

Ephesians 15-05-03a

This is Sunday, the 3rd of May, 2015. We continue and conclude our study of the book of Ephesians, Paul's letter to the Laodicean church this morning, and we'll try to review and summarize the highlights, even as we complete the last four verses, verses 21 through 24. We'll take a moment as we begin to go to the Lord in prayer, dedicate our time, our concentration, our fellowship to the Lord Jesus and to God the Father at whose right hand He currently sits.

Shall we pray? Father, we're grateful as we come before You this morning as a group, as a fellowship of believers who are aware of the inadequacy and insufficiency of ourselves. In us dwelleth no good thing, as the Apostle says, and yet You have regenerated us, You have filled us with Your Spirit, You have accounted us as righteous for the sake of our faith in the Lord Jesus, You have transferred to us His merits and His qualifications, His relationship with You is now shared by us, and we're so grateful. We are certainly undeserving, and it is a wonderful thing to be brought into relationship with You and have the opportunity to reflect Your glory, to come to know You better, to serve, to fulfill the purpose for which You saved us and for which You have put all of the elements of the universe in motion.

We thank You for this book that we have been studying. We thank You for the truths that it has imparted to us, and we pray that as we review it and complete our study this morning that God the Holy Spirit will impress these things on our hearts in a meaningful and lasting way that will enable us to have that elevated perspective and the appreciation of higher and greater things that are at stake even as we are chained to the mortality and the temporary and material nature of this life. We thank You for that transcendent life that is given to us in Christ, enabled and empowered by Your Holy Spirit, and we ask Your blessing on us as we seek to refresh our appreciation for it this morning.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as Paul completes his inventory of the spiritual armor in chapter 6, he has given the defensive pieces, the belt, the breastplate, the solid foundation, those hobnailed boots or sandals, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and then he mentions the offensive weapon of the sword.

It is both offensive and defensive actually. Of course, you can parry and deflect blows using the sword. It is a multi-purpose device.

And many commentators will also list prayer as another offensive weapon. And to the extent that prayer is mentioned here, it is not assigned a metallic component or metaphorical equivalent in the armor. But if you consider it in this light, it is also multi-purpose.

It can be an offensive weapon in the sense of asking God to move forward His purposes and His intentions in individual lives and in the broader theater of operations, whether it is our nation, our community, our families, our workplaces. The various relationships between believers can

certainly benefit from prayer. And it is also defensive when we find ourselves and when we observe others under attack.

This is the opportunity, as I think, as an artilleryman, an opportunity for a call for fire. For many years I was an instructor teaching young brain mush lieutenants, such as I once was just a few short years before that, how to function under pressure. And when you are assigned to an infantry unit as an artillery observer, you are not with your battery.

You are with the infantry. You live with them. You march with them.

You travel with them. You are dug in in place with them. And when bad things start happening and they need supporting fires, you are the guy with the artillery expertise to know how that particular weapon can best serve, can best create confusion and destruction for the enemy so that your guys benefit.

There are other guys that are naval gunfire liaison officers. There are other guys that are specialists in calling in air support. But the artillery forward observer, his specialty, his skill is bringing in supporting fires from a distant artillery battery to benefit that infantry unit.

And this is the function of prayer in both defense and offense. If you want to soften up a target in advance before the infantry go to take that piece of ground, it's an offensive tactic. If they are under attack, if there is an advance and intelligence indicates that there is a strong force on the way, they can be delayed.

They can be deflected. They can be destroyed by effective artillery fire. But it is called in from a remote and invisible location.

And you need a radio or a carrier pigeon or some other means of transmitting the information. If you are using a carrier pigeon, it's going to be, by the way, a mission that is at a set time. Like you figure the pigeon can get there in a couple of hours and so you say, well, at 2100, just after dark, we would like these fires to fall while these guys are out trying to set up camp and we want to give them an unrestful night.

And seriously, even in recent times, as late as Vietnam, they were still using carrier pigeons. So although I know it makes you smile, sometimes that's all you've got. And by the way, they better keep training those pigeons because when something happens to the digital webiverse and all of this fancy stuff fails, they are going to be back to the old ways.

They are going to be stringing wire and stringing tin cans and flying pigeons. Pretty tough to stop a pigeon that's well-trained. They can get through when all your little drones get misdirected and, you know, there's ways to fry their brain.

That stuff doesn't work on a pigeon. They don't have enough of a brain to fry. They've got one idea.

I'm going back to where I came from. And it's really a wonderful thing. And sometimes the old ways come back to life.

