are fallen and broken humanity and yet we are united with Christ. Remember that Paul says, in Romans 6, that we are united with Him in death in our baptism, and we are united with Him in resurrection and life we are united with Him in resurrection and life when we come out of the baptismal waters. That’s why, when we baptize somebody here, we say, “Buried in the likeness of His death, raised in the likeness of His resurrection”; we are united with Christ. We saw in Ephesians 1 that we are brought up into that heavenly relationship that is timeless between Father and Son. We are brought up into that and that’s where we exist.

One of my favorite moments of every day is right at bedtime when Moe[[179]](#footnote-179) says, “Night night. Night night. Night night,” and everybody has to get a Moe sandwich, and if I’m holding him, or somebody else is holding him, everyone has to get around him and we squeeze him. It’s the most secure place for that once orphaned little boy to know that in this home, and in this security, and between these people, there is safety, and security, and food, and a bed. He’s getting ready to get a big, fat sippy cup full of milk, and he’s in a secure place. Union with Christ provides for us, not just an eternal security but a security in the here and the now which says, “I will overwhelmingly conquer, through Christ.”

We are united through Christ and there are four ways in which this occurs:

1. We are “in Christ.” Again, remember in Ephesians 1:4, we know from eternity past that God chose us “in Christ.” Let me read that verse again, “…*even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world*…” Then, in Romans 5:19, this is amazing. Listen, church, let’s pause here for a couple of reasons. Pause for a second because I want to let this sink in. Romans 5:19 says that Christ is a “second Adam.” Remember that? We sinned in the first Adam. Young people, this is important and I want you to get this; when Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, we sinned in them, because we would eventually descend from them. So, when the first two humans, our first parents, sinned, we sinned with them. Romans 5:19 says that in Christ many would be made righteous.[[180]](#footnote-180) So, in Christ’s conquest of Satan in the wilderness, we conquered Satan in the wilderness. In His conquest of Satan at the cross, we conquered Satan at the cross. We were in Christ during His earthly ministry. Don’t miss that. That’s critical to our understanding of union with Christ. Then, now, thanks be to God, in our daily lives we are in Christ in the way that we live.
2. The second way that we are in Christ comes to us in John 15:5, where Jesus says, “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit.” Christ is in us.
3. Number three, we are like Christ. So, we are in Christ, Christ is in us, and we are like Christ. We are told to imitate Christ and He is our great example. We are told to be holy as He is holy, and Paul says to “imitate me as I imitate Christ.”[[181]](#footnote-181)
4. The fourth aspect of our union with Christ is that we are with Christ always. His eminence, His presence, His omnipresence, and His personal presence are for us. In Matthew 28:20, as He is leaving this planet, He says, *“I will be with you always, even to the end of the age*.”

So, we identify with Christ and He has identified with us. He knows our thoughts, our fears, our doubts, our joys, even before we can express them, and He understands. This is why we are told in Ephesians 6 to “stand in Christ,” as we are told to stand in this armor.

Now, think of Christ’s temptation in the wilderness, think of His time on the cross, think of His resurrection, think of His humanly impulses and desires that were appealed to, because the Bible says that He was tempted in every way just as we are, yet He never sinned. And, we were in Christ as He was not sinning. Amen? That’s glorious!

So, now we move into our text in verse 13.

Ephesians 6:13,

*“Therefore take up the whole armor of God,….”*

So, understanding these two enemies who are coming against us, and the King who we stand behind, and in, and with, and who He is in us, and all that that encompasses, now we go t

*“Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm.”*

I want to point out that this is somewhat of a literary device, when Paul says, *“Take up the whole armor of God”,* in light of who our King is, and we are in Christ, and Christ is in us. It is helpful to know that in ancient Greek literature and in ancient Greek history, it was believed that when a great warrior—whether this was truthful, factual, historical, or from folklore or Greek mythology—when a great warrior would go to battle, particularly Achilles, in the Iliad—it was believed that what happened was that the gods would sort of empower this man, through something called the *aristeia[[182]](#footnote-182)*, to sort of go on a rampage. In certain Native American cultures they had similar beliefs that they were empowered by gods. You see this oftentimes in parts of Africa, even today, where a people will believe that in going to war they need to bring down the empowering of the gods. But what is happening here is that there seems to be a literary device that Paul is using, where Achilles goes off to war, and it’s not that he’s going to battle, but it’s that he’s going on a rampage. So, he is being armed and clothed in armor by the gods. This seems to be a powerful picture that Paul is painting, where he is saying, “You’re not just getting suited up in armor to go to a jousting match,” or “You’re not just getting suited up in armor so that this is just a neat word picture.” This was a literary device. This is something that would be understood as, “We’re not just going to war; this is a rampage. I’m not going to be backed into a corner and play defense; I’m going to war in the name and the power of the Gospel. I’m going out, not just as a defender, because I have a Defender; therefore, I will go out as a warrior, a fighter, a soldier in the army of God.” That’s what missions is. That’s what evangelism is. That’s what the march of the Church is. That’s why Jesus said to Peter, “I’m going to build the Church and the gates of Hell won’t prevail against it.” Why? Because the Church is an offensive move against defensive history. The Church is an offensive war-machine that is taking territory. The Bible promises us in Mark 13 and at the end of the book of Matthew that ultimately the Gospel will go to all nations, all tribes, and all tongues. The gates of Hell are not going to stop it from happening, so suit up in this armor because we are about to go on this rampage, both individually, in our war against sin daily, but also there is this picture of Yahweh, that we saw in those passage last week throughout the Old Testament, as a warrior. It is so important to the ancient Jews and it needs to be important to us.

