

Ephesians 13-09-22a

This is Sunday, the 22nd of September, 2013. This is our second foray into the epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians or to the sanctified and faithful in Christ Jesus. We will take a moment to dedicate our time and our concentration to God the Father through the Lord Jesus and ask the blessing of His Holy Spirit and then we'll begin.

Father, we are grateful for another opportunity to spend this time together to receive the blessings and benefits that come as we are blessed through the gifts that You've distributed in our midst. We thank You for the Lord Jesus and for all of the things that we have in Him. We thank You for this passage of Scripture and the truth that it has for us, not just in the abstract, not just as theological propositions, but as practical daily guidance, wisdom, strength and encouragement.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enliven these truths for us, make them flame and live in our souls so that we can make the maximum use of the time and opportunities that You've given to us and what remains to us of this life. We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen. As we saw last time, this is a letter written by the Apostle Paul.

I believe this is one of two letters that were written at about the same time, the other one being Colossians and they were carried to the same vicinity at about the same time. If you turn a few pages forward in your Bible to the end of Colossians 4.16-18, now when this epistle, the epistle to Colossae, is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea. I personally cannot imagine this instruction being in the Bible and given to this group of believers and yet the letter not being available to us.

What letter could that be? It can only be the book we call Ephesians. So this pair of letters was carried by Epaphras. If you look back at verse 12 in that same chapter, Epaphras, who is one of you, a bond servant of Christ, greets you, laboring fervently for you in prayers that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

I bear him witness. He has a great zeal for you and those who are in Laodicea and those in Hierapolis. And then Luke and Demas also greet them.

So these letters I think were carried together and were designed to be exchanged. The first chapter, which is the portion to which we naturally address ourselves as we start the letter, contains first of all the salutation in the first two verses. Verse 1 says, Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

We spent some time talking about what it is to be an apostle, who is and is not an apostle. This is by the will of God. Apostle is a very limited, very special, and very particular spiritual gift.

But it is representative in many ways of all spiritual gifts. All spiritual gifts are by the will of God.

We don't choose our spiritual gift.

Some people would like to. There are people who would like to be a pastor, but that's not their gift. They'd like to be an evangelist, but that's not their gift.

They would like to travel overseas in a missionary capacity and evangelize and teach people in foreign lands. It's not their gift. There are other people who have those gifts of pastor or of evangelist or doing so in a foreign field, and they do not respond.

They do not prepare themselves. They don't take up that call, and their gift lies dormant. This is true of all gifts.

Those are sort of the visible, front-line gifts that we like to see and talk about. They're very public. People can see them and acknowledge them without much difficulty.

There are many other spiritual callings and spiritual giftings that God gives us through the presence of His Holy Spirit. But they all have this in common. They are by the will of God.

God gifted you. Maybe we can make some more words. You know that hymn, Love Lifted Me? Well, we can have another hymn called God Gifted Me.

God gifted even me. When nothing else could help, God gifted me. You have a gift by the will of God.

Every single believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, that's one of the things that is a part of your identity in Christ, is a particular capacity to bless the body of Christ. Your gift, with the exception of evangelism, is designed to benefit fellow believers. That's what the gift is for.

It isn't to feed the world. It isn't to save the whales. It isn't to repopulate the ice pack or the rainforest.

It isn't to close the hole in the ozone layer. It isn't to, you know, save the puppies. This breaks your heart looking at these commercials on television, these sad-eyed puppies and these people, the dogs have been set on fire and horribly abused and left to starve.

It's awful. It's a wonderful expression of the evils of man's humanity that these kinds of things take place, and many others. They always talk about inhumanity.

It's not inhuman. These are human, these evils and these awful acts. We've had a rash of crazy people shooting up the place.

It's humanity. It's man's humanity that is expressed. But in Christ, through the ministry and the presence of God's Holy Spirit, we are given divinity.

And in Christ, in the body of Christ, in our fellowship, in our brotherhood, we have, in our royal

family, we have an ability, a unique ability, given to us to bless our fellow believers. You may not be able to put a name to it. You may not be able to see where it begins and where it ends, but you could pick any small piece of tissue in your body, and that piece of tissue might not be aware of how important it is.

It might just be an elbow tendon. It might be a piece of connective tissue in the abdomen. It might be a little chunk of cartilage in some joint, and it may have no idea about how beneficial it is to the rest of the body for movement and for flexibility and for strength, for direction, for limiting.

It's a wonderful thing that our joints are limited in their scope. Your knees don't bend 180 degrees, and you can be thankful for that. They bend slightly less.

