

Exod 03-10-05a

As we continue our worship this morning and approach the study of God's Word, it gives us the opportunity to reflect on the status of things in our soul. We often have things going on. We have the details of our lives to contend with, and it is sometimes difficult for us to lay all that aside so that we can concentrate.

You know, this happens today to an increasing extent in our society where the family meal has kind of gone by the wayside. You hear people decrying this here and there that because of the rapid pace and the separate schedules that different members of the family have, they don't sit down as was once commonplace to a meal around the family table and begin by giving thanks to the Lord and then sitting as a family and spending time in conversation and in fellowship around the nourishment that has been prepared. And the same thing can happen in our spiritual lives where we kind of set up a TV tray and get a quick snack from God's Word and then run off to do the rest of our activities.

And it is important that we individually study the Word of God for our nourishment. It is also important, according to the Word of God, that we assemble ourselves together to do so for all of the same reasons that the family meal is important. For unity, for fellowship, for encouragement, for the exercise of that spiritual gift that has been given to each one for the benefit of the others.

Our time of assembly is important. Just the very fact that we are together and that we are united by a love of God's Word is a blessing and is a responsibility that has been given to us by God. So as we spend this time together, we want to ensure that God the Holy Spirit can work in us and through us, not only for our own personal benefit, but also for the benefit of those who are gathered with us.

We want to be a source of blessing and not a source of testing to one another. We want to be susceptible and amenable and pliable in the hands of the Holy Spirit as He ministers God's Word to us. But our purpose is not simply to absorb.

We have the light of God's Word and we can receive it and absorb it. But what is the color that you get from a material that absorbs all the light that strikes it? Black. What is the color of something that reflects all of the light that strikes it? White.

We want to be reflectors of God's glory. We want to be reflectors of God's love and grace. And so it is a process of intake and of exhale, both of taking in and of applying God's Word.

We cannot do that. We don't have the ability in our human strength to do so. It all depends on God's Spirit.

So there is no more important thing that we do throughout our day and especially at the time of study of God's Word than to recognize our dependence on the Holy Spirit and to cultivate His

ministry in our souls. Shall we pray? Father, thank you for this day and for the environment that you have created in which we live. You have either initiated or allowed each of the factors, each of the circumstances that surrounds every individual.

We know that you have carefully crafted our lives, our situations, and our circumstances in such a way that we can take what you give us in your Word and through your Spirit and learn and grow and be transformed. We pray that as we study your Word together this morning, that process will take place. We thank you that we live in a country where we are free from many of the persecutions and oppressions that are upon believers in other countries on other continents, very near to us in South America and other areas of the world that we hear about on the news.

We know that Christians are actively being persecuted, actively being oppressed, being murdered, being imprisoned, being harassed and forbidden to assemble. We are free of all of those distractions and we know that that is for a reason. You have given us this opportunity for a purpose.

We pray that that purpose will be fulfilled and that we will be mindful that from those to whom much is given, much is expected. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ and His work on our behalf, His presence with us in the Word and through the Spirit. We thank you that we have a bright hope and a great expectation of His return, delivering us out from the day of wrath.

We know that we will be evaluated and we ask that our activities this morning, our fellowship, our study, will equip us and prepare us for that day of judgment and for the time of service in the kingdom that will follow. We thank you again for each one who is here, for each one who is a part of our church, either locally or through the extended ministry of recordings. We thank you and pray that you will be with each one of us and enable us, through your grace, to grow in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We pray it in His name. Amen. For a scripture reading this morning, turn with me to the book of Philippians.

The book of Philippians. Chapter 2 in Philippians is titled or subtitled in the New King James, Unity Through Humility. Philippians 2, verse 1 Therefore, if there is any consolation in Christ, if there is any comfort of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if there is any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy, Paul says, by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord and of one mind.

You can't get much more specific than that. Throughout the scriptures, you look at 1 Corinthians chapter 1 as a notable example of our command, the requirement that we have to be unified, to be of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind, let each one esteem others better than himself.

Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. It

would be a great thing if we could review this passage before every conversation, before every decision, before every social interaction, before every activity where we engage in efforts with others to remember to be like-minded, have the same love, be of one accord, of one mind, never doing anything through a selfish ambition, but in lowliness of mind, esteeming others better than ourselves, looking out not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others. Notice, we do not do this and neglect ourselves.

You have the ascetics, A-S-C-E-T-I-C, ascetic. The ascetics are the ones who, like Gandhi, sit on the side of the road and don't take a bath and don't do anything to get their meals. They have taken self-sacrifice to an unhealthy extreme.

They wear a hair shirt, something that will actually afflict them. People crawl on their knees going up steps to some holy shrine or whatever. It says we are to look out for our own interests.

Did you notice that? Let each of you look out not only for his own interests. We are to take care of ourselves. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

We are the people of God. We are a dwelling place and a residence for the presence of God. We reflect, or should reflect, God's glory.

And it's important for us to take care and to look out for our interests. We have that responsibility, but not only for ours, but for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God.

This is better translated, did not think equality with God a thing to be grasped, a thing to be retained in the fist. But he made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bond-servant and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even to the point of death, the death of the cross.

Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven and of those on earth and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. And what is the point of that? The glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own deliverance, your own salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you, both to will and to do, for his good pleasure. Do all things without complaining. Do all things without disputing.

Boy, there's a convicting passage, isn't it? Do all things without complaining. Do all things without disputing. So that you may become blameless and harmless.

Now wait a minute, I thought if we were saved we were already blameless and harmless. We

have a great hymn, Jesus paid it all. I heard a story this morning, the pastor down at First Baptist, actually it wasn't the pastor, it was Mrs. Criswell.

People sent her little funnies that she opens her class with. This is an old chestnut from way back, but there was a dispute in a church between the choir director and the pastor. And so when the pastor would preach on giving, why the choir director would have everybody sing Jesus paid it all.

And this went on every time the pastor would preach on a theme, why the choir director would respond with some hymn title. And it finally culminates, the pastor gets fed up and decides he's going to resign, and he announces his resignation. And he says, you know, Jesus brought me to this church, and now Jesus has called me to leave.

And so the choir director couldn't resist, and he leads everybody in, what a friend we have in Jesus. But do all things without complaining and disputing, so that you may become blameless. This is a process after our salvation.

What was it that was paid on the cross? The penalty for sins. This is the penalty. This is the legal transaction.

What the social ideal is today, is to take our criminals and not only incarcerate them so that they pay the legal penalty for their crime, but ideally we would like to rehabilitate. We would like to teach people the life skills so that they will not go out and do the very same thing again. Many times our incarceration system simply pools all the criminals so they can share their knowledge and become better criminals when they get out.

And any time you are trying to turn away from a bad choice in life, or a bad pattern in life, one of the most helpful things is not only to turn away from something that's bad, but to turn toward something that is good. We have been saved and we have been turned away from the kingdom of darkness. We have been taken out of the kingdom of darkness and have been entered into citizenship in the kingdom of light.

We still retain our fallen nature. And even though we are saved and the legal penalty has been paid, our souls need rehabilitation. We need to adopt a new way of thinking, establish new goals and new priorities and new values.

And as we do that, and as we grow in grace and knowledge of the Savior, we become blameless and we become harmless. It does not mean that we become perfect. But what do we learn how to do? We learn how to cleanse ourselves in the water of God's grace, in the precious blood of Christ.

You go to 1 John 1 and get the details of that process. This is what David knew how to do in the Old Testament. He committed grievous sins, but he said, Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. He says, I will stand before God blameless. I will walk before God in mine integrity, it says in the King James.

Where does that integrity and that blamelessness and that clean status come from? It comes from the same place that the disciples' feet received their cleansing. It is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, I don't need to bathe you again.

You've been bathed. You've had your salvation bath. But you do need your feet washed.