So, the first act in taking up armor is to submit into and unto Christ. The idea in *aristeia* is that the warrior would stand before the gods and they would clothe him in the armor. The idea that you are in Christ is only a reality because you first surrendered and submitted to Christ. You don’t just go to war; you go to war having surrendered to the King that you now know; and He is in you and you are in Him.

Let me illustrate this from the Old Testament. Psalm 46:10,

*“Be still, and know that I am God.*

*I will be exalted among the nations,*

*I will be exalted in the earth!”*

A beautiful Psalm; a beautiful verse.

*“Be still, and know that I am God.”*

One of the hardest things for us to do is be still, be quiet, let God move, and let God work. We want to be busy, we want to fix things, and we are constantly trying to be moving and doing.

*“Be still, and know that I am God.”*

Most of us are worse than three-year-olds when it comes to being still in our lives.

*“Be still, and know that I am God.”*

So, “be still”—now, listen to Joshua 1:5.

*“No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.”*

The word “leave” is the same Hebrew word as “be still.” So, God is saying “*be still*” in Psalm 46:10 “*and know that I am God,*” because I will not be still. You see, God will never rest in His war against sin. He will never rest in His war for your holiness. So, He says, “You be still…I will not be still…rest in me.” The Hebrew word is *raphah*, and it means to become slack, to relax, and sometimes it means to literally drop your hands. The Psalm says to relax, put down your hands, let God be God, and let God fight for us.

It reminds me of Exodus 14:14, which we saw as we came through that study of Exodus, and it was so powerful. They were standing there and they were about to cross the Red Sea; remember that? And Pharaoh’s army was bearing down on them when the Lord said to Moses and through Moses, “*The Lord will fight for you; you have only to be silent.”* If you think about it, the list Paul gives us in the next few verses are rooted in all the characteristics of Jesus. When we talk about the armor, it’s not like we could hypothesize, “What kind of helmet was it? Was it the kind with cheek pieces? Did it have one of those big furry things that looks like a mohawk? Did it have a chinstrap? Was it Velcro? They didn’t have Velcro. What did the shoes look like? What are loins?” Don’t look that one up or it will freak you out; The Reader’s New Testament has it a little bit PG rated. So, what are we to make of all this stuff? Let’s not look at the pieces of armor; let’s look at the spiritual fruit or the spiritual application of each one.

So, the first thing is “truth.” We need to combat the lies of the world, this flesh, and the Devil with the truth of God’s Word. Jesus said in John 14, *“I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life.”* We live in a world where lies abound. One of the things that Satan will do is he will lie, and accuse, and manipulate. He is so destructive. That’s why, parents, you have to teach your kids at the earliest age that telling the truth is critical. You are not allowed to lie. That will get you in big trouble. We teach a high value of the truth. Listen, this is what’s killing this generation of young people; the lies that Satan tells. This is where he is real and he manipulates; “You’re not good enough…Nobody loves you…Your daddy didn’t love you so you’re not worth anything…The only thing you are good for is to be a sexual toy to the next boy…God can’t forgive you…Nobody wants you…You can’t do this on your own…You need that medication, you need more of that medication…You need this…You need that…Christ is not enough…You need this or that relationship…You need that material possession…If you could make this much more money or rack up that much more credit card debt…If you can have sex with that person then everything will be okay and you will feel better”—those are lies. What do we attack lies with? Do we try to unravel each lie? No, we just live in, and proclaim, and declare, and study, and know, and believe truth. If we believe truth and we live in the truth then we will be secure from the lies that destroy homes, destroy marriages, destroy joy, and remove security. Understand, from who we are in Christ, that lies are destructive and they come from the father of lies. They originated with him. The thing about lies is that they can be extremely destructive.

