

Ephesians 15-03-01a

This is Sunday, the 1st of March, 2015. We continue our study in Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Laodicean church, copied to Colossae, at chapter 6, verse 5. Our passage is, Bond servants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ. We'll take a moment, as is our custom, to go before the Lord in prayer, to dedicate our time and our fellowship and our concentration to the Lord Jesus Christ, as He is the only way, the only truth, and the only life connecting us to God the Father.

Shall we pray? Father, thank you for your gracious provision, your watch care over us, your attention to not just our needs, but the desires of our heart, the training up in the way that we should go so that we can come to the place of being mature, of being qualified for service, of having the opportunity to reflect your glory as we enjoy these many blessings and many privileges in Christ. We thank you for the Lord Jesus. We thank you that being born in this age and at this time, we are in Him, and with that status we have so many wonderful provisions and opportunities and potentials.

We pray that as we study this portion of your Word this morning, that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart, that we will grow in grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus, that in particular these truths will illuminate our paths, help us to see clearly the way that we should go, the service that we should perform, the ministry that we can accomplish, and the glory that we can reflect again as we spend this time in the interim between our salvation and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ to move us into that new and exciting day when His Kingdom is implemented, when we have the opportunities for putting into practice the things that we are learning and training in now. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We have seen in the broad sweep of this letter so much emphasis on who we are in Christ, what we have been given in Christ. I was musing because several times over the years I have the past few weeks I have heard the phrase, a personal relationship with Jesus Christ connected to Christianity. You can have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you say that to an unbeliever, you may well get a question in return. I was studying late last night and I had the Trinity Broadcast Network on the television. There is a quite well done historical movie account, if you will, of the days immediately after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of the Lord Jesus that I have seen quite often on that channel.

I didn't look to see what the title of it was, but you have the early career of Peter as an apostle, Saul of Tarsus is holding the coats as Stephen is stoned. All of these things are dramatized and I have to say very, very excellently done. I have seldom seen anything that so respected the intention and the actual history that took place.

It is really, really well done. But as I glanced up to track the progress of the story, there are a few

fictional characters that help to weave the account and acts together. There is a priest in Jerusalem who in this narrative is named Reuben.

He is a friend of Saul of Tarsus. But in the early days of Christianity, he is out to quash it. He believes that this is a threat to the law of Moses and in his righteous indignation.

He is one of those who stones Stephen. In fact, it is he who hands his garments to his friend Saul. He hands a rock to Saul and Saul won't throw it.

So he hands his outer cloak and garments to him and then he ensures that Stephen dies. Well a bit later in the story, he is in the market and there are people such as I think Barnabas is there and a few others. But people in the street, some voice comes up and says, you know, Jesus is alive.

He is here. He is here. You can know him.

You can have a relationship with him. And so Reuben, the priest, strides through the square and says, so Jesus is alive and he is here. Jesus, Jesus, come out.

Where are you Jesus? If you will show your face, I will fall down and worship you. And he goes into this mocking mode. And then he seems to see Jesus and he falls down on his knees and raises his hands to heaven and says, oh Jesus, I believe, I believe.

And then he cracks and breaks and laughs and stands up and everyone is quite mortified because this notion that Jesus is alive and is present can't be proven to the eye. And this is his point. And it's very effectively done.

So again, I ask the question, when someone says that Christianity, our faith, is a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and yet he is not personally present, what are we talking about? There is much poetry and song and refrigerator magnet aphorisms have gone into Jesus is my friend, he's alive and he is a friend of mine and so on. But think about it. Now I'm on an edge here where people will throw things at me in certain quarters.

But I ask the question from a biblical standpoint. You know your Bible, right? To whom do we pray? Do we pray to the Lord Jesus? Is that the model that he left us? Which member of the Trinity is the focus and the target of our faith and our attention? Who is it that we are most trying to please as we live a life that is defined by the Word of God, looking ahead to the eternal future? To whom are we connected? What is the target and the connection point in the Trinity for our faith? Who is it? A little hesitant here, aren't we? Who is it? Who are we connected to? What does John 14, 6 say? I quoted part of it earlier. I am the way, the truth and the life.

