

Ephesians 13-12-20a

This is Friday, the 20th of December, 2013. We continue our study tonight in the book of Ephesians, which we have come to know as the Laodicean letter. We'll see a little bit of additional support for that notion tonight.

We are picking up at the end of chapter two and the beginning of chapter three. We'll take a moment to focus our attention, go before the Lord in prayer, ensure that we're susceptible to the ministry of God's Holy Spirit, without which we have a really hard time understanding the truth of God, and to dedicate our time and our fellowship to the Lord Jesus. Shall we pray? Father, what a privilege and what a blessing it is to find the oasis of your word to rest by the shores of the water of life that restores and refreshes our souls.

We thank you for the company and the enthusiasm and the support and the encouragement of believers of like mind who share the appreciation and the enthusiasm for the many blessings you've bestowed on us and the wonderful opportunities that you give to us in Christ. We pray that as we spend this time together this evening, that God the Holy Spirit will superintend, that each heart will be blessed, each soul will be encouraged and strengthened through the truth of your word. We pray it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We have been looking in our recent study in Ephesians, which I'll continue to call it for the sake of convenience, at the concept that Paul introduced at the end of chapter 1, an artificial division as we have seen. Nevertheless, Paul having communicated the content of his prayer, when you think about the prayer of the Apostle Paul, you would imagine that if he is praying with these specific objectives in mind, these would be things worth pursuing.

You and I, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, ought to be making progress toward these things that the Apostle Paul prays. What does he pray? Verse 17, chapter 1, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit characterized by wisdom and revelation in the epinosis, the full experiential knowledge of him. Sounds very theological.

What does it mean? Wisdom, even in English, implies practical application of skills. Everybody here has skills. As I look around at you, I can, because I know you well, I know what some of your skills are.

Each one of you are really good at certain things, really good. I could name any one of a number of things that might need to be done, and I would say, you know who is the best person in this room to do that? This person right here, that person right there, because when you approach that particular task, you have experience, you have knowledge, and you have done it before, and when you get ready to do this thing, it's going to be done efficiently, it's going to be done intelligently, it's going to be done effectively, and people are going to be grateful that you were the one doing it and not somebody else. That's wisdom, not just knowledge.

I watched the Discovery Channel, and I know how to go extract lava from a volcano so it can be tested. I want somebody that's actually done that, and I don't want to go try to do it myself. You'll find a sender that used to be me on the edge of something, because I didn't know what I was doing, and instead of a pillar of salt, there will be a pillar of sand standing there, and that's all there is.

You need wisdom, right? We need wisdom. What does Paul pray for here? I pray that you will have a spirit characterized by wisdom. Wouldn't this be a great thing? In the coming week we get Christmas, we get my favorite holiday, my birthday coming up, we've got New Year's, we have a lot of festive activity, but in and through it all, wouldn't it be great if our spiritual wisdom was in evidence that we carried off the coming week and the coming days and beyond spiritually skillful, operating in the experience and the knowledge, just like some of the things that you know how to do best.

You think of something that you can really nail. You know how to do this thing. You've got plenty of understanding of it, you've got plenty of experience, and when you sit down to do that thing or stand up to do that thing, you really can just nail it.

Wouldn't it be great if that was the case spiritually? The next time a conversation crops up and all of a sudden it starts going wrong for some reason, the next time a requirement comes up and troubling thoughts and internal temptations begin to rear their heads, the next time external circumstances start wearing down our enthusiasm and our motivation and our perspective and our objectivity, wouldn't it be great if that spiritual wisdom would kick in? Well, this is why we're in the book of Ephesians. This is why Paul has written this letter. He says, one of the reasons I'm writing this letter is because it comports with my prayer for you that your human spirit will be characterized by this wisdom.

So this is a great book for us to be studying because I think all of us want to have that wisdom. And Paul says, and what's great, this is like any good prayer. You don't just pray for a thing, you're also in a position to help it come about.

