

Ephesians 15-01-04a

This is Sunday, the 4th of January, 2015. We continue our study of Paul's letter to the Laodiceans, most likely designed to be kind of a circular letter. He sent it both to them and to the believers at Colossae and asked that the Laodiceans read the Colossian letter as well.

We'll be taking a brief look at the Colossian portion that corresponds with our passage this morning, as well as something from the Apostle Peter that becomes the third witness to the truths we're going to see. We will be picking up this morning in Ephesians 5, verse 22. Take a moment, as is our custom, to pause and go before the throne of grace, ask God's blessing on us as a fellowship, and as we look at the truth of His Word, recognize the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit, the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ, where two or three are gathered in His name, so that we benefit as God's children from the grace and the provision from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Shall we pray? Father, we are so grateful for Your watch care over us. As we review the year past and the year that lies before us, we realize that we are lifted above the earthly and the temporary, the short term, by those things that are our privilege and our possession through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank You for Him.

We thank You for the transforming grace that regenerates us, that instills within us eternal life, life that partakes of those things that are beyond the material and beyond the sensory perceptions of this life. We know how easily we are enmeshed in the things that are presented to us in our culture and in our environment, in the media and in education and in the hardness of heart that so characterizes what once was a nation that worshiped and functioned with a recognition of Your sovereign power. We thank You that as believers in the Lord Jesus, we can continue to exist in an environment that You create for us.

We live within the wall of fire. We live in a place where we can continue to enjoy peace and safety and the active ministry and the active oversight that You have promised to us as we seek to walk the narrow road and enter through the straight gate of life. We thank You for this passage.

We thank You for the truth that it contains and the light that it sheds on our lives both in its immediate context and application and in the general principles that it conveys, the perspective and the viewpoint that we gain as it reinforces in our minds the great need for humility, for recognizing Your plan and Your purpose in what remains to us of this life. We pray that our study this morning will be a blessing to each one who participates, that God the Holy Spirit will be our teacher, that these things will remain as a part of the resources in our soul and be a part of the transforming and renewing power that is essential for us to live in a way that is pleasing in Your sight. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

As we have seen throughout this letter, it is our position in Christ that defines us. We've talked in

recent times about what defines us. Going back some months now, even back in September, we spent some time looking at how do I view myself? How do I like to be viewed by others? What is my role and my place? What is my identity as a human being? The grass springs up, spends its short life in the sun, drinking up the rain, hopefully in a healthy way, possibly reproducing.

And then the season passes, the grass withers, the flower fades, and soon a new generation replaces and supplants that which had its day in the sun. There's never been a time when that is more apparent than now with video, with photographs. I think there has never been easily, there has never been a time in human history for thousands and thousands of years, there has never been a time when more of the present has been recorded to be looked at in the future.

How many pictures got snapped at Christmas? How many videos were taken? How many records were made and kept? It used to be, you know, you could have a photo album, you could have a little book, maybe 20 or 30 pages front and back in little slots, and you'd put your printed pictures in it. Those are quickly becoming a thing of the past. And in that album you might have, I mean, I've got one little small album that covers pretty much my entire military career, no more.

An album couldn't contain even the pictures from one event. And what we see in that is the passing of time. We see ourselves and others in youth, in middle age, in old age, we see the ravages of time, and necessarily in that time of sin.

It is sin, it is the fallenness of creation that created death. And it is basically, I don't want to be morbid or depressing, but our lives are basically a slow but accelerating progress toward death. Even in our youth, the seeds are being sowed.

Every time our cells reproduce, telomeres are a little bit shorter. The copies that are made are a little bit less great. The first few generations of copies are pretty good, but a copy of a copy of a copy, and we begin to degenerate, and we lose our collagens, and we lose our snap and our mental acuity, and we lose our muscle tone, and we lose what used to be on high, gravity pushes it down low, and we don't heal as fast, we don't resist as much, we are not as strong.