If they bent more than 180 degrees, you'd be in trouble. Your kneecaps would pop off, and you'd be unable to function. We have a scope or an extent for our elbows and our shoulders, and they are limiting.

Sometimes our presence is a limiting feature. It is something that guides the body and prevents it from taking something to an extreme. There are an infinitude of ways in which we can be a blessing and never even know it.

You can think of people, I can think of people in my past, and you can think of people in your past that have been a blessing, and you can be confident that they really are unconscious of it, have no idea, or don't know the extent or the permanence or how vivid that memory is of something that they did, because the presence and the power of God's Holy Spirit is, and was, manifested in them and became a blessing to us. This is a work of God. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God.

You are a believer with a gift and an ability to bless believers in your periphery by the will of God. God chooses the way and the means. He chooses the occasions.

We can't force it. We can't coerce it. We can't necessarily even choose it or command it.

It is something that God does by His will. Paul is an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and in his function as an apostle, the communication that is to follow is authoritative. Ephesians, by the way, is one of the questioned books, and don't waste your time, but if you get into commentary and criticism and so on, especially over the last few hundred years, the authorship of this book by Paul was first questioned back in 1792 in print, and since that time, more and more scholars have risen up in judgment on Ephesians and have decided that it isn't Pauline enough.

He doesn't separate law and grace enough. He doesn't use words in exactly the same way with exactly the same connotation that he does in some of his quote-unquote unquestioned letters. You can fill in your own adjective for that sort of talk.

Needless to say, the very beginning, you know, could somebody forge a letter and say, well, this is from Paul the apostle? They could try, but it would not have the spiritual resonance. You and I, because of the presence of the Holy Spirit, have a great little device within us just like aircraft have, the old IFF, identification friend or foe, and God the Holy Spirit bears witness in our spirit, and when God the Holy Spirit is pitching and God the Holy Spirit is catching, that's going to be authoritative for us. You don't need a statistic.

You don't need a proof. You don't need, you know, this is the wonderful thing about science. There's never enough evidence to prove something.

It's more the weight of evidence. It's like being in courts. I've been on jury duty.

Well, beyond a reasonable doubt, they can never remove all doubt. It doesn't matter. Well, we've got them on video.

Well, the video could be doctored. Well, we have eyewitnesses. Well, the witnesses, maybe they didn't see what they thought they saw.

Maybe they're lying. There's never enough evidence. Even scientific, quote-unquote, laws are based on a lot of observation.

It seems to hold true all the time. What amazes me is scientists can observe less than 3% of what we know is out there, and yet they say that these, quote-unquote, laws hold true throughout the universe. Speed of light is constant in the universe.

They don't know that. They assume that. They can only measure the speed of light within a very, you know, they've never measured the speed of light beyond putting reflectors on the moon.

That's as far as they've been able to actually measure it. Is the speed of light constant? I have no idea. It's constant around here, but, you know, they say all these laws of momentum and everything else apply everywhere.

They have no way of knowing that. They assume it. Well, we have confidence because God has put His Spirit within us, and what is His function? To lead us into all truth, to help us to identify truth.

Don't you wonder sometimes how can people accept stuff like the Book of Mormon or the, you know, spurious writings, apocryphal books and things? If you've ever wondered, you know, is there more truth? Maybe God has spoken in other ways. Maybe Mary Baker Patterson Glover Heddy had some inspiration in her, you know, science and health thing is from God. Maybe the, you know, the additions to Esther or the Gospel of Peter or the Gospel of Judas or Thomas or one of these others.

Maybe this is inspired, you know, how do I know? There's evidence. People adduce evidence

and say, well, these are early and, you know, Book of Enoch, why that predates the New Testament. So couldn't that be Scripture? How do I know? Well, the standard line is, well, you had these synods and these councils and they established what is and isn't the canon.

For crying out loud, there's a bunch of Catholics. I don't take their word for hardly anything. It isn't the synods and the councils that established the canonicity of Scripture for you and for me.

You know what establishes canonicity? It's the witness of Scripture. If you think there might be some other books out there, here's my encouragement to you. Sit down with a session of prayer before God the Father, acknowledge His grace, thank Him for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, ask Him for wisdom and discernment, and then sit down and read some of those letters.

You'll have no trouble figuring out what's canonical and what's not. Read them. Read the Book of Mormon.

Read Mary Baker, Eddie. Read any of that stuff. Go pull something out of the Apocrypha.

