

## **Ephesians 14-01-19b**

Let's resume our study of the Word of God. We're going to switch over to our primary text in Ephesians chapter 3. This, as we're well convinced by now, isn't actually addressed to Ephesus. We're going to see a pointed example of that in the portion we look at this morning.

In chapter 3, Paul says, For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for you Gentiles. For you Gentiles. In the first session, as we were looking at Revelation 2220, I sketched out by way of review for you all the broad sweep of human history.

What is going on? This is the answer to an ontological question. It's ontology. You can look at Wikipedia later.

Ontology. O-N-T-O-L-O-G-Y. The source of things.

Where did stuff come from? What is the origin of sin and suffering? What is the reason? How can a loving God let people suffer? If there's a God in heaven, my child would not have died. People have thrown over their faith because a bad thing happened in their life and they thought God was a rabbit's foot of some kind, a good luck charm. And you ask yourself, you know, a rabbit's got four feet.

If you got one on your key chain, it didn't do him much good, did it? But people think that being a Christian is some sort of an edge where you can make your life go better. And it completely misses the point. Yes, your life will be better, but not in the ways that you might expect.

He's not the genie of the lamp. As I go through my day, I don't expect God to be up there organizing the angels and controlling physics and chemistry and other people to accomplish the plan of Sam. I have a great plan for my own prosperity, my own happiness.

I want money to roll in while I kick back and watch the playoffs or something. That would be my idea of a pleasant afternoon. In fact, it's going to be my pleasant afternoon.

The money is rolling in. Rolling in. But we need to adjust.

The pastor I used to listen to a long time ago, some of the rest of you did as well. He had a real odd phrase that he came up with in the later part of his ministry, but he talked about adjustment to the justice of God. He said, people need to adjust to the justice of God.

And I thought, that's a real mouthful. And if you're a mature believer, then it was maturity adjustment to the justice of God. You adjust to it a little bit when you get saved, and then later on you adjust to it more.

And so he had so many phrases, I had all these abbreviations in my notes. And so if it was the edification complex of the soul, that was ECS. If it was the volition, I just put a V with a plus and

minus.

And I had all these little shorthand things. Well, when he had maturity adjustment to the justice of God, I thought, gracious sakes. So I put M-A-D-J-O-G.

Mad, mad jog. Sounds like a guy hell-bent on running down the trail or something. Mad jog.

But adjustment to the justice of God. But the essence of that idea is, God is immutable. God is unchangeable.

God's standards are absolute. What is the definition of family? This is something Elizabeth was working on yesterday in one of her courses. What is the definition of family? If you'd ask somebody, you know, many decades ago, they might have said, well, you basically got a husband and a wife and some kids, that's a family.

Extended family, that includes grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles, cousins, that'd be your extended family. Family is, you know, then they start talking about the nuclear family. I thought, was that the Jetsons or nuclear? What's a nuclear family? But they were talking about the nucleus, the essence, the center part of it is a married couple and possibly with kids.

You know, the couple, the husband and wife, that's the nucleus of the family. And then you can have more family. But now, what's the definition of a family? Well, look on your television set.

People are pushing that word to cover almost anything. And so it becomes a matter of definitions. And the definition of family, the connotation of the word family has changed, hasn't it? We're real careful now.

If somebody says, this is my spouse, well, I don't just take it for granted anymore that that's always going to be a husband introducing his wife or a wife introducing their husband. There's all kinds of spouses now. Families are, they talk about blended families.

And what are they talking about? Well, there's been a marriage here, a marriage there. There were children. The marriages broke up.

These people married these people. These people married other people. And you've got half brothers, half sisters.

You've got this, that, and the other. And when they all come together and they're living under one roof, is that a family? Well, yes. You adopt a child.

Is that family? Yes. So you really have to have some context and some background and have some common, what is the purpose of language anyway? What is the purpose of a word? It is to communicate an idea from the speaker to the listener. I'm using words right now to communicate ideas to you, but we have to have a common understanding of that word.

What people want now is a universal definition that works for everyone. When I say, the justice of God to you, it means something different than if I walk down to somebody standing in line at Walmart and say, are you familiar with the justice of God? They say, what? Is that a new reality show? I don't know. What are you talking about? So words have meanings that are understood in a context of communication between speakers and listeners, between writers and readers, and so on.

