

Ephesians 13-09-15b

We continue our introduction by way of Acts chapter 1 to our new study in the book of Ephesians. We had a happy confluence where our scheduled chapter in the Joshua Code provides a very suitable introduction to this study. And we saw in Acts chapter 1 verse 8, as well as Matthew 28, 19, and 20, and the three accounts in the book of Acts of the conversion of the apostle Paul, conversion meaning shift in mission from being a Pharisee to being an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there is some helpful context for the Lord's words to the eleven and to Saul, who becomes Paul, with regard to what has come to be known as the Great Commission, what has come to define the evangelical church.

And it's not a terrible thing. This is not at the level of heresy or evil or corruption entering the church. It is, to my persuasion, a missed emphasis, an imbalance in things that are true, but a good thing overemphasized can become bad.

Everybody likes sugar. I have been reading with great interest the sort of discovery of sugar by Europeans because sugarcane was not known in Europe until the New World was discovered. And when people first tasted sugar, it was worse than tobacco.

It was worse than caffeine or nicotine. People couldn't get enough sugar. They were just stunned.

They found these places where people would chew cane, and initially they didn't know how to turn it into something that could be stored and shipped because you can cut the cane and store it, but very quickly it's kind of like bananas. It will go bad. And they couldn't figure out for a while how to make a product out of it that could be shipped and sent back to Europe and so on, but eventually they discovered how to cook it down and how to granulate it and how to make it into something that could be stored long term.

And, oh my goodness, when people tasted sugar, that was it. They just couldn't get enough. It was the rage.

It was a craze. They couldn't make enough. They couldn't get enough.

And this was one of several new products that fueled the burgeoning industry of slavery. Tobacco fueled the burgeoning of slavery. Sugar fueled the burgeoning and expansion of slavery.

Rubber, latex, greatly labor-intensive. All of these labor-intensive things that people wanted to grow and make money at required more manpower than was available. And as I have been learning in my recreational reading, Europeans first turned to their own kind, indentured servants who had a contract and had debts to relieve and so on, would indenture themselves to pay off these debts.

The problem is, any time you brought them to the New World, they died. Died in droves. Died by

the thousands.

Two out of every three Europeans that came to North and South America in the first century and a half, after 1492, died. And died within the first year. Died of disease.

Because not so much that they encountered new diseases. They encountered old diseases to which they had not been exposed by sitting around waiting for their ship to leave in London. Malaria and yellow fever were rife in the port cities in Britain, and people would come there wanting to go to the New World, but they had to sit around and wait until the next ship would sail.

They would be exposed. The incubation period was during their travels. They would get here just in time to get fatally ill.

And everybody said, well, there's something about the New World. There's bad air, malaria. You know, they're breathing this stuff.

Well, of course, then it spread here, and even people that had escaped exposure in the Old World would pick it up in the New, and they had very little resistance to it. Because it was an African disease that had come north due to the slave trade of blacks selling other blacks into slavery in Africa, sent to Europe by the Muslim slave traders. Anybody that tries to tell you, oh, boo on the white people in America that sponsored and invented slavery doesn't know history and hasn't been taught a more accurate history, which is slavery had gone on for centuries in Africa.

Africans took each other's slave, and by the way, so did Native Americans. Before the white men ever showed up here, Indians would defeat other Indians and enslave them. And just very quickly, there were two major groups separated by language in this country before Europeans ever appeared.

You had your Algonquians in the north, you had your Mississippians in the south, and the ones in the north weren't really so sole on slavery, so to speak. They weren't that interested in it. It wasn't a big deal to them.

They would occasionally do it, but it wasn't a big deal. The southern Mississippian groups were big on it, and they would constantly enslave one another, defeat a village, take the people's slaves. And the dividing line between those two language groups, oddly enough, right along the Mason Dixon line.

It pre-existed, the white men. So when these labor-intensive crops needed to be grown, Europeans who came here and survived to live and try to start farming tried to impress other Europeans into service, but they lost so many of them to death that they couldn't make a living at it. So they turned to the Native Americans, especially in the south, who had a long tradition of slavery and they said, hey, sell us some of your Native American slaves.

