

Ephesians 14-05-04a

This is Sunday, the 4th of May, 2014. We continue our study in the book of Ephesians, which we know is in fact the letter Paul wrote to the Laodicean church. And we pick up this morning in chapter 4, verse 7. We'll take a moment as we begin to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and to give us all of the benefits of the gift of His Holy Spirit in the delivery and in the hearing and meditating upon this part of His Word.

Shall we pray? Father, what a privilege it is for us each time we assemble to enter into Your presence, to find ourselves once again availing ourselves of Your grace. We thank You for this portion of Your Word, its preservation down through the ages, the truth that it contains that has been a benefit and a ministry to countless generations. We thank You for the gift of Your Spirit that enables us in ways that are impossible for us by any other means to understand Your truth, to be enabled and empowered by it, to live in its light and to walk worthy of our calling through the provision that You have made for us.

We thank You most of all for the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You for His example, for His willingness to empty Himself and take on the form of a servant and come in the likeness of our flesh. His example of dedication and commitment and obedience is something that we can follow because You have given us the grace, You've given us the power through the provision that You've made to do so.

We pray that as we look at this portion of Your Word this morning that it will enhance our appreciation for all of those things, for all of those gifts and all of those potentials, and also our appreciation for one another. We know that this is the measure of our success in heeding the exhortation that we find in this letter, and we ask Your blessing on our fellowship and our time of study. In Jesus' name, amen.

Ephesians chapter 4, I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech You to walk worthy of the calling with which You were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. You think back over the first three chapters and you know where the unity is. The unity is in Christ.

That is the circle. All believers are in Christ. It's not easy for people to stick together.

It's not easy for marriages to stick together sometimes. It's not easy for families to remain in harmony. It's not easy for friends or co-workers or fellow students.

We are all fallen. We are fallible. We are susceptible to selfishness and self-indulgence and to blindness, to indifference, to lack of attention.

We fail. We are fallible. These insults against one another have the potential to cause rifts and that potential is often fulfilled.

Our calling in Christ is unity. It is forbearance. It is endurance.

It is to be lowly and gentle-minded, bearing with one another. To the extent that we do this, we are successful in the worthy walk. We are fulfilling our calling.

This is the gauge. This is the meter. You look at your dashboard and depending on how old your car is, you have a gas gauge that works or that reflects something.

I have replaced, never mind. There are indicators of how fast you are going, whether or not your engine is hot. In some cases, how fast it is turning over.

Your odometer shows you how far you have gone. These are indicators and when they are working properly, this gives you helpful information for the maintenance and successful operation and future longevity of your car. What is the telltale? What is the indication of whether or not we are actually pleasing God? Many people think they are pleasing God.

Do you remember Jesus telling what it is going to be like in the resurrection for Israel? When He goes in and sits down at the table with faithful believers and there is a knock at the door, Lord, Lord, in your name, we did all these wonderful things. And He is going to say, depart from me. I never knew you.

These people expect that there is a seat with their name at the top of their plate. I don't want to be one of those people. I don't think you want to be one of those people, confidently walking up to the door, well, hello, I'm here.

Let the party begin. Sorry, there is no place set for you. Who are you again? I cannot think of a more profound loss and disappointment than to not be able to sit down.

And why is that? You remember the letter we looked at a couple of weeks ago to this same church, recorded by John in Revelation 3, the last of the seven letters to Laodicea. What does it say in verse 20? In this life, Jesus says, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with me.

That's the dinner opportunity now. The those who heed that knock and open the door and enjoy fellowship with him now, unity with him now, his body entering in and sitting down for a fellowship meal now will have that privilege reserved for them when it's the Lord's banquet table and it's his door and we're knocking. He will get up and open the door and we will resume the kind of fellowship we have now.

So this is important. And via Corinthians and what we studied in the last couple of weeks, especially on Resurrection Sunday, what is the body of Christ? The physical body of Christ has ascended on high. He is seated at the right hand of the Father.

His body on this earth now is us and it's a unified body. It is a self-consistent body. It is a body

that has a mind in it that belongs to Christ Jesus.

Let this mind be in you, which also was in Christ Jesus. Why? We are his presence and we have to be mindful of that first. Do you want to sacrifice being a part of the presence of Christ because of a petty dispute, an argument, an issue? I'm upset by this.

I don't think I got my due out of that. Well, this is the issue. And that's why Paul says here, after covering in chapter 1, in him we have.

