

Ephesians 14-07-27a

This is Sunday, the 27th of July, 2014. In our study of the book of Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Laodicean church, shared with the folks at Colossae and vice versa, we have come to the closing verses of chapter 4. The section here, verses 25 through 32, is very dense. We've taken several weeks to look at it, but we will pick up this morning in verse 25, actually, because we're going to take a running start at getting through to the end.

Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin. Father, thank you for this day and for all of the gracious provisions that you have made for us, protecting us, providing for us, challenging us with circumstances that give us the opportunity to put into practice the things that we have learned, giving us times of refreshment and encouragement as we spend time together in fellowship and as we enjoy the over and above blessings that you bestow on us beyond our needs and beyond even our desires. Sometimes you, as our loving Heavenly Father, give us things that we are reminded through and by of the overflowing nature of your love and grace toward us.

We thank you most of all for the Lord Jesus and for His work on our behalf, His ongoing presence at your side, interceding for us, representing us before your throne, and assuring us that the day will come when He will return and gather us to Himself and we will live in your presence and His throughout the eternal future. We know that this life is preparation for that time and that purpose, and we pray that as we study your Word this morning, we'll see clearly the truth that you have given to us that guides us, that energizes us, that motivates and compels us in the fulfillment of that goal and that purpose. We know that this reflects your glory and the glory of the Lord Jesus, and we pray these things in His name, Amen.

Let's just quickly remind ourselves of where we are in Ephesians chapter 4, therefore in verse 25, which reflects back on the preceding section, you shouldn't walk like the rest of the world walks. You shouldn't live like the rest of the world lives. And immediately, as I said earlier this morning, how do you do that? We have to get up in the morning, we have to dress and feed ourselves, we have to go out and do a job, we have to engage in the same activities as everybody else.

So why does it say don't live like other people anymore? Because it is not what we do, it is how and why we do it. Do not walk the way others, your former companions and confederates walk in the futility of their mind. It is futile to live for momentary gratification because it passes, it has no lasting value.

Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die. You can live your life that way, but it's fruitless, it is meaningless, it has no significance. I'm often impressed with the limited thought that goes into the argument for the atheist and the uninterested when it comes to spiritual things because they say, well, what is the meaning of life? Why should I live altruistically? Why should I give to charities? Why should I try to do good? Well, if I can bring happiness or do something good for others, that

makes my life worthwhile.

So you go over and you dig a well and the village in the middle of some far off place that had brackish water that caused disease and greatly impaired the life of their children, now there's a well, you've taught them how to purify, you go over there, you're with the Peace Corps or somebody and you do this altruistic work, now they've got water. And you say, see, I've done something significant, it makes a difference. Well, in the immediate temporal view, you can pat yourself on the back and say, look, I have made a positive difference.

Somebody says, hey, great, we've got water. We've got water that comes out of the tap that we don't have to worry about. What is the significance of not having water and then having water? It's a nice thing to have, but the people who drink the water are going to die.

And once they're dead, where did the benefit go? Well, while they were alive, it made a difference. Well, if they're gone and they perish and they never come back and there's no memory of it, it is as though it never happened. Somebody went and dug a well back in 1873 for some villagers off in some remote part of Africa.

They drank the water. They're all dead. He's dead.

What's the difference? Well, it made a difference at the time. Okay. And that's, what's the difference if you hadn't gone and dug the well and you'd gone to Las Vegas and, you know, played the roulette wheel and made yourself happy that way? What's the difference? Either way, everybody's dead.

All benefit is gone. If you back up and look at the physics of it and the long-term view cosmos and with Carl Sagan or you read your physicists like Hawking, ultimately the whole system is going to burn up. And if they say, well, we've got to hurry up and figure out a way to get off the planet because one of these days the sun's going to swell and it's all going to be roasted.

Now, what difference will it make? Here's the thing. We use the Julian calendar. Julius Caesar was instrumental in calculating the thing.

And we say, wow, thanks, Caesar. We've got a much better calendar than what people used to use before 14-something. Thanks a lot.

Does Caesar know? Does Caesar care? Does Caesar know that he's famous? Does anybody in the past know or care that they conferred a benefit on the human race? They don't. They're dead. And in the view of the materialist and the atheist, what difference did it make? Caesar could have just been a goat herd instead of Caesar and general and so on.

He could have just been Julius, could have lived a life like hundreds of thousands of other Romans, lived and died, perished, gone to dust. What's the difference to him, whether he did good or not? Well, maybe he was happy in the moment that he did it. A, self-gratification.

