

Ephesians 14-09-21a

This is Sunday, the 21st of September 2014. We are in the book of Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Laodicean church, also copied, cc'd to the church at Colossae and ultimately to all of us as believers. We're in the 5th chapter, we're in the vicinity of verses 8-14, 8-14.

We'll take a moment to reflect on our individual spiritual status and focus our attention on the Word of God. So let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank You for this day, thank You for the blessings that You have bestowed on us, the grace that conditions our environment, that guides each footstep, that protects us, that provides for us, that shows us the way in which we should go.

We thank You for the presence of Your Holy Spirit that takes the things that we have learned from Your Word and brings them to our minds, helps us understand their pertinence and their applicability. We thank You for His comfort and encouragement when we get discouraged, when we are afflicted by our own failures or the failures of others, when the pressure and the weight of the world besets us and tends to slow us down and slow our progress. We thank You that You have not only given us a calling and You have not only given us commands and direction on how to live, but You have given us the means.

You have enabled us and You have empowered us and You have shown us the perfect example of how it is done in the Lord Jesus. We thank You for Him, we thank You for His work on our behalf both in His life and in His death and now in His resurrected presence at Your right hand, interceding for us, speaking for us, representing us and serving as a reminder to presences in heaven and in earth of the perfection of Your plan, the power of Your salvation and the hope that guides us toward the everlasting future. We pray that as we look at this portion of Your Word this morning that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, that each of us will be personally encouraged and strengthened and motivated, built up and drawn closer to fellow believers, that we can all in a like-minded and single-hearted fashion pursue the goal of the upward call in Christ Jesus in the time that remains to us in this life.

We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen. Let's read our passage and kind of refresh where we are. We're going to look particularly at one word this morning and we've had a recent reminder that context is very helpful in ensuring that we don't misuse something that Scripture says.

The Bible is well known as the world's most popular book, the world's best seller. It's been published more, copied more, distributed more than any other book in the history of humanity. But it is also the most misunderstood, distorted, abused, corrupted, defiled, misquoted set of materials ever.

Nobody gets into fights and disputes over some passage in Caesar's Gallic Wars. But here, because it is important, important things get debated and discussed. And when people have

differences of understanding, we have to look and find where is the truth.

One is right, the other is right, maybe they're both right in different ways, maybe neither one of them is right and there's a third position. But it is not solvable by human reason alone. And the mistake that we often make is to let the world drag us down to mere reason.

Now, you all know that there is no bigger fan of a rational faith than me. The Bible has to make practical sense or we have got it wrong. God didn't give us mysticism, He didn't give us goofiness, He didn't give us a cult or the occult.

The Bible is of all things truthful, practical, factual, down to earth, this is how you get it done. That's why it is given to us. However, it cannot be understood with the tools that exist at that level.

You think about your car, it is a machine. It functions purely in the realm of physics. If it breaks, you fix it with physical tools.

But when it comes time for you to take the test and get your driver's license, they don't hand you a box of wrenches and say, go drive. There is conceptual information that is above the level of the mechanical that you must have in order to operate a car. The car exists at the mechanical.

You can operate it and fix it at the mechanical level. It is powered at the level of physics. But to use a car, you have to function at a higher level.

Your dog can't drive the car. Why? He lacks the conceptual tools. He's got paws, you've seen dogs pictured sitting in the seat with their paws on the steering wheel.

Could he conceivably, if you turned it on and put it in gear, could he steer the thing? But he's got no concept of why he's sitting in a car. If he sees a squirrel, heaven help everybody in the vicinity, because he cannot grasp what the purpose of all that mechanics is for, what the guiding idea of it is. And it's the same with Scripture and the concepts of Scripture.

They are grounded in the earth. They are designed for earthly use. But you cannot solve physical, using physical tools, what might be seen as puzzles in the Bible or unclear passages or trying to, you know, people say, well, it's all about the grammar.

I'm going to use the Granville Sharpe rule and I'll figure out what this passage means. Or I'm going to put all the passages into a computer and it's going to solve for me what the answer is. Or I'm going to just make a really powerful rational argument.