Well, the Native Americans had even less resistance to the diseases of malaria and yellow fever than the Europeans did, and they died almost entirely. And so having tried the Europeans and having tried the Native Americans for slaves, there were some African slaves that had come over and were being offered for sale and so on. Well, the Africans had a hereditary resistance to these diseases that the Europeans and Native Americans did not have, and you could buy them and they would last.

And so this was one of a number of causes why the enslavement of people of African origin became so ubiquitous, especially in the south. But one of the things that comes out of this is it is important to understand context. And I mentioned sugar and the tremendous appeal that this had, not because of its nutritive value, not because of its health and physical benefit, but because it tasted good.

And it just became so attractive because of this sort of temporary stimulation. People just had to have more and more. Well, suddenly you have tooth rot and you have people just taking it to excess.

And it is possible to find a thing that has attractive taste and attractive value, and anything taken to excess is bad. And so my initial thought that we began with in this session is there can be things that are good and attractive and even beneficial in small quantities, but if you take them to excess, you cause problems. There really, a lot of the physical problems that come from sugar or an excess of it in your diet don't show up if you're not eating sugar.

There are all sorts of concomitants if you overdo. You can take any good thing and if you overdo it, it becomes a bad thing. Even the study of the Word of God.

If you take Bible study to excess, it is an abuse and it is an imbalance. God did not leave us here to spend our entire day in study. He didn't set up life that way.

We are here to live and to encounter circumstances and situations where we apply the Word of God, where we lay hold of righteousness by faith. You don't do righteousness by faith sitting in Bible class. You do righteousness by faith in circumstances, at decision points, when it is time to accomplish a purpose, when it is time to act, when it is time to think, when it is time to speak, or to refrain from acting and refrain from speaking.

But this is only possible as we live life in the world. We are strangers and pilgrims and we sojourn here and it is this sojourn that gives us occasions to apply. It's the same in any area of life.

If you go to school and learn a skill or a trade or an area of expertise, you're not fulfilled sitting in the classroom continuing to learn it, although there are people who become professional scholars and they never actually get out and do. It is in the doing, it is in the implementation that these things count. We are supposed to be not in Bible class.

We are supposed to not be in a time of reflection and meditation and concentration. We are supposed to be largely in the arena of application. That is our call.

As we look this morning in the first session at Matthew 28, 19 and 20, Acts 1, verse 8, at the words of the Lord Jesus to Paul as he reflects on it in two subsequent occasions after his conversion story there, what do we see? There is a specific set of instructions given to a specific group of individuals, the twelve apostles. And the justification for us rushing under this umbrella and claiming that they apply to us as well is entirely based on Jesus in Matthew 28, 20 saying, teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you. All right, let's say that that is valid.

Jesus gave them the Great Commission. It is traditionally said, go ye into all the world and so on. If that is the case, if the teaching to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you includes this evangelistic function that seems to be present, you would expect that the apostles would have done this, right? If Peter and John and Paul, let's just take those three, if they are to teach others the Great Commission, then they would have done so, right? You would expect this.

So we look at the epistles of Peter. We look at the epistles of John. We look at the epistles, the great collection that we have, the Pauline epistles.

And we say, well, if this is true, if this is a valid understanding, then Peter will have told the churches that he shepherded, that he was writing apostolic instructions to, to implement the Great Commission, right? Paul will have written the Corinthians, the Galatians, the Ephesians, the Philippians, the Colossians, the Thessalonians, possibly Hebrews. He will have told them in those letters, go ye into all the world, make disciples, baptize them in the name, and so on, right? Did that happen? As I was mentioning on the break, remarkably, astonishingly, there is not a single reference in any of Paul's letters to all of these different churches. There is not a single reference in either of Peter's epistles.

There is not a single reference in any of the three Johannine epistles, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, to personal evangelism. There is no exhortation. There is no command.

There is no encouragement to go door to door, to even to, to, the closest you can get is when we have the exhortation to be ready always to give an answer to anyone who asks us a reason. Be ready to answer. Answer presupposes question, right? You don't answer a question that hasn't been asked.

It's either implied or overtly asked. You answer, you respond, and answer is a response to an initiation by someone else. The disciples asked the Lord, when shall these things be? Jesus answered and said, be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you.

That's as close as you can get. Would there not at least be one reiteration? The Apostle Paul even uses the upper room bread and cup. You've got a greater foundation for the traditional ritual

of the Lord's table.