There's a lot more gratifying ways to be self-gratifying than to be altruistic. What's the difference? So I've often asked myself this question, you know, how do people justify it? They can only justify it. They can only vindicate their godless view of life by limiting it to the moment.

In this moment, I feel good. And they have to not think about the future. Because ultimately, you wind up being a nihilist and basically saying, why should I be good to anybody else? Because the only thing that counts is my pleasure in the moment.

I will soon be gone and it won't matter at that point. So I should concentrate on making myself as happy as I can be in this moment because I'm going to be like the squirrel in the road that got hit by the car very soon and it won't matter. And so the gift that God has given us is that we don't live that way.

There is actually and in matter of fact a God. We were created by him and this time is not all time. This life is not all of life.

Everybody, believer and unbeliever, saved and unsaved, is going to come back. Some briefly, some for much longer. We are those who are coming back for much longer.

And this life has meaning and purpose in the same way that your grade school education had meaning and purpose. How many people still, especially in my generation, can multiply single digit numbers in your head? When did you learn that? Well, I learned it back in, you know, single digit grade school. That was in whatever grade I was in.

I don't know when you learned your times table. Second grade maybe? Third? Third grade? Third? Yeah. Still useful to me.

Even though I learned it so long ago, it's a part of my nature. I can do mental math. Now, I can't vouch for anybody under the age of, you know, 30.

But those of us that grew up back, can you do your times tables? Okay. Anybody under the age of, can you do your times tables? Well, you were homeschooled. It doesn't count.

It does count. And you count in both senses of the word. But you see my point.

Things that we learn early on benefit us from then on and should. That's what this life is for the greatly longer, more extensive, and much greater potential involved in the eternal future. So that makes every day count.

That makes every hour count. The decisions, the actions, the experiences that we have are fitting us and equipping us in God's plan for specific service and function in the future. You say, I don't see how what I'm going through right now is fitting me for anything except patience.

I'm just having to try to be patient. Just be careful because who wrote the curriculum? Who designed this lesson plan? Who picked you and me in eternity past and said, this time, this place, this family, this set of physical characteristics, this environmental impact, this health issue, this personal issue, this relationship issue, this job issue, this education issue. God, for our intents and purposes, had us individually by name in mind and mapped out everything that would happen to us in eternity past.

And He said, here's going to be a testing point. Here's going to be an instruction point. Here's going to be a testing point.

Here's going to be an instruction point. We either do or don't avail ourselves of the instruction by assembling together, by learning the Word of God, by going back and reviewing. Anybody that's been in college, and some of you still are, and some of you now are after a long hiatus, know that you go to class and get an initial exposure to information, but what do you do before the test? Review, highlight, go back and make sure it's in there for the time of challenge, for the time of reproducing that information.

This is what God is doing with us. We learn it here, but the primary learning takes place as we reflect on it, as we think back on it and try to make sure that it's solid in our hearts and our minds at the time that it needs to be applied, right? That's the way any learning process works, if it's going to work. So that's what Paul is talking about.

He says, look, I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord. He really emphasizes this back in verse 17. You can't be walking like people who have no future goal.

They're living in the moment. They're living for now. They've got a very limited set of, oh, well, I'm socking away some savings for my retirement.

You don't even know if you're going to retire. You don't know if you're going to live that long. You walk out here to get the mail, some guy swerves, you're gone.

Your life has suddenly come to a close. What did it mean? What was it for? Well, it doesn't matter now because you didn't live for the future. You didn't understand that this is just a phase.

This isn't all there is. So Paul says, that is futility of mind. That is short term.

You saw kids that goofed around in class, cheated on their assignments. Why? All they cared about was, I just want to turn this in and not get in trouble now. Didn't think about the future.

What happened when it came time to actually have that information? Failure. Disaster. Catastrophe.

Impairment. Limitation. Graduating high school, illiterate.

Unable to. Now I know what I want to do. Here's a job.

Here's a trade. Here's an activity I want to engage in. But I didn't lay the foundation because I didn't pay attention in school because I was goofing off back then.

Now I don't have the ability. I don't have the opportunity. Long time ago, my pastor, when I was just a youth, would frequently say, Good decisions open up your future options.

Bad decisions shut your options down. If you're at a fork in the road and you're past the point of just saying, well, take it. You want to actually go one way or the other.