But this is prayer and it can be both an offensive and defensive weapon. And Paul closes with this supplication, with this request for supplication. And there is a kind of symmetry in the book of Ephesians that we'll talk about here shortly.

And this appeal to prayer is part of it. So take note. It's not a light thing.

It's not just sort of a filler idea. Paul is serious when he says, be watchful with perseverance and supplication for all the saints and be watchful with perseverance and supplication for me. In my particular mission, Paul says, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.

When you ask for prayer, there's a lot of different things you could ask for, isn't there? Paul's request is related to his particular gift, his particular ministry, which, because he is fulfilling it effectively, has created resistance and opposition from the unseen elements that he just got through talking about in verse 12. The reason Paul is in chains, the reason he says in chapter 3, verse 1, Paul, the prisoner of the Lord, the reason he says in chapter 4, verse 1, I, Paul, the prisoner of the Lord, and he refers to it here again, the prisoner of the Lord, you think about everything that we've learned these many months studying this letter, all of the spiritual truth that has poured forth from the soul of the apostle Paul under the ministry and influence of God the Holy Spirit. How much has he said about his physical situation? I would be telling you all about how smelly these Roman guards can get, how dank and dismal the environment is, how bad it is for my respiratory functions, how terrible the food is, how all of my particulars pray for me because this stuff is just messing with my digestion like you can't believe, and being a prisoner in chains, that's a bad thing, and these Romans and preventing me from going out and I can't do this and I can't do that and look at all my limitations being in chains.

Paul alludes to his imprisonment only as a reminder to the believers to whom he writes, which includes us, that these physical circumstances in no way limit the spiritual potentials that he's talking about. The things that we have in Christ are in no way diminished or limited by circumstance. Your opportunities ministry-wise can be limited.

Paul was limited in the communities he could visit, even in the letters that he could write, and I'm sure it was frustrating to him as an apostle, but he says look at all of the things that cannot be touched by people and circumstance, and that's what this letter has largely been about. Regardless of the straits you find yourself in, regardless of the chains that may limit and restrict, relationships between believers are there. They can be exploited.

They can be nurtured and improved. They can be valued and watered and nourished. They can be loved and be a blessing and be blessed at the same time.

The standing that we have in Christ, the opportunity in the inner life to lay hold of righteousness by faith, as long as you are conscious, this is a possibility. While we are alive on this earth, it is a potential. It's an opportunity, and if we get deflected and distracted by our circumstances and start worrying about them and trying to resolve them and miss these other things, this is the difference between an effective and fruitful Christian life and a wasted existence as a believer in the Lord Jesus.

Wasting the salvation that Christ has given us, I think, is something God isn't going to take well at the judgment. So he concludes. He says, I'm an ambassador in chains, in verse 20, and pray for me that I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.

He doesn't say pray for my release. He doesn't say pray for my future travels. He says, I am an ambassador in chains.

He's reminded them twice, and you know that Epaphras and Tychicus have filled in and will fill in the details of his situation, but in the letter he says, what I pray is that I can continue my spiritual function as I ought to in this situation. He doesn't pray for a change in the situation. He says, in these circumstances, pray that God will bless the opportunities and the words of my mouth.

So then in verse 21, but that you also may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, will make all things known to you. This is going to provide opportunities for those people who have service gifts. There are people that just seem to instinctively know the right thing to do for somebody that's having a difficult time and facing challenges, and those people in this community will figure out things to send Paul, people they might know in the community who can stop by and minister to Paul.

He says, so that you will know my affairs. Why would he want them to know how he's doing and the specifics of his circumstance? It will ease their hearts to know the details. When we find out that somebody we know and love has got a health issue or a circumstance issue, we want to know the details.

It helps us to pray intelligently. We love them. We care for them.

We empathize with them. We want to rejoice with those who rejoice. We want to weep with those who weep.

So it is a good thing to share in an appropriate way the details of our situation, not for self-pity, not for a contest to see who's seen the most trouble, but as an opportunity for mutual encouragement, the function of ministry gifts that edify the body, and an opportunity for mutual appreciation for the Lord Jesus and the ways that God works in what the world would count as adversity, like Joseph being sold into slavery. It doesn't look good at the time, but that was one of the greatest events in history, Joseph being sold into slavery. God converted that into one of the greatest episodes of all time.

It is the basis for the Exodus. It's the basis for the foundation of the nation of Israel. They don't march out under Moses.