There's a whole vocabulary in a video game that bears no resemblance to the outside world. There's vocabulary in the military that is inscrutable to people on the outside. When it comes to God, He is immutable.

He is unchangeable. He is a constant. So this is a good thing because this is a foundation upon which we can build a stable relationship, a stable life.

Paul says, I, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles, writing to the people in Laodicea, you Gentiles, this is something that would not have happened in the Old Testament age. Moses didn't get the tables of the law and stride forth out of Egypt and go to Asia or go down into Africa or build the Contiki and go across the Atlantic and find South America, North America, and start distributing the Word of God from Mount Sinai. It was to Israel.

Israel was the people of God in the Old Testament age. Everybody else on the planet were God rejecters and were given over to Satan. There were Satan's tinker toys to see if he could build civilizations.

And of course they all miserably failed. Look at any of the ancient civilizations. They were all horrific and they all came to a bad end.

And none of them are left. They all disintegrated. They all fell apart because Satan can't make a thing go.

It's all corruption apart from God. But to you Gentiles, well, this is a new thing. So Paul digresses and explains it here.

And he says, if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you. Dispensation is a big \$4 word, but it is a dispensing. If you've got something that you hit and soap comes out by your sink, what do we call it? It's a soap what? Dispenser.

I mean that's one word for it. We've got one that I have fixed innumerable times that's got batteries in it and a little sensor. It's got a little invisible light beam thing.

You stick your hand under there, allegedly soap will come out from a little electric pump. And if all goes well and nobody has moved it since the last time I fixed it, you can stick your hand under there and it dispenses soap. That is a dispensation of soap.

It has been dispensed. It was inside, now it's outside. It was in the bottle, now it's in your hand.

Dispensation. If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, this is a transfer. This is an allocation, an apportionment.

The grace of God was up with God in heaven. It has been dispensed. It has come down.

Listen, the grace of God did not used to be dispensed to Gentiles. The grace of God was dispensed to Israel. It was limited to Israel.

If you wanted the grace of God, where did you have to go? Hello? If you wanted the grace of God in the Old Testament days, where did you have to go? Israel. That is where the grace of God was being dispensed. If you are a Chinaman and you suddenly look skyward and say, I believe there is a God and I would like to know more about Him, where do you have to go to learn about God? There are no Israelite missionaries to China.

None. There are only two ways you are going to get the grace of God. Either an angel is going to come down, grab you by the hair of the head and fly you to Israel, or you are going to have to get on whatever transportation is available in China and go all the way across Asia, all the way down to the Middle East, find Israel, find a prophet, or maybe if you are in a nearby country and you have conquered the Israelites at some time in the recent past, you have got a slave girl in your household that is Israelite and you are naming the Syrian and you say, you know what, I think the gods of our nation are useless.

Here I am, I have got leprosy and they can't do a darn thing about it. And a slave girl from Israel says, you know, there is a God in Israel that can fix this kind of stuff. And Naaman says, that sounds good to me, I will go learn about this God.

Naaman, where does he go? He goes to Israel. And he comes in contact with the God of Israel. And when he has to go back to Syria, he picks up some of the dirt from Israel and he says, O prophet of God, will God be okay with me returning and doing my duties and supporting my family and honoring my king? And he says, yes.

And he says, I am taking some of this dirt because this is where my citizenship now is. This is where my heart is. I am a believer in the God of Israel.

That was the dispensation of grace before Christ came. Now that Christ has come, now that the clock for Israel has stopped with a seven-year remaining period, now that the clock of the church has begun and has been ticking for nearly 2,000 years, this is the dispensation of grace to people everywhere, to the Gentiles, to the nations. Paul says, I, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, for you Gentiles.

The reason he is a prisoner, and you can imagine that the Judaizers and those who didn't understand that God's plan had changed and thought that you still had to come to Israel for God's

grace, they didn't like Paul. He was upsetting the apple cart. They were powerful and well thought of in the religious establishment.

And this guy in their mind is preaching heresy. They don't want to see the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. They don't want to see, they like the status quo, because they're sitting on the top of the pile.