Read it. Now, just be sure that you have prayed and that you're in the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit and that you are actually seeking the truth and you don't have an agenda, you're not trying to find some stone on which you can grind your axe. Just read them.

You will have no trouble discerning what is and is not Scripture. By the will of God, Paul is an apostle and this apostle has written for us inspired Scripture and believers with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in their life have no trouble identifying it where scholars with way too much education can't figure out if it's real or not. So you have an advantage over them.

You have an advantage over people with master's and doctor's degrees when you avail yourself of God's Spirit. But, by the will of God, to the sanctified and faithful in Christ Jesus. In Epheso, as we pointed out before, is a late edition.

Somebody in all the other books had a destination and they said, well, what are we going to call this? We're going to call it the Epistle to the Saints and Faithful? That won't work. Maybe they found a copy in or near Ephesus early on. But this is the letter to the saints and faithful.

Now this means that for you and me as recipients, this is only going to be pertinent and applicable if we are in fact sanctified and if we are faithful. It's not going to do us any good. So how can we ensure that we are recipients of this letter, that it's going to do us good? We need to be sure that we are sanctified, that we are cleansed, that we are set apart, that we understand our identity and our purpose and we need to be faithful.

We need to be people who are actively pursuing righteousness by faith. We want to live our lives to please God. Hear me carefully when I make this next statement.

If you really aren't setting your top priority as living life to please God, this study, this book is going to be a waste of time. It will be opaque. It will be a little boring.

You'll grind through it because you know you're supposed to be here. This book is written to people who are sanctified and who are faithful. If that fits you, this book is going to be one of the greatest blessings and one of the most incredible revelations that has ever struck your soul.

It's like the parables of the Lord Jesus. Those that had insight, those parables are wonderful revelations of divine truth. They just grow and burgeon and reflect an almost infinite amount of divine revelation.

But to those who are outside, seeing they see and don't perceive, hearing they hear and don't understand, it is a separation. This book will separate us. If we find this uninteresting, if we find it unhelpful, if we think, I knew that, the problem is not with the book, the problem is with us because this is written to the sanctified and faithful.

Those who fit that description, this thing is explosively, powerfully, dynamically revelatory and inspiring and encouraging. If you do not find yourself compelled and fired up after we get into the starting at verse 2 and forward, you need to sit down and take stock because this letter ought to get us moving on all eight cylinders, maximum horsepower, maximum speed, heading down that straight road and the narrow gate. That's what it's for.

This is almost a litmus test, it's an indicator. See how you respond, see how you react to the truth that we're about to see in this book and if it doesn't fire you up, it's a warning. It's its own revelation that we need to take stock and reshuffle our values, our goals and our priorities.

So having said that, it is to the sanctified ones, it is to those who are faithful in Christ Jesus. We say, well yeah, I have faith in Christ Jesus. This isn't so much telling us the object of our faith, it is telling us the sphere of our faith.

In Christ is a place, it's a location, it's a sphere. People are sanctified and faithful in Christ, being in Christ, in this realm, in this territory of in Christ. There's lots of people who think that they are sanctified, they think that they're good, they think that they're set apart in some special way.

I'm America's idol, I'm America's voice, I'm the top this or the best of that. We have a lot of areas of achievement where people think they have distinguished themselves. We have distinguished service medals, that's what sanctified means, it means distinguished, set apart, marked out.

In our spiritual realm it means set apart by holiness and in the realm of holiness and unto the purpose of holiness. It is in Christ Jesus. Now, you might as well get used to this phrase, in Christ Jesus, because with slight variations we're going to see it ten times in the next few verses.

Ten times in Christ Jesus. So if scripture tells us something ten times in thirteen verses, is it

important? It's actually about twelve verses. It occurs an average of once per verse here, in Christ, in Him, by Him, through Him.

So yes, it's important. And by the way, this is going to enable you to solve a theological puzzle that scholars and commentators and doctors of theology have wrestled with for centuries. You will be able to easily pin this down and move on with no difficulty whatsoever.

It's the wonderfully convoluted discussion having to do with predestination, election, foreordination, tulip, unconditional election, the you and tulip. So let's begin. To the saints who are in Ephesus and faithful in Christ Jesus, we have now covered the salutation.

That's verses 1 and 2. We know who it's from. Remember Coverdale? You need to figure out who it's from and who it's to. Paul gives us that in the first two verses.

It's from Him. He has the authority of God. He is communicating divine truth by the will of God to a particular subset of believers.

This isn't to all believers. Some believers need other books first. Maybe they need correction and rebuke in certain areas.