No man cometh to me but through faith. Is that how it goes? What did the Lord Jesus Christ say on the night before he was crucified about faith? I am the way, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me.

I am going away. I will send you another Comforter. He will lead you into the truth.

He will take your prayers. Paul says we cannot pray as we ought, but the Holy Spirit takes them and conveys them to whom? To the Father. Who is your faith relationship with? Through the Holy Spirit, primarily through the Lord Jesus Christ, we are related to the Father.

Jesus doesn't run around calling everyone brother. He says, your Father in heaven, your Father in heaven. Your Father in heaven knows you have need of these.

Your Father in heaven. When you pray, pray thus, our Father who art in heaven, right? So I ask again, is it legitimate? Is it biblical to talk about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ? And if so, what does that really mean? Well, oddly enough, even though you don't necessarily see it at first glance, this is what Ephesians is about. This is what our study is teaching us.

In the first several chapters, what did we learn? In Him we have. In Him we are. In Him we know.

In Him we become. Are we personally related to the Lord Jesus Christ? Of course. We are in Him.

We are chosen in Him before the foundation of the world. We have our righteousness and our peace and our sanctification. You cannot be more closely connected to the Lord Jesus than to be His body and He to be the head of the church, which we are.

However, to lose sight of the purpose of that definition, to lose sight of the purpose of that position, is to miss the focus of our faith. It is to miss the function of our faith. It is to miss the fruit of our faith.

Focus, function, and fruit. You miss them all if you stop at recognizing our connection to the Lord Jesus, because He is clear. He is the way to the Father.

It is the Father we live to please. It is the Father whose glory we ultimately want to reflect, just as the Lord Jesus did. He didn't say, leave me alone, I must be about my own business, did He? I must be about my Father's business.

He prays, Father, glorify Thy name. And He says, I have both glorified it and I will glorify it again. Hallowed be Thy name.

Glory to Thy name. Jesus enjoins His disciples to pray. Well, as we turn the corner in this letter of Paul to the practical application, how should we then live? I think one of the greatest book titles that has ever been given, Francis Schaeffer, how should we then live? If these things are true, so what? That's what Paul is answering for us in this practical application section.

So we have seen that it is defined by truth. Put away deceit. Put away falsehood.

Put away superficiality. Put it away. Let it go.

Get connected to truth. Because Jesus not only said He is the way, He is the truth. And you're not going to get to the Father, we're not going to glorify the Father, we're not going to please the Father if we are not living in truth, which means no artifice, no hypocrisy, no facade, no saying one thing and doing another, giving an appearance that isn't valid.

We are to walk in love. We are to walk in light. We are to walk in wisdom.

God is love. God is light. And the only wise God, our Father, to Him be glory.

So this emphasis we saw in chapter 4 and in chapter 5 is now carrying through with some practical illustrations. That all sounds great. I get it.

I believe it. I'm for it. How does it work itself out when I close my Bible and put on my shoes and go out into the world to live the other 23 hours and 30 minutes of my life? Well, Paul is bringing this down to the gravel in the road.

This is where it happens. And so we have seen in marriage, which for people who are married is the definitional relationship in this life, or should be. So we've seen the admonition and instruction and exhortation to wives and to husbands and how that reflects higher and grander truths.

As to the Lord, in the fear of the Lord, just as Christ did. We saw this all through the last half of chapter 5. We are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. And we saw the textual emendation there.

We are members of His body. That's what counts. We are church.

For this reason a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh, verse 31. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Do we have a personal relationship with Christ? Yes, we do. But it doesn't end there. That's not the definition.

That's not the goal and the purpose. It is a means. Our connection to Christ, our relationship with the Lord Jesus, our standing in Him has a purpose, and it is to please the Father.

Children, obey your fathers, your parents, in the Lord, for this is right. Did you notice that in terms of family connection there's something missing in this section? We have husbands and wives. We have children and parents.

What do we not have? How many of us have a brother or a sister? Most of us. Does He say, brothers, be nice to your sisters? Sisters, don't vex your brothers. Brothers, don't pick on your

little brothers.