Remember the beautiful menorah, the seven-branched candlestick of things we have in Christ? In him we have. In him we are. In him we are elect, chosen, destined.

In him, because it's the body of Christ and God the Father honors Jesus Christ and our participation, our entrance into, our effective function as body of Christ brings us into all of those blessings from the Father. What a privilege. This is the mystery that Paul was entrusted with.

Israel didn't have this privilege. Israel was not the body of Christ on this earth. It's us.

It is we. It is you and I. And as long as we keep that truth before us, other things will pale. The things of this earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Do you remember the song? Well, that's what Paul is talking about. So what did he talk about in chapter 2 and chapter 3? You remember it. You who are far off have been brought near.

We're no longer talking about Israel and the favored and the outcast. We are one in Him. Those of us who were near, those of us who were the first to hope are all in the same camp now.

Don't break what God has joined together. Every wedding, what God has joined together, let no man divide asunder. Well, we are the body and ultimately the bride of Christ, right? Don't divide the bride.

Don't cause strife and division in the body. It's not worth it. What possible objective could we achieve in argumentation and concentrating on differences? We saw the Philippians passage where it talks about to the extent that a thing is pure, lovely, of good report.

Whatever virtue, whatever praise, think on these things. You look around at Christian churches, Christian denominations, Christian ministries, and you say, well, you know what? They haven't got this right and they're not doing that right. One of the ways that I began to change my mind about having sort of an attitude of disparagement toward, I thought, well, you know, they're doctrinally incorrect.

But I noticed people were getting saved and people were being blessed and good work in terms of washing the feet of the saints and taking care of widows and orphans and a lot of other things were happening. I thought, wait a minute. How can God possibly be at work and blessed when

these people have got this understanding of Scripture wrong? This was a conundrum for me for a brief period of time and I realized God deals with everybody else just like He does me.

I am not perfect. More is the pity. Woe to those who know me and have to live with me.

And yet God still seems to be present and works. What does God do? God finds the parts of us that are functional and that are usable and are workable and He works in and through that. He doesn't wait for us to get every doctrine correct.

He doesn't wait for us to get every understanding correct, does He? He uses the parts that work. Think about the body of Christ. Look around.

There are wonderful ministries to widows and orphans, to the poor, to the community and they are done by churches. And we look at the denomination and say, well, I could never join that church. I could never be a part of that church.

Well, maybe not. But pray for them. Encourage them.

Be happy to meet them and be an encouragement on the things that they are doing right. Don't focus on, well, you know, you've got the whole eschatology thing wrong. I can't believe you're post-Trib or you're Ah-Mill or you're this or you're that.

God doesn't withdraw and take the glory cloud away and say, well, boo on them. They're a heathen and a tax collector and nobody's going to get saved. Nobody's going to learn anything from the Word of God.

There are places that are woefully screwed up. They raise their hands in the air when they sing. How could they possibly be right? Think about this now.

We need to get off our high horse and stop looking at what divides and start looking at what unites. Now, it doesn't mean that we are going to compromise on essential things. It doesn't mean that we are going to support and encourage error.

There is a balance here. Let your moderation be known unto all. The Lord is at hand.

What is moderation? I am not going to be in an extreme. I'm not going to be extremely critical. But in an area where there is some error and some fault, I'm not going to be overly praiseworthy either.

I'm going to find that happy balance point like the Lord Jesus did when He was here on this earth. He was down on the Pharisees, but He met with Nicodemus and He talked with Nicodemus where there was common ground, where they could have a conversation. Did He pronounce the seven woes to Nicodemus? Nicodemus knocks on the door, Nicodemus, woe to you, scribe, Pharisee, hypocrite.

You tithe the spices in your cabinet and you've lost the greater things of the law. I can't believe the way your group is treated. Did Jesus just, you know, fire hose him away from the front step when he came in? He had a discussion with Nicodemus on ground where they could talk.

And He was able to do good. He was able to provoke healthy meditation on the Word of God. He took that opportunity.

It's not always the time to point out what is wrong. It is much more often the time to find whatsoever things, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things. This is what Paul is talking about.

This is what this letter is about. Why did Paul lay that foundation in chapter one of Ephesians? Look at all of the tremendous things we all have in Christ. Chapter two and chapter three, there used to be a valid distinction made between the people of God and the people outside.

Touch not the unclean thing. Come out from among them. Be ye separate.