Well, so you've got that liver inflammation? Well, I'll pray for you. Or you've got that cerebral hemorrhage? Well, I'll pray for you. I mean, that's great as far as it goes, but wouldn't you like to be talking to a brain surgeon that says, I'll pray for you and I'll go in and fix that problem for you, or I'll give you what you need to fix it.

And this is what Paul is doing. He's praying for them that they'll have this knowledge, but he is also the means of supplying and giving them the tools to acquire and exercise this knowledge. And he's giving it to us.

God, the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have all worked together to give you and me this letter to supply us with this wisdom so that we can excel, we can reflect the glory of God.

I pray, verse 17, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, that's the Father of glory, will give you a spirit characterized by wisdom and revelation. We saw that this revelation is church-age truth.

These things were not revealed formerly. More about that soon. In full knowledge, epinosis, practical wisdom.

I see this proving out in my daily experience. I was, any of you that happen to see the state of play in the Bible, you know, the state of play documentary that I mentioned last week and the Fuller thing that it was talking about. State of play, I think, is the program that was talking about this Trophy Kids documentary.

Trophy Kids is the documentary. State of play is how you can see portions of it for free. You can record that.

They're playing it now through the middle of January, I think, on our cable systems around here. Anyway, one of the things that was said in there, in the aftermath, they showed excerpts from Trophy Kids and then there was a panel of three guys that were talking about it afterwards. One of the comments that this former NFL quarterback and this sports expert guy that works with professional athletes and the host of the show, one of the things they were talking about, one of them said, you know, these parents are trying to, some of them are trying to put a lot of pressure on their children and trying to explain to them, and he said, I think all of us who have played sports have had the experience of actually getting out on the field and through experience suddenly realizing, oh, now I get it.

This is what dad was talking about. This is what coach was trying to explain. It didn't really sink in and it didn't become a reality and didn't make sense until they were out on the field and it suddenly clicked.

Oh, you know, we think it's so clear when we explain a thing. Can you not see that? It's just crystal clear. Well, it's crystal clear to us, but it's opaque a lot of times to the person we're explaining it to until they get out there and it's suddenly the puzzle piece falls in place.

Oh, that's what you meant when you said righty tighty and lefty loosey or whatever it might be. So that that's really not so much in sports, but, uh, you know, plumbing maybe. Um, so this is what he's talking about.

Epinosis. Epinosis is that gelling of what we've been taught in experience. Now I get it.

Now it makes sense. Okay, I can, I can do this. I can make this work.

That's really epinosis. It's knowledge that is, has, has reached a fresh level. So that's what he's praying.

Well, so then we saw in chapter two after the last verse in chapter one, he says, he's put all

things under the Lord Jesus' feet and given him to be head over all things to the church. And as soon as he says head over all things, kephale, uh, uh, there, there's a, there's a Arabic sort of chief guy called a kefir and the root is the same thing. It's kephale.

Uh, same idea here. But when he says that Jesus is the head, he says the church is his body. He's the head of all things to the church, which is his body.

And when he introduces this idea of the body, this great dual truth comes into play. Now it's theological. It's a little bit of an abstract, but it has tremendous application.

It has tremendous meaning in our experience because what is Paul's goal? I want you to have this wisdom. I want you to have this epinosis where as you're going through your day, you say, that's what that Ephesians two thing was. It's happening right here before my very eyes.

Here I am in a conversation. Here I am in a task. Here I am living my life.

I get it. It's not just something in my notes. It's not something I heard Sam say on Friday night.

I see what this means. It's right here. It's right now.

Now I get it. You have that click experience. This is Paul's goal in giving us this information that we'll have that aha moment.

Okay. So he's going to introduce this and just like when we talked about it last week, it may not immediately, you may not say, oh wow, that's going to be just such a practical thing I'm going to use. That's handier than a pocket on a shirt.

I'm just going to, that'll be the greatest thing. Not initially, but if we get a good grip on this truth, it is going to become this practical wisdom. So what we're going to do tonight is endeavor to really it, pardon the, the near pun, but we're going to flesh this out a little bit.

We're going to, we're going to see what it means when he's talking about the body, the body of Christ. I introduced it last time because there's two ideas going on here. What do we talk about with the incarnation? Carne.