This book is not to them. We like to think this book is to us. We want to believe and we hope and I believe that we are the saints and faithful in Christ Jesus, in Christ Jesus.

So of our 10 times, number one here is the realm of sanctification and faith is for us in this age in Christ Jesus. There is no sanctification and faithfulness apart from Christ Jesus. It is in Him.

So this is one of your gifts in Christ. Are you in Christ? If any man be in Christ, he's what? He is a new creature. He's a new creation.

Old things are passed away. Behold, all things are become new. If anyone be in Christ, are we in Christ? Have you accepted Christ by faith as your Savior? When you die and to use sort of an old-fashioned picture, you stand at the pearly gates and Saint Peter is there and he says, why should I let you in to approach the throne of God? We substitute Saint Peter for what Lucifer used to do, the starts and stops, you remember that? But in mythology, Saint Peter stands at the pearly gates because, of course, he's the Pope.

This is an old Catholic thing. Why should I let you in? If any angel, if anybody anywhere challenges you why you should enter into the eternal future with God, what is your answer? The Lord Jesus Christ is my Savior. I have claimed Him by faith and His blood and His work has redeemed me, has atoned for my sin, has reconciled me to God and I am in and I am going in because of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I am in Him. That has to be our confidence. Neither is there salvation in any other for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be delivered.

It is the name of Jesus Christ, in Him. So, verse 2, this is the beginning of a section, we'll call this verses 2-14, most outlines divide, they put verse 2 up with the salutation and start in verse 3, but it's verse 2. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't be splitting this off and discarding it as, you know, dear John or whatever at the beginning.

It's the salutation. Well, now that the salutation is out of the way, now we're going to start paying attention. Have to pay attention at verse 2. Grace to you and peace from two individuals.

Grace and peace come from both. Now these two individuals are going to keep reappearing throughout the next dozen verses. Back and forth, back and forth, because it is God the Father in and through God the Son bringing us this grace and this peace.

When He says grace to you and peace, it's not just, hi there. He is going to tell us all about this grace and this peace. That's what verses 3-14 are talking about.

This is the introduction to the subject. It's not just a toss off. It's not just kind of warming up the pen and getting the ink flowing here.

Grace to you and peace, it is from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now I wish we all had colored pens or some way to distinguish these things, but you're just going to have to watch. You see God, who is not just the Father, He's our Father.

This is a bold claim, a bold claim. God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, three-fold name for the second person of the Trinity in His incarnate Saviorhood. He is the Lord, Adonai, Yahweh.

He is Yeshua, the Savior, the Deliverer, the God-Man, and He is Mashiach, Christ, the Anointed Deliverer for the nation of Israel. Christ, interestingly, is His identity to Israel, to all He is the Lord, to all He is Yeshua. Christ is specifically, initially at least, His Messiahhood, His Messiahship, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now look at verse 3, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. How do you bless God? Sometimes you hear people use this as an exclamation, bless God. How can you bless God? What are you going to do to bless God? God blesses us, right? He's the, sorry, every good and perfect gift comes down from above.

Do you seriously think you can bless God? Well God's having a better day today because of me. You know, if it wasn't for me, He'd probably be kind of moping around up there, but I've blessed Him. You know how we feel when we get a blessing.

We're ecstatic, we're joyful, we're appreciative, we are down on our knees thankful because God blesses us. How do you bless God? It says here, blessed be God the Father. Bless His name.

What does it mean? Well bless is one of those words that by overuse has almost lost its meaning. Try substituting the word benefit. Isn't a blessing a benefit? Doesn't God bestow

benefits on us when He blesses us? Aren't we better off? Benefit.

Now, we can't send blessings up to God per se. What can we do? Can we benefit Him? Can we fulfill His purpose? Can we be obedient? Can He look down and be pleased? Benefit God. Now this is much more of a taxing command, isn't it? If you say, oh, blessed be God, it just sounds like an invocation of some sort.

If the Apostle here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, says, you benefit God, you be a benefit to God, now we've got some responsibility here. Now the imperative idea makes sense, doesn't it? Benefit God. Reciprocate to the extent that we can reciprocate anything from God.

Benefit the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What did it say in verse 2? God our Father. Now in verse 3, He says, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So if He's our Father and if He's the Lord Jesus Christ's Father, what does that make us to the Lord Jesus? Brethren, such a compact, this is like a zip file that you have to expand. This is like concentrate that you have to add water to. We could easily, if I went word by word and verse by verse through this, we'd be in Ephesians for years.

