

02-07-28a Revelation

As we continue our worship this morning in the Word of God, let's take a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit as we worship together in God's Word. Shall we pray? Father, what a privilege it is to have the opportunity to assemble with believers of like mind to worship according to our understanding of your Word without fear of oppression or persecution. We thank you that we have so many opportunities and so many blessings.

We are secure, we are free, we have prosperity in many areas of life and we thank you for placing us at this time in history and at this geographical location. We thank you that we are here together and can unite our hearts in fellowship and in appreciation for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We ask now as we spend time in your Word that God the Holy Spirit will minister it to our souls, that we will find refreshment, encouragement and motivation to walk the narrow road that leads through the straight gate to life.

We pray that our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified thereby. We pray for those who are not here with us but who worship with us through the study of your Word. We pray for our military and for our governmental leaders.

We ask that you will continue to keep your hand upon them in these challenging times. All of us have both prosperity testing and the testing of challenges and trials. We know that you work all things together for good to those who love you and recognize the calling that we have in Christ Jesus.

We pray that we will operate in your power and not seek to operate in our own strength which accomplishes nothing and only interferes. We pray that we can rest in that great Sabbath rest that has been promised to the people of God. We thank you again for the opportunity we have and pray that you will bless us as we study in Jesus name.

Amen. For our scripture reading this morning we're going to be looking at the fourth chapter of Ephesians and I'm going to do something a little bit different. I would like you to follow along in your Bible of choice there but I'm going to read this to you from Kenneth Wiest's translation which is sort of like an amplified amplified.

If you've seen the amplified Bible you know that they'll try to throw in a lot of words to get the nuance that is there in the Greek. Kenneth Wiest does a great job of really bringing out the flavor. It's not good for a literal study type of thing but it's great if you want to catch all of the nuances and the full import of what is there in the Greek.

So you can kind of follow along and listen maybe at the same time. We'll try this and see if it's just total confusion or if it's helpful. But I really like his translation of Ephesians chapter 4. The reason we are in Ephesians chapter 4 is because in our study of Revelation chapter 2 we're going to be

looking at the first church.

The first of seven is the church at Ephesus and we're going to find that the major issue that Jesus brings up for that church is the issue of love. I'm not spoiling any surprises here. You know that the church at Ephesus has against it that it has lost its first love.

Well we want to find out exactly what that means. We want to talk a little bit about the subject of love. Of course if you think about this, anytime you say love, even trying to define that word or trying to pick it up as a topic, it is so broad, it is so big, it is so huge.

It's mentioned so many times in scripture. How can you even wrestle it down into some sort of a manageable thing that you can cover? And so when he says you've lost your first love, there are people who have done a whole series, a preaching series that lasts months on love and its aspects and its scriptural connotations, spiritual love, love between people, love for God, horizontal, vertical and all the rest of it. Well we're not going to try to do an exhaustive study of love, but we're going to look at it specifically as it pertains to the folks in Ephesus.

Now you and I know from our study in Colossians that this letter of Ephesians was not specifically written to Ephesus. So we're not getting something that was directly addressed to our church of Revelation chapter 2 verse 1 in Ephesians chapter 4. However, this letter which was written to the Laodiceans was meant to be circulated throughout the region. And if you look at a map, you'll remember that Colossae and Laodicea and Hierapolis are a little triangle in the Lycus Valley there of churches.

And then if you travel further west, it's not a very far distance to get over to Ephesus. And that's how this letter wound up. The copy that got reproduced was the copy that made it over to Ephesus.

Maybe the original stopped after it had made the rounds of Colossae, Hierapolis and Laodicea. Tychicus, you remember, was the messenger. He carried the letter to these different churches and carried some verbal greetings from Paul and let them know how he was doing and so on.

He was the emissary that carried these two letters in the same pouch, Colossians and this letter. And so it made it over to Ephesus. And Paul had them in mind.

He had all of the churches in that region in mind when he wrote this. But just remember, it's not specifically diagnosing Ephesus alone. It was to all of the believers in the region.

But this is a great chapter on the Christian walk and the walk in love. And we know that love is specifically mentioned as a problem by the Lord Jesus Christ in our letter in Revelation chapter 2. So that's why we find ourselves here. So hopefully you can follow along as I read this from Kenneth Weist's translation.