Just like the wealthy brokers of power in Russia didn't like it when their government fell apart, because they didn't get to keep their little Swiss Alps apartments and their fancy cars, and they didn't have to wait in bread lines like everybody else. And that was a good system for them. And then all of it came crumbling down and they had to go be among the masses, and a lot of them didn't survive that.

Well, the religiously powerful and influential people didn't want to see a change, because they had risen to the top of that system, and they were using it for their own ends in many cases. And so they opposed Paul, and they found reasons to oppose him. And one of the things they said is, if this is God's guy, if he really is communicating the Word of God, then why did this Jesus that he preached get crucified, and why is he in jail? He's a criminal.

And the guy he's preaching about was a criminal, and the Romans executed him, and now they've got him in jail. So why are you listening to this guy? Well, what would be the human solution to such a situation, such an accusation? If somebody said, you are messed up, this Christianity stuff. You're a problem.

You are the problem, and you ought to be in jail. You ought to be... This happens in countries all around the world. Try being an outright Christian in an Islamic country run by fundamentalists.

Try being a Christian in the many parts of northern Africa right now. Try being a Christian anywhere where Christianity is actively being opposed. And when people start making that accusation and say, you're the problem, if it wasn't for you things would be running smoothly, what is often the response? People want to put their Christian identity under a blanket.

Oh no, Peter by the fire while Jesus is on trial. I don't know the man. Let me swear at you a little bit and prove that I don't know anything about it.

I'll use some curse words. I'll shock everybody into believing that I have nothing to do with it. A little maid, a little servant girl says, you were with him.

I saw you with him. Oh no, no. Peter, who is later going to be so bold, is intimidated by this little servant girl.

It's the biggest embarrassing moment of Peter's life, and he wept bitterly right afterward because Jesus had predicted it. Paul says, I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles. Paul goes

right to the people who are hearing these accusations that this guy that's trying to talk to you, this guy writing you this letter is illegitimate because he's in jail, and the Christ he preaches was in jail.

And Paul says, Paul doesn't hide it. Paul wears it as a badge of honor. He says, yes, I am in jail for preaching Christ, and it's for you.

I am putting up with this for your sake. I am the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles. If indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you.

Remember in Revelation in our first session this morning we saw that the testimony in Revelation 22.20, the testimony of Him, that's the Lord Jesus, that He gave to an angel who gave it to the Apostle John who gives it to us in that written book. Here the testimony is given by the Lord Jesus to the Apostle Paul for the Laodiceans and for us in this written book. It is channeled, it is delegated, it is assigned, and it comes through, you know, who of us heard the gospel of Jesus Christ from Jesus Himself? Who of us heard it through an angel? We have heard it from someone who learned it from the witness of the Apostles and is now a living human being talking to us.

It is through the verbal witness of people that the gospel of Jesus Christ is communicated. It doesn't fall from heaven like snowflakes. It is in the Word of God and it is in the living Word, the hearts of people, and it is communicated person to person, messengers.

And we are witnesses and we are messengers. And when time and opportunity and God the Holy Spirit guides and permits we share that good news. Paul says, I, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, not just Jesus, Christ Jesus, the anointed Jesus, the Mashiach Jesus, if indeed you have heard of the dispensing of grace of God given to me for you.

Now this is one of the reasons we know that this letter wasn't sent to Ephesus because Paul had spent by this time over two years living in Ephesus and preaching face to face with this congregation, the Ephesian congregation. He knows them well. He knows them by name and there is no if you have heard for the people of Ephesus.

A city where he has not been is Laodicea. Keep your finger here and just turn over to the end of this letter. On the last page there, verse 20 of chapter 6, I am an ambassador in chains.

A prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles. I am an ambassador in chains that in it I may speak boldly as I ought to speak. The chains don't diminish him.

They don't discourage him. They don't intimidate him. He says, these chains enable me to be even more bold.

But that you may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will make all things known to you. I have sent him to you for this very purpose that you may know our affairs and that he may comfort your hearts. Peace to the brethren and

love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

No personal greetings of any kind in this letter to people allegedly that he had lived with for over two years. You go to the last part of Romans and he is mentioning people by name to the household of these guys and to this person and that person and the other person. And it is astonishing that in a letter he would be writing after living there for two years there would be no personal greetings and he would say, maybe you've heard of the dispensation of grace that was given to me, maybe not.