Everybody know Spanish? Chili con carne. What is it? Chili beans with meat, flesh, hopefully, you know, of the, of the cow kind. Carne.

Carnation. Incarnation means into the flesh. Jesus becoming flesh.

The Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory, second person of the Trinity becoming flesh incarnate. All right. So he had a body.

He was here for 33 years. That body suffered the same privations. He was hungry.

He was thirsty. He was tired at the crucifixion. He was beaten and tortured.

He died physically, the death on the cross. He bore our sins in that body on the tree. That's the body of the Lord Jesus in the church truest and nearest sense.

However, there is this sense that Paul is using here. The church is his body. Now, right away, we know that this is an abstraction.

We're not literally the body of Christ, but it takes some thought and it takes some meditation. It takes some concentration, takes a little bit of, of reflection to lay hold of what this means. If you're not a reflective sort, have you ever been in a conversation? Matthew and I both have been in a conversation with somebody just this past week who doesn't reflect at all on anything but what he himself says.

If he makes any kind of a statement and you give a reply, there's no grasping of what the reply actually entails or what the content of it is. It's just an excuse for another reaction. You say, look, are you listening to what I'm saying? Are you processing any of the ideas that I'm communicating here? Can you please interact with the idea? No, I don't like what you say.

Therefore, you're stupid and everybody you come from is stupid. Everything you've cited is stupid. Anything you say is stupid.

It's just a reflex. It's like, by the way, do you know where the vomit reflex is located? It's in the fourth ventricle of your brain. There are people whose conversation originates in the fourth ventricle of their brain.

That's where it comes from. I find that disagreeable. Little side note there.

So here's my point. There is a truth here that we need to grasp, but we need to think about it. We need to reflect on its content.

Now, I'm going to give you an example of what happens when you don't. Turn back to the Gospel of John. It's just a few pages back.

And Jesus is introducing this very truth. It is this very truth. He is going to talk about His flesh.

Go back to John 6. John 6.22. The following day, the people were standing on the other side of the sea. They saw that there was no other boat except the one that His disciples had entered. Jesus did not enter the boat with His disciples.

The disciples had gone away, and so on. And Jesus in verse 26 says, Assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes.

You're completely literal-minded. They wanted to make Jesus king because, wow, this is the gravy train. This guy can give us food, physical food, physical provision.

What is Jesus trying to give them? Bread from heaven. Spiritual truth. Spiritual food.

Something that doesn't perish with the using. Something that isn't temporal and mundane. Look at verse 27.

Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you because God the Father has set His seal on Him. Look at verse 32. Verily, verily, most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven.

Remember the manna? That was physical sustenance. It was a picture of great things to come. My Father gives you the true bread from heaven.

The bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. Interesting choice of words, is it not? It doesn't say gives life to Israel. It doesn't say gives life to His people.

It gives life to the world. The bread from heaven gives the true bread of heaven, bread of God, He who comes down from heaven. He is bread.

Jesus says, I am the bread of heaven. I am the bread of life. Verse 35.

He who comes to me shall never hunger. He who believes in me shall never thirst. But I say to you, you have seen me and yet you do not trust.

You do not express faith. You do not believe. Look at verse 53.

I could spend a lot of time in this chapter but skip down to verse 53. When the Jews are quarreling among themselves saying, how can this man give us his flesh to eat? Because Jesus has just said, verse 50, this is the bread which comes down from heaven that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven.

If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I shall give is my flesh which I shall give for the life of the world. My flesh which I shall give.

What is the flesh that Jesus gave for the life of the world? Remember incarnation? Bore our sins in His own body on the tree. And what is He saying? You've got to eat of this flesh. What's He doing? He's trying to raise them above the mundane and the literal and realize who He is, where He comes from and what the meaning of these literal things is.

Right? It takes a bit of a stretch. You've got to stop and think. Now, what part of the brain are the Pharisees responding from when they give their reply? Fourth ventricle.

