

Ephesians 13-10-13a

This is Sunday, the 13th of October, 2013. We continue our study in the book of Ephesians, which we understand to be, I understand to be, the Laodicean letter Paul spoke of in Colossians. We are halfway through chapter 1. We'll continue picking up at verse 15 through 23 this morning.

Let's take a moment as we begin to dedicate our time and our thoughts and our concentration to God and to the understanding of the Lord Jesus Christ that we hope to obtain by studying God's Word together. Shall we pray? Father, we're so grateful for this opportunity to be refreshed and renewed and restored in the company of others who love you, who understand your plan and purpose, and who are personally dedicated to it. We thank you for the gift of your Word, which reveals the even greater gift of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you for our privileges and our standing in Him. We thank you for the bright future that is before us, the opportunities that you give us on this day and in the days ahead. And we pray that as we spend this time looking at the truth of your Word that your Holy Spirit will make it clear to us, reveal to us the truths that are so vital to our thinking and to our faith and to our obedience before you.

We pray that these things will equip us for every good work and enable us to more fully reflect your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus who died to give us these privileges. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen. Well we have spent a fair time now looking at the first half of this chapter.

I have organized it just to try to simplify it a bit because it is so densely packed, so full and fulsome. Each phrase, each statement here is rich with meaning and people have spent literally years in the study of this book. We're not going to spend years, we're going to spend a few months.

So for convenience and to try to organize the sense of this a little bit, I've given the notion of a seven-branched idea, three ideas, three main thoughts, then the statement on which they all depend, which is there in verse 10. And really you can sum up the chapter, the whole first chapter here in verse 10, "...in the dispensation of the fullness of times, God has gathered together all things in Christ." That's really the big idea here. If you sometime down the road say, oh yeah, somebody mentions Ephesians or they say, oh my favorite verse is in Ephesians or I just love that letter from the Apostle Paul and you think Ephesians, Ephesians, we studied that book.

What is that book about? How much can I remember about it? Well the summation of chapter 1 here is in verse 10. This is the big idea. If you want to know what chapter 1 is about and ultimately what the entire letter is about, it's verse 10.

God in the fullness of times, this dispensation is where everything is drawn together and the potential for the fulfillment of all things is exploited. It's not complete, it's not full. God still has to fulfill His promises to Israel, which He will do in the coming millennial kingdom, but the center of

human history is the Lord Jesus Christ coming and accomplishing His work in life and in death and in resurrection and in His ascension and session.

Session just means, why do we call something a session? Everybody sits down. Well, we're going to have a, Congress is in session, it means they're all sitting down talking to each other or listening to each other talk. Or not.

But session, theologically when you say the ascension and session, you're talking about Christ rising back to the throne room of God and sitting down at the right hand of the majesty on high, the right hand of His Father. There He intercedes for us. He doesn't review the events of the Old Testament age.

He doesn't speculate on things. The Bible tells us that one of the primary things that the Lord Jesus is doing right now, we love to study what Jesus did, but what does Jesus do? What is He doing right now? The Bible tells us several things He's doing, one of which is He is preparing a place for us. Now if He's sitting at the right hand of the Father, how can He be preparing a place for us? Well, if He created the world and without Him was not anything made that was made, did He do it all Himself? Or did He organize and delegate and oversee and cause minions to execute things? God accomplishes His will.

He's all-powerful, but He doesn't do everything Himself. He works in and through His creation. He delegates tasks to the angelic hosts, and they do a multitude of things.

They control weather. They look over the little ones in God's kingdom. They bring messages.

They take reports back to heaven. God knows all things, and yet He still has the angels reporting to Him. Why? Because it's much more interesting that way, and angels learn.

We learn. So Jesus is preparing a place for us. How? Well, He is, I think, overseeing and directly controlling the work crews that are doing whatever sort of heavenly construction that entails.

He is also interceding on our behalf. He constantly represents us to God the Father. When God's justice would, as it were, be leaning toward judging us, the Lord Jesus interposes.

We sang that song this morning. He interposed His precious blood, and He continues to do so. So everything centers on Christ.

That's the center post that holds up the branches of this lampstand, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Now, verse 10. The mystery is revealed that in the dispensation of the fullness of times, God would gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him.

And the heavenly part is much more obscure to us. We are endeavoring to understand all of the implications on earth. But He's gathering together all things in heaven.

This is one of the passages that undergirds what many people describe as the angelic conflict, meaning that human civilization, human history, human creation itself is part of a larger purpose that involves the angels. God is demonstrating something to them because there were events that took place, i.e., the fall of Satan and some of the other angels siding with Him. And God, rather than simply blinking them out of existence, used this rebellion in heaven as an opportunity to teach, to reveal His character, to explain Himself to all of creation, the fallen and the unfallen, and to mirror, to create a demonstration with us.