Paul repeats that and he wasn't even there. How did he know that, by the way? How did he hear about what the Lord said in the upper room? He had concourse with those who were there, who bore witness. But feel free to look.

I have looked exhaustively for a single exhortation, command, injunction, imperative to personal evangelism, go thou and personally evangelize in any of the apostolic epistles, and I find exactly zero. Now this is remarkable if this traditional interpretation of Matthew 28.20 is valid, that the apostles went and taught others to do the very same thing that Jesus taught them in this passage, that He taught them to go and make disciples. Everybody is to be a disciple or everybody is to be an evangelist.

Not a single mention in any epistle? This is quite remarkable. It requires some sort of explanation, which I have yet to hear. So all of that commends itself to our attention as a caution.

We do not want to take any good thing, and believe me, witnessing an evangelism, none of us would be here without it. It's a wonderful thing. It's a privilege to speak the truth in love to others, to celebrate and to share what God has done for us in Christ.

To Dr. Criswell, I used this in an ad, a one-page thing that we've had published a couple of times, to talk about the Lord Jesus Christ to others is the highest, heavenliest privilege of human life. It's absolutely true. It's a wonderful privilege, but it is not an imperative.

It is not the measure by which your spiritual life is evaluated. God's not going to say, well, how many people did you share the gospel with? And there would be some negative judgment made because, well, what? You mean you knew somebody and you didn't witness to them? You didn't corner them and didn't press them with an appeal to come to faith? It is not an imperative for us. Well, what is the teaching that the apostles have shared with us? The things that Jesus gave them, and interestingly, the apostle Paul, you remember that last section where he says, not only what you have learned, but what I am going to reveal to you, just as Jesus told the eleven, a good teacher brings forth out of his treasury, out of his storehouse, things new and old, the apostle Paul is going to draw on his extensive Old Testament knowledge as well as the mysteries that are revealed to him in the church to teach, to fulfill Matthew 28, 19 and 20, to fulfill Acts 1, verse 8, even though he wasn't there, he is going to be a witness.

And this is the privilege that we have, is to be the beneficiaries and the recipients of that apostolic witness. The apostolic witness is sufficient. The twelve that Jesus called and commissioned to be his witnesses and his teachers have given us everything we need.

We don't need new revelation, we don't need fresh manna from above to share, it is all here. That which is complete has come. And that which was in part, which was the supernatural gifts of prophecy, of tongues, of interpretation of tongues and so on, those were stop gaps, those were

temporary measures to bridge the gap until the apostolic witness could be set down in writing and be available to all of us.

It is now here. This before you, in your lap, this Bible that you have in your hand, is the fulfillment of Jesus' instructions to the apostles. That's why we have it.

And one of the greatest compendiums of this truth, bringing together things old and new, witnessing to Jew and Gentile alike, is the book of Ephesians. And if you turn to the book of Ephesians, it begins with a salutation, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. This is what we have been talking about.

This is the background that we have covered in the first session plus this morning. Paul, an apostle. We understand that what is to follow is the Word of God.

It is given in and through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Remember Acts 1-2? Remember the story of Paul's initial introduction into the Christian faith? Continue on and it will be told you. And there is the witness of the Holy Spirit, there is the supernatural ministry of God to impart to Saul his new function as the apostle Paul.

And it is in and through the ministry of God's Holy Spirit that his insights and his biblical knowledge and his grasp of the revealed mysteries of the church age are imparted to us. This book, like the rest of the New Testament, like the rest of the Bible, is inspired scripture. We know it is inspired because Paul is an apostle.

I could make up some things. I could tell you that I had a dream and you are supposed to go start a mission in Borneo. What would be the authentication that this is a Word from God through the Holy Spirit? I need to see some authentication such as we have with the apostle Paul.

And in the modern day you typically don't find that because everything we need is here. So the epistle of Paul the apostle to the Ephesians. This is our book.

This is our study. This is the letter from Paul that we are going to undertake to understand. Paul an apostle of Jesus Christ.

This is not just a formula. This is essential. This tells me how much attention I should pay to the saints.

One of the differences between this letter and Matthew 28, 19 and 20, one of the differences between this letter and Acts chapter 1 is I am absolutely 100% certain that you and I are recipients of this information. That it is given to us. It is for us.

It is addressed to us. Because you and I are saints. We are set apart ones.