The testimony has gone out through Asia, but he has not been in Laodicea and that's why he says this. So this is one of the pieces of evidence that tells us that that late insertion in chapter 1 to the saints in Ephesus was somebody trying to be helpful. And this is the Laodicean letter mentioned in Colossians.

So if indeed, you ought to see the contortions of commentators who believe that this is to Ephesus and when they hit this here there will be a whole page of saying, well, you know, this is kind of like, if we win we will celebrate. It's a first class condition, if. It's very awkward if he was writing to people that he knew that this if clause would even be in there.

But there is no getting around it. There is no textual difficulty and the reason it looks odd is that he's not talking to Ephesus. Why is that important? Why do we care? This is, ought to bring this letter home to our hearts because Paul hasn't lived among us either.

And the viewpoint by way of introduction, by way of emphasis, he is talking to believers just like us. This could just as easily be the letter to the Planoites. This is the epistle of Paul to Plano, to Grace and Truth Bible Church.

We have the same lack of personal familiarity with Paul and he says, that's okay. The reason I'm not there is I'm locked up. I'm in chains for Jesus Christ.

But it is the word that counts and it is couched in terms of people who don't have a personal acquaintance just as we don't have a personal acquaintance with the Apostle. But this message is ideal for us because he is putting everything in the letter. Remember I said earlier how you can use words like justice and in the context of knowing someone well, you have an in joke or you have a shared experience of the past and you can use a word that is just meaningful in a certain way to you and that person.

Married couples know all about this. You can have a whole language where you can say one word and it brings up a whole episode in the past and that word has a resonance because of your past shared experience. Well, in this letter Paul doesn't have past shared experience with this audience just as we don't have.

And so we know everything is in the letter. Everything is here in common terms, not in special

terms. So when he says, here's what the dispensation of grace was, by revelation he made known to me the mystery as I have briefly written already.

Where did you write about that already? That was chapter 1, right? That was chapter 1, the mystery, which was not known before times. And what is the mystery? Christ in you, the hope of glory. Back to our big sweep of human history.

God in past days dwelt with the nation of Israel. Where was God in Israel? Where was God in Israel? What was His location? If you wanted to go visit God, where did you go? To the tabernacle and then to the temple, the Holy of Holies, right? Ark of the Covenant. The common element between the tabernacle and temple is what had been the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire when they came out of Egypt.

The Shekinah comes into the tabernacle and by the time they cross the Jordan into the land and the priests are carrying the Ark across, from then on in Israel where is God? He's at the Ark. When the Ark goes to Philistia and winds up in the Temple of Dagon, where is God? He's in the Temple of Dagon. And what happens to the Statue of Dagon? It falls over and stuff breaks because God is there.

And Israel pines and wants the presence of God back. And eventually they put the thing on an ox cart with the rats and tumors made out of gold and that whole story. But it comes back.

That's the presence of God. Now, in this age, revelation of the mystery, where is God? If you want to visit God, you need to buy a plane ticket, go to Jerusalem, go to the Wailing Wall, which is all that's left of the location where the Temple used to be. Ark of the Covenant is some unknown hiding place.

I think it still exists. I think it's socked away. I think Jeremiah hid it and it's been there ever since.

And it will come out when the Lord Jesus returns. I think the throne of David is in there. And when it says He will sit on the throne of His father David, I think that very chair that David and Solomon sat on is going to come out and be set back up in Jerusalem and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself is going to sit on it and literally fulfill that prophecy.

That chair is hidden away probably in the same room with the ark. And that stuff will come back out. But what's the difference? If you want to visit God today, where do you go? You don't have to go anywhere.

Revelation 3.20, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears My voice and opens the door, I come in. Emmanuel, God with us, was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus came and it has been true ever since.

Through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, through the presence of God's Word in our soul, the One who has My Word and keeps it, He's the One that loves me. Not the One that

accepted me as Savior, the One who has My Word, who comes to church and sits through long Bible classes to get that Word and listens to it and takes it on board and thinks about it and tries to live in its light. Jesus said, You're the One that loves Me and I will come to Him and make My home with Him.