We often believe lies even though we know them to not be true. But, if we are not listening to the voice of truth in our lives we are going to much more easily believe the lies. It is so destructive; if somebody can get you to believe something that is not true, then they have done the damage. If someone walks up to a husband or wife and says something like, “You know, I have a really weird feeling about your wife and this fella that she works with. I’ve been seeing the way they interact…”—immediately, what he has done is he has created instability in that relationship, or in that moment in your mind there is doubt. Satan wants to sow doubt, so one of the things he does when he attacks is he says, “God can’t love you. You are not holy. You are not good enough,” and he will try to convince you that the only way you can get God to accept you is to clean yourself up first. That’s the greatest lie he tells. Lies lead people to do horrible things. We must live our lives in light of the truth. We must live in the truth of the Gospel.

Next, Paul refers to the breastplate of righteousness. We need our hearts guarded. Don’t be confused about this. Jesus gives us righteousness. Righteousness is imputed to us. One of the great doctrines of the Christian faith is found in 2 Corinthians 5:21, where the Bible says,

*“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

One of the glorious doctrines of salvation is that we receive the righteousness of Christ. What he is saying is that we are made righteous in Christ, and by Christ, but we must daily pursue righteousness and faithfulness. Paul tells Timothy to pursue righteousness and faithfulness. We are not saved because of our works, we are not righteous because of our works, but we are righteous because Christ makes us so. Listen, God did not save us because of something in us; He saved us because of something in Him. He saved us because of something in Christ. We need to believe that. But, that being said, the point is that because we have been made righteous we should live rightly. Because we have been made righteous, we should live in obedience.

John Stott, in his commentary on Ephesians that a lot of you have used in this study, says this,

“It is unconceivable that we should enjoy a relationship with God, as His children, without accepting the obligation to imitate our Father and cultivate the family likeness.”

This means that what we watch matters, what we say matters, where we go matters, what we look at matters, who we have sex with matters, what we put into our bodies matters. We do because of who we are. We act because of who we are. You *do* based on who you *are*. So, righteousness is given to us in salvation but it is then to be pursued by us as an attribute and a daily characteristic in our lives as we pursue Christ.

I want to add this; one of Satan’s tactics is to convince you that you cannot change and people buy into that lie all the time. “Ah, God made me this way, I can’t change…I’ve already gone down this path and there is no turning back.” Listen, when Christ imputes, and instills, and puts His righteousness in, and over, and around, and on a person, they will change in a moment. They are a new creation. The power of the Gospel changes us. Jesus changes us when He saves us. Jesus is bigger than therapy, He’s bigger than addiction, He’s bigger than counseling, and He’s bigger than an abusive past or a past as an abuser. He’s bigger than your pornography, your job loss, your divorce, your failures, your frustrations and your misery. He has made you righteous, so listen to Him, obey Him, follow Him, and reject the lies of this world and of Satan. Live righteously—that’s the call in verse 14.

Then, shoes for your feet—it talks about the Gospel. Shoes are a big deal. Some people don’t wear shoes, like my daughter. I can’t imagine going barefoot. I don’t even go barefoot in my house. A lot of you wear sandals and I can’t even wear sandals. I grew up wearing boots. I wear boots. I’m a boot guy. For those of you who wear sandals, that’s cool. But, as a note, if you ever find yourself having to go to war, ditch those sandals and put you on a good pair of combat boots. Amen? You’ll need some go-to-war feet and go-to-war shoes. You know what I’m saying? One of the things that’s critical in understanding the word picture here is to stand firmly in that which is secure, and which will protect, and which will defend, and Paul is talking about the Gospel. The Gospel is what we walk in. The Gospel is what we stand in, in 1 Corinthians 15:1. 1 Corinthians 15 is an amazing passage that starts in verse 1, where Paul says,

“*Stand in this Gospel*,”

and ends in verse 58, where he says,

“*Be immovable. Let nothing move you. Always abound in the work of the Lord for you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.*”

It’s a strong picture of standing firmly in the Gospel. That’s why we always say it is so important to preach or proclaim the Gospel to yourself, daily. What happens when you are constantly being inundated with the Gospel, and reminded of the Gospel, is that it empowers, excites, encourages, and it fires you up as a Christian, and it gives you the foot armor that you need to walk forward, evangelistically, as a disciple of Christ, to make an impact in this world, and it burdens us for those who don’t know.