Little brothers, don't aggravate and torment everybody else in the house, which is your apparent mission in life sometimes. Where is the brother to brother, brother to sister, sister to brother, sister to sister material in here? You don't find it, do you? Why? Because the focus here is not on sibling relationships. It is in the realm of authority.

It is in the realm of responsibility. Am I my brother's keeper, Cain asks. Children, obey your parents in the Lord.

This is righteousness. This is what is good. And there is an echo here in looking to obedience to parents.

We look in obedience, not ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ, but in Him and through Him we look to the Father. We pray to the Father. And if I were to say what my faith is, I have a personal relationship with God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of God the Holy Spirit.

I am connected to all three members of the Trinity, but each in a unique way and for a unique purpose. In the power of the Spirit, through the Lord Jesus Christ, I arrive ultimately at relationship, personal relationship with God the Father. This is what the Lord Jesus died to give us.

This is what Israel didn't have. They had a national connection. They had a national destiny.

Personal relationship with God was a rarity. You have your Davids. You have your Joshua's.

You have your Joseph's, but it is the exception rather than the rule. People had a national destiny and a national connection. Praise God in this age, being the body of Christ, we have a personal relationship through Him to God Himself, to God the Father.

Honor your father and mother the first commandment with promise. Do you remember the promise? Verse three, that it may be well with you and you may live long in the land. Haaretz in Hebrew.

And you fathers do not provoke your children to wrath, to frustration is really a better translation. Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. We didn't really talk about those two words.

I want to quickly cover them. Training and admonition. You fathers, this really applies for parents, doesn't it? Because the parents are a team.

The fathers can't get this done alone. If they are off earning the bread by the sweat of their brow, it is the mother who is doing much of the daily training, especially for your younger children. The

fathers perhaps have a little more influence as they get older.

You fathers, you parents, do not provoke your children. And you remember this was par orgizo. Those things that are associated with unbridled angst, anger, emotion.

You fathers do not bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. We did a fairly detailed study on that. But the second half we did not.

Bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. Bring them up. Raise them.

This is the Greek word ektrepho, which means to nourish. this is cultivating. This is doing that which is necessary for something to grow in a healthy and productive way.

Ectrefo, bring them up, nurture them with training and admonition. This is Paideia. There's a whole school of, well it's actually a school system really or a type of school called the Paideia movement, the Paideia type of school which is very much oriented to cultivation and development of the well-rounded child, not just academics but moral development, ethical understanding, character, integrity, Paideia.

Admonition is Neuthacea. Neuthacea. This, you can see the N-O-U-S root there, neus, the mind.

Neuthacea has the idea of understanding. You are going to impart understanding. A legalistic system of rules unexplained doesn't do this.

As children grow, we don't just give them the what or the how, we give them the why. To understand why things must be the way they are. There are people who are raised to adulthood and go throughout their lives and do not understand the balance in life between joy and pain, between blessing and cursing, between what is wonderful and prosperous and what is challenging and involves suffering.

People say suffering is wrong. There shouldn't be suffering. Everything should be joy.

Everything should be easy. Everything should be on a plate. There should be no difficulties.

Neuthacea is understanding of why the world is the way it is. This is the job of parents to explain. Of course, this is incredibly easier if you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ and if you have knowledge of the Word of God because that is the light that shines on life.

You have no good explanation for suffering, for disease, for children who starve. There is nothing more heart-rending than seeing tents full of dead and dying children in far-off lands, of seeing children even in this country who are suffering with cancer. If you see the spots on the air for St. Jude's and you see the little children who...and that, by the way, is quite a wonderful, biblical and effective form of ministry, the St. Jude's Hospital where they treat children with cancer at no charge to the families because people underwrite, support, donate, endow.

Danny Thomas started that thing decades ago. That is a wonderful model of genuine charity, of making a difference on the biblical model. But it is heart-rending to see what happens to children.

How do you explain that? Well, there are people who just think that proves there is no God. I beg to differ. It proves there is a God and He is far wiser than we.