You have the Shekinah. You have the ark of the New Covenant in your heart. And that door opens.

This is not a picture of salvation. It was written to a church of people that were already saved. Jesus said to people who were already saved, I'm standing at the door and knocking.

And if you open the door because you want to hear more of what I have to say, as someone who already believes in Me, I will come in and sit down and we will talk over a meal. That's the mystery. Paul says, I am the Apostle that was given this wonderful news.

Keep your finger here and turn over to Galatians chapter 2. Paul says, After fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus with me. I went up by revelation. Many, many times I could take you to the book of Acts where Paul sees a vision in the night.

God spoke with Paul in much the same way that He spoke with Moses. God said, in most people they have to stay away from My presence, but with Moses I speak to him face to face. God came to the Apostle Paul by revelation, communicated the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run or had run in vain.

Skip down to verse 5. There were those who were opposed to Paul's message, didn't think the Gentiles had anything to do with God's plan, and they wanted to spy out our liberty we have in Christ Jesus that might bring us into bondage. When it says spy out, this is a circumlocution to say he had Titus with him, and Titus had not been circumcised. Circumcision was the sign of the old covenant in Israel.

Paul is bringing Titus down there. He's a Gentile and he has not been circumcised. And so they're all up in arms.

He can't have a relationship with God because he's not a part of the covenant of Abraham that has the mark of circumcision. That's why he says spy out our freedom, that we can be related to God now without the Old Testament trappings and trammels and laws. But the good part of this is further down.

Verse 7, On the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, this is the gospel for the Gentiles. This is the gospel he's talking about in Ephesians 3, the mystery that was committed to Paul. They saw that it had been committed to me just as the gospel for the circumcised was committed to Peter.

The good news of Jesus Christ to Israel to help them make the transition from their old relationship with God under the Law of Moses to the new relationship in Christ, that's Peter's job and not just Peter alone. And it's kind of an odd thing that the one guy that has specifically said, God sent him to the Jews, that's who the Catholics made the first pope. And everybody's got to be descended from Peter as a pope for the church when the Bible says Peter is sent to the Jews.

And the Catholic Church has been responsible for as much anti-Semitism as anybody. And they claim that their roots go back to Peter and Peter wasn't even sent to the church, he was sent to the Jews. It's just nuts.

People don't read their Bibles. For he who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised, to the circumcised, that's the Jews, also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles. And when James, Cephas, who is Peter, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, the grace that had been dispensed to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

How many times have we been over this? Acts 1.8, you shall be witnesses unto me, you eleven, who's not there, of the twelve apostles to the church, who's not present when Jesus is talking in Acts 1.8? Paul is not there. He is still Saul, he's still a Pharisee, he's still doing the Pharisee thing. The eleven, Jesus says, you eleven, Judas is gone, you will be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria until the end of the age.

You have been sent to the circumcised. And right now the circumcised are in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria. Over the next few decades the Diaspora is going to be taking place and these Jews are going to be driven out and they're going to be scattered and Peter is going to continue to minister to them.

First and second Peter are written to the Jews of the Diaspora in Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and all of that, right? Peter is the apostle to the circumcised. Who's the one guy out of twelve that's been sent to the entire Gentile church? Paul. That's what he's talking about.

So, a few pages forward now, back in Ephesians chapter 3, if indeed you have heard, and you might have heard it from some of the Jews in your vicinity who are early spreaders of the gospel, the first generation of the church, that Jesus has come and Peter and John were witnesses of Him. James is His half-brother, but Paul is the guy that has been sent specifically. He's a former Pharisee.

He's steeped in all of that Old Testament stuff. John and Peter weren't trained in the law. And isn't it an interesting thing that in human standards, who of the twelve apostles would be most qualified to be sent to the Jews? The Pharisee, right? The guy that knows more Judaism than all the rest of them put together.

He's steeped in it. He sat at the feet of Gamaliel. He can quote Old Testament backwards, forwards, upside down.

The guys that were sent to the circumcision are fishermen. They're blue-collar guys. They're garbage truck drivers.