Verse 16,

*“In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.”*

In all circumstances faith is crucial. Faith is critical. We’ve all been in situations where our faith was tested when we least expected. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith. It’s going to be tested, it’s going to be attacked with doubt, and it’s going to be war-battered. I think it’s important to point out, if we are going to stay in this word picture or this literary device of a shield, that all the shields I’ve ever seen are in museums. It dawned on me that I’ve seen a lot of really cool shields and crests, but they were always very nicely painted, with a lot of ornamentation on the shield. I wonder what a shield would look like that came out of the Battle of Stirling[[183]](#footnote-183), where there were eight thousand guys with swords fighting each other. You are holding it over your head and there are seven, eight, or ten arrows sticking out of it. I remember seeing in a movie where the guy had all these arrows sticking out of his shield and he took his sword and cut them all off. I think that’s what the shield would look like.

There is one thought that there was a body-sized shield that you have maybe seen in movies, where the front row of guys would get down behind theirs and the second row of guys would hold theirs over the top and sort of made it impenetrable. I don’t know what the shield looked like but the principle is what matters—we live by faith. We walk by faith, not by sight[[184]](#footnote-184); and faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God[[185]](#footnote-185). If you want to be a man or a woman of strong resolve and deep faith, live, abide, love, and submit to being under the authority of the Word of God. Study it, read it, love it and your faith will grow. Doubt will attack and your faith will be battered, but when you get to the end—some of you have a long way to go, with four, five, six, seven decades in front of you—when you get to the end that shield will be beaten, battered, chipped up, and it will need some serious repair, but don’t worry because you are getting it. It’s called glorification--where faith will be no more. We will no longer walk by faith; we will walk by sight, because we will gaze on the eternal and infinite glory, where the Sun doesn’t shine because we are in the presence of the Son; the Son that will reign and shine forever and ever. So, hold that shield up and live in the Word, and walk by faith.

The helmet is critical. Amen? Take your helmet off at a football game and they throw a flag and you go to the hospital. I think this is cool. When I think of the helmet of salvation, I think that my salvation is what protects my mind. The security that I have in Christ is understanding constantly that who I am is that Jesus has saved me. Listen, there are going to be days, just practically, where you need to remind yourself and you need to remind both enemies, “I’m saved. I’m in Christ.” I don’t know how people stand firm who don’t believe in the staying power of the sealing work of the Holy Spirit in a believer. I don’t know what you would do with yourself if you thought that today or the next day that you could lose this. I would unravel, psychologically and emotionally, daily. Thanks be to God that I didn’t write my faith. I didn’t draw it up and I didn’t save myself. He did it before the foundations of the Earth. In Ephesians 1:4—He did it. So, He’s the one that’s going to continue and carry it to the end. Live in that truth and be thankful for that truth.

Know this; that your mind is a battlefield. Sacred thoughts have to be guarded and perverse and carnal thoughts have to be thrown out. All thoughts in between have to be appropriated. Jesus used the Scriptures and so should we. The Word of God is our greatest weapon and it is what will guard our hearts and minds. It’s why Paul calls it a sword. It’s the sword of the Spirit. Paul tells the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians 10:4,

*“For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. 5 We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ.”*

So, we go to war with salvation, with the Word of God, the Scriptures, and with prayer. So, now we come to this powerful weapon, which he breaks down into sort of two categories. John Piper says it this way, “We cannot know what prayer is, we cannot know what prayer is for, until we know that life is war. Life is war. That’s not all it is but it certainly is that. Our weakness in prayer is owing largely to our neglect of this truth. Prayer is primarily a wartime walkie-talkie for the mission of the Church, as it advances against the powers of darkness and unbelief. It is not surprising that prayer malfunctions when we try to make it a domestic intercom to call upstairs for more comforts in the den downstairs. God has given us prayer as a wartime walkie-talkie so that we can call headquarters for everything we need as the kingdom of Christ advances in the world.” Prayer is a weapon of war, to communicate with God and to communicate on behalf of others. It is sort of the lifeblood and DNA that connects us and unites us. It’s warfare.

Paul makes two points on the warfare of prayer. He says we should pray comprehensively and he uses the word “all” four times. Pray all the time—all supplication—all perseverance—for all the saints. Paul is saying that prayer encompasses every avenue and area of your life. Pray constantly. Be in prayer. This is an act of war and prayer is critical because wartime prayer will require me to be in tune with where my flesh is; it will require me to be in tune with the needs of my brothers and sisters in the Church; it will require me to know what is going on globally and missionally; and it will require me to be in tune with the will of God for my life and for others. It’s critical.