The reason suffering exists is at the behest of God. It is a part of God's plan and purpose. And if we do not understand it as an adult, how can we possibly newthesia our children, give them understanding of why the world works as it does? How are they going to have answers when their faith is challenged by naysayers who have a sort of a one-ply argument, well, if there was a God, there would not be evil in the world.

Well, this is like saying, if my mother loved me, she would not take me in for shots. If my mother loved me, she would never spank me. If my father loved me, he would never discipline me.

If my parents loved me, they would always give me everything I ask for. It's childish. It's shallow newthesia.

In order to be parents who train up their children in the nurture and admonition, the nurture and understanding of the Lord, we first have to possess that ourselves. It's not much different than a teacher or a pastor presenting a message such as this, must first learn it himself, must understand it himself before he can attempt to pass it on to others. Well, this is an outgrowth.

Where are we in this letter? Because we are in Christ, because we have been given God's power in the Holy Spirit, because we have been handed the truth. Stand in the truth. Drop deceit.

Drop falsehood. Let go of faulty explanations and stand in the truth. Live in the truth.

Be the embodiment of the truth. Jesus said, I am the truth. We are His body.

We are supposed to be the truth. And in that regard, the next generation, when we scroll off and shuffle off our mortal coil, who's going to be the truth 20 or 30 years from now? Our children, whether it's our physical children or children in the faith, the next generation of believers. It is a sobering thing to look around at the church so-called today, to listen to the music, the alleged worship music today.

We have a very distressing lack of truth and lack of new thesia understanding in our upcoming generation. We have, I hope, a remnant such as the young people in this church who have a grounding in the truth, who have an understanding of why the world works as it does, of what it means to be in Christ, what it means to be a new creation. Where wisdom is, where truth is.

But so many of the young people who claim Christ as Savior in this upcoming generation and the generations to follow are helpless in the face of even the slightest opposition, the slightest questioning of the existence of God, of the veracity of the Bible, of the integrity of Scripture. They

have no answers. Why? The generation of parents, the generation of pastors and teachers has failed to preach and teach the unvarnished, uncompromised truth of the Word of God.

It has been compromised. It has been made palatable. We want the umbrella to be as large as possible and to include as many people so we soft pedal the harsher truths.

We push those to the back and we try to bring forward the tasty stuff, the sugary stuff. We don't want the bitter pill. We're afraid we'll lose numbers, that we'll lose credibility, that we'll lose whatever.

And as a result of that compromise, of that accommodation, the church so-called, the Christian culture especially in this country is anemic, it is insipid, it is fraught through with deceit and error and misunderstanding. The only antidote for the ills that plague our country, the cultural disintegration, is not political action. It is not who we elect the next time a ballot is put in front of us.

It is nurture and admonition. It is building structure into Christian souls that connects us to the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and allows us to dwell in the light, in the truth, and in the wisdom of God. And expository preaching and teaching is perishing.

Biblical foundational essential teaching is increasingly hard to find. We possess that truth. We have that light and this is no time to hide it under a bushel.

This is the time to hold it up, to let it shine before men so that they can see the righteousness spoken of by Paul here. Children obey your parents in the Lord. This is righteousness.

This is what's right. Family structure. There's a lot of talk about the sanctity of marriage and so on.

You know why marriage is so easily toppling? Why however many states it is now allow any two people who take an ocean to marry each other regardless of their gender? It isn't a downturn politically. It is a corruption and a rot of proper marriages. This is what rushes in when we're trying to avoid.

Marriage has been under attack not by the homosexuals in recent years. It has been under attack by immorality and licentiousness and apathy and indifference even in churches to premarital sex and dating to fornication to out of wedlock pregnancies to shack up, live in relationships to try it before you buy it mentality for decades. All the homosexuals have done is walk into the void because Christians have not stood for truth, have not lived it out, have not embodied it, have not been the body of Christ on this earth.

What do you expect when you vacate the premises? Of course you're going to get squatters and ne'er-do-wells coming in and taking over the landscape. And the answer is not to drive them out and leave it void. It is to return to biblical values.

You can tell I've been in a convocation of believers for the past several days and there's nothing like being exposed at first hand and close contact with what purports to be and claims to represent Christianity to drive you back with arms open, hugging the Word of God, resorting to the oasis of God's Word, being refreshed and restored and renewed in the truth. Bring them up in the cultivation and understanding of the Lord. There is no answer anywhere else.