And this is what we do when we go before God and acknowledge our sins. And as we grow and develop our ability to walk in the light, we become blameless and harmless. We acknowledge our sins so that He can be faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

When we do this, we become children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. Is there anybody who seriously believes we do not live in a crooked and perverse generation? It is to the point now where if you try to watch your TV set and you choose an innocuous program, you still can't get through it without being afflicted with degeneracy and evil in the commercials they run between the segments. You can be trying to watch the most innocent, innocuous, up-building program in the world, and when the commercials come on for Will and Grace, which is about a flaming homosexual.

I have never seen the show, but I know all about it from the commercials. Or some program that came on, I haven't seen it either, but it appears to be about people who were sort of rock and roll, woman and man, and then they have a baby and their adjustment to try to live family life. On the commercial, the lady has a tattoo on her arm and this.

But when the commercial for that show came on, I cannot repeat in any company the conversation that was had on the commercial for that program. I can't even tell you what was said and the references to different body parts and so on. I'm about ready to just pitch the television out and we'll just subscribe to the newspaper because it is a conduit for evil.

And the justification that, well, there is occasionally a good program is just dwindling away to nothing. I am about to find no good thing on television. But we live in a crooked and perverse generation that glorifies degeneracy and glorifies perversity and glorifies rank, abominable evil.

Activities that were punishable by death in Israel are glorified and treated as normal and sort of fun and hip in our culture. We live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation among whom we are supposed to shine as lights in the world. Where does that light come from? It isn't going to come if all we do is absorb.

We need to reflect. Our life ought to reflect the light of God's Word. How does that happen? Look at verse 16.

What does it mean to hold fast the Word of Life? Just grab your Bible a little more tightly. It

means to stick to it. God the Holy Spirit will reveal to us in the situations we encounter, what should I do here? But we have a choice whether or not to listen.

And there are some times when we sort of turn a deaf ear to that because there is something we have always done in the past or there is a certain thing that is just sort of our resistance is worn down in that area. When the Holy Spirit tries to speak through the Word, we just sort of wink one eye and turn a deaf ear and go the way we have always gone. Well, we are not holding fast the Word of Life.

If the Word of Life says separate, touch not the unclean thing, don't participate in the unfruitful works of darkness, don't produce wood, hay and stubble, thorns and thistles, don't be the field where the rain comes many times on it and you produce worthlessness. We choose, we decide if we are going to hold fast the Word of Life or not. Hold fast the Word of Life so that, Paul says, I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

And you get the idea that this is the Holy Spirit speaking through the Apostle Paul. The Apostles were channels of power, the power and the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking the Word of God to the early generation of the church. And you get the idea that the Holy Spirit would say the same thing.

He is here convicting, He is enabling, He is giving insight and understanding, He gives us memory, He shows us how to apply the Word of God if we are just willing to listen. He is present. He is the seal of our salvation.

If you are saved, and I'll make that a first class condition, if and it's true, if you are saved, God the Holy Spirit dwells in your soul. It is a concrete fact. Move forward from that.

If God the Holy Spirit dwells in your soul, He isn't sitting there with duct tape over His mouth. He is going to speak. He is there to lead and to guide.

He is there to convict and to exhort and to encourage. His very name, Paracletos, means the one who is called alongside for assistance. It's similar to our word paramedic.

Paramedic comes alongside to give medical assistance. Well, you call 911. Well, we've got sort of a perpetual 911 call in.

We constantly have the one who has been called alongside to render benefit and aid and comfort. It's translated comforter. So you get the idea that the Holy Spirit will rejoice in the day of Christ, that He has not ministered in vain or labored in vain.

Paul says in verse 17, Yes, and even if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all, and for the same reason you also should be glad and rejoice with me. The sacrificial ministries that each one of us can enter into, you go back to the first part of this chapter, do not do things through selfish ambition. Be humble.

Remember the definition of humility? It is strength under control. It is a strong person who exercises self-control. It's been a theme in literature, in novels, and in movies through the ages that the hero, the central character, who has the ability to retaliate, does not.