There's never been a time when it was so observable and so manifest as now. You can look at pictures and movies and very realistic contact with your parents and grandparents when they were young, and you look at them now, and you look at yourself when you were young, and you look at yourself as you get older, and you think the passing of time is cruel in the sense that we slowly degenerate. This is the nature of life in the material world.

The great gift, and what Paul talks about in Ephesians, because this has been known, it's been known since ancient times, that when I was young, I thought as a child, spoke as a child, when I grew old, I put away childish things, but as I get very old, remember Solomon describes this in the closing verses of Ecclesiastes, when the silver cord snaps and the golden bowl is broken, when the grinders are few and you no longer hear the birds because you're getting deaf, and you can't see as well, and it becomes dark, and he describes old age in metaphorical terms. This has

been known forever, but why is it so impressed on us now? The time is short, and I am so impressed with what you could call the hockey stick graph of all things, whether you look at the use of resources on the planet, whether you look at the accumulation of human detritus, landfills, waste, we are so impressed with the use of quickly coming to the point where we're going to bury ourselves in trash. We're running out of places to put it.

We're running out of ways to recycle it. We have used up our resources. Oil will never be as cheap as it was in the 1960s.

Copper will never be as available as when they could find great chunks of it laying on the surface. There's a new controversy out in New Mexico, I think, where they want to do a great copper mine, one of the last places they've got good copper, but it is sacred Native American grounds or something, and so there's a big contest between the copper miners and some tribe of Indians out there that say, well, you know, we think our ancestors have got spirits floating around here, and we don't want you messing with it. Well, they're so desperate for copper, I've got a feeling that, as with most other battles, the Indians are going to lose, and the big trucks are going to come in, and the price of copper will come down a little for a while, but we're using these things up.

The economies of the world, the nature of inflation, the nature of debt, the impending necessity for the bubble to burst worldwide, almost anything you want to graph, population, from going back to ancient times until now, it is a hockey stick graph, and as you look at one and another of almost every area, we see that there is a sort of symmetry. It's another way of looking at a chiasm. You've got a very small bit, and then you have a prime area, and then it goes up this way, and you've got a big spike at the end.

Well, you don't look at history and see hockey sticks that come down and then start another hockey stick. It begins this way. Without a huge natural disaster, the population of the earth is not going to go down, and of course, Revelation tells us that that is going to happen.

But all of these things conspire to witness to us. We have the witness of the Word. We have the witness of nature.

We have the witness of the incredible level of data collection and record keeping that we have in this day, but the time is short. There is a big change coming, and whatever your beliefs, there is a big change coming. It cannot continue as it is currently going.

It cannot continue. World economies cannot continue. World populations cannot continue.

The use of non-renewable resources that are running out cannot continue. So Paul says, look, lift your gaze above the material and the earthly, the short-term and the mundane, and remember that we are delivered not only eternally, not only from the penalty of sin and from the power of Satan and of death, but we are delivered out of this present evil age. We can redeem the time where someone else may be trying to lay up investments, barns with grain.

This night your soul is required of you, and you lose it all. Lay up not for yourself treasure on this earth where moth and rust corrupt, where thieves break in and steal. There is no security.

There is no safety in the mundane material world. People think they're safe, and they're not. They think they're achieving happiness, and they're not.

They think they are making progress, and they're not. I don't care how much progress you make. If you watched any retelling of The Christmas Carol, this is something that Scrooge learns in the course of that story.

One of the last lines in the one I watched this holiday season is as he becomes generous and thoughtful and outward-looking, his attitude is the exact opposite of what it is in the beginning. He says, you know you can't take it with you, and you can't. So he begins to look outward and realize that there is a use for these things that we have in the short term.

Well, Paul has described this. We've reviewed the first part of this letter many times, and as we come to chapter 5, and you can see in your New King James if it's like mine, you have three great headings here. Walk in love at the beginning of chapter 5. Walk in light beginning at verse 8 of chapter 5. Walk in wisdom beginning at verse 15.

And this is a good topical summary of the first half of the chapter. Walk in love. Walk in light.

Walk in wisdom. What is the source of love? Well, in the human realm, it is fickle. It is changeable.

I love you today. I don't love you tomorrow. I don't love you.

Paul Simon has a lyric in one of his more recent songs where he says, who's going to love you when your looks are gone? Because so much of love and fascination today is based on ephemeral and short term conditions. Where is the permanence? Where is the enduring source of human love? Well, there is no enduring source of human love because it's based on human fallible emotions, human fallible estimations of value. All you have to do for a lot of us is think back to what you thought was good and important in high school or in your early 20s, and as you get further along in life, you look back and you say, what was I thinking? What made me think that was good? What made me think those long pointy collars looked cool? What made me think those bell-bottom pants and those platform shoes and those long sideburns and that incredibly puffy hair and disco? What made me think that was just the epitome of quality? You look back at it now and it's just kind of sad, at least in my view.

I often wonder, and I don't know, and nothing against people who go down the whole piercings and tattoos thing, but a tattoo and a piercing looks really cool when you're in your early 20s, and I think when you're like 68 or 70 and all of that stuff is sagged and faded and you've got to spread the wrinkly flesh to see what the tattoo, are you really going to think that that was a good idea?

Maybe so. I don't know. I just think what you think is really valuable when you're young, the wisdom of experience teaches us, but in the fallible human world, that knowledge comes too late.

This is why the old saw says that youth is wasted on the young. I wish I had the wisdom of my age when I am young so that I can live a useful life. Well, that's why in Proverbs, David passes on to Solomon and Solomon passes on to the rest of us that a young man can pursue and achieve wisdom.

Where does it come from? You don't have to wait to learn it the hard way by experience and realize that everything is too late and you've made so many mistakes and overburdened and made so many cracks and repairs in the foundation. Wisdom is available. Walk in love and the source of love is the Lord God, genuine love, love that is transcendent, love that is enduring, love that is not dependent on transient things.

Walk in light, the light of truth, the light of objectivity. There is a way that seems right to us and it leads to death. We're so sure, we're so confident, we are so convinced, but the divine light of truth that shines from God's word corrects our misapprehension.

Have you seen these? I love these optical illusions and there was a whole presentation of these. You can get it on books, there are TV shows, Weird Science or whatever. You look at a thing and it looks like here's a box made out of sticks, it's 3D, or here's a view of somebody, it looks like there's a crater in the asphalt and a hole has been dug and there's a broken water pipe down in it and maybe something crawling out of it.

And then they move the camera and you see that this has been painted in a very long fashion and if you stand at one particular vantage point and have a 2D picture taken, your mind says, well that's 3D, that's a hole, that's a pipe, but then you stand to the side and it's this great long deception. It isn't that at all. But you could not discern it only looking at it from that one viewpoint.

Same thing with these Escher things and Infinite Stairway and the rest of that. People have actually made those and it looks good from one vantage point, but then you swing around to a different angle and you realize somebody has done this really marvelous and ingenious construction and it isn't what it appeared to be from that one vantage point. The light of God's word gives us that divine perspective that keeps us from being deceived.

What seems so much a part of verite and truth and just can't be wrong, God's light shines on it and we find out that there is an alternative. There is another and a better way. Be not deceived.

And we saw that in this letter. Put away lying. Speak the truth.

Leave behind deception and falsehood and wrong conviction. We can't do that in our own strength. We don't have the ability to shift our perspective.

It is the light of God's word. Walk in love. Walk in light.

Walk in wisdom. This brings us now to verse 21 where after encouraging fellowship and encouraging the unity of the body. Do not be an island.

Do not be isolated. Do not go off and cut off fellowship. We benefit from the ministry gifts that bless us and allow us to be a blessing to others when we are in contact and in fellowship with other believers.

So forsake not the assembly. Speak to one another. Psalms, hymns, spiritual songs.

By the way, that love and that light and that wisdom are reflected many times in our hymnology, in our songs and psalms and spiritual musical expressions. There is light. There is love.

We sang hymns this morning about love, love divine. Love lifted me out of the miry clay. It is a reminder.

It is a recognition. It's another perspective on love, light and wisdom. Singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord.

Giving thanks always. We've talked about the link between thankfulness and humility. God resists the arrogant.

God resists the proud. God resists. God opposes.

God removes blessing and provision from those who abide in self-sufficiency. God gives grace to the humble. Cultivating gratitude, cultivating thankfulness is cultivating humility and recognition that what we have, we have received from God.

Every good gift comes from above, from the Father of lights in whom is no shadow of turning. Giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We saw in our memory verse review, praying in the Holy Ghost.

Keep yourselves in the love of God, praying in the Holy Ghost. Giving thanks to God the Father, that's the destination for prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the authority by which we can claim promises and it is in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

All three members of the Trinity involved in our communication in both directions. Then verse 21, submitting to one another, hupotasso-ing in the fear of God. That is the key to everything that follows in the remainder of the chapter.

Look at it. Submission, hupotasso, standing under, remaining under, obeying, recognizing and functioning under authority in the fear of God. If a cruel and evil dictator begins to issue instructions, I cannot hupotasso to that in the fear of God.

This is a limiting and a functional description of what this fear of submission is. If you can't do it in

the fear of God, you shouldn't do it. This is the limitation.

This is one of the balancing truths. Every truth of scripture will have at least one and usually several other truths that balance it, that limit it, that keep it from being taken to an extreme. Wife in an abusive marriage cannot continue to submit to a destructive and an evil husband in the fear of God.

Even less so if there are children who are suffering in that environment. Get out. How much is too much? Pray.

Seek godly counsel, if necessary. But some people have taken this verse and said, though he slay me yet will I submit to him. That's not in the Bible.

Submission is in the fear of God. That brings us to verse 22 where we pick up this morning. Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord.

Again, in the fear of the Lord. Interestingly, if you look at the Greek texts that are witnesses for this verse, hupotasso in the Alexandrian texts, the text behind your New American Standard, for example, does not have the word hupotasso at all in verse 22. Typically, if there is a clarifying addition, which is what this looks like, and you find it in the majority text or the Western Byzantine text tradition that underlies the King James and therefore our New King James, many times it is expansive.

Scribes thought they would be helpful by amplifying or explaining it. Sometimes it even had a teaching motivation. I'll stick this in here and just be sure nobody mistakes it.

And so it is my opinion that hupotasso is not in verse 22, it is extended from verse 21. The concept is there, but if you read this from what is considered to be an earlier and better text tradition, it says, doing these things, singing, making melody, giving thanks, submitting to one another in the fear of God, wives to your own husbands as to the Lord. It's borrowing the submission idea from the previous statement.

Submitting to one another in the fear of God, i.e., wives to your husbands, and so the strong implication of it is there. We have no qualms about this because of the parallels. Because of the parallels, we have, for example, over in Colossians, the third chapter in the 18th verse, keep your finger here on Ephesians, turn past Philippians to Colossians chapter 3, just a few pages.

Colossians chapter 3 verse 18, here there is no textual difficulty. Wives submit to your own husbands as is fitting in the Lord. Both of them say, as to the Lord, in the Lord, in the fear of God, so there is a very strong emphasis on the limiting factor here.

People say, oh, the only reason we think the American Revolution was a good rebellion instead of a bad rebellion is that we won. If we had lost and we were all still British, we'd be saying boo

on that insurrection, that horrible attempt to throw off lawful constituted authority. What is the distinction? The governmental policies, and this is just an example, and you can argue all you want, but the reason the founding fathers, who were godly, scripturally educated men, almost to a man, the reason they felt justified and vindicated in throwing off the authority of King George is this principle.

We cannot function under this authority in the Lord anymore. This has gone beyond the pale. This is a decision everybody has to make.

If you question whether you should continue to function under authority, you've got to go to God. These were men of prayer. These were men of thoughtful scriptural study, and in their minds, knowing what they knew at the time, and I don't choose to second-guess them, that's what they thought, and that's how this nation got started.

There are many times when a marriage needs to dissolve, when a father, especially, needs to be out of the picture with children, when it is outside of the fear of God. It is not possible to continue to try to function under this authority in the Lord. This can happen in employment.

It has happened in employment, some of us personally so. Things are beyond the ability to associate with in the moral realm. There are crimes being committed.

There are unethical practices being embraced and perpetrated, and you are asked to be a part of this, and you say, I cannot function under this employee authority in the Lord anymore. There are times when you may be in school, and you may be given an assignment, and you must do this immoral thing. You must do this thing that is against your beliefs, and more and more in higher education especially, Christians are being targeted, and professors are using the authority of the classroom to force Christians to conform, or to force them into a box, or into a corner, and demand that they do things that are against their beliefs.

You do not have to follow that authority, and here is your scriptural authority to ignore and refuse that authority. Look, if you flunk, you flunk. I would rather stand before the Lord and say, I did not compromise, and I did not allow myself to be shoved into an unethical or immoral place.

This even happens indirectly. I think one of the biggest evils in education, both high school and beyond, is group projects, where several individuals are allegedly going to work on a project, and then they will all get the same grade, and two or three of the people in the group just bail and do nothing. Well, the other people have to take up the slack for their work, or everybody gets a bad grade.

These people do nothing, and they get a good grade, and they know they can do that. They've done it before. They're going to do it again.

It's evil, and my suggestion is do your own work. Turn in your own project. If it takes you three

times as long, and you can't do as good a job as a group could do, fine, but go to the professor, and if the professor won't accept it, go to the department chairman, and if the department chairman won't accept it, go as high as you have to go in the authority structure and say, look, I will not be a part of cheating.

I'm a Christian, and I don't believe in turning in work and putting somebody else's name on it when they didn't work on it. It's a lie. I would rather stand on my own effort than be dragged down by these ne'er-do-wells that have been carried through the educational system by evil policies.

Here's my work. Grade it. Flunk me if you like, but I am not going to be a part of an evil practice.

You do not have to follow authority that pushes you outside the sphere of the fear of the Lord, the fear of God. Take whatever consequences come. It may involve a war, as it did back in the 1770s and 80s, but whatever it takes, stick to your guns in the fear of God as unto the Lord.

Got to be sure you're on solid ground spiritually, and then resist to the point of blood. That's what Ephesians chapter 5 tells us. This is what Colossians chapter 3 tells us.

And the first example, why? Because it is one of the most common places where authority is abused. There are a lot of bad husbands, or husbands who do bad things for various reasons. And wives are one of the first, even in the ancient world.

Christianity elevated women far above what Greek and Roman culture did, even above what Jewish culture did. Christianity gave them worth, gave them value, gave them autonomy, gave them standing. And this created problems.

There were men who found this culturally unpalatable, and would abuse their authority. There were women who sort of overenjoyed this newfound freedom and started overexpressing their independence. There is balance.

It is in the fear of God. It is as unto the Lord. The only way to do it right is just like disciplining children or any other function in life.

It has to be balanced, and it has to be looking first and foremost to the fear of the Lord. Well, what does it mean? We're going to see that there is a beautiful chiastic structure in this section of Ephesians chapter 5. It is illuminated by Colossians. It's illuminated by the Apostle Peter.

But there is a chiasm, and as usual, right at the center of that symmetry is the fundamental, most important consideration, the big idea, right smack in the middle. That's what we'll see when we come back from the break.