It's the vomit reflex. I don't like that. This guy is nuts and here's a convenient saying that he has

made that I can seize on to mock him because my real goal is just to try to undermine, undercut, denigrate and dissuade anybody from paying any attention to this Jesus who is upsetting our wonderful little scheme that we've got running here.

So the Jews quarreled among themselves saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. What is this, twilight? Unless you eat the flesh and drink the blood, you have no life in you? What is Jesus forcing them to do? You have either got to elevate your thinking beyond the literal or you're done here. Does Jesus stop and say, Now let me explain to you what an analogy is.

Let me tell you how there are typologies. He doesn't need to explain this. The Pharisees have been steeped in this from childhood.

They know what figures are. They know that the Levitical system is representative, that it speaks of higher truths. What are they doing? Willful disregard of an obvious figure of speech.

They willfully reject it. They willfully refuse to consider it. They don't want to understand it.

They don't want to know. And Jesus pushes the figure right in their face because what does it do? Like all divine truth, it exposes the thoughts and intents of the heart. It exposes them.

Jesus puts this out there knowing it's just like litmus paper. You stick it in there, it's either going to turn red or blue. Litmus paper does not create an acid and it doesn't create a base.

What does it do? It exposes what something already is. And this truth, communicated in very simple terms, exposes the hearts of these people. But think about it now because this is our truth.

This is Ephesians chapter 2. In him, the church is his body. He's talking about the body. This is such a common theme in the New Testament.

It's amazing that it doesn't get more air time, that it doesn't get more radio play in sermonizing and so on because it's a very prominent, prevalent figure and method of teaching the reality of what it means to be in Christ. He says, look, you have got to internalize my flesh. What does it mean you've got to drink my blood? I mean if you don't have your spiritual headphones on, this is pretty off-putting.

And it did and it put them off and they left in droves when Jesus said this. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh, this is verse 54, John 6, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.

Wow. I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed.

Real food, real manna, real sustenance, transcendent nourishment, eternal life is what is in view here, not physical life, not physical eating, not physical flesh, not physical blood. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me. What was Ephesians chapter 1? In him, in him, in him, in him.

Jesus says if you can grasp what this incarnation is all about, if you can grasp what God the Father is doing in and through this flesh and what is coming in redemption and the perfect sacrifice, the lamb without spot, if you can grasp that, if you can internalize it, if you can digest it, if you can see what the covenant is that God is fulfilling and the new covenant that he is making, what did Jesus say about his blood in the upper room? This cup is what? The new covenant in my blood. And that's not a fresh insight in the upper room. He's been teaching this all along.

The Old Testament Levitical system taught it from the very beginning. Going back to the day that God slew the animals to put clothing on Adam and Eve, blood represents God's substitutionary, his willingness to accept a proxy. Someone else suffers, you benefit.

The animal dies, your nakedness is covered. The sacrifice is slain, I will overlook your sins. Covenant in blood.

Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. It's an Old Testament teaching. It's kind of like what John says, I don't give you a new commandment but a commandment we've had from the beginning, that you love one another.

The new commandment is as Christ loved you. It's a new standard. So, verse 57, as the living father sent me.

Interesting choice of words, is it not? As the living father sent me. And I live because of the father. What kind of life is he talking about? This is transcendent life, eternal life, life that partakes of God and of eternity.

As the living father sent me and I live because of the father, so he who feeds on me will live because of me. What kind of life? Eternal life. Transcendent life.

Abundant life. Divine life. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not as your fathers ate the manna and are dead.

I'm not talking about physical bread, physical bodies, physical life here. He who eats this bread will live forever. He said these things in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Therefore many of his disciples when they heard it said this is a hard saying, who can comprehend it? What's the answer to that question? Who can comprehend it? Did Jesus intentionally say something he knew nobody would get? Are there people that can comprehend it? Yes. And that is what's going on in human history. Divine truth communicated separates

people, spreads the field.

There are people who will think about this and eventually get it. There are others who will immediately give up, who don't really want to know anyway. And it is a truth revealer.