You've got the presence of God. You've got the ark. You've got the holy of holies.

And you are distinct. You are separate. You are insulated.

I have a wall of fire around you. And not until you disobey and put yourself in the place of breaking the covenant will I ever leave you or forsake you. It was national.

It was group. The nation in the Old Testament gives us points of application for individuals in the New Testament. Now we are body of Christ.

So in chapter four when he says, I therefore the prisoner of the Lord beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called. This calling is to the body. Those who disregard the body when it is time for a fellowship meal eat and drink judgment to themselves, not discerning the body.

Not discerning the body. It is so important for us to be careful and pay attention about how we think about one another, how we treat one another, what is in our mind when an issue, as it inevitably does, comes up between us and our fellow believers. This is the story problem.

This is the challenge that God puts in our path. In this world you shall have tribulation. There is going to be testing.

Don't act like it's some strange thing when fiery trial comes to you. And fiery trial is often at the hands of people. Lowliness, gentleness.

Notice he leads with that because we've got to cultivate and encourage that attitude in ourselves. You cannot do this if you're not humbling self. How did Jesus do it? How did Jesus leave the

realms of glory and come down and operate as a servant and wash the disciples' feet? Die for our sins.

How did he do that? This mind that was in him, he humbled himself and was obedient. He, for the hope that was set before him, endured the cross and despised the shame. He looked past the test, past the challenge, past the difficulty to the glory beyond.

For the joy that was set before him endured the cross. And that's what we have to do. We've got to think.

Think our way through these things. Stop and consider. Wait a minute.

Am I putting myself in the place of the Lord Jesus? Am I looking out for my own interests instead of the interests of others? Lowliness, gentleness, long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep, striving, spudazzo. This is work. We heard a message.

It was suggested to us by somebody out in the periphery there to listen to a guy talking about, it's a YouTube video on radical grace. Radical grace. It's not just grace.

It's radical grace. Interesting discussion. A lot of truth in it.

A lot of true things said. But I have been asked to produce a response. So I'm sort of trying this out on you to see if I can summarize it briefly.

It reminds me of when we studied the books of Bart Ehrman, an evangelical Christian leader, minister, professor, Bible scholar who hit a rough patch in his life and found his Christianity to be hollow, to be too much work, to not have a reality in it, and he threw it over and he doesn't believe the Bible anymore. Now his erudition and his scholarship is employed in debunking and pointing out errors and contradictions and everything that's wrong. My familiar friend has lifted up his heel against me with all prayer for his recovery.

That's what has happened to Dr. Ehrman. He's using his familiarity with scripture to attack it and to undermine it and also to make a really nice career for himself. But here's the thing.

What happens? There is, in fact, and in denominational Christianity particularly, it is easy to get into a form of godliness that denies the power. It has ritual. It has memes.

It has tropes. It has paradigms. It has structures.

It has traditions. It looks like Christianity. You carry your Bible around.

You say a lot of things. You sing the songs. But when the pressure hits, the reality isn't there and people wake up and say, this isn't working.

I don't feel the power and presence of God in my life. I feel like I'm just, this could be the Moose

Lodge. This could be the Elks Club.

This could be the Rotary or the, you know, the Knights of Pitheas or something. I'm just a member of a club. But when the chips are down, I don't, I feel like I'm just as mashed as anybody else in this situation.

There's a choice at that point. You have to go back and say, where is the reality in this Christian faith? And people do two things. They either go back to the Word of God and they go to the throne of God and they pray and they say, Lord, show me your truth.

I have not got it here. I believe in you and I believe you have a truth and I believe I have missed it. Please reveal it to me.

I don't want a hollow faith. I don't want an empty affiliation. I want to know you.

I want to come to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. I want to grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior. I want it to make a difference.

I want to be enabled and empowered and fulfill a worthy walk and a glorious calling here on earth. And I really have come to realize under pressure that I get nothing inside my faith. Lord, show it to me.

And God does. He answers that prayer. And there are countless ones of us that have reached that point and God has answered that prayer.

And you can stand and testify. You can know that that is true. There are other people who say, well, this isn't working.

And in some sort of human operation that I really can't fathom, they pick something else. Bart Ehrman picked anti-Christ, anti-faith, anti-Bible. He said, well, this didn't work for me.

It's all bunk. Other people say, this isn't working for me. I've understood it wrong.