We are made in the image of God and after His likeness. This is what a laboratory experiment is. We try to find similar things.

We work with mice because their systems are in many ways similar to humans. And testing procedures and medicines on them illuminates what would work for us. And God, working in the salvation of the human race, teaches, demonstrates, and vindicates His righteousness and justice.

So this is one of the passages from which we derive that idea because God is fulfilling something and drawing together loose ends, so to speak, in heaven as well as on earth, all things in Christ. Of course, the question always returns to, well, there was a fall on earth and God provided salvation. There was a fall in heaven.

Did God provide salvation? I don't know. The Bible is silent as far as I can see on that point. And there are just some things that are not for us to know.

It isn't important for us. The mice don't have to know why the humans are testing them. They merely need to run through the maze.

I say mice. I probably am actually meaning rats and mice. Whatever little laboratory animal, they fulfill their function in service of a larger purpose.

The wonderful thing is that God doesn't discard us at the end of the experiment. He promotes us, which is a huge difference between God and man. God, as we saw in our memory verse this morning from Romans 5, God commends His love toward us and Christ died for us.

And you could imagine in a scientific laboratory, if after completing all of the work with the rats and mice, the scientists put them in a machine and they popped out as humans as their reward. This, in sort of a crude way, is the difference between man and God. God doesn't simply, and He could.

Who would stop Him? He could think a thought and we would simply vaporize. He could think a thought and the angels wouldn't remember that we had ever existed. Why does God choose to raise us up? I've thought about this.

Dr. Criswell had an illustration that I mentioned sometime in the past week about the arrogance of scientists thinking that they understand everything in the universe and that anything they can't think of can't exist. And he described a conversation between a paramecium and an amoeba in a drop of water, saying, well, there's no such thing as anything bigger than us. Look, this universe within this drop.

And we think, you know, one-celled animals, how could they possibly even begin? How could we even explain to an amoeba the human race, our sophistication, all of our accomplishments and our world? But what blows my mind is that God promotes the amoeba. God says, I can take you and bring you up to this level where He exists. And it's a stunning thing.

We would discard the drop and not worry about the millions of flora and fauna that dwell therein. There's plenty of drops where that came from, but God loves us and God cares for us and promotes us this vast distance, as the hymn says, the mighty gulf that God spanned at Calvary. And how would you communicate with somebody at the water drop level? I can talk all day long to the drop, and it might sense some vibrations in its universe, but it's not going to understand me.

There's no possible way. God found a way to dwell inside the drop and communicate at our level and offer us the opportunity to be delivered upward and outward and beyond in ways that we can not ask, think, the eye hasn't seen, ear hasn't heard, hasn't entered into our hearts the thing that God has prepared for us. All of it is in verse 10.

In the dispensation of the fullness of the times, God is gathering together in one all things in Christ, things which are in heaven and which are on earth in Him. So we've looked at these things. God's pre-choosing of the Lord Jesus, purposing Him before the project ever started, so that we in Him could be holy and blameless.

We in Him could be to the praise of His glory. We in Him could have redemption and forgiveness. We in Him could be to the praise of His glory.

We in Him could have an inheritance. And again, we in Him could be to the praise of His glory. Those are the so that's that I've given you over the past few weeks.

My understanding of kind of how this lays out. All of this brings us now to that seventh row in your notes. Paul says, I having heard in verse 15 of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.

Faith and love. The great triad of Christian virtues is faith, hope and love. And Paul here says, having heard of your faith and your love, I want to communicate to you more about your hope.

That's what the rest of this chapter is going to describe as our hope. It is faith, hope and love. Paul says, you've got the faith and you've got the love for the saints.

I've heard of it. And because of that, I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers. Paul doesn't say, having heard of your type of fellowship, I need to talk to you about divisions as he does in Corinthians.

I don't need to talk to you about legalism as he does in Galatians. I don't need to talk to you about pastoral care like I do in Timothy and Titus. Here he says, I am thankful for you.

Your church is vibrant. It's alive. Your faith in God is active.

Your love for one another is active. And I thank God for that, he says. Not ceasing to make mention of you in my prayers.

That. What does he pray? Paul's prayers, as I've said many times, are a wonderful study in themselves. I did a series on that long years ago when I was filling in on Wednesday nights at a church up in Tulsa.

I drove up there from down here every week. The prayers of Paul are very instructive because he manifests, he demonstrates what prayer is really all about. And it is doctrinal content.

It is truth content. It is reflecting back to God what you know about His plan and purpose. That's an effective prayer.

Oh God, please do what I want you to do is not nearly as effective a prayer as, Oh God, you have promised and I claim your promise. I am redeeming that ticket. I am bringing in that gift card.