They're Home Depot employees. They're Lowe's hardware guys. They're farmers.

They're fishermen. They're blue-collar. They have no qualifications to compete with the Pharisees and the Sadducees and all the high religious mucky-mucks in Israel.

And God takes these people, seemingly the least qualified, and sends them to the circumcision. And He takes the guy that's got all the creds, all the diplomas on his wall, all of the panache and the ability to stand toe-to-toe with the highest of the Pharisees and all the guys in the Sanhedrin. And He says, I'm not sending you to the Jews at all.

I'm going to send you to the Gentiles. It's just reversal. Here's the point.

Here's the application. You look at yourself and you say, I don't know what God will be doing with me. I'm not anybody special.

My gifts are in an area that really has nothing to do with Christianity. I don't, you know, Christianity is great. There's pastors and missionaries and people, you know, writing Sunday school quarterlies and stuff.

But I'm a person out on the economy. I am a Gentile of the Gentiles. I'm not a Hebrew of the Hebrews like Paul.

I'm a Gentile of the Gentiles. I live out here. I do stuff.

I go to school. I finish school. I get a job.

I wash clothes. I drive my car. I do these normal, everyday things.

I have no qualifications whatsoever for anything spiritual. I think of myself as a spiritual person, but I don't do spiritual things. Back to what we covered in the first session.

Revelation 22.20 is such a great introduction to this passage and this section of the Laodicean letter because that's the point. Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit saith the Lord. You couldn't think of guys that on paper would be less equipped.

There's even a joke that used to circulate, you know, where the Apostle Paul or the Apostle Peter is applying to work at a church and they say, what are your qualifications? And he goes down his resume and they reject him or the Lord Jesus himself. They ask him all these questions and he doesn't answer them right. And they say, well, you know, we can't really use you in our church.

And it's the Lord Jesus or it's the Apostle Paul. It's almost a truism that not many mighty are called. So don't sell yourself short.

Your daily life counts because every day you live in this life, every day that you dedicate your time in the menial, mundane, ordinary chores of life, when you do it as under the Lord. I'm a student. I'm going to be a student as under the Lord.

I want the Lord to be proud of me. I was talking to somebody the other day who was in a situation where in the workplace somebody has become a bit of a pariah. They're not well thought of for various reasons.

And so now this is one of those things, if you've ever seen, you know, the wounded chicken and all the rest of the hens all gathered in one corner and this one that's got a little blood spot is kind of off on her own. And next thing you know, they are hen pecked. That's where the term comes from.

Hen pecked came from chicken farmers watching chickens. And when one chicken starts looking a little bit odd, the other chickens will peck it to death. Well, there's a situation ongoing right now where one poor hapless lady didn't quite fit, didn't make an honest mistake, wasn't thought of as being really fully qualified anyway.

Now everybody else is gathered over on this side and won't talk, won't give the time of day, gossips, mocks. Well, if you're a believer in that situation, what do you do? If these people are influential in your future, do you kind of, well, I've got to kind of go with the flow here because if I'm nice to this person, if I'm just decent and courteous to this person, it's going to cost me, oh, so you're friends with her, you're with her, and now it's going to cost you something. This is kind of a minor thing.

You think, well, what difference does it make how I treat this person? It makes every difference. This is why we're here. Do you have the courage to be the person God calls you to be regardless of the social pressure, regardless of what it might cost? Because honestly, wouldn't this be a compromise if you said, well, I'm going to stay away from that person.

I won't do the normal courtesies. I won't be a friend. I won't be kind.

I'll just kind of, I'll just arrange to be elsewhere. I'll just kind of avoid that whole situation. If you avoid someone because of social pressure, what are you doing? You're compromising the gospel of grace.

What if Paul had done that? You know, the Gentiles aren't well thought of in my Jewish circles. We'd never have the gospel. We'd never have all of these wonderful biblical books if that had been his attitude.

What about the Lord Jesus, who didn't think His equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant and came in the likeness of men and died an ignominious, shameful death for us? Have we not got enough starch that in a situation like this, we become and we act as and we live as the people that we are called to be. And the light of Christ shines in us and we don't let other people dictate who we are, who we talk to, who we hang around with. Our standards are not based on, well, this is convenient or this is appealing to me.