And they come up with a new understanding that is just as distant in my perception as the first one. It's just different. That's what I see in this radical grace thing.

And you hear it in the description. I used to work. I used to strive.

I used to think I was ministering for God. And then I found it all to be empty. And what I realized is, it's already done.

I just need to relax. I just need to wait for the Lord to come from glory and stop worrying about it. I just need to quit worrying.

I'm just way too worried about my Christian faith. I need to realize that He's going to continue to

do what He's already done. I was looking for salvation.

I've already got it. I was looking for grace. I already have it.

I was looking for faith. I've already got it. So I'm just going to relax.

And they'll quote the verses that say, God is at work in you to will and to do for His good purpose. I just need to wait until God puts a will in me, and then I'll do whatever that is. I need to wait for an impulse.

God, delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart. What is the proper understanding of that verse out of the Psalms? What is it? Psalm 37, 4, I think. Delight yourself in the Lord, and He will give you the desires of your heart.

Psalms of David. What's He saying? If you delight yourself in the Lord, and especially if you go back and read the context of the Psalm, instead of trying to fulfill your own desires, delight yourself in the Lord. He will come around and fulfill those things that you've been seeking.

Fellowship, peace, stability, joy, attributes to get along with others. Delight yourself in the Lord. He will fulfill your desires.

They turn this verse around and say, delight yourself in the Lord, and He will put desires into your heart. You wake up one morning and suddenly feel the need to be a missionary to Zambia, or to go open a John 3, 16 mission in the ghetto or something. He will give you the desires of your heart.

He will give you desires in your heart for Him. And so this radical grace thing says, you know what, you've got to quit looking around thinking, I need to be doing this and be doing that, and just sit there and just wait until God gives you a desire. Follow it.

What is Jeremiah 17, 9? Jeremiah 17, 9, one of the first verses I ever learned. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can understand it? Who can know it? If you start looking at your heart and waiting for the desires of your heart to guide you, there is a way that seemeth right unto a man, and the ends thereof are the ways of death.

What defines our guidance, what defines our mission, is not the desires of our heart. This radical grace thing is all about, well, just, it's kind of like experiencing God. You know, look around.

People keep coming up with alternatives. They try a form of Christianity that doesn't have power in it. It doesn't work for them.

And so they trade it off for a different thing instead of going to God and going to Scripture. This is our worthy walk. This is our calling.

What is it? There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.

And if you misunderstand it and think the hope is to evangelize the world, if you think the hope is to wait for a desire to hit your heart and then fulfill that, you missed it. It's not there.

This is the worthy walk. God has placed us in Christ. We are body of Christ on this earth.

He was here and ministered. He went to the cross, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and that's what we have coming up here in verse 8. There is one body and one spirit and we are it. We are one body and there is one spirit in the body right now.

That is the spirit that unites all of us. Just as you were called in one hope of your calling, what is the hope of our calling? Pop quiz. Got a piece of paper, write down, okay, this is what I'm living for, this is the purpose, this is what I'm going to be judged on at the judgment seat of Christ.

What is the hope of your calling? I don't mean in the abstract, you know, bring glory to God. What is the hope of your calling? This afternoon, after lunch, what is the hope of our calling? It is to be the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in this earth with all of its purposes. What is the purpose of the Lord Jesus Christ? This shines the light of hope of eternal life.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you. The Lord Jesus Christ preached the gospel of the kingdom, the gospel of the way to God. He's not here, we are.

That's what we do now. It is one of the things we do is be ready to deliver the message of hope and truth and life with God through Christ. That's part of why we're here.

And we should be such an evident ambassador for that truth that people come up and ask us, how can you live the way you live? Where does this hope come from? Why are you not crushed? Why are you not dismayed? Why are you not discouraged? And you see this often when people get into the terminal phase of their life. They come down with something. Something tells them, here comes the terminus ad quem, I do not have long left to live, and yet they are joyful.

People go to try to comfort them and come away comforted and encouraged, and they say, how did that happen? I was going to try to cheer this person up. I have such a lift and such a benefit and a blessing from associating with them. Why? Because of their hope, because of the Spirit that dwells in them, and it is a miracle, just like the miracles the Lord Jesus did in His flesh on this earth, in the days of His flesh.