He is thought to be weak. He is thought to be a coward. He is thought to be ignoble in some fashion.

When you, as the omniscient reader, know that he is more than noble. He is more than strong. He is more than able.

And he is holding himself in. And he doesn't speak up and defend himself. And you want to holler at the character.

You want to say, Why don't you tell them that you're not guilty of this thing they accuse you of? Why don't you show them that you're not a coward and that you're really strong? Why don't you say something? The ultimate example of that is the Lord Jesus Christ, who opened not His mouth when He was the victim of false accusation, slander, maligning. They spit on Him. They ripped out His whiskers.

They beat Him. They shoved a crown of thorns into His head. And He did not open His mouth.

He did not retaliate. People thought He was weak. They thought He was helpless.

They thought He was a fraud. They thought He was a phony and a pretender and a blasphemer. When, in fact, He was the very living Son of God.

That is humility. Strength under control. Anybody can develop a strength.

The question is, can you control that strength? Can you know when to exercise it and when to rein it in? That's what we're called to here in Philippians. And the goal of this, when it comes to fellowship, is unity. Well, we go back now to our study where we resume in Exodus.

We have seen that now, for the third time, God has brought the Israelites. Notice, they didn't wander away and get themselves too far from the water. They didn't wander away and get themselves too far from pasturage or from food.

God leads them. We're picking up in chapter 17, and this is the third time that they have run short of provisions. God told them ahead of time, I am bringing you into the wilderness to test you, to see whether or not you will keep my word, whether or not you will trust me.

He told them ahead of time. This is an important principle, by the way, if you find yourself in a position of authority, if you have those that you are evaluating, who are accountable to you. Don't set up a mystical, unknown standard, and then come to someone and say, you have failed to fulfill my expectations, and you never said what the expectations are.

God always tells us, this is what is required of you. God, through Moses, told Israel, clear back

in Egypt. I am the God of your father, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

I will bring you forth to a land. I am Yahweh. I am Yahweh Rapha, your healer.

Keep my word, trust, obey. If you will put the blood on the doorpost, I will deliver you. If you will follow me and not turn aside, and not faint, and not fall short, I will bless you, I will keep you, I will reward you in time and in eternity.

These are the promises of God. This complaining and this failure of faith is not how they learn what God requires. This is how God learns that they are refusing to do what He requires.

It is a known, declared standard that they are failing. And we need to remember that, as the Scripture says, be imitators of God as dear children. And we should not judge people over things that we have never communicated clearly.

Parents need to make sure the standards in a home are clearly communicated. Employers need to ensure that their employees understand the standards and the requirements. In the military, nothing is more frustrating, and it happens all the time, than to come up to fitness report time or come up to what they call pro-con marks, proficiency in conduct marks, and the senior, whether it's a NCO being called in in front of a staff NCO, or in front of an officer, or whatever, comes in for evaluation, and they say, well, you know, you've done this, and you've done that, and you've done the other, and this is why I had to mark you down in these different categories.

Well, why didn't you tell me this at the beginning? Why didn't you tell me that that's what you were looking at, and that's what you expected, and give me a chance to show you some improvement, that I can respond to constructive criticism? You're just sitting there writing in your little notebook, waiting for the day of evaluation, so you can hammer me and slam me and tear me down. Are you on my side, or are you just looking for a way to cut my legs out from under me? God never does that, and we shouldn't either. Clearly communicate what is expected, what is required, and then give some feedback along the way, and say, remember I told you that I expect you to be on time? I've noticed you're coming in at the last possible moment here for formation.

You want to watch that. You remember I told you that you need to spruce up your uniform? You always have a few threads and a few wrinkles, and your shine on your shoes is not quite up to par. I'm telling you now, you know, there is a block I have to check on your military appearance.

You need to take a look at that. We're supposed to be on the same team, right? The reason we have these standards and the reason we have these evaluations is to improve and make the team better, to be a unified whole, and it's something all of us need to remember. There is a destructive kind of criticism, and there is a constructive kind of criticism, and standards need to be communicated clearly ahead of time.