That isn't how it works. The analogy I'm making here is without God the Holy Spirit in His proper role as our guidance counselor, as our advisor, as our illuminator, as the one who enables us to understand what Scripture is really saying, it's not mystical. It's practical.

It isn't goofy. It isn't strangely purposed. You know, people say, well, I'm getting the ghost and I'm going to take my hairpins out and, you know, shake my hair out and yell glory up and down the aisles and all kinds of strange things.

What is the purpose of that? God didn't give us this whole Holy Spirit so that we could be buoyed up on some wave of emotion, especially a temporary wave. And you know what happens with waves? Anytime there is a maximum, there's going to be a minimum. It is up and it is followed by down.

This is how tsunamis work. This is how any kind of a wave works. If there's an up, there's going to be a down.

It's not an up and then it just stays up. Even Noah's flood eventually came down. So, we're here looking at the practical wisdom, the practical guidance, the guidelines.

This is how you live your life. If you claim the name of Jesus Christ and you're a Christian, how should we then live? What's the means of doing it? And much of our life as Christians is in interaction with one another. We live in the world and the world is not Christian.

It wasn't designed to be Christian. We're not supposed to have some sort of a theocracy in the United States of America and it's pointless to try to pursue some sort of Bible-based governmental structure. That's not what the Bible is for.

The Bible doesn't say, Behold, thou shalt go and establish a new land. We're going to see that this morning. We're in the world but not of it and we don't try to subdue the earth and make it some sort of a Christian kingdom.

Leave that to the Lord Jesus. That's His job. He's the King.

He will bring in the kingdom. And when He does that, now we're living in a theocratic kingdom. Not until then.

So, if that's the case and we live in a rule of others, a rule of kings, a rule of governments, what does the Bible say? Fear God, honor the King. Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's. Jesus didn't say, Well, you know, there really shouldn't be a Caesar.

What we need to do is go up there and conquer all the Romans and we'll set up our own little fiefdom here. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. Render unto God the things that are God's.

Well this immediately, if you think about it, creates some judgment calls. If I pay my taxes to Caesar and Caesar turns around and uses my tax money to federally fund stuff I strongly disagree with, now what? Is there a point at which I no longer obey the government? Were our founding fathers correct when they split from King George and Britain? Well, we need some

guidance in the practicalities of how to live in a world that is dominated by the God of this world. A world that is dominated by principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this age and the spiritual side and we've got all kinds of who knows whom up in the realms of government.

Well, that's what this is talking about. So we've seen, we started in chapter 5, Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And Mimetes there, we looked at that.

Be those who do what you have seen God doing. So this is our first clue. However it is we live in this world, we're going to do it the way God has done.

And so how does God treat unbelievers? Here's the first category. When I say unbelievers I'm talking about the world. Those who don't profess any faith in Christ, they think He's a myth, they think He's the imaginary concoction of a couple of shepherds who got out there and found a strange plant, ate it, started having visions and first thing you know there's a God of the Hebrews and a bunch of goat herds got together and wrote down scriptures.

They say you people are benighted and foolish that 2,000 years, 3,000 years, 4,000 years later you're still trying to follow this imaginary goat herd figure of fun to them. We're trying to ascertain as we bump into these folks, as we are in an ocean of culture dictated by them, how are we supposed to operate? Well the first clue, the first piece of guidance here is what you've seen God do, that's what you should do. Well so I ask myself the question, how does God treat people that are completely hostile to Him, have no interest in relationship with Him? Well, does He slay them all? No.

Does He remove them all? No. Does He kill them all? Not yet. There is a space of time, it is not the will of God that any should perish but that all should come to repentance, all should come to change of mind.

So there is a period of toleration. Now let me ask you this, who is tolerating whom? You say well we've got the world at large, you know majority of people don't hold with, which is actually false by the way. Most people, poll after poll after poll, a majority of people, especially in this country, believe in a creator, believe in a God, may take various forms, may be personal or impersonal, but there is still, it's somewhere in the 80 something percent people will say I think there is more to this world than meets the eye.

There is a force, a power, there is a creator, there is a something out there. And of course scientists say well you know what that is, ancient man would see the leaves rustle and he had one of two responses, either he said I don't see anything therefore there is nothing there or he got spooked and said I think there is a lion in the bushes, I'm going to run away. And so he evolved because the guy that didn't think there was anything there got eaten and the guy who did think there was something there, whether there was or not, became very careful and spooky and so he survived.