You don't have Passover. You don't have any of the definitional aspects of the nation of Israel if you don't first have Israel in Egypt. How do they get to Egypt? Why are they in Egypt? It goes back to Joseph.

It all goes back to the faithfulness and the obedience of one man. You can say the same about several other men. You can say that about Moses.

You can say that about Joshua. You can say that about Abraham. You can say that about Jacob.

All of these men, unbeknownst to themselves, as they lived through difficult circumstances, each one of those men that I named, you think about the difficulties that they faced and some of the failures that they experienced themselves or at the hands of others, especially in Joseph's case, and yet God works all things together for good to those who love Him. None of those men had anything more than a promise of God of how important their faithfulness and obedience would be. They don't have the perspective we have, and yet we stand in similar circumstances.

So that you may know my affairs and how I am doing, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord. Can you imagine how good it would feel if the Apostle Paul was a personal friend of mine and could say, fill in your name here, a beloved brother or sister and a faithful minister in the Lord. That's a nice evaluation.

The Lord Jesus Christ evaluates us and we all hope that when He returns and we are face to face with Him, He says, well done, thou good and faithful servant. Beloved brother, faithful minister in the Lord. There is no attainment in this life, there is no good opinion we can earn, there is no accomplishment we can lay hold of that touches in any way, that holds a candle to this evaluation.

Tychicus stands in the Word of God eternally and for the ages as beloved and faithful to the Apostle Paul and to the Lord Jesus. Beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord. A lot of people doing a lot of ministry and not all of it is in the Lord.

He will make all things known to you. Here is a point of observation to interpret and apply. A letter, a written communication was insufficient for this purpose.

Paul says, I am sending you a person. He will communicate to you in person. It is face to face, it is interactive.

Paul would love to be there himself but he is prevented, he is in bonds. So he sends Tychicus but this is personal. Keep this in mind as you think about relationships and whether you choose to sustain them via text or via personal face to face interaction.

One of the more interesting observations you can make in the book of Acts especially is that when there is a message to be delivered, particularly the message of the Gospel to Cornelius, to the disciples of John, to various examples throughout that book, even when an angel appears, even when a voice speaks from heaven, even when the Lord Jesus himself confronts Saul on the road to Damascus, Jesus gives him an overall summary but he says, I am sending you on to another man who will give you the details. Philip the Evangelist riding along in the Ethiopian eunuch to whom Philip the Evangelist will speak, riding along in the chariot reading Isaiah, has questions. God doesn't send an angel, God sends Philip.

Philip is in the middle of a big active ministry and God whisks him out into the middle of the desert, he knows not why, and he sees this guy, servant of Candace down there in Ethiopia, heading back and he has purchased himself a copy of Isaiah and he is reading it and he doesn't understand and he is apparently, his puzzlement has come up before God and God sends Philip. God doesn't send an angel, God doesn't send a vision, God doesn't have a voice from heaven saying, Behold thou eunuch! And conveniently, Philip the Evangelist is not only teaching him about the Lord Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of those pictures but then he baptizes him. This is connecting the eunuch, people have always said, shouldn't we all be baptized because look, this guy gets saved and here is water, what preventeth me from being baptized? Well, think about this, baptism especially in those early days was primarily a sign to a community that you hold with that community and you are joining that community.

Baptism preceded Christianity, proselytes to Judaism got baptized. The baptism said I am washing off everything associated with my old priorities and my old affiliations and associations and when I come up out of this water, newborn so to speak, I am born into this community. The community, baptism, water baptism especially in Acts and in the early days of the church was a sign of affiliation.

It was a ritual of initiation. You are now one of us and you don't dunk yourself. Somebody in the community says, I see you, I recognize you, I on behalf of the community approve and accept you and in the name of the Father and in the name of the Son and in the name of the Holy Spirit, you are now one of us and this is when you get your card.

You join an Indian tribe, they will send you a card. You join a club or a group, they give you a card. You work in a building, they give you a card.

It is access, it is affiliation, it is association. In the early days of the church before there was the clear and complete ministry of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of it who enters us into union with Christ and therefore into affiliation and association with fellow members of the body, before that communication was available in the New Testament, this was the way it was taught and it was a wonderful little pre-Bible, a pre-New Testament and it was a great thing. It served its purpose.

Tychicus is going to make that personal connection between Paul and the Laodiceans and the

Colossians eventually. He is going to take this letter to Colossae. It is personal.

When God wants to communicate the Gospel, when He wants to communicate truth, He doesn't say, well, go into your closet and wait for an inner voice. He says, forsake not the assembling of yourselves together. Speak the truth to one another in love.