I have a very good friend who is a pastor and his name is Mike Talley. Maybe I shouldn’t have said that but I think it’s okay because he won the Bronze Star for this, so it’s no secret. I guess once you win something and they pin it on your chest, it’s no longer a secret. He won a Bronze Star in Iraq or Afghanistan. He’s what they call a Combat Controller, who is an Air Force officer who is assigned to special operations units. They go in with Seal teams, and SF teams, and Delta teams, and they run a headset and they communicate with whatever air power is circling overhead, waiting to give air support. In terms of military history it’s a new position that’s been created in the last couple of decades. It is very important and very critical, because what you have is a group of guys who are fighting on the ground and they need air support. How they call that in is they have this man with them who is trained and knows every weapon in the arsenal, in air defense and offense, and all those things.

So, Mike Talley goes over and he ends up in a position where he is overseeing about a hundred of these forward air controllers, JTACS, these guys that are assigned to special operations units. He’s awakened at three o’clock in the morning—it’s riveting when he tells this story. I was at his church recently and he told this story when I saw his Bronze Star over his desk. I said, “That’s pretty awesome. Tell me about it.” So, he said he was awakened at three in the morning and he got out of his cot in his tent. He rolled out of the rack and he went over and put his headset on, and on the other end of the headset was the team commander for a four man Navy Seal team who had gone into a town to extract a high profile prisoner. But, it was a double-cross and when they got in there it was an ambush. There were two-hundred Taliban or Al Qaida fighters and they turned against these guys, who were able to back themselves into one corner of that town, and four men were holding off two-hundred. They killed sixty or seventy of these attackers. What they needed was air support but the problem was that the cloud cover on the ground was not enabling the men overhead to get a clear identity on which buildings needed to be marked. So, their team commander was communicating to Mike, who was in his tent, and who was then communicating to the pilot in a B-1 Bomber overhead. He was going to have to literally, visually articulate and describe the buildings to him, because these four men were in a situation where you couldn’t just start lobbing bombs into that town. They had to, with precision, take out the enemy. Those guys were embedded and they were fighting on all four sides. So, Mike and the commander identified that the bulk of the enemy were in a group of buildings that were about eight feet taller than the other buildings. These B-1 Bombers, that are massive airplanes, circled and came in right off the deck. They zipped over that town and they got an actual eye-visual on the two tallest buildings. They circled around, dumped their ordnance, and destroyed those buildings. They eventually wiped out the rest of the contingency in that town and after two and a half hours, where Mike was on the headset talking to pilots and fighters on the ground, the last thing that the guy said to him was, “Hey, man, the helicopter is here. Thanks, you saved my life. Maybe I’ll catch you later.” Game over. He never talked to him again. Mike said, “I tried. I did everything I could to find out who that guy was but that stuff’s classified.”

How critical, in that moment, were the details of that communication? The needs of that man on the ground were being conveyed to Mike and those needs were being conveyed to that pilot overhead. Listen, prayer demands detail, and sometimes prayer demands generalization. There are times when you can pray for a whole people group and you can say, “God, save them all.” But, there is a need for us to engage in prayer, in detail, to pray for the needs of people, and to love people well enough to pray for the war that they are in. You will be a more effective fighter and you will be a more effective spiritual combat veteran when you pray for those who are fighting alongside of you. You pray in tune with what their needs are.

The last thing Paul tells them is “Pray for my boldness. Pray that I will share the Gospel.” We need to pray for our missionaries. We need to pray for our high school, and middle school, and elementary school students and teachers, as they go into the school systems, that they would have boldness to proclaim the Gospel. We need to pray for those in the workplace and the marketplace, that as they go to work tomorrow and this week, that we pray for one another for Gospel opportunities. We need to pray for the Echelon team[[186]](#footnote-186). We need to pray for Josh and Aaron[[187]](#footnote-187). We need to pray for those who advance the Gospel. That’s war. That’s offensive war.

Paul comes to the end and he says this in verse 23,

*“Peace be to the brothers, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”*

Here is how he closes the letter. Finally, go to war. Peace be upon you. Go to war..peace be upon you. The peace that comes from the Gospel is the only peace we can live our lives in, church, as we as individuals pursue holiness, and as a church as we go out to make an impact on this generation and this planet. So, tonight, as we close out this glorious letter, knowing that we serve a conquering King who is exalted, and under whom is dominion of all things, we serve Him as those who have been commissioned to go to war, for personal holiness and for the advance of the Church. What awaits us is an eternal existence, as the Bride of Christ, where there will be no more war. There will be eternal peace that is without end. Amen and amen.

So, I will pray and we will stand and sing tonight in reflection.