So we have evolved a weird sense that there is something there, whether there is or not. And this is your God center in your brain, that the wind blew, there is something there, it's just a holdover, it's an evolutionary appendix, it's an evolutionary little toe, it will eventually go away and because we are smart we are going to try to make it go away very soon. Well, go be warm, be fed.

If you don't believe in a creator, if you really think that's the explanation, good luck. There is nothing I can say to help you. Of course, my sense of spookiness doesn't explain any of the overwhelming evidence for intelligence behind creation.

So we are back to God's provision for us to live in this world of people, many of whom don't believe in him. And the interesting thing is, Buddhists, Hindus, 98% of the other religions that have ever existed aren't particularly militant, aren't particularly anxious to win your hearts and minds. Only a few are that way and mainly in the interest of world domination.

It's not so much that they actually want you in the kingdom of whatever their deity is, such as Allah, but they want to control everything. So submit or die because we want to be in charge and that's really more of a political motivation. But interestingly, when it comes to the God of the Bible, no hostility is like the hostility against the God of Scripture.

There is no hostility like hostility against Jesus Christ. People don't get mad at Mohammed the way they get mad at Jesus. They don't get mad at Allah the way they get mad at the Creator God of Scripture.

Why is that? Because in their heart of hearts, they have knowledge of him. And just like Satan, just like the fallen angels, I don't believe in him and I hate him. I don't think he exists, but I hate him anyway.

And that hostility is what Romans chapter 1 talks about. So there are a lot of these people around and they want to take control of things and be in charge of things. They've already gotten a hold of the educational system.

So what God is doing here is saying, look, you're in this world and this, by the way, has never been true. Think about the Romans and their pantheon of godlets and demigods and semi-gods and goofy gods. It's just humanity blown large, these gods with their jealousies and their, well, Hera is doing this and Zeus is doing that.

They're just reading themselves, as people tend to do with the God of the Bible, into the forces that control circumstance. God says, look, you're in this world. You're not going to take it over.

I'm not telling you to go be militant and establish a kingdom. I want you to dwell in the midst and shine as lights in it. Well, that's easy to say, but how do I do it? Where do I draw the lines? How do I know when to associate, when to disassociate? How do I know when to have converse and discussion and try to communicate the truth and when to back off? And, you know, one part of

the Bible says, flee youthful lusts.

And another one says, resist the devil and he will flee from you. Well, is it fight or flight? Which is it? How do I know? That's what this passage tells us. This is the manual for how to do it and when to do it.

So he says, be those who do what you have seen God doing as dear children. Children often end up in the profession of their parents. You know, Sanford and son.

Dad's a junk dealer, you're a junk dealer. You know, how many aunts' sons' businesses did we used to have? And it has ever been thus because you learn from your parents and you become comfortable with it. You become familiar with it.

You find out what's meritorious and what's enjoyable about it. And it's an easy path to doing what you have seen your parents do. And now, you know, with women being so often in the workforce, there are daughters who will end up going into a related field of what their mothers do.

And it's great. Do what you have seen your father do as dear children and walk in love. So the overarching policy, the attitude, the beginning point is love.

And this isn't, you know, all you need is love. This isn't we are the weird. This isn't some sort of gooey, goofy, sappy stuff.

This isn't, you know, sticky, you know, whipped sugar. What is that stuff? Candy, cotton, cotton candy. Kind of love.

This is not the Archies, sugar, sugar. You know, this is a policy that says I will put the interest of others ahead of my own. If it comes to a conflict, we're both at the door at the same time.

Go on ahead. I can wait. If everybody had this attitude that look, you know, you may be in a bigger hurry than me.

You're at the grocery store in the line. We're at Costco the other day. We've got this basket that's just stuff is falling off it.

It's so full. There's a lady behind me with three bottles of vitamins for her dog. Look, ma'am, you know, if you're going to wait for me to get through this basket, it's going to be seven to ten minutes.