What else did the Lord Jesus do in His body on the tree? What did Jesus do in His body on the tree? He did what? Say it out loud. He bore our sins in His body on the tree. Haven't you ever wondered, didn't it seem like it was supposed to be spiritual death and anybody can die? Wasn't it His spiritual death that paid for our sins? Why does it say that the Lord Jesus Christ bore our sins in His body on the tree? Where is His body now on this earth? It's us.

Who is supposed to be unjustly and unfairly putting up with and enduring and bearing our sins now? We are, in the sense that we, with lowliness and gentleness, long-suffering, bearing with one another in love. If Jesus can bear sins in His body on the tree, His body on this earth can bear, put up with, I'm not talking about the forensics and the aspects of forgiveness and atonement. I'm talking about when we get sinned against, we bear it.

What did Jesus say on the cross about those who were crucifying Him? Father, smite them. Father, blight them. Father, write these names down and in the judgment, I want to reserve a specially hot place for them.

I have talked to these people for years and look at what they're doing to me. How unfair is this, Father? I want you to take special note of that hypocrite standing right there mocking me. I can hear him from here saying, if you're the Son of God, come down from the cross.

Smite, blight, nuke, evaporate, scatter the atoms to the farthest reaches of the known physical universe. I never want to see that person again and I want them to know just before they evaporate how wrong they were to do this to me. Is that the attitude of the Lord Jesus on the cross? What does He say in His body on the tree? Father, forgive them.

They do not know what they are doing. We who do know what God is doing and what our calling is are called to do what? Endure, bear with, maintain the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit just as you were called in one hope of your calling.

What is the hope of your calling? You've still got your little piece of paper there and you're going to write it down. I represent the Lord Jesus Christ physically on this earth. What He did, I should do.

His patience, my patience. His forgiveness, my forgiveness. His endurance, my endurance.

His bearing with, bearing up, under. His gentleness, His humility. He was the Son of God in glory and came down and humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant and came in the likeness of human flesh.

That's my attitude. Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus. Why? His mind was in His body.

His mind needs to be in His body now. What kind of arrogant platform are we trying to stand on when we get offended and we get unhappy and we get impatient and we get short and we think, hey, wait a minute. How dare you do this to me? That mind was not in the Lord Jesus.

One God and Father of all. What did Jesus say about Himself in John 14, 6? I am what? He could have just said I am. That's what He says in Gethsemane, right? We're trying to find Jesus.

I am. They all fall down. The force of that statement, I am.

But what does He say in 14, 6? I am the way, the truth, the life. No man comes to the Father. The goal of the Lord Jesus Christ was to bring men to the Father.

If I be lifted up, I will draw all men unto Me and through Him, He is the new and living way through the veil to the Father. So what should we be doing? What is the hope of our calling? What is the purpose of our calling? To be the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, to be a transparent representation of the Lord Jesus Christ who was the fullness of deity in bodily form. That's who we are now.

We are body of Christ. We are to do what He did, to say what He said, to represent what He represented. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

We are to represent that, to be a light shining in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. One God and Father of all who is above all and through all and in all. Not in you all, because He's not in you all.

Who is God the Father in? What did Jesus say in the upper room? Same timeframe as 14, 6. What does He say? The one who has My words and keeps them, He's the one that loves Me. And the one who has My words and keeps them and loves Me, I and My Father will come to Him and make our home with Him. Father's not in all of us.

He is in those who have the word and keep it. This word, He loves Me. What are the two great commandments? Love the Lord your God, love one another.

They are inextricably linked. And to keep the lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering and bearing with in love requires that. But we saw this last time in verse 7, to each one is given grace according to the measure, the metron, of Christ's gift.

Now this is where it really gets interesting. We close with this last time. Therefore He says when He ascended on high, now doesn't this make sense? That body that was the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth has ascended on high.

Now there is a new body here. That's the mystery. We are His body.

When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Yet when you go back to Psalm 68, that's not what it says. It says when He ascended on high, He received gifts from men.

What happened? Did the Apostle Paul make a mistake? Oh, you should see the dead seas of ink that have been spilled on this passage. Ephesians 4, 8. How to explain the Apostle Paul, an expert in Old Testament Scripture, trained from youth, a Bible scholar of the first order, misquotes a very well-known and well-known passage here. Misquote reverses it.

How is that even possible? How did this happen? What's going on? Do we have a textual

problem in the Old Testament or in the New? Is there a variation, maybe in the Septuagint? How did this happen and why did it happen? Well, this is what we're going to see when we come back from the break.