And it's difficult. You're weighing pluses and minuses. One of the criteria you can apply to resolve a decision point is, Which of these gives me the most open options in the future? Which one of these locks me into something that I can't really back up and go a different direction? Good decisions give you options in the future.

Bad decisions shut your options down. You decide you're going to be immoral in your teen or early 20s years. Something happens.

A child is produced. Guess what? As wonderful as it is to have children in the world, it limits your options. Because it is outside the structure that God designed for the nurturing of children.

You've colored outside the lines. You've messed up the provision that is made in a family for the optimal training and nurturing of a child. You've done it your own way, which is an inferior way.

You've limited the child's options and you've limited your own options. And you've limited the options of the other person involved in bringing that child into the world. It's a bad decision because it limits your options.

Good decisions keep those options open. To not think about what impact is going to occur in a decision, let me know if that's for me. Sam, this is heaven.

Get back into your passage. That's futility of the mind, to not consider the future, to not consider perspective, to not understand how your walk. It's not just a walk.

Do you take a walk just to walk or do you actually have some place in mind? This is the problem with Alzheimer's. You go for a walk and then you can't remember where you were going or where you came from. You get in a car and start driving.

And I've had relatives that this has happened to. And it is scary beyond all belief to get in the car, drive somewhere, and suddenly look around. You don't know where you are, you don't know where you came from, and you don't know how to get back.

That's walking in emptiness of mind, not having the knowledge to condition what your walk is for.

This is the gift that the Lord Jesus Christ has given us. We know what our life is for.

We know where we're headed. We know why we are walking because we know our destination. We know where we came from, the futility of mind that belongs to the Gentiles here.

And we know where we're going, which is definition and purpose and meaning in every moment of our lives. That's what's at stake here. That's what Paul is talking about.

Don't waste your life like the Gentiles do in the emptiness of their mind. So then, when we come to our section, he says, Therefore, here's what you've got to do. Because you're not doing that walk anymore, here's what you've got to do.

Having put away the deception, the deception that says, I'm having a good life when it's really going nowhere. Having set that aside. Remember, this is an aorist participle, precedes the action of the main verb.

Having put away the lying, the deception. Each one of you speak truth with his neighbor. One thing this implies is that you have got neighbors that are interested in the truth.

So, pick your neighbors carefully. Bad company corrupts good morals, right? I always thought there was a pretty good band that chose a name for themselves, Bad Company. And I think, yeah, well, when I listen to your songs, they do kind of corrupt good morals now that I think about it.

Talented guys, though. Bad company corrupts good morals. So, if you're going to speak truth with your neighbor, well, who is a neighbor that's going to appreciate it and speak some truth back? This is care in choosing associations.

Because if we constantly associate ourselves, it's the old thing they told me when I was a kid, you know, if you put one good apple in a barrel of bad apples, the good apple doesn't turn the bad ones good. When you associate the two, it all goes in one direction. Then we saw this thing about being angry.

Now, I want you to notice, one of the reasons I've gone back here is because look at the beginning of verse 26. Be angry. Remember the verb here, orge? Orgezo mai? And the noun from it is orge.

They get orgy from this, which means a, you know, sort of an uncontrolled situation. Be angry, but do not sin. Well, here's the thing.

Look down at verse 31, where we're going to pick up this morning. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you. Anger there is orge.

Oh, I've got a contradiction in your Bible there, young man, young woman. Up here, Paul says, be

angry. Down here, he says, let all anger be put away.

How does that work? Be angry, but put away all. It doesn't say put away some anger. It says put away all anger.

Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you with all malice. And up here, he says, be angry. Which is it? Be angry or don't be angry? Be angry and then put away the anger.

I take it out, I put it back. I'm not characterized by anger. I don't have a climate in my soul of wrath or bitterness.

It is okay to be momentarily bitter. I get bitter when I look at scholars of the Bible who switch sides, who defect, who become Benedict Arnold. There are Benedict Arnold scholars, and we've had whole studies looking at their books and explaining where they fell off the wagon.

I get bitter over that, but I'm not in a constant state of bitterness. I can pick up a Bart Ehrman book and start reading it, and bitterness at him using these wonderful faculties and the training and the knowledge that he has in languages and in comparative philology and all of these other wonderful tools. But it's like a guy that's got a wonderful set of construction tools, and he goes over to a building, to somebody's building, and he just starts knocking it all down.

He takes his sledgehammer and tears down. He takes his saws all and just starts cutting the studs in the walls, and I think it makes me bitter for a short space. Then I back up, and I say, you know what? We're all made out of the same clay.