Why don't you just go ahead? And interestingly from that, we learned some cool stuff about what these vitamins do for dogs. It was kind of a handy thing, but you know, it's and not to not like that's a big deal, but it's it is the idea that if you look and you can see where you can benefit the interests of others, what is the slight delay of a gal with three bottles? It's not like it's a big sacrifice, but if everyone had the attitude of the interests of others ahead of my own, the world

would be a wonderfully smooth, well-oiled machine. Of course, it is the grasping, it is the covetousness that this passage talks about that is the opposite of that.

Walk in love. Love is the policy. Bite down the impatience, bite down the frustration, bite down the angst and the anger and the I can't believe you cut in front of me.

My belief is that you did not plan ahead well enough to leave when you should have, and now you're driving like a maniac endangering my life and the lives of others with your swerving in and out of traffic. I just I stuff that back down. Maybe this person woke up late.

Maybe they have an appointment they can't miss. Maybe if they don't get there, they're going to lose their job and it wasn't totally their fault. Maybe they're plumbing broke and they had to mop up and they still got to be there.

Maybe this is a genuine, give them the benefit of the doubt. Back up and let them go. And believe me, this is what I have now decided to always do.

When I see somebody coming up in my rear view, and you should be aware, 360, what's going on. You see somebody weaving in and out, get out of their way and let them go. I used to try to frustrate them because it gave me great pleasure.

I'll pull up just far enough that they get ahead and they're just weaving around like this. I'm thinking, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Guess you get up a little earlier next time, won't you? I don't do that anymore.

Because I am trying to think about the principles in this passage. Put the interests of others, and look, even if he's a selfish, dangerous person, I want him to be selfish and dangerous somewhere else. Not next to me, not behind me, not in front of me.

I will slow my own progress down because I did plan ahead and I am leaving at a good time and I've got some padding in my arrival time, by the way. If we plan ahead, we've got the flexibility to take a delay. I was heading for something and I saw a lady with a flat taking stuff out of the back of her car so that she could get to her spare.

I would love to have gone over and helped her, but I had an appointment and I didn't have enough time to help her and make the appointment, the appointment that involved a number of people. I would love to have pulled over and stopped. If you leave with sufficient time, it gives you opportunities.

It gives you flexibility to do what this passage says we should do, which is walk in love. Love is sacrificial toward self, beneficial toward others. It's not an emotion.

It's a policy. If you respect that policy, if you want to pursue that policy, many occasions require time. Implicit in walk in love, and you wouldn't think this, there's probably been no sermon on love

in the last 50 years that said this, but to walk in love, you have to be a good time manager because it's an investment of time.

If you're going to put the interests of others ahead of your own, that means your stuff is going to get put on hold. It's going to be delayed, which means you need to be a good time manager. You need to allow extra time.

You need to leave early. You need to allow extra time in case something comes up where you can say, go ahead. Looks like you're in a hurry.

Go ahead. Looks like you have a need. Go ahead.

I can stop and help you with your thing, and then I'll come back and finish mine. Go ahead. Walk in love.

This is not abstract. It's not refrigerator magnet aphorism. This is policy.

This is how you do it. This afternoon, tomorrow, you get out of here and hit a bunch of balloon fest people, and they're trying to get somewhere, trying to get somewhere else. Let them in.

Let them out. Yeah, you've got food on. Well, if you've planned ahead, it can wait.

It can keep. And we do it. It's not just the doing.

It is the spirit with which we do it. In fact, it is almost entirely the spirit with which we do it that counts. That's what gets recorded in the books.

That's what shows up at the judgment. Did you walk in love? It doesn't say stand in love. It doesn't say sit in love.

It doesn't say lie down in love. Why does it say walk? Because walking is a process. It is one foot in front of the other.

It is ongoing, and it requires consistency. Walking, unless you've got a really terrible limp, should be consistent. If one leg is significantly shorter than the other, you know, if you're not careful, you're just going to be circular.

It's a consistent, ongoing process. Walk in love as Christ also has loved us. Was He consistent? Did He put the interests of others ahead of His own? All you have to do is look at the cross.

Look at His life. Look at the record of His ministry in four different perspectives. Actually, many more than four.