It is an expression of opposing of what is in the heart. When this truth comes there are people who will grab their pick and shovel and keep digging until they get the treasure out of it. They know something is there and they won't give up until they find it.

There are others, it's an easy excuse to turn away. That's just nuts. And they walk away.

Why? Because that's the kind of heart they have chosen to have. When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples complained about this, he said to them, does this offend you? This is the question. Does this kind of truth offend you? Do you look at it as a challenge to advance your understanding or do you look at it as an excuse to walk away? How many times has something, you've been in a conversation with somebody, co-worker, somebody you sit next to and meet on a casual basis or something, a little conversation comes up, suddenly the conversation turns to something to do with Christianity or the church or Christ or whatever, and as soon as somebody finds out that you're a believer or you're a Christian, oh well, immediately there's a reaction.

What started out as kind of a friendly, hail fellow, well met, oh now it's oppositional. How can you go to a church where there's so many hypocrites? How can you believe in a God who would let children starve in Afghanistan? And that knowledge, you reach that point in acquaintance and there are people who are like-minded and they say, oh, where do you go to church? I go up here. It either draws you closer or there's a polarization.

Nobody's really just kind of lackadaisical about Christ. Generally it's either I love Him or I hate Him. And people associated with Christ, they either love you or they're ready to leap on you and rip you limb from limb.

And they've got all of the arguments and they've tried these out on believers who don't know very much and have left them speechless and they say, ah, here's my favorite hatchet to chop down Christians. What about the heathen? What about the Chinese? What about the starving children? And they bring out their favorite knives and they want to slice you up with them. And what's really nice is if you've got cogent answers to these things, because after their first little set of attacks, they got nothing.

And they're just, now they're in that realm of you've not converted a man because you've silenced him. You can take away all of their favorite knives and daggers to throw at you, but they're just sitting there glaring at you like a wounded animal and it's like, well, well, as soon as I think of something, I'm going to attack you with it because it is an exposing of what is in the heart. Jesus did this on purpose.

Divine truth is designed to provoke a response or a reaction. Divine truth is provocative. Don't be surprised.

It'll either provoke interest. It'll provoke enthusiasm. It will provoke appreciation.

It will provoke expressions of love and praise, or it will provoke anger, bitterness, rejection, reaction, vilification, denigration, ad hominem attack. It's designed to do it. Don't be surprised at the fiery trial that you sometimes encounter when divine truth is revealed in your life.

Expect it. It's designed to do that. It is a reactive.

It's like an oxidizing agent. You get it near something and that thing is going to rust or burst into flame or do something. It's not going to sit there unchanged.

So when they reacted, Jesus said in verse 61, does this offend you? What then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? If this truth sets you off, what do you think is going to happen when you see the truth of me sitting at the right hand of the Father? If this little piece of truth causes you to react, guess what's going to happen when you see me sitting at the right hand of the Father? You would think that people would be humbled, that they would be impressed, that it would change their mind. Jesus said, this little bit of truth here has turned you off. What then when you see me sitting at the right hand of the Father? You are going to be, where is Satan? Where can I get on board with him? I've got to get out of here.

This is the most heinous, awful thing I've ever seen. I mean, can you imagine? We can't because we've chosen a different path. But people that do not like God and do not like the Lord, if this piece of truth offends them, wait until they see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Father.

You've never seen such an ugly expression on a face as the reaction that's going to take place when they see that. Where for us, you can't imagine anything more glorious, more profound, more expressive of God's grace and mercy than a human being, God made flesh, is now acceptable and we in Him are acceptable in God's sight. We can walk boldly into the throne room because of the way that's been made through His flesh.

There's no greater truth for us and there is no more hated reality on the part of people who don't have faith than Jesus Christ glorified at the right hand of the Father. That's what He's saying here. What do you do with the truth of the body of Christ, the humanity of Christ, the flesh of Jesus Christ? What does it do for you? When we understand this, it is going to be a life-changing truth.

And we've just begun to scratch the surface of it here in Ephesians. We're going to be in Corinthians, we're going to be in Colossians before the night is over, but we'll pause here and take our break.