Why don't I look to myself and be careful with the way I use the tools that God has handed me and ensure that I am a workman that needeth not to be ashamed? Some workmen need to be ashamed, and when workman looks at workman, there's an opportunity for anger. There's an opportunity for bitterness, but you've got to put it away. More important things.

If somebody's falling by the wayside, somebody falls behind, you're running the race. Somebody didn't train, didn't condition, didn't time their meals and their fluid intake before the run, and they cramp up or they slow down or they fall by the wayside. You can look at them.

You can draw a conclusion, but you've got to keep running. Put away. That's what he's talking about here in verse 31.

Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, it's going to occur. Some of these are okay. Evil speaking, I'm not sure it should ever really take place, but when it does happen, isolate it.

Put it away. Wouldn't it be great if you could stay cool, calm, and dry all day long? But if you go outside, if you went outside yesterday, you perspired. You can't stand out there for two minutes without breaking out in perspiration.

It would be great if we didn't, but we do. So when you come back in, at some point, you're going to have to take a shower. It's just an inevitability of life that these things will come.

Some of them are okay, some of them not so okay, but all of them need to be put away. Put away. The goal being to be kind to one another, verse 32.

Tenderhearted, forgiving one another objectively. That's what the last phrase means, be objective. Why should I forgive this person that did this rascal thing? This insensitive thing? This thing that makes me want to be angry or bitter? Or those concomitant things that are a part of wrath? Makes me want to speak evil.

You know what so-and-so did? Can you believe what just happened to me at the hands of this person? Let me tell you what a rascal that person is. That's evil speaking. Put it away.

If somebody starts to do evil speaking to you, slow them down. Say, well, well, well, why don't we change the subject here? I really don't need to hear that. You can help others.

We're supposed to be speaking the truth to one another in love, not evil speaking in cooperation with gossip, maligning, judging, backbiting, tearing apart the bonds of the Holy Spirit in the fellowship, in the relationships between believers. All of us have got a bad side. All of us have failures.

It is not productive to share that. It is productive and beneficial to share truth with one another, the truth of God. So we've got to watch for it.

We've got to put it away when it starts cropping up. Sometimes we should first and foremost try to do this for ourselves. If we fail, the benefit of fellowship is somebody near us can say, hey, look, let's just see if we can't shift the direction of this conversation.

Wouldn't it be more helpful if we focused on this? Or if somebody starts dwelling on the negative side, you can say, yes, but if nothing else, here's a benefit. Or, well, it's certainly a warning that I not go and do likewise. You can speak the truth in a way that will turn and deflect conversation and fellowship back into a positive direction.

And all of us need to do this for ourselves and for one another and not let these things continue. They've got to be put away. Well, he introduced this whole idea here with, let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor, be angry and do not sin.

And if you've got a New King James like I do, you notice that verse 26 is in italics. Be angry and do not sin. There's two reasons that the New King James uses italics.

One is to supply words that are included for smoothness or to try to make sense out of something that would be very cryptic if you just said word for word translation out of Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic. The other is to indicate that it is an Old Testament quote. This is actually an Old

Testament quote.

If you look down at the bottom of the page, it tells you that it is from Psalm 4. We're going to pause here and take our break, thinking about something we've talked about before. When Paul, in particular, quotes the Old Testament, he often expects that the people to whom he quotes it remember the context. And it's a footnote.

It's an allusion that speaks of the entire passage. He gives just a line. If I say, to be or not to be, you can fill in a lot of the rest of that, right? Even if you haven't ever studied Shakespeare, it's been quoted so much, try it.

I'm going to say, to be or not to be, and you fill in the rest of the line. To be or not to be, that is the question. Anybody know the rest? Whether tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take up arms against a sea of trouble and by opposing end them.

I just say, to be or not to be, the context comes to your mind. I say, hello darkness, my old friend, and most of you can do the whole rest of the song, right? Or I say, cuckoo-kachoo, which is a meaning, but you can come up with two songs that that is an allusion from. An earlier one and a later one.

Mrs. Robinson being one and John Lennon being the other. So this is a common method of communication. I say all of that to say this.

In verse 26, be angry and do not sin, says a lot more than it looks like it says, because Paul expects us to know the context. So we're going to pause and take a break. When we come back we're going to go look at that context.

It is going to greatly illuminate this entire section just before we leave it. It is going to help us to see the background and the fabric that holds all of these concepts together. So we'll look at that as soon as we come back.