We are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and this information is specifically directed and

addressed to us. The next phrase, who are in Ephesus, scratch it out. It is not there.

It was added later. We have several manuscripts. The earliest witnesses to this and that phrase is not there.

This letter was evidently designed to be circulated and to be passed along among several churches. To the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus. It's one thing to be a saint.

It's one thing to be saved. It is another thing to be faithful in Christ Jesus. Can you be one and not be the other? Can you be a saint and not be faithful? Yes.

Why isn't this just merely to the saints? Why is there a subset of the saints to which this letter comes? To those who are faithful in Christ Jesus. What about the saints who are unfaithful in Christ Jesus? What about them? This letter is not for them? That's exactly right. This letter is not for the unfaithful in Christ Jesus.

If you're unfaithful in Christ Jesus, there are other portions of Scripture that pertain. This is one of the reasons, by the way, that after doing a lot of preliminary work in 1 Corinthians, I have chosen not to study that book at this time. Because it is addressed to and designed to benefit a category of believers into which we almost entirely do not fall.

The problems in the Corinthian church really are not ones that we are currently facing. They are not issues that we have in our group. We do not have divisions among us.

We are not dividing up under different teachers and opposing one another and calling each other names. We are not tolerating immorality in our midst, at least not that I know of. If you look through the issues, look at any outline of 1 Corinthians, the issues that face that group which the Apostle Paul addresses so effectively and so directly aren't those things which really apply in our case.

Thankfully, praise God, those are not problems for us. There are churches where there is division. There are churches where there is overt immorality in the group.

That would be a wonderful book to study for those groups. It does not really pertain to us. Who are we? I like to think, I believe in my heart of hearts that we are both saints and faithful.

This is a great book for us. If you look at an outline of the book of Ephesians, which I will give you in detail next time, this is a wonderful book for us. It reviews what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us.

It reminds us of the privileges and the blessings that are ours in Christ, and then it moves from that to practical application for those who are growing, who are narrow road, straight gate believers. How can we maximize the potential? How can we make sure that our faith is resulting in righteousness and obtaining an inheritance among the saints? Remember that commission for

the Apostle Paul to share with them the Lord Jesus Christ, that they may obtain an inheritance among the faithful, among the saints? That's us. I am convinced that you, like I, want to inherit, want to reflect the glory of Jesus Christ.

That's what this letter addresses. I believe, and I have shared with you in the past, especially in our Colossians study, that this is in fact the letter that was initially sent to Laodicea. If you look at the end of the book of Colossians, flip over just a few pages, Colossians 4, verse 16, when this epistle, the letter to the Colossians, is read among you, and notice this is the format for communication.

They didn't Xerox it and hand it out to everybody and say, take this home, it's like a newsletter. It was read in their hearing. It was read and expounded upon by a teaching elder.

It's a letter from Paul. Hey, we've got a letter from Paul. Everybody listen.

And a guy who had the ability to read and had the ability to explain when questions came up, what does he mean by that? He could explain it. When this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans. Colossae and Laodicea were 11 miles apart, just down the road.

If you walk at a speed of 3 to 5 miles an hour, you could be there in 2 or 3 hours. They were a neighboring town. So Paul sends one letter to Colossae.

He sends another letter to Laodicea. And he says, what I would like is rather than me repeating myself on a lot of these things, you all just exchange letters. Once you've read the letter, once you've had your questions answered about it, pass it along to your neighboring church, your fellow believers down the road.

See that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. There's a lot of torturous analysis done on that second-to-last word, letter from Laodicea. Why doesn't he say the letter to Laodicea? Well, it's pretty simple and obvious.

He has told the Laodiceans via the messenger, once you've read this, be sure and send it down to Colossae. And so he says, look, my letter to the Laodiceans is going to be coming from there to you in Colossae. And they're going to get a letter from you as well.

Now, here's the thing. What does this prove about Ephesians? Well, why would this particular verse be in the Bible if the letter to the Laodiceans had not survived? Why would this verse even be there? Why couldn't this have been information that was imparted by the carrier, by the messenger? Why is it in there? When you have finished this letter of Colossians, be sure you read the letter to the Laodiceans. Be sure you have it read in your presence.

Be sure that you get that content as well. Well, those people might have been able to do it, but we can't because the letter to the Laodiceans is lost. So are we missing out that we've only got

half the message? I think not.