We have the four Gospels, but we have a fresh perspective that we're uncovering to a great degree in the Old Testament prophetic record. In many cases, you get more insight into the Lord

Jesus and what He did from prophecy and from the Old Testament than you do from the actual eyewitness accounts. An offering and a sacrifice.

Remember the difference? What's the difference in an offering and a sacrifice? An offering is a gift from the first fruits, from what you have in abundance. Sacrifice is that which costs me something. You can give a gift, you know, I was up in Claremore the other day and everybody's tomatoes came in.

Tomatoes everywhere. Tomatoes just stacking up. So people are giving each other tomatoes, you know, here, take these tomatoes, please.

They're going to go bad. Baskets of tomatoes, buckets of tomatoes. Tomatoes everywhere.

And they're really wonderful, homegrown, organic tomatoes. They're great. Well, that's an offering.

Sacrifice would be, I've only got one gallon of milk left, but you've got a baby, here, take it. I'll do without. It costs me something.

And of course, that's a mundane example. Sacrifice is often far more costly. The Lord Jesus, the sacrifice He made was the most costly.

Offering and a sacrifice. Do what you have seen God doing. What does John 3.16 say? Is there any sort of an offering involved there? An offering and a sacrifice? God so loved the world that He gave.

It doesn't say Jesus so loved the world that He came, does it? Why doesn't it say that? Wouldn't John 3.16 be great if it said, Jesus so loved the world that He came and died on the cross that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish. Why didn't it say that? God so loved the world that He gave. What you have seen God doing, do.

But, pornia and all akatharsia, and we've seen that this goes way beyond just physical acts of fornication or some sort of, gee, I need a bath-ism. These are speaking of larger things. Uncleanliness is spiritual uncleanness.

Pornia is spiritual unfaithfulness. We don't have any trouble understanding that uncleanness doesn't mean don't let yourself get dirty. If you work on your car, wear rubber gloves.

This is a new thing. I never saw anybody wearing rubber gloves to work on a car until just lately. And I think, I don't know.

I thought that's probably real practical. I just can't make myself do it. I think, seriously? Rubber gloves to work on a car? It's just not American.

I don't know what's the matter with it. There's something wrong with it. But we understand that

uncleanness in the Bible isn't talking about don't get your hands dirty, right? Why do we have such trouble understanding that pornia isn't just some physical dalliance, some physical disobedience, that it speaks of larger things? They're right next to each other.

They're in a group here. And they're all talking about spiritual things. You can, and it's not just imagining physical things either.

You know, Jimmy Carter got in such trouble for saying, well, yeah, I've committed adultery in my heart when he got, why? Well, that's a long story. Don't be interviewed by Playboy. I mean, you're just asking for trouble.

That's how Jimmy Carter got in such trouble. He let himself be interviewed by Playboy and they said, well, you know, have you ever broken any of the commandments of the Bible? And Jimmy said, well, sure. I've lusted for women in my heart and he never lived it down.

But when it talks about these things, these are kinds of unfaithfulness. Pornia in the physical sense is a representation of crossing a known boundary and it injures other people. It breaks faith.

It breaks promises. It causes tears and rips in the fabric of families. Married or unmarried, it rends things in families.

For unmarried daughters, think what happens for the father and mother. For sons, think what happens when they later on are going to try to establish a family and try to be faithful to one woman when they have a pattern of this in their history. Think about what happens when it involves adultery and there are already promises made.

Everybody that is going to not have an ultimately celibate life and even that, is either currently in a covenant relationship with somebody or is going to be. And you can break a covenant even before you enter into it. Because if you know there is someone out there that is going to be your spouse and you dally anyway, if you know they're out there and you just haven't met them yet and you're willing to break faith in advance, what's going to happen once you have the relationship? You're going to rationalize breaking faith with them afterward in the same way that you rationalize it beforehand.

There's only one path of non-pornia and that is faithfulness to commitments. And if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus and you believe that God has designed you to be one half of a tremendous, the two being one flesh relationship, then to dally outside that in the physical realm is breaking faith. You're saying, well, God, I don't really believe your design is that hot.

You're breaking faith with God and you're breaking faith with that future person. There's no way around it. That's what you're doing as a believer when you do that.