You have made that statement. You have made that promise. And I see the application of that promise and the application of your desire to fulfill it in this case.

And because I have recognized that, I am asking you to do so. This is what Moses does when he intercedes on behalf of the people back in Exodus. Lord, what will the nation say if you destroy this people? You have promised to take them to a land.

What's that going to do to your reputation? He reflects divine truth back to God. And, of course, that was God's purpose all along is to create an occasion and an opportunity to do that. Because it is for our benefit.

God hasn't forgotten His promises. God wants us not to forget His promises. And it is in the challenge and the momentary or temporary suspension of their fulfillment that causes us to review them and to bring them to the throne and say, Lord, you promised.

And He says, yes, I did. And I'm glad you've remembered and now I will fulfill it. That's really the whole idea behind our prayer.

So Paul prays. What does he pray? The word that in verse 17 is a huge pivot point here. There's

a therefore in verse 15 that connects back to everything we've just seen.

And there is a that in verse 17 that connects to everything that follows. So Paul turns from reviewing what God has done so that we have a status that fulfills a purpose. And Paul says, I review these things and I reflect on them and I bring them before the throne of grace in my prayers, especially with regard to you because I've heard of your faith and your love.

You've got the potential to fulfill these things. And here's what I pray. Verse 17, that first of all, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory will do something.

The God of our Lord. Now, why didn't he just say that God will do something? Why all these titles? What would you think? Couldn't he just say God? Couldn't he just say the father? Why does he say the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory? Look back at your notes. How central has Jesus Christ been to everything he just said? How central has his glory been in everything he just says? He's tying it together.

There's a therefore. He prays this prayer in the light of the centrality of Jesus Christ and the purpose of reflecting and appreciating God's glory. This prayer isn't just, oh, I want so and so to be happy.

I want so and so to be relieved from pain. I want so and so to have a nice experience. Why do we pray? What motivates us to pray? What turns our attention to God? The quickest way for somebody to start thinking about praying or to promise to pray is to tell them about a problem, right? Tell them something's amiss.

Oh, just wanted to tell you, so and so just developed a problem. Well, we'll pray. We'll put it on the prayer chain.

By the way, nothing wrong with that. I love that. I appreciate that.

We've benefited, all of us have benefited from that many times. It's a wonderful thing. But notice the purpose of this prayer.

This is not a response to crisis prayer. This is not, oh, Lord, please protect, provide, heal, restore. That's not what this prayer is.

And Paul tells us why he's praying this prayer in this introduction. He prays that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God who made all these things possible in Him, the Father of glory. He's now our Father because we are in Him.

And our purpose is His glory. So it's a distillation, it's a summation of the entire first 14 verses in those two titles. They mean something.

They're not there for no purpose. The God of our, our Lord Jesus Christ, not the Lord Jesus

Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ. Who is He writing to? The faithful and sanctified who can claim the Lord Jesus Christ, who have that central pillar holding up these wonderful branches of accomplishment and opportunity.

That He may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. That He may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him. The word for spirit can be understood that we don't have capitalization and lowercase distinction made in the Greek language.

So when you talk about a pneuma, it can be your human spirit, it can be God's Holy Spirit, it can be sometimes translated wind. You find this in John 3, Jesus talking to Nicodemus. So what do we have here? This is an exceedingly important question because in some translations you find that this is uppercase.

I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit. They say this is a wonderful thing because you've got a Trinitarian passage here. You've got God the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, that He may give you the spirit.

The full-orbed ministry of God's Holy Spirit. If you were going to describe the Holy Spirit in terms other than holy, what would you call Him? What is His purpose and function? Jesus said when He comes, He will lead you into all truth. The sort of wisdom that Eve was looking for when she ate the fruit.

She saw it was desirable to make one wise, but the fruit took her in the opposite direction. It took the whole human race in the opposite direction. What is it that moves us toward wisdom? It is God's Holy Spirit, isn't it? It can't really be wise apart from His function.

These things of God are spiritually discerned. So would this be or could this be God the Holy Spirit? My emphatic answer is no. Grammatically it could be, but theologically it can't be.

Why? Why is the spirit of wisdom and revelation not the Holy Spirit? How does the Holy Spirit come? Do you need an apostle to pray that you receive it? And what if you don't happen to know an apostle? What if you're the lonely faithful believer in Galatia or in Corinth, and Paul's not writing a letter saying, I pray all the time that God will give you His Holy Spirit. Well, now what? How do I get the spirit if the apostle doesn't pray for it? Let me put it another way. Can you pray for someone else to receive the spirit? Oh Lord, well listen, people do.