This is Ephesians chapter 4. I beg of you, please, therefore, I the prisoner in the Lord, order your behavior in a manner worthy of the divine summons with which you were called. I'll read that again. I beg of you, please, therefore, I the prisoner in the Lord, order your behavior in a manner worthy of the divine summons with which you were called.

With every lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, bearing with one another in love, doing your best to safeguard the unanimity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one spirit, even as you were also called in one hope of your calling. That's the same calling, by the way, that it mentions up above.

Order your behavior in a manner worthy of the divine summons with which you were called. There is one body and one spirit, and you were called in one hope of your calling. That divine summons has one purpose, one expectation, one hope.

There is one Lord, one faith, one placing into, and that's all it says, one placing into. So we put in brackets the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. But there is one placing into, there is one joining.

One God and Father of all, the one above all, and through all, and in all. But to each one of us there was given the grace in the measure of the gift of the Christ. Wherefore, he says, having ascended on high, he led away captive those taken captive, and gave gifts to men.

Now the fact that he ascended, what is it except that he also descended into the nether parts of the earth? The one who descended himself is also the one who ascended above all the heavens in order that he might fill all things. Now that descending and ascending, we talked about that before. People think he descended down into the nether world or into Hades or Sheol or something.

What it's talking about is the one who descended to earth and became man. That descent is the incarnation. His divinity, his divine self came and was incarnate.

And the one who ascended is the one who first descended. He's the same Christ. There's no reference here to the nether regions or preaching to the spirits in chains or any of that.

The one who descended himself is also the one who ascended above all the heavens in order that he might fill all things. And that's what's important because it's the Jesus that walked among us. Who walked in love.

Who expressed love and compassion. Who took on the form of a servant. Who washed the disciples' feet.

Who did these things that it speaks up above. Walking in lowliness and meekness with long suffering. Bearing with.

How much bearing with did the Lord Jesus do? The reason Paul mentions the ascending and

descending here is not to throw in some weird reference to Hades or the nether world. It's because he's saying, look, remember the Christ that descended. The one that is up there raised above all things and is seated at the right hand of the Father in glory.

You know how he got there? It's because of lowliness and meekness and submission to the will of the Father. That's how he got to that elevated place. And those who follow him in the walk of love and humility are the ones who are going to join him in that lofty place.

This is the point of the ascending and descending. That's why Paul brings it up. The one who ascended above all the heavens in order that he might fill all things.

And he himself gave some on the one hand as apostles and on the other hand as prophets. Still again, some as bringers of good news. And finally, some as pastors who are also teachers for the equipping of the saints for ministering work with a view to the building up of the body of Christ.

I love that part because anyone who has served as a pastor knows that there is the temptation, and I'm not thinking of my current situation, I'm thinking of days gone by, where in an organized church with a building and so on, people decide that, well, we've hired the pastor and he will do the work of the ministry. I can hand him the name of a newcomer to town or I can hand him the name of someone who is sick and afflicted round about us and he can go minister to them. It's not what the scripture says, is it? The Lord Jesus gave some as pastors who are also teachers and they equip the saints for ministering work.

Hopefully the fruit of our ministry here, of our study in the word of God here, our fellowship in the word here, is that we are equipped to minister to one another and to those who are in our periphery as we scatter to our lives. If you do not find that you are fed in your soul and nourished up and strengthened and equipped to be a minister and to engage in ministry, being a blessing and speaking the truth in love and whatever your natural gifts are from the Lord, if you don't find the exercise of those things, if you don't find God the Holy Spirit showing you avenues of expression, then something needs to change. Maybe I'm not the right guy to present the word of God to you.

Maybe there is some impediment because this is not an end in itself. We don't just study to be built up and nourished and little Jack Horner sat in the corner eating his Christmas pie, stuck in his thumb, pulled out a plum and said, my what a good boy am I. There is sort of spiritual Jack Hornerism where we sit in the corner with our pie and we stick in our thumb and pull out a plum and say, boy I'm all set here. That's not the goal.

All of this talk in Ephesians 4 about unity and unanimity and the bond that is created, that is a real thing. That should be the outflow. We should have an outward looking attitude.

That's what love really is and it's generated in our hearts by the Holy Spirit through the word of God just like everything else that is a part of the power of God. So if we don't find that, if we don't

find avenues of expression, if we don't find the motivation in our souls for expression, we want to come back and look at this Ephesians chapter 4 and see that this is what we are called to. This is our divine commission.