Lord, I pray tonight, that as we worship you tonight in song to close our time together, that we would do so in obedience to your commands and your instructions from Scripture. I pray that we would sing and worship with hearts that are pure and minds that are clear and that we would do so under conviction. I pray that we would believe your Word and that we would trust your Word. God, that we would have the strength and the spiritual spine that we need this week to wage war in personal warfare and in corporate warfare, as a church. We fight for the purity of the church and we fight for the purity of our marriages. We fight knowing that there is coming a day where you will present us, as Paul has told us back in chapter 5, as a Bride who is spotless, washed with your Word, cleansed by your blood, purely and fully sanctified, and we await that day with longing and anticipation. We rejoice because it’s coming. In Jesus’ name we pray.

1. <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/christian-identity-and-christian-destiny>; John Piper [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Acts 19:24-34 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Acts 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Mark Driscoll [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/christian-identity-and-christian-destiny> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/more-than-just-raking> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p.840 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Matthew 18:20 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Acts 17:30 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Matthew 6:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Piper, John. *The Dangerous Duty of Delight;* Multnomah Books, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Philippians 4:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Psalm 73:26 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. A book about Jay Redman: <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/the-trident-jason-redman/1114918639?ean=9780062208330> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Date on which a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda were made on the United States; on the morning of Tuesday, September 11, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Inspiring article about Redman, listing his injuries: <http://ww2.dcmilitary.com/stories/021909/journal_28172.shtml> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <http://woundedwear.org/jason_redman> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Luke 12:24-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Luke 21:36, Colossians 4:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Brody and his wife’s adopted children [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ephesians 6:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. 1 Peter 1:24-25 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Hughes, Kent. *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*; Crossway, 1990. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Psalm 62:5 [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. James Stuart Stewart (1896-1990) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. <http://www.amfmonline.com/articles/anmviewer.asp?a=85&print=yes> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Kent Hughes, *Ephesians: The Mystery of the Body of Christ*, p. 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. 1 Corinthians 15:20, *“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.”* 15:23, *“But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ."* [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Because they are taught the catechism: Q. What is the chief end of man? A. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Revelation 4:8; Isaiah 6:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Genesis 3:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Lincoln, Andrew. *The Theology of the Later Pauline Epistles*; Cambridge University Press, 1993. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. The cover of Vanity Fair at the time of this message was about sports hero, Bruce Jenner, going through a “gender transition.” [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Ephesians,* InterVarsity Press, 1979. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Revelation 4:8, Isaiah 6:3 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. A phrase from a classic Christian hymn, *Amazing Grace*: <http://library.timelesstruths.org/music/Amazing_Grace/> [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Titus 3:3-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. http://www.echelon-africa.com/about/our-team/ [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. <http://theafricansecrets.com/the-dinka-people/> [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antiochus_IV_Epiphanes> [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maccabean_Revolt> [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rwandan_Genocide> [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. <https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Battle_of_Mogadishu_(1993)> [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. <http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g293829-d1168899-Reviews-Nyamata_Church-Kigali_Kigali_Province.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ruth 1:16-17, *“But Ruth said, “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. <https://www.ted.com/talks> [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. <https://www.ted.com/talks/matthew_o_reilly_am_i_dying_the_honest_answer> [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Ephesians 1:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. See podcast and transcript of message preached on May 10, 2015 @ <http://redoak-church.com/media.php?pageID=5> [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Galatians 6:14, *“But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-FHYI3kdK_g&feature=youtu.be> [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. 1 Thessalonians 5:3 (KJV), *“For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Matthew 10:34 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. John 19:30, *“When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Genesis 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Also called the “Holy of Holies,”; Hebrews 10:19-20; <http://www.gotquestions.org/Holy-of-Holies.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Matthew 27:50-51; <http://www.gotquestions.org/temple-veil-torn.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Acts 22:25 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. <https://www.dday.org/the-memorial/why-bedford-the-bedford-boys.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Genesis 12:2, *“And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. “Saul,” in this text, is Paul. They will begin changing his name in this same text. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Acts 23:6, *“Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Acts 13:47, *“For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”* [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Its mission is to help employers and employees reduce on the job injuries, illnesses and deaths. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Derbe was about 60 miles from Lystra. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. *“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Luke 15:4-7 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. John 8:1-11 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Matthew 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; Luke 7:26-50; John 12:1-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. <http://www.gotquestions.org/already-not-yet.