Oh Lord, put your spirit on so-and-so. It's not legitimate. There is no scripture that says that God will impart, delegate, designate, impute, or in any other way orientate.

I hate that word. God does not send His Spirit based on prayer by others. That's not the way the Spirit comes.

What are the ministries of the Spirit? When does He come? At the point of salvation, saving faith,

claiming Christ as Savior, you have the immediate, in this age, indwelling, filling, sealing, gifting, enablement, empowerment of God's Holy Spirit. It comes at the point of faith. Now, that would be prayer, wouldn't it? You pray and the Spirit comes.

Does salvation come by prayer? Pray the sinner's prayer. This is perhaps one of the biggest misconceptions in all of human understanding of Christianity. Does salvation come by prayer? Do you pray to receive the Lord Jesus into your heart? No.

Salvation does not come by prayer. Salvation comes by faith. You can express the fact that you have that faith in a prayer.

You have the privilege of prayer once you are saved. But God does not grant salvation upon request. God grants salvation upon faith.

I believe it, that settles it. I will pray afterward. Salvation does not come by prayer.

Many times they're closely associated, but you've got to slice these things fine. So Paul is not praying that they receive God the Holy Spirit. Paul says, I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit.

A spirit. There is no the here. This is Pneuma Sophia Apocalypseos.

Sophia Apocalypseos. Pray that God will give you an apocalyptic and Sophia spirit. Apocalyptic.

What is Apocalypse? When we say the Apocalypse, capital A, what are we talking about? Book of Revelation? The Revelation. If God is going to give us a spirit of these things, we have to figure out what kind of genitives they are. These are going to be appurtenances somehow of the spirit.

Well, to cut a long story short, these things characterize. If I say I have an attitude of faith, that means my faith is characterized. My attitude is characterized by faith.

If I've got a spirit of willingness, it means my spirit is characterized by a pattern of willingness. If I say I've got a noun modified by a genitive, many times that genitive says this is the characteristic. So Paul says, I pray that God can give to you a spirit characterized by wisdom and revelation.

We can't build our own spirit and fill it with wisdom and revelation. God can give us a spirit that is characterized by those things. How can He do that? Well, He's going to do it, certainly through the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, through the teaching of His Word, through the answering of prayer, ask and it shall be given, seek and you will find, knock and it will be opened.

And Paul says, I pray that you will be people that God can give that kind of spirit to. You have faith, you have love, I pray that God can give you a spirit, can make your spirit essentially one that is characterized by wisdom and revelation. Why? What's that going to do to their faith toward God? It's going to enhance it and expand it and amplify it.

What is it going to do to their love for one another? It is going to enhance it and expand it and amplify it. The wisdom and revelation of God's purposes is only going to strengthen these things. So that is Paul's prayer.

I pray that God may give you a spirit, your spirit, of wisdom and revelation. How? It says, in the knowledge of Him. Knowledge here is epinosis.

Epinosis is knowledge that is reinforced and strengthened by experience. It is multifaceted knowledge. It is knowledge that has been proven in circumstance.

And this in, by or with is instrumental. God can give you this spirit of wisdom and revelation by means of full knowledge of Him. By means of epinosis of Him.

Practical, daily, working in and through the knowledge of God. Knowledge is one thing, wisdom is another, right? And we can have knowledge, but when you start putting that knowledge in operation, suddenly things are revealed to you. You discover things and realize things.

You had the knowledge, you just didn't realize what the outcome would be. People can tell you, use a certain technique to clean something, but when you actually use that technique, you discover, wow, it not only does this, but it does that. It not only cleans, but it puts a protective coating on.

I didn't know that until I experientially applied this knowledge that this is what everyone recommends to use. Now that I've used it, wow, it has multiple results. I just didn't realize how much easier it is.

I didn't realize how much easier it is to get tarnish off doing this than rubbing away with that. And not only does it do it, but it stays brighter longer. I didn't know that until I did it.

This is revelation that comes to us. Additional truths, additional observations and insights that come to us as we apply the things that we know. It results in wisdom.

We'll know how to do it better next time. We'll be able to help others when they encounter such a problem. It just amplifies and multiplies because divine power is in it.

This is Paul's prayer. Look at verse 17 again. Paul prays that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you, that's the faithful, sanctified ones, these that are in Christ, a spirit characterized by wisdom and revelation by means of full knowledge of Him, experiential application of the Word of God, epinosis of Him.

It's all in Him, through Him, by Him, enabled and empowered by Him, and we benefit, we are blessed. It's a wonderful, terrific verse. You could probably dwell on it for a great length of time.

But we're going to pause here and take our break and look at what follows in verse 18. This is

another very beautiful, somewhat lengthy, complex sentence. And our eyes come up next in verse 18.

Let's pause here and take our break.