And there's no rationale that can excuse it. Well, it is just put as a vocabulary term here for anything of that type. Fornication doesn't begin to cover what pornia is.

Pornia is breaking faith, selfishly so, short sightedly so, unspiritually so, unfaithfully so. Let it not even be named among you as is proper for saints. And this gives us some practicality here.

Let it not be named among you. Are there churches that are almost famous for tolerating all comers? Hey, we don't care what kind of relationship you're in. Come on in.

Shacked up two boys, two girls, three, five, come on in. You know, wear what you want, say what you want, do what you want, be what you want. Come on in.

Well, now it is named among them, isn't it? If there's a fellowship of believers and there is an example that thrusts itself into view, if something's going on and I don't know about it, then I'm not responsible to separate from it. But if somebody comes in and makes an issue, and there are many people who want to flaunt their freedom, they want to flaunt their ideas of what they think is right, well, that makes it an issue for me. If you advertise, if you wear it on your sleeve, if you wave it like a flag, if you wear it like a crown, then you are going to force me to make a decision.

Because now it is being named in the midst. This is the midst. This is the fellowship of believers.

My midst includes my circle of friends, my circle of acquaintances. And after a period of time of concourse, of discussion, of acquaintance and opportunity to speak the truth in love, if someone is unrepentant, uninterested in a change, the truth doesn't make a dent in them, I can no longer let that be named in my midst. It's either going to change or it's going to leave.

But it can't stay in my midst for months. That's being named in the midst. So how do I know when to separate from the world? How do I know when to put some distance between myself and other people? And when I say other people, there's something coming out from the passage that qualifies even that.

But this is practical guidance. We don't have to guess. We don't have to make exceptions or, well, you know, I'm just not real sure.

It's very clear. And it's very helpful, too, because there's a purpose in it. This not only ensures that the glory of God is reflected in us and through us so that we can shine as lights in the world, but this is the path of peace.

Violating these guidelines, trying to operate with some other set of standards, you'll never have peace. God's ways are ways of pleasantness and all His paths are peace. And if you don't have peace, you're not on the path.

And it will disturb and interrupt our walk. We'll find that we're not walking in love anymore. We're having to walk in angst.

We're having to walk in fear. We're having to walk in troubled times and over rocky ground. And the upward call of God in Christ Jesus is not one where we're constantly having to compromise with evil.

It is separation from evil. But, again, it's tricky. How and when? How long? Do I never talk, you know, let's be Amish.

Let's go off and form a little bubble community, live inside a germ-free plastic film. And how do we do it? Well, the part we're coming up to, all we've had right now is review. What we're coming up to in this next section, 8-14, this is very clear, makes it very easy to know when and how.

It is going to shine a bright light on this whole concept because this is our daily need, our daily experience is we meet people at the counter. We work with people. We go to school with people.

We, in some cases, even live with people. We have people all over the world. It's just overstuffed with people, in my opinion.

This is why I don't go to any place crowded. I just get the creep and willies. You won't see me at the Balloon Fest.

Only out of pure love and dedication to my family will I go to the Perot Museum on a Saturday or any other place that's, you know, Costco on shopping day. I mean, it just overwhelms my delicate sensibilities. You know, I'm a very cosmically sensitive person and it's just too much input for my finely tuned senses.

But we're called to live in the world and this is how to get it done. And we can relax. The great thing is it's relaxed.

It isn't tense. It's not retentive. It's not so tightened up that you get cramps.

It's relaxed. It's friendly. It is open.

You can live your life with a smile. We're not judging. We're not punishing.

We are not creating some big set of problems out of our religiosity or our holier-than-thou-ness. It is simply a wonderfully defined policy that lets us live our lives as unto the Lord, lets other people live the way they want to, and it actually avoids a great deal of conflict and a great deal of strife because it is non-confrontational. It is non-violent.

It is non-stressful. It is a gift of God that lets us live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation without losing our peace. We have shalom.

We can speak shalom. We can radiate shalom. And yet we can maintain purity and we can let the light of Jesus Christ shine at the same time.

Well, it sounds like a really tricky thing and if we had to figure out how to do it, it would be, but God gives us the means and He gives us the enablement and it's defined in this passage and that's what we'll look at when we come back from our break.