I think the reason you have Colossians 4.16 is that we have the letter, and it has been misidentified in the early days of the church as to the Ephesians. By the way, Paul had a closer relationship with the believers in Ephesus than almost any other group. He spent months and months and months and months in Ephesus.

He knew the people in Ephesus. He helped found that church. He was intimately acquainted with them.

And when you read this letter that we are about to study, there is no hint that he has that kind of close concourse and knowledge of individuals in the church. In fact, at one point he says, when I heard of your faith. By the time this letter is written, the time in Paul's ministry, he doesn't need to hear of it.

He's been there. I have seen your faith. I have encouraged your faith.

We have done these things together. The group to whom he writes the letter we're about to study, which we'll continue to call the Book of Ephesians, but it is, I am convinced, this is in fact the letter that Paul is talking about in 4.16 of Colossians. This is the letter that he initially sent to Laodicea.

It was then carried to Colossae, and from there to other churches. It was sort of a circular. It was a letter that could benefit any church that received it.

It is general in its application, not to specific issues, such as you find, for example, in 1 Corinthians. There were specific issues, specific problems, specific needs for that particular group, and Paul writes into that situation. The Book of Ephesians is a great book for any group, in any circumstance to study and to learn from.

So, I believe it is the Colossians 4.16 letter. And I think that having studied Colossians, and that study is available on the website, we can now fulfill Paul's exhortation, having finished Colossians, study the Book of Ephesians. So that's what we're going to do.

It is a terrific, terrific book. The first chapter is one of the greatest pieces of theological writing in history. Old Testament, New Testament, Pauline epistles, Johannine, Petrine.

It is a wonderful, wonderful encouragement. It is a wonderful revelation. It places us in the context of God's plan and purpose.

It shows us the privileges and benefits we have through the presence and power of God in our lives. It's just a terrific book. We are going to study this, and I will tell you now, we're going to move rather quickly.

These upcoming classes will be dense. So, if you're going to take notes, just be forewarned. You'll be writing a lot, because there will not be much fat in the presentation.

Necessarily so, because there are some other things we want to cover after we've done Ephesians, and I want to outlive the study. I want to still be alive and around after we've finished. So, my plan is that we will move quickly, similar to the way we did the book of Job, the way we did some of the longer books that we've already covered.

This is dense material, and we need to waste no time. So, this is about as relaxed as it's going to get in this study. We will start exegetically next time in Ephesians 1.1, and we will be covering sections each session.

There will be a section that we cover, and the next session will be the next section. We will not posthole, we will not dwell, we will not dally. So, I just tell you now, strap in, because we're going to be moving quickly, but I hope effectively and thoroughly through this wonderful, wonderful letter, which is information the Lord Jesus Christ gave to the Apostle Paul, the Apostle Paul, to give to us.

So, I encourage you to read ahead of time, formulate any questions that you have about specific areas ahead of time. Anything you see in chapter 1 that you have a question about, read it over, look it over, be familiar with the ground. This will help us move quickly, because I watch your eyes and your faces to see if I need to keep explaining or if you've got it.

So, read it ahead of time. Any questions that you have, any particular issues you hope to see addressed, you can let me know in advance, you can ask me on the break, before, after, during. Stick your hand up and say, wait a minute, before we go on, I'm still unclear about this.

Speak up. But that will be the plan. That's, you know, the best plans of mice and men don't always pan out, but that's my fervent intention.

So, read it ahead of time, think about it, formulate any questions that you have, and we're going to dive in and start swimming strongly next Sunday. But we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for the wonderful provision of this nourishment for our souls, the words that are given to the Holy Spirit to speak in our hearts on an hourly and a daily basis. We pray that as we seek to understand Your Word and Your truth for us, that God the Holy Spirit will impress it on our hearts, that He will make it clear and plain, not only what it says and what it means, but how it applies in the circumstances that You have assigned to each one of us, that we can grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, we can lay hold of righteousness by faith, we can enter into that inheritance that You purposed for us when You commissioned the apostles, when You brought us to salvation through Your Son, the Lord Jesus, and that in all of these areas and in all of these endeavors, You will be glorified, the Lord Jesus Christ will be magnified, and we will

be fruitful and productive in Your will, both now and in the times that are to come. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.