There is also grace. You will notice the first time the Israelites complained and fell short in their

faith, God did not rebuke them, did he? Forty-five days out from Egypt, they're grumbling and complaining, we're out of food, you brought us out here to die in the wilderness. God does not say a negative or rebuking word at all.

He says, you'll have quail tonight, you'll have bread in the morning. And so he says, okay, you've got a legitimate gripe here. You could have phrased it more carefully, you could have come before me with more faith, but I'll fulfill that need, and he does.

The next time they run short, they get to the bitter waters of Marah, they should learn from that past experience and say, well, the last time we had a need, the Lord filled it, let's go tell the Lord and see if he'll fill this one. But they don't, they grumble and complain. Now for a third time, in Exodus 17, the congregation of the children of Israel set out, camped and were feeding, there was no water for the people to drink.

The people contended with Moses and said, give us water that we may drink. Two times now, God has provided. Do they say, appeal to the Lord on our behalf? Go to the great provider, to the great healer? Like you did before, he has provided for us before.

There's no mention of God. They say, look, Moses, you're the guy we can see, you better do something about this. Moses said to them, why are you contending with me? Why do you test the Lord? Now look at this.

What is the situation here? Who is testing whom? The Israelites are in the wilderness to be evaluated by God. The Israelites have not come to the wilderness to evaluate whether or not they have a good God. It is not the people's place to decide and pass judgment on God.

God will decide and pass judgment on the people. But we often have the reverse taking place. So the people thirsted there for water.

The people complained against Moses and said, why have you, Moses, brought us up out of Egypt to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst? Moses does the right thing. He goes to the Lord and says, what shall I do with this people? They are a little more and they will stone me, is what it literally says. The Lord said to Moses, go on before the people, take with you some of the elders of Israel.

We looked at this last time. These people are not qualified. They are not in a position to appreciate the great miraculous work of God.

And they don't get to see it. There are some who are in positions of leadership. They will see it.

They will communicate. They will lead the people to the water that God provides. And this is a principle that comes all the way down through history.

God will select some as intermediaries. There are a couple of different lessons you can draw from this. For one, it is important to watch and find those to whom God has given the water.

If a pastor, if a Bible teacher, if a Bible ministry is a dry well and a barren creek bed, that is not the place to dwell. You want to find the place. We are not all equipped to go to the well and draw our own water.

We are busy. We have been called to other things. We have been given other spiritual gifts.

And so we have to go to the elders who have as their responsibility well bucket work, bearing the water. And that picture is set up here. Secondly, we recognize that even of the elders, not everyone was chosen by Moses to go.

God says take some of the elders. What basis do you think Moses used to choose the elders that went forward? Ones that in his estimation would appreciate and understand what they were about to see. The revelation of God's grace, the living water, the source of life that he is about to bring forth from this rock.

Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in horror, he says in verse 6, and you shall strike the rock. In what form does God stand before them, do you think, at the rock? What is the physical manifestation of God's presence at this stage? It's the pillar of cloud, right? It's daytime. So the pillar of cloud is going to go on before Moses and a few of the elders.

He says, I will stand before you. How are they going to see the Lord standing? It's the pillar. The pillar of cloud is going to rest over the rock.

The guidance of God, the provision of God, the direction of God will always take us to Christ. It's very clear that the rock represents Christ. We are told so explicitly over in Hebrews.

They drank of that spiritual rock that followed them and that rock was Christ. The glory of God, the manifestation of God, the direction and guidance of God will always lead us to Christ. Christ is our life.

He is our righteousness, our peace, our sanctification, our wisdom. He is our very life and being. I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb.

You shall strike the rock and water will come out of it. Notice it is necessary for Moses as the head of the people representing the leadership of Israel at this point. God does not say come, take off the shoes from off your feet, stand in a ring and watch.

I'm going to split this rock. A big bolt of lightning comes down and splits the rock. There is great foreshadowing in the fact that the leader of Israel uses the rod that represents his authority, God-given authority, and he strikes the rock.

This is what happens to the Lord Jesus. The leadership exercising God-given authority within the limits of God's foreknowledge and His perfect plan will strike the Lord Jesus. They will turn Him over to the Romans for crucifixion so that the people may drink.

Out of the splitting of the rock, out of the striking of the rock comes life. It is a beautiful picture

of our salvation through Christ. Moses did so in the sight of these elders of Israel.

He called the name of that place two things, Massah and Meribah. Because of the contention of the children of Israel, Massah literally means putting to the test. This was a grievous wrong that the Israelites commit against God.

Did God withhold provision because of that? He did not. God provides in spite of their sinful attitude, but the occasion is labeled as testing. The other name that is given to it is Meribah.

If you remember from the Prophets, when you go over to Isaiah and you go to Ezekiel, it talks about the fact that God has a case against His own people, or He has a case against Egypt, or a case against the Assyrians. In Hebrew, this word for having a bone to pick, having a contention with someone, is R-I-B. Reeve is the word for a conflict, a lawsuit, if you will, a grievance.

Well, as I've told you before, you can make a noun out of a verb. The verb Reeve, to contend, to conflict, to go to court against, can be made into a noun by putting an M in front of it. So you have Ma Reeve.

We make it a feminine noun because it is a conceptual thing. It is not a concrete item. A lot of times in Hebrew, concepts are feminine.

You have Ma Reeve Ah. And the A-H ending makes it feminine. Ma Reeve Ah, or Meribah.

That's where this word comes from. This is a court case. This is a contention.

It's a conflict. Because they tempted the Lord, saying, Is the Lord among us or not? Goodness sakes. Look up.

What's that big column of smoke? Is the Lord among us or not? Well, we'll decide if He's among us, if He'll provide our specific need here. We're out of water. So, I don't really know if God's here, or if He's just brought us out here to die, or if Moses brought us out here to die, and we've all been deluded.

If there's a God, He'll bring water. Excuse me? Have you forgotten the ten plagues? Have you forgotten the crossing of the sea? Have you forgotten the slaying of the Egyptian army? Have you forgotten the manna you picked up this morning? In what way can you still be wondering, Is the Lord among us or not? And we look at the Israelites, and we just shake our head and say, What a bunch of... I'm riffling through all my adjectives to find one that's acceptable. What a bunch of ignorant people.

What a bunch of short-sighted, myopic, blinded, non-humble, non-oriented, non-objective people. And yet, they are no different than us. We are no different than they when we do this same sort of thing.

Where is God? My current situation is putting pressure on me. I just don't know if God's even here. And we put the Lord to the test.

Masah, Meribah. Now, Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. This is where we're going to pick up when we come back from our break.

But, there are weaknesses in the thinking of the people of Israel. There are weaknesses in the congregation. And there is nothing like pressure to expose a weakness.

My watch that I spent 80-something dollars for is no longer usable because one of the little stick-out parts that holds the band on broke off. And when it broke off, I looked at it, and the watch is made of plastic. An \$80 watch, and the case is chrome-plated plastic.

I could not believe it. I will name the name, Casio. Do not buy a Casio watch without checking.

It says stainless steel back. It looks like chrome. It's plastic.

Green plastic. Well, there was a weakness there all along. I noticed, looking at the chrome, that it had this funny faceted effect there that I hadn't seen on three of those four stick-out things.

And when I was trying to get the band off to clean it, that thing just snapped off. Pressure exposes hidden weakness. God will put us under pressure and show our hidden weaknesses.

This is what we're going to see when we come back. But remember Philippians 2. If we orient ourselves to the plan and purpose of God, if we consider others ahead of ourselves, if we remember God's grace, His presence among us, and that He is testing us and not the other way around, it will go a long way toward enabling us to reflect His glory and not be the black substance that does nothing but absorb. Let's pause here and take our break.