It is through fellowship and personal interaction with fellow members of the body, the body into which we have been truly baptized by God the Holy Spirit. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is. You are not, as I have said many times, you are not the lone wolf scout.

You are in a troop. You have got others with whom you fellowship and it is not always easy, especially in this day and age. Everybody is going six ways to Sunday.

We have got schedules. I quit trying to keep a day time. You know you used to have those books, a calendar with a day timer thing.

Well the blocks on the page weren't big enough. I had appointments. I had stuff I wanted to get done.

I had to pay by this time and be here by this time. It just became so cluttered. Now they have got it like on digital stuff, but I can't do that.

Philosophically I can't do it. The day timer thing didn't work either. I still look at it.

I used to call it my brain because it had a gray cover and everything I knew was in it. All my contacts were in the front and all my schedule was in the middle and my business card collection was in the back. I had a calendar and I could look ahead and see if I was gone on a certain day.

I have saved it. It is a snapshot in time of the last year that I used it. I look at that and I think, I was a younger man to do all of that stuff and still be ready to go the next day.

Tychicus goes, Paul doesn't just put it in a letter and say, well look, we will fly this letter in. We will send it by some anonymous messenger. Personal attachment, personal communication is important and we want to cultivate that.

We want to value it and treasure it and give it the priority that it deserves even in our busy life. He says in verse 22, I have sent him to you for this very purpose. There is a whole verse in the Bible that says Tychicus is coming.

This is why we still visit each other. This is why when you live in a distant town and you have a chance, you say, I am going to go see grandma and grandpa. I am going to go see my brother and my sister.

I am going to go see my cousin. I am going to see my aunt and uncle or my good friends. You

can't do remotely what can only be done in person.

For this very purpose, I send him to you that you may know our affairs and that he may comfort your hearts. Paul doesn't say, if your heart is troubled, read this letter over again and grab that Colossian letter. Make a copy of that and if your heart is in need of comfort, just reread the letter.

Go back and spend some time thinking about the letter. He says, he will comfort your hearts. He doesn't say this letter will comfort your hearts.

He will comfort your hearts. These are things that we do as we spend time together. Jesus didn't say where two or three are texting in my name, there am I in the midst.

Fellowship, we gather, we unite, we look into each other's eyes. There is a lot of communication that goes on beyond the word. Verse 23, peace to the brethren and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen. Look at the sprint to the finish here that Paul puts right at the end of the letter.

You can just circle in verse 23, peace, brethren, love, faith, grace, love, and sincerity. At the center of them, supporting them, defining them, making them meaningful is God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything he has talked about in the letter, notice love is mentioned twice.

Peace to the brethren, and if you look at the brethren, that relationship is also defined by love, shared love for God, mutual love for one another. So you've really got sort of a trinity of love here. You have brethren, you have love with faith, grace to all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ.

So you have the first love at the top, the brethren, love with faith, and below you have love for our Lord Jesus Christ in truth, in sincerity. Well, this is a tremendous exhortation to be a Christian, even as it is a benediction and a closing, and we know what these words mean now having read this letter and having studied it at length. We know the basis for peace.

We know what it is to be brethren, whether Jew or Greek. We know what love with faith is. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church.

Obedience in the Lord, submission in the Lord, love with faith. Not love for its own sake, not God is love and we have no standards and no discrimination and no discernment. Love with faith, sourced in, from, originating in and being distributed by God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace unto, with, all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ, genuinely. He doesn't say grace be to all, does he? There is a limitation, there is a condition, there is a discernment, there is a discrimination, there is a division, there is a limitation. Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ, genuinely, for real.

Paul doesn't wish grace on those who actually need discipline, who need a wake up, who need an encouragement of the spanking type. Grace to all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ, in sincerity. Amen.

May it be so. Well, that concludes the text. What does the letter mean as we look back at it in its summary form and how did these folks respond? When we come back from the break, we're going to quickly review the major emphases.

When you think back on the Ephesians study there's been a lot of detail. What are the big ideas? I am hoping that as we look back at the Minor Prophets, we remember some big ideas about Jonah and Hosea and Amos and Micah. When you think about the letters of Paul that we study, what is their main focus? What is their big idea? What should we, as they say now, another verb into a noun, what is the takeaway from this letter? Well, we're going to try to define that for ourselves in the first few minutes of this second session.

Then we are going to go to Revelation chapter 3 and see what the Lord Jesus Christ has to say a few years later to this same church. We'll do that after the break.