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. <https://vimeo.com/123705964> [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Luke 10:19 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Luke 8:22-39 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Daniel 4:35 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Scripture has many mentions of Jesus casting out demons, including Mark 1:39 and Mark 16:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Proverbs 8:29 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. NBA, Steph Curry game five highlights: <http://www.nba.com/video/channels/playoffs/2015/06/15/20150615-curry-phantom-gm5.nba/> [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Petersen, Grant. *Eat Bacon, Don’t Jog*; Workman Publishing Company, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. These message podcasts and transcripts can be found at: <http://redoak-church.com/#/podcasts> . Dates for the series on “Distinctives of a Biblical Church” are 12/29/2013 to 3/9/2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Although we have not researched this article for its entire accuracy, it gives a good description of what Paul’s prison may have been like: <http://www.mpumc.org/uploads/file/Prisons%20in%20Paul.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Philippians 4:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/conversation/> [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. A theme of wothe book of Ecclesiastes, by Solomon. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. This is because Romans 5:3 says, “Tribulation worketh patience,” or produces patience. Nobody wants to pray for tribulation so it can bring patience in their lives! [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. A good resource on the illegal trials of Jesus: <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/2389/the-illegal-unjust-trials-of-jesus-part-1> [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Southeastern Baptist Seminary [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, by Tony Merida, p. 97 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Ephesians 3:20, *“Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. According to Wikipedia, “The Bible Belt is an informal term for a region in the south-eastern and south-central United States in which socially conservative evangelical Protestantism plays a strong role in society and politics, and Christian church attendance across the denominations is generally higher than the nation's average.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. A reference to the recent Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriage [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. An English Puritan theologian (1616 – 1683), who wrote such light reading as *Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture; with Considerations on the Prolegomena and Appendix to the Late “Biblia Polyglotta*” [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2015/07/01/40-questions-for-christians-now-waving-rainbow-flags/> [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Ephesians 2:8-9 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. John 10:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. A children’s song many of us remember from Sunday School. Author Unknown. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. “Kahuna” is the nickname for Steve Coleman, President and CEO of Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters, in Andrews, NC. [www.swoutfitters.com](http://www.swoutfitters.com). Red Oak Church meets on the grounds of Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. 1 Corinthians 4:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. 1 Corinthians 15:!0 [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Hebrews 12:!2 [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. 2 Corinthians 3:18 [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Soteriology is the study of the doctrine of salvation. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Proverbs 6:16-19, *“There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: 17 haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, 19 a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. John 13:35, *“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. 1 Timothy 6:16, *“…who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Romans 8:15, *“…you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”* [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Ephesians 5:2 [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. 1 John 4:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. 1 Corinthians 10:12 [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. A saying attributed to the English reformer and martyr, John Bradford (1510–1555). [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. <http://www.challies.com/articles/planned-parenthood-4-ways-to-respond> ; <http://www.albertmohler.com/2015/07/15/a-lot-of-people-want-intact-hearts-these-days-planned-parenthood-abortion-and-the-conscience-of-a-nation/> [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/05/opinion/in-zimbabwe-we-dont-cry-for-lions.html?_r=0> [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/08/03/cecil-the-lion-honored-as-part-empire-state-building-light-show/> [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. <http://www.nationalinfantrymuseum.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. *Marvelous Light*, by Charlie Hall, from the album *Flying Into Daybreak*, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. John 17:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. 2 Corinthians 6:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. *In vino veritas* is a Latin phrase that means "in wine there is truth." Its counterpart in Greek, "Ἐν οἴνῳ ἀλήθεια" (En oinōi alētheia) dates back to biblical times. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Already/not yet theology explained: <http://www.gotquestions.org/already-not-yet.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. *Letter to the Ephesians*, commentary by Peter T. O’Brien, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Oct 25, 1999 [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. *Les Misérables* is a 2012 British epic romantic musical period drama film produced by Working Title Films and distributed by Universal Pictures [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Hugh Jackman played the superhero, Wolverine, a Marvel Comics character in various productions. Russell Crowe played the gladiator, Maximus, in the movie, *Gladiator* (2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. *I Sing the Mighty Power of God*, by Isaac Watts, 1715. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. *Marvelous Light*, by Charlie Hall, from the album *Flying Into Daybreak*, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. *Be Thou My Vision*, a traditional Irish hymn. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. An American situation comedy about a boy named Theodore (“The Beaver”) Cleaver and his adventures; 1957-1963; distributed by NBC Universal Television. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Delling, Gerhard; *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (quoted by Andrew Lincoln and others) [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Stott, John; *The Message of Ephesians*, InterVarsity Press, Apr 2, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. O’Brien, Peter T.; *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Oct 25, 1999 [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7, 9:10 [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. A two-part sermon: <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/lionhearted-and-lamblike-the-christian-husband-as-head-part-1> and <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/lionhearted-and-lamblike-the-christian-husband-as-head-part-2> [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Stott, John; *The Message of Ephesians*, InterVarsity Press, Apr 2, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Rob Conti, other elders of Red Oak, and many members of Red Oak, also work at Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters, a Christian camp. At the time of this message, the camp had just wrapped up the last of ten intense weeks of summer camp. [www.swoutfitters.com](http://www.swoutfitters.com) [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. <http://cbmw.org/uncategorized/summaries-of-the-egalitarian-and-complementarian-positions/> [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Red Oak Church meets on the campus of Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters ([www.swoutfitters.com](http://www.swoutfitters.com)) and most of the staff attends the church. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that all 50 states must allow “same-sex marriages.” <http://www.scotusblog.com/case-files/cases/obergefell-v-hodges/> [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Grudem, Wayne; *Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology;* Chapters 22 & 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. <http://cbmw.org/uncategorized/summaries-of-the-egalitarian-and-complementarian-positions/> [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. DeYoung, Kevin, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality*; Crossway (April 30, 2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Stott, John R. W.; *The Message of Ephesians*, p. 222; IVP Academic, 1984. Italics added. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. DeYoung, Kevin, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality*; Crossway (April 30, 2015) [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Stott, John; *Ephesians: Building a Community in Christ*; IVP Connect; June 30, 2008 [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Merida, Tony. *Exalting Jesus in Ephesians*, p.153; B&H Publishing Group, Sep 1, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Since the release of the undercover videos of the behind-the-scenes bargaining for unborn babies and baby parts by Planned Parenthood; <http://www.centerformedicalprogress.org/cmp/investigative-footage/> [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Stott, John. *The Message of Ephesians*; InterVarsity Press, Apr 2, 2014 [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Philippians 1:6 [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Proverbs 9:10, Deuteronomy 10:12, and others. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Bill Maher is an American comedian, writer, producer, political commentator, actor, media critic, and television host. *Politically Incorrect* with Bill Maher, was a television show that allowed analysts and celebrities the chance to discuss controversial issues. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Jerry Falwell was an American evangelical Southern Baptist pastor, televangelist, and a conservative political commentator, as well as Chancellor of Liberty University in Lynchburg, Kentucky. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters; Andrews, North Carolina [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. 1 John 4:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Lincoln, Andrew T., *The Theology of the Later Pauline Letters*, Cambridge University Press, Jun 3, 1993 [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. A city in India. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. The area in and around the location of Red Oak Church and a couple of the locations where Red Oak Church has and supports missionaries. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Stott, John. *The Message of Ephesians*, IVP, 1979 [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. A classic masterpiece by C.S. Lewis that is written as a mysterious series of recorded conversations between two demons tasked with securing the demise of their human "patients." [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. A fictional team of superheroes appearing in American comic books published by Marvel Comics (debut, 1963). [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Luke 15:11-32 [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Red Oak Church meets on the campus of Snowbird Wilderness Outfitters; www.swoutfitters.com [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. *The Greatest American Hero*, 1981-1983; Stephen J. Cannell Productions [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Podcasts of these messages are available here. The 10 Distinctives messages are 12/29/13-3/9/14. <http://www.redoak-church.com/media.php?pageID=5> [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Go to this link, click on “podcasts,” and then “launch media player.” [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Romans 8:31 [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Revelation 12:11 [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Matthew 25:40 [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. James 1:27 [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Daniel 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Mark 1:34, among others. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.” [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Job 1:6-12 [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. From [www.biblestudyforum.com](http://www.biblestudyforum.com); The Roman poet Virgil (70-19 BC) illustrates this atrocity in all its horrors, in the account that he gives of the tyrant Mezentius, in the following stanza:

     What tongue can such barbarities record, Or count the slaughters of his ruthless sword? ‘Twas not enough the good, the guiltless bled,

     Still worse, he bound the living to the dead: These, limb to limb, and face to face, he joined; O, monstrous crime, of unexampled kind!

     Till choked with stench, the lingering wretches lay, And, in the loathed embraces, died away! [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. https://bible.org/question/what-does-greek-word-tetelestai-mean [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/chumbawamba/tubthumping.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Matthew 2:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Moe is Brody’s little two-year-old son, Moses, who was adopted from Uganda when he was one. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. “For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.” [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. 1 Corinthians 4:16 and 11:1 [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. <http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_aristeia.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. <http://www.thesocietyofwilliamwallace.com/battleofstirlingbridge.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. 2 Corinthians 5:7 [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Romans 10:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. <http://www.echelon-africa.com/> [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. Red Oak Church members on a short-term mission [↑](#footnote-ref-187)