You're not going to find it in social life. You're not going to find it in accommodation. You're not going to find it in flowery beds of ease and finding good circumstances where there's a minimum of ripple, a minimum of persecution, a minimum of impact, a minimum of light shining that somebody says, hey, that hurts my eyes, please turn that off.

That's our job. That's why we're here. Remember in Acts it says that the new Christian faith and the men who represented it were turning the world upside down.

Why is it that it's our world, the world of Christianity that is being turned upside down by ne'er-do-wells, by materialists and secularists and humanists? We are supposed to be the world shakers, not have our world shaken by those who are outside. What's happened to our power? Well, Christianity so-called has been disconnected from the truth, has been disconnected from Christ, therefore disconnected from the Father. And all of our in-hymns and all of our potentials and opportunities lay fallow, sold for pottage.

This is the way to remedy that. I can't change the world. I can't change the culture.

I can't change the government. I can't change the laws. Where do I have sovereignty? Where do I have authority? Where do I have power for change? My own soul, my own life, my own family, my own church, my own family.

This is where Paul focuses attention. If you want to make a difference, you don't have to march, you don't have to picket, you don't have to engage in a write-in campaign, you don't have to do the easy thing and put on a bumper sticker and that's about it. Do you want genuine, effective change? Live for God the Father through Christ in the power of the Spirit.

That's divine energy, divine change-reinforcing. Seeking power implemented at the point of attack, at the point of contact, your life, your soul, your witness, your circumstance. Change is done one life at a time.

It should be our life. We are the King of Israel when it comes to our soul. We hear the prophet speaking the Word of God in our ear.

We see the power of God manifest in our domain. What do we do about it? Dedicate, focus, concentrate. If we have truly been raised in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, then we know what to do.

Make a difference starting here. If you heard the review on Friday from 2 Peter and the challenge, how much time do we spend reflecting, pondering, going to God and praying over the things that we've learned? What's the proportion in the day? Make the fraction. Do the ratio.

This many minutes of my what we used to call devotions, my quiet time. Take the average over the last week. Take the minutes on Monday, the minutes on Tuesday, the minutes on Wednesday over the rest of the waking day.

What's the proportion? Should we be surprised that not much is happening in terms of divine power, divine fruit, investment in the Kingdom of God and the eternal future? Should we be surprised? Look at the investment. Some of us happily, I think, have a good ratio. There is time.

Sometimes it's family time. Sometimes it's couple time. Sometimes it is individual time.

But as that proportion rises, as that fraction gets healthier, so does the presence and power of God the Holy Spirit, our exploitation of the potentials of the Lord Jesus Christ in Him, and thus our connection to God the Father, pleasing in His sight. That is the how. That is the way.

And there is no other. You can't do it by good intentions. You can't do it by wishful thinking.

You can't do it by resting on laurels from the past. Well, I used to be. I once was.

Remember when? Nothing more pathetic than seeing an old rock star from the 1960s going back and singing the same old tired songs for the 900th time. Haven't thought up anything new. Can't do anything fresh.

Just listen to me sing my hit from 1963 one more time. You can't live in the past, particularly as a believer. So nurture and admonition, it says it's for children, that parents are to invest it, are to make it happen for their children.

But we are to be the product of that, right? We are to be cultivated fields. We are to be wise. Well, this brings us to verse 5. Bond servants, be obedient to those who are your masters.

Oh, my goodness, the Bible teaches slavery. How can that play in the modern day? Martin Luther King has marched. Slavery is a four-letter word.

And here's the Bible, not saying, masters, release your slaves. Slavery is evil. Boo on slavery.

It says if you're a slave, be a really good one. And if you're a master of slaves, be a really good one. This is Bible.

Well, there's nothing that will more quickly transport you into the realms of scorn and abuse in our day than to claim to believe in a Bible that doesn't condemn slavery. If you don't condemn slavery, you are not just politically incorrect, you are at hazard. What about this? We'll find out

when we come back from the break.