It is the law of Christ. It is the witness of Christ. We're defined by our relationship with God, not our relationship with our co-workers.

We're defined by our relationship with God, not our relationship with what makes us individually happy. You know, there's associations we ought to cut off because they're unhealthy, but we compromise in that area. There are some that we should have that we don't.

There's others we have and we shouldn't because we allow our affections to be determined by the world. Paul says, I'm a prisoner on behalf of Jesus Christ for you. Paul could have had a comfortable life as a Pharisee.

Luxuries, servants, esteem, social life, well thought of. Instead, he's sitting in a dank, dark jail, at times chained to sweaty Roman soldiers. Why? Because he didn't compromise the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And in his soul, he is one of the happiest, most content, fulfilled people ever. Because his happiness wasn't defined or determined by his circumstances. It was defined and determined by the presence of Jesus Christ.

Outside, not so great circumstances. Inside, he is seated at a table with the Lord Jesus Christ, receiving revelation, receiving truth that he could share with other people who love that truth and are going to come to a meaningful relationship with Christ through that truth. It is a transcendent life.

It is offered to us. We are called to it. We are invited to it.

Behold, I stand at the door and knock. That's not an invitation to get saved. It is an invitation to us who are saved to live a life that isn't defined by circumstances or by the fickle affections of people.

You can do that. You can tap dance and try to stay in the affections of the crowd, and they'll still stab you in the back. Just hang around and watch what happens to other people.

You know, people who sit around and talk about someone behind their back, you wait until the first time you're the person that's not there. They'll be doing the very same thing to you because

that's the quality and the kind of people they are. And in their mind, it's justified.

And if you quack instead of squeak, if you bark instead of meow, you'll be the person on the outs. And you will be longing for someone who will be a friend to you and not worry about those opinions. One day, you'll be the person who appreciates someone who is selfless enough to not regard that as the defining influence in their life.

That's what the Lord Jesus did for us. That's what the Apostle Paul has done for us, whom he did not know personally, just as he didn't know these Laodiceans personally. But he's a prisoner of Jesus Christ for them because he knows what this message can mean and what it can do.

And that is true for us as well. So how important is your faith? Is it important enough to live in its light, to make decisions and make your choices, who you associate with and who you don't, on its basis? Or are you blown about by whatever social wind is hitting today, whatever personal desire is being assuaged and comforted today? Are we defined by our faith or are we defined by the world? If you're defined by the world, what's the point of your faith? If it makes no difference, what good is it? And what we sacrifice unknowingly, there is never happiness in this temporary stimulation and temporary acceptance of people. There is deep abiding peace, satisfaction, fulfillment and hope and preparation for the future in sitting across the table from the Lord Jesus Christ and dining.

We sang that song, On His Word I Dine. That's the manna. That's the meal we share with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it is indescribable. You have to be there. You have to partake of that food.

Somebody can say, oh, I went to a restaurant and ate the best food. You can say, well, I believe you, but you can't really be smacked in the head by how good that food is unless you go and eat it yourself. Nobody can describe how wonderful it is to share that meal with the Lord Jesus.

You have to do it for yourself. And when you do, nothing else will suffice. And it gives us strength.

And it gives us courage. And it gives us definitional motivation to be the people God calls us to be. And it sets us on that narrow road that leads to the gate of life.

And it's a once in a lifetime opportunity. People in the Old Testament didn't get it. People in the future won't get it.

It's us. It's we. And it's now.

This is what Paul is writing about in chapter three. And we're going to see the reason he digresses here is he says, look, this mystery is no small thing. I'm a prisoner here for a reason.

And let me tell you why. And that's the section we're in in chapter three. And we'll pick it up next

time.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for this witness that has been preserved for us, this testimony that is so essential to our finding meaning and purpose and focus and motivation in our lives, that what we do has value, that transcends the moment, that transcends the immediate, that transcends the mundane. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts, that we won't forget them, we won't lose sight of them, but we will find it encouraging and motivating in the days ahead so that we can fulfill the potential that was given to us by grace in this dispensation of grace through the Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen.