

Ephesians 15-02-15a

This is February the 15th, 2015, so it's 2-15-2-0-15. We continue our study in our New Testament side. We do the Old Testament on Fridays and the New Testament on Sundays, at least this year.

And we find ourselves in chapter 5 of the book of Ephesians. We have spent the last two weeks looking at a passage that pertains and gives us a parallel insight and a fresh perspective on these truths, particularly as they pertain to authority, the relationship of husbands and wives, and most importantly of we as believers to God the Holy Spirit as we interact with one another. The role of the Holy Spirit in guiding us in our behavior toward one another.

This certainly involves respect for authority and the exercise of authority and goes beyond it to putting the interests of others ahead of our own. As we are reminded in Philippians chapter 2, the mind that was in Christ Jesus was putting the interests of others ahead of His own, at the same time recognizing the authority of God the Father and fulfilling His plan and purpose entirely. The only way the Lord Jesus could be a perfect sacrifice is to be perfectly obedient to, as the old hymn says, place your all on the altar.

And we've seen as we looked at Acts chapter 5, that one of the often overlooked aspects of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira was the partial nature of the offering. It isn't only that they lied. It is that they were false to the Holy Spirit in the sense of not fully following His prompting and fully exploiting the opportunity that God had given them through the sale of a piece of property to bless their fellow believers in the church.

There was means, there was motive, and there was opportunity in and through God the Holy Spirit. And a root, a bitter weed root of selfishness crept in and caused them to compromise that prompting, compromise the provision that God intended to make through them to others in the church, and the property that God had previously blessed them with and given them a certain value and then had prompted them as believers who should have had a willing heart to sell that and contribute the proceeds to the church, they decided on their own to divide it, to only provide a part. And this is the substance of the sin, and we've seen this over the last two weeks.

The falsehood is not so much misstating the price as ever dividing it in the first place. Well, let's begin as we always do by going to the Lord for a moment in prayer to dedicate our time and our concentration, our fellowship to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we thank you for another opportunity to spend this time together with an emphasis on the ministry of your Spirit in teaching us, making us aware of the truths that have the supernatural power to cleanse us, to enable us, and to fit us to reflect your glory, to represent the Lord Jesus Christ on this earth as His body, to fulfill all of your purposes and to prepare us for future service and future existence in His kingdom and in yours.

We pray that as we study this passage together and its parallels and its links throughout your Word, that each one of us will find in it truth that is meaningful, that is pertinent, that is applicable, that rests in our thoughts as a guide and as an illumination, so that as we analyze ourselves, our motivations, our decisions, our priorities, the goals that we pursue and the actions that we perform, that all will be pleasing in your sight and we can truly present ourselves as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to you without division, without blemish, without stain. We know that this is a privilege reserved to us because of the Lord Jesus Christ and we ask these things in His name. Amen.

Let's review the substance of our primary passage in Ephesians chapter 5. We saw the lead up to this and we've reviewed it many times, the turning the corner from the theological perspective of what it means to be in Christ in the first four chapters and the importance of being true to that identity, recognizing who and what we are in Christ, which is quite a lot to consider. That's why Paul takes these first four chapters, certainly three-and-a-half chapters, to emphasize all of those things. We saw the beautiful menorah, the seven-fold blessings that we have in Him in chapter 1 and into chapter 2. We've seen the responsibilities and the opportunities that that provides to us.

So, we then come to the last part of chapter 4 where he says, therefore, in verse 25, what does it all mean? Here we sit, or here I stand, as the case may be, on a Sunday. We know that we're believers. We've got a Bible in our lap.

We're at church. We're doing what we are supposed to do, right? But what is the substance of that responsibility? What exactly is it we are supposed to do as we sit here on a Sunday in church, fellowshiping with one another, singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in our hearts, speaking the truth to one another in love? What is the focus? What is the purpose? Well, verse 25 of chapter 4, put away falsehood, put away deceit, be true. Most deceit, most lies succeed because they are partial truths, right? It's a half-truth.

I tell you part of a story, part of a circumstance, part of a situation, but I leave something out, or I shade it, or I emphasize one thing when really that's not the point. Deceit is partial telling, or failing to complete the truth, right? And it is this lack, it is this deficit in the truth that makes it misleading and makes it a disservice. So Paul says, put that away.

Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor. And this truth represents a higher and greater truth, which is that we have nothing to hide and we have nothing to fear. We have nothing to gain.

Isn't this why people tell lies? They feel they have something to gain, they have something to hide, or they have something to fear. If the truth is known, if everything comes out, I will suffer a disadvantage. If I hide the truth, you know, tax season began sometime last month and will continue until the last desperate hours of people either filing or extending in April, but people who do their own taxes have numerous opportunities to shade the truth.

It's always a difficulty for me if you have an office in the home and you're trying to figure out, well, what percentage is fair to take as a deduction, because yes, I have the office in the home, but I don't use the office in the home eight hours a day. So should I not only take a percentage of the space in the house and a percentage of the utilities and all the rest of it, but what about the time I'm in the office and I'm not really doing office work? Is it legitimate to claim it for the whole year and not take some percentage because, well, I really only use it as an office in the home 60% of the time, not 100% of the time? And we wrestle with how far to go into the spice cabinet to start dividing the cinnamon and the mint and the cumin and all the rest of it to try to be scrupulously truthful and scrupulously faithful. And there are a lot of factors that enter into that, but God's Word says, adhere to the truth.

Thy Word is truth. God is true. Let God be true even though every man is a liar.

Truth is important to God. God's Word is synonymous with and defines what truth is. So God takes this pretty seriously.

He's not casual. He's not lax. He's not sloppy.

He's not ready to compromise on truth. And we should strive to have that same attitude. If the idea of personal advantage begins to creep into our calculations of how loyal we are going to be to the truth, we're back to the garden, we're back to Eve, we're back to a partial truth.

Hath God not said, you may eat of every tree in the garden? Well, try eating of this one. Look what it did for me. I was a beast and now I can talk and carry on conversations.

And it is desirable to make you wise. You will have an advantage. You can introduce something to Adam for a change.

He got here first and he's always explaining things to you and he's the leader and he's filling you. You can show him something he doesn't know. This wonderful fruit.

And it appeals to the selfish side of our nature to compromise the truth. Well, we've seen that this is an emphasis in this letter. It is emphasized in its companion letter in Colossians.

And so Paul over and over again talks about the truth. Let no corrupt word, verse 29 of chapter 4, let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification. What benefits others.

That it may impart grace to the hearers. Falsehood, dissembling, deceit, cheating, cutting corners doesn't impart grace to the hearers. In the case where we decide to compromise the truth, we grieve the Holy Spirit of God, verse 30.

The Holy Spirit is intimately connected with God's truth. He's the one that makes it understandable to us. He's the one that recalls it to our mind.

It is His voice. The Word of God is what the Holy Spirit uses to speak to us. He does not speak for Himself.

Jesus emphasized this in John 14 and in John 15. He talks extensively about what the Holy Spirit is going to do. He will lead you into all truth.

He will take the things of Me and make them understandable to you. That's His role. That's His job.

And when we depart from the truth, we depart from the Holy Spirit. When we compromise the truth, we compromise the Holy Spirit. When we fail to speak the truth, fail to live the truth, we grieve the Holy Spirit because He is the Spirit of truth.

That's one of His names. So we saw when we went to Acts chapter 5 and looked at Ananias and Sapphira, the emphasis that Peter places on this and the emphasis that God, through this episode, places on the truth, on being true, not just speaking the truth, but being true. And so Peter, three different times, emphasizes that what Ananias and Sapphira have done in bringing this partial offering is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

There's no two ways about it. Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to, to be false to, the Holy Spirit? You can't really lie to God when He knows everything. I mean, you could try, but it's pretty silly.

And they didn't say, excuse me, Apostle Peter, have you seen the Holy Spirit? I want to tell Him something about this offering we're bringing. Being false to the Holy Spirit is false to the prompting, false to the opportunity, false to the ministry that God called them to. Why do you think they have this property in the first place? Why do they have this substance and this means? God placed it in their hands.

It is a stewardship. And it has a purpose, just as the things that God has placed in our hands have a purpose. Not just our material goods, but our talents, our opportunities, our situation in life has been given to us by God.

And there are times when He is going to reveal the purpose and say, I have put you here to do this. I have put you here to contribute that. I have put you here to engage in this act of ministry, this benefit to fellow believers.

That's why I put you here and why I gave you what I have given you. We get this prompting through the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit. And God takes it seriously.

It's all the same as if you take troops, you recruit them, you send them to boot camp, you train them, you mold them, you break down all their civilian inanities and you build them back up as mean, lean, green fighting machines. And you send them into battle and they suddenly say, oh

look, a coconut. And they drop their weapons and climb a palm tree trying to get a little coconut milk for themselves.

And you think, what is the matter with you? I've spent thousands of dollars of government money getting you ready to do this one mission and all you can do is climb a coconut tree. You remember my favorite illustration of this from the cinema. It's hard not to like a Clint Eastwood movie, but I really have problems with Kelly's Heroes.

Because the entire premise of the movie is that these guys are off trying to get gold out of a bank and they hijack all kinds of government property. They abandon their mission. They're off serving themselves.

And it's a great picture in my mind of everything that is wrong with us when we are false to the Holy Spirit. When Sapphira comes in, Peter says in verse 9, How is it you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? And this is really what brought this passage into connection with our study in Ephesians chapter 5. You have agreed together to test the Holy Spirit. Wives, submit to your husbands.

Ananias says, I'm going to sell the property, but I'm only just going to take part of the money down to the church. We'll keep the rest of it and we'll take that vacation. You've always wanted to go to Sicily, we're going to go to Sicily.

We're going to put in granite countertops. We're going to landscape the backyard. I don't know what it is they thought they were going to do with the money, but it appealed to Sapphira and she agreed.

Now, doesn't this bring our passage to mind? What's wrong with agreeing with your husband? He's the authority. He says this is what we're going to do. He's the head of the house.

He's accountable before God for the way the finances are spent. And if Ananias says we're going to keep back part of the money, Sapphira agrees, can't she claim the principle of Ephesians chapter 5? Say, well, I'm just submitting to my husband. Ask him.

I'm just a willing, subservient wife. Peter calls her to account and says, you are guilty because you agreed. So this creates a responsibility for anyone under authority to analyze whether or not submission to that authority is or is not meeting the condition in the passage, which is what? Wives, submit to your husbands how? In the Lord, in the fear of the Lord.

Children, obey your parents how? In the Lord. If it's not in the Lord, it is grieving the Holy Spirit. If it's not in the Lord, it is compromising the truth.

This is the great sin that Sapphira commits in agreeing with her husband to vex the Holy Spirit. This word can mean test, tempt, vex, cause to be unhappy, go against, contradict. It has quite a wide range of negative meanings.

Well, I ask myself then, how do we know how far to take this? There is another great example of a situation where a husband has chosen a path and the wife had to make a decision about whether to agree or disagree. And if you will turn with me back to the book of 1 Samuel, chapter 25, this is the story of David, Nabal and Abigail. You have a notation at the beginning that Samuel has died and the Israelites gathered together and lamented for him, buried him at his home in Ramah.

David arose and went down to the wilderness of Paran. The location is important. If you look at a map of Judah, we saw Friday night in talking about Tekoa that you have Jerusalem which is pretty much due west of the north edge of the Dead Sea, it's a little bit north of that and west.

South of that you have Bethlehem, south of that you have Tekoa and we talked about Tekoa being near the southern border of Judah that impinges on, this is where the verdant pasturage begins to fade into harsher territory, into the Negev and around the southern edge of the Dead Sea and over into Edom and the territory of the Amalekites. Well, the wilderness of Paran is down in that area. This is the southernmost part of Judah, it's south of Tekoa, it is in a region where there is a lot of open country, it's easy to hide and David being a fugitive from King Saul has chosen to go down here.

It's also a place where there are many agricultural people and so there are shepherds, there are herdsmen, there are ways in which David being a shepherd himself can sustain himself. So this is where he goes and there is in this region two particular areas that we want to talk about. One is Carmel.

Look at verse 2 of 1 Samuel chapter 25. Now there was a man in Ma'on, this is a town or township, whose business was in Carmel. This is not Mount Carmel up in northern Israel, not the place of Elijah's future ministry.

This is down in the south. Carmel is a border area and when you cross that and go east you are in the regions of Edom, you are in the regions of the Midianites, you are in the regions of the Amalekites. This man Nabal has 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats.

He is wealthy, he is very well off, he is another of these businessmen. We talked about in Tekoa how you can have a lot of pasturage and a lot of animal husbandry because of the nature of the land. And so he is shearing his sheep in Carmel.

This is sheep shearing season. And the name of the man is Nabal and the name of his wife is Abigail. She was a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance, but the man was harsh and evil in his doings.

Then you have he was of the house of, that's all in italics, Caleb. He is of the house of Caleb. Well, it doesn't say he was of the house of, it just says he was Kelev.

And Kelev is the Hebrew word for dog. We've got a couple of dogs in here with us this morning, real ones. One more behaved than the other.

But there is a tongue-in-cheek or a double entendre here. He probably is a descendant of Caleb because this is southern Judah and this is the territory of Caleb. But there is a lot going on with names here because Nabal in Hebrew means fool.

And in one sense, without being explicitly told, he is a fool, he is harsh, he is evil, and he is a dog. All of these things seem to pertain. So we don't have high expectations of Abigail's husband at this point.

When David heard in the wilderness that Nabal was shearing his sheep, this is a time of cashing in. This is a time of prosperity. This is after the sheep have been grazing in the bounty of the summertime.

They have grown out their wool through the wintertime. And you shear them in the spring. This is the time of selling the wool.

This is the time in some cases of selling the sheep and gaining a profit. The time to sell them is in the spring so that people can do the work of pasturing them and feeding them, letting them grow out their thick winter coats, and then you shear them so that you don't shear them in the fall when winter is coming on and they're out there shivering. You shear them after, just before their thick coats begin to thin out.

So David heard that Nabal is in the wilderness shearing his sheep. This is not the time of harvest now, this is going to be earlier on and we're going to see evidence of that momentarily. So David sent ten young men and said to the young men, Go to Carmel, go to Nabal, and greet him in my name.

And thus you shall say to him who lives in prosperity, you have that in italics as well, Peace be to you, to your house, and peace to all that you have. I have heard that you have shearers, your shepherds were with us, and we did not hurt them, nor was there anything missing from them all the while they were in Carmel. Ask your young men and they will tell you.

Therefore let my young men find favor in your eyes, for we come on a feast day. Please give whatever comes to your hand to your servants and to your son David. To your son David.

Here's the situation. Nabal has been pasturing his large flocks, his 3,000 sheep and 1,000 goats, in this border area. It is subject to raids by the Amalekites.

You remember King Saul fights the Amalekites and has a degree of success. He drives them back and we have passages that tell us about this. For example, if you keep your finger here, but turn back to 1 Samuel 15.

Samuel says to Saul, The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people over Israel. Therefore heed the voice of the words of the Lord. Thus says the Lord of hosts, I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt.

There's a school of thought that thinks that the Hyksos were the Amalekites on their way into the ravaged remnants of Egypt after the plagues. They went in and took over and became the Hyksos as the Israelites are leaving. They pass each other on the way and the Amalekites attack Israel.

This is where you have the famous story. So God says, I'm going to get them for that. Now that Israel has a king and has an army, the judgment, this is how many generations later? 400 years later? But God has not forgotten.

We've talked about the idea that there are immediate judgments that are pictures in scripture of ultimate judgments that for most people are delayed. The man who picks up sticks on the Sabbath, he's judged immediately. He is stoned to death immediately.

Ananias and Sapphira being false to the Holy Spirit, betraying their responsibility to their fellow believers are judged immediately. But that hasn't happened to every person that's done it since. It's a picture.

Well, God has not forgotten that judgment is due to the Amalekites. And so he says, Go and attack Amalek and utterly destroy all that they have and do not spare them. Kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.

If you go back and figure out who exactly are the Amalekites, they are descended from Esau. One of Esau's grandsons I think was Amalek. And they just took off.

It says in another place that Amalek is the first of the nations, meaning the largest. He just mushroomed. Part of the blessing, the secondary blessing that God gave to Esau after he forfeited his blessing to his brother Jacob was numerosity, fecundity, propagation, multiplication.

And so the descendants of Esau through Amalek are just, they fill a huge area. If you look at a map and look at the Sinai Peninsula, there's a gulf that goes to the northwest and there's a gulf that goes to the northeast. Well, from the tip of that gulf all the way across, that's the region of Amalek.

The wilderness of Shur is on the west. That's what almost borders Egypt and borders the Negev. And then it goes all the way to Havilah.

Havilah, that's mentioned in the beginning chapters of Genesis, talking about the gold and so on. But Havilah is way to the east. It's a huge area.

And this is where Amalek dwells. Well, they're not content. They want to go west and they want to

take this produce and this verdant pasturage and animals and whatever else they can lay their hands on.

And so they will come across the border and raid. So David's men, living down in the wilderness, have graciously protected Nabal's men and his animals. He has had a security force all through these many months before the shearing.

So even though Saul has attacked these... And you remember the story, Saul gets in trouble here because Agag is the king of the Amalekites. And they tell the Kenites... Remember the Kenites are another set of cousins down there. These are the ones that are sort of related to Moses through his wife, through Jethro.

Tell the Kenites to depart. So Saul attacked in verse 7 from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. He took Agag.

Now it doesn't mean that he... If you look at a map, there's no way Saul went all the way across to Havilah. He says he attacked the Amalekites who dwell in the region from Shur all the way over to Havilah. He took Agag, king of the Amalekites, alive and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

That's all the people within reach. It's a huge area. But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs and all that was good and were unwilling to utterly destroy them.

What has been the theme of our study the past few weeks? Entire obedience. Entire fidelity to the Word and the prompting of God. When God says, it is time for you to do this act of service for me, we are enjoined to do it fully.

Serve the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength because you love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul, all your strength and all your might. Whatever you do, do it heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men. Right? Well, Saul has partial obedience here.

Partial obedience. He spares Agag, he spares a bunch of the loot. He apparently has forgotten the story of Achan.

He has apparently forgotten what happens when people divide spoil that is entirely dedicated to God. There's a sense in which you look at this and say, this is a sacrifice and an offering that Saul is supposed to send to God via the sword. Send all of these Amalekites and all of their stuff up to God and he keeps part back.

So you remember what happened? Samuel came after God talks to him. God says, I greatly regret that I set up Saul as king. He has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.

He grieved Samuel. He cries to the Lord all night. Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul.

It was told Samuel saying Saul went to Carmel and indeed he set up a monument for himself. I have entirely vanquished the Amalekites. Look at me.

I am the great king of Israel. Look at my massive victory. And at Carmel, the very place of our story, Saul sets up a big monument to himself.

Well, you know the outcome of that story. And one of the reasons I like being named Samuel is the end of this story. Samuel grabs a sword and hewed Agag in pieces.

And I think, you know, if you're going to have a partial offering, well here's a partial offering for you. Here's, you know, here's Agag in all kinds of partial pieces. Well, back to 1 Samuel 25.

This is the area in which this is taking place. These are the resurgent Amalekites now who are trying to, and this is the way I know that Saul didn't go into Amalek and wipe every one of them out. The ones that he did not wipe out are the ones that are now a problem.

And they're coming back over the border and they're attacking people. And David is down there as security and military protection, fending off the Amalekites who Saul should have slain and didn't. He's out there fighting these guys in the shadow of Saul's monument that says, I won a great victory here and utterly destroyed the Amalekites, and he didn't.

And so they do this at great risk to themselves for months, all during the time that these sheep are being pastured and are growing out their wool. And now it's the time of shearing. So David says, look, we've done this for you.

And this is the day of celebration. This is the day of feasting. This would probably be in the area of the spring feasts in Israel.

We don't know which feast, but it is a feast day. Could have been the Feast of Pentecost where the first of the grain and so on. But there is great prosperity, great celebration.

And Nabal says, no, I have no knowledge of you. I'm perfectly content to just take what's mine and I'm not going to share what I have with you. And this is another case where a person ostensibly belonging to God, Nabal, has the opportunity to be a blessing and a benefit to people that God wants to preserve and wants to provide for, David and his men, and he does not.

He utterly refuses. Well, this is sort of an ananias situation because he's married to Abigail. And Abigail has to make a choice here.

Is she going to throw in with her husband Nabal and support him in his decision or not? Well, we're going to pause here and take our break. When we come back, we will look at the outcome

in this confrontation. Most of you know kind of how this story goes, but it is in the how of the story going that we're going to see both a comparison and a contrast with Ananias and Sapphira.

We have an issue of provision for people that God wants provided for. We have an issue of an obligation before the Lord that is not met. We have an issue of selfishness.

And we have an issue of judgment directly from God. So, these are points of contact that are worth exploring, and that's what we'll do when we come back from our break.