Just to give you an idea of the density of information here. Could we talk about Lord and what it means? Could we talk about Yeshua, Jesus, Jesus in Greek, and what it means? Could we talk about Christ and Messiahship and what it means? Could we talk about the first person of the Trinity, God, the Father, as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and as our Father? You could spend weeks, weeks on these things. I just point them out.

Paul says, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Benefit, bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us. You see the reciprocal idea here? Benefit Him because He has benefited us.

We love because He first loved us. You see the idea? It's a synergy. It's a back and forth.

It's a reflection. Reflect back to God, benefit because He has benefited us. He is a Father to His children.

He is a Father to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a Father to us. And the role of the Father is to benefit His children, right? And we, like good children, should benefit Him.

Benefit the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, I'm going to translate it, who has benefited us with every spiritual benefit. What do you think the main idea of this verse is? Mentioned three times. Benefit, it's productive.

We looked for our memory verse this morning in Romans 6.23, the wages of sin is death. That's what sin produces. That's what activity and life apart from God produces, separation and death.

What does association with God, fellowship with God, relationship with God in and through Jesus Christ produce? Benefit. Benefit in all directions. It's a benefit explosion.

You can't help but get hit by it. There's benefit to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has benefited us with every spiritual benefit. Now think about this.

The origination point of all of these benefits is heaven, not earth. It doesn't start here. It doesn't begin here.

It's not thought up here. It isn't created here. It isn't manufactured here.

I was looking at the label in my shirt Friday night. It said, had a big eagle and American flag thing on it. It said American life.

Then I looked at the side tag and it said made in Hong Kong. It's an American life shirt made in Hong Kong. The American life shirt did not come from America.

It wasn't made by Americans. It was made by Chinese in Hong Kong. What is the origination point? Heaven.

What kind of benefits are these? Spiritual. This is our destination. This is our identity.

This is where we're going. These are spiritual benefits in the heavenly places in Christ. In the heavenly places in Christ.

Guess what being in Christ does for us? It lifts us up from the mundane, the earthly, the material, the limited, the fallen, the fleshly into the heavenly places in Christ is our spiritual identity. You say, well, of course, I mean, I know being a Christian is a spiritual thing. How easy is it to transcend the circumstances of this life to have a transcendent attitude, to have a transcendent existence, to have a transcendent purpose when we are beset on every side with a fallen world, with fallen people, with mistakes, failures, goofs, shortcomings, disappointments.

We are enmeshed. We are embroiled in a fallen circumstance. Our own nature betrays us.

What I want to do, I don't do. What I don't want to do, that I do. Paul talks about it in Romans.

But in Christ, in Christ, we are in the heavenlies. In Christ, we become spiritual creation. In Christ, God is our Father.

In Christ, every spiritual benefit is ours. So, I'm thinking this in Christ territory, this in Christ sphere and realm is a thing I want to fully understand and cultivate because that's where all my benefits are. And I can be a believer and not be in Christ.

This is a profound thought and not many Christians understand it. It is not automatic to be sanctified. It is not automatic to be faithful.

It is not automatic to have every spiritual benefit. It's when we are in Christ and we have to pursue and maintain that existence dwelling in that sphere. It is not automatic.

This is why we have so many exhortations, so many commands, so many reminders. This is why the Lord Jesus told his disciples in the upper room, abide in me. Let my words abide in you so that you can bear fruit because not in him, there's no fruit.

Not in him, there's no life. Not in him, all of those eternal life benefits disappear. We have to understand this in him so that we can benefit God the Father.

You cannot bless God. You cannot benefit God if you don't understand how to actively maintain position in Christ. That's why it is going to be mentioned ten times here, in him, in him, in Christ.

Exceedingly important. This is a terrific exhortation in the positive direction. This is such a positive letter that it's one of the excuses that scholars and academicians give for thinking it doesn't belong to Paul.

Well, there's not enough rebuke. There's not enough slapping people around for getting back in the law and so on. It's too happy.

It's too hopeful. It focuses too much on blessing and not enough on rebuke and correction. It can't be from Paul.

It is from Paul, but it is to the saints and faithful. That's who we want to be. That's who we intend to be.

So we're going to take a look at what we have, this sphere of blessing in Christ. We are going to have a when. We're going to have a what.

We're going to have a why. We're going to have a where. We're going to have a how.

All coming up in the next verse and a half. The who, what, when, where, why, and how of being in Christ are all given to us in the space of the next two verses. It's just amazingly compact and we're going to unpack it and do our best to understand it and benefit from it as soon as we come back from the break.