The reason we are here breathing God's air is to be expressors of divine love. Look at Romans 5.5. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Keep in mind this is going to be the problem we are going to see in Ephesus.

The pastors are not there to be the center of the universe. We are not supposed to have pastors who are the center of their little solar system and all the planets orbit around them and they are the light that shines and the energy source for everybody who is in their periphery. That is not the goal.

The pastor is the hash slinger. The image always comes to my mind whenever I see pastors and teachers. I think about the mess decks on the old USS Juno LPD-10, one of the first Navy ships I was ever on for any length of time.

I spent two weeks on that ship and every day, three times a day, we had to go to the mess decks. We ate with the enlisted watches. We were doing enlisted work and we would go down there when the enlisted guys got their break, go to the mess decks.

It is all metal and bulkheads and stuff like you see in the movies of ships. Here are these stainless steel counters and there is steam and there are sweaty guys in t-shirts with little white hats on, scooping the chow out and putting it on the tin trays and scooting it in your direction. You get your food there and you think, well now how big of a celebrity is this guy behind the counter scooping out the stuff and putting it on my tin tray? Well, I don't know a single one of their names.

I am sorry to say I can't tell you which Lance Corporal or which seaman apprentice or whatever was back there slinging the hash because he is not the point, is he? The point is to get fed so that you can go do your duties and stand your watches and that the whole ship, because it is full of healthy sailors and healthy marines, can do its job. I will tell you I am in a position now where in my job I work with the materials of a very famous pastor and I will tell you that in the periphery of anybody like that there are people who are totally obsessed with the man and completely lost sight of the message and it is a caution. I don't find that problem here.

I don't generate the kind of charisma that is going to cause that problem. But I tell you as a warning, whatever might be in our history or whatever might be in our future, remember it is God that we serve. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who is our celebrity and we want to focus on Him.

Everything else is the means to that end. Paul the Apostle had this problem himself where people made an issue out of him. Remember the first chapter of 1 Corinthians? There are divisions in the body of Christ.

What were they caused by? People getting focused on the man instead of the message. I am of Paul. I am of Apollos.

Well, I am of Peter. Well, I've got you all beat. I am of Christ.

And it is a terrible thing to divide over that. The pastor is given for the equipping of the saints for ministering work. Even if you get fully equipped, if it doesn't result in ministering work, the point has been missed.

We should be expressors of love with a view to the building up of the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the experiential full and precise knowledge of the Son of God. That is how we translate Epinosus. Isn't that great? The experiential full and precise knowledge of the Son of God.

I will say that one more time because it is not enough to know the word of God. The Pharisees knew the word of God. Listen to how he translates Epinosus.

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the experiential full and precise knowledge of the Son of God to a spiritually mature man to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. That is the goal. That is what we are shooting for.

In order that, what is the result now? When we reach that place, you know what it is going to accomplish? We are no longer immature ones tossed to and fro and carried around in circles by every wind of teaching in the cunning adroitness of men in craftiness which furthers the scheming deceitful art of error. That is a great phrase. The scheming deceitful art of error.

It is scheming. It is malice aforethought. People do this on purpose.

Watch Trinity Broadcasting Network for a day sometime. It furthers the scheming deceitful art of error but this is in contrast. Speaking the truth in love we may grow up into him in all things who is the head, Christ from whom all the body constantly being joined closely together and constantly being knit together through every joint of supply.

See that? That is what he does with the present tense there. The present tense is important in Greek. Constantly being joined closely together.

Constantly being knit together through every joint of supply. According to this is not something we have to sweat out. Not something we have to achieve.

It is according to the operative energy put forth to the capacity of each part. The operative energy put forth to the capacity of each part. It makes for increased growth of the body resulting in the building up of itself in the sphere of love.

You know what that means? Your spiritual gift is designed to contribute to the building up of

Christ's body here on earth. You have a gift from Christ energized, activated and empowered by the Holy Spirit through the word of God that builds up fellow believers. You may not even know what it is.

It may not have a name. You may just be that person that walks in and encourages someone or lifts the spirits of someone or you may have a God given knack for knowing exactly the right thing to say or exactly the right thing to do. You may have a perception of how you can best encourage and assist someone in a time of trial.

There are people, it's amazing. I'll give you an example. Ann Criswell, Dr. Criswell's daughter was in the hospital here the last few weeks and there's a girl who works at Criswell College and she's an administrative assistant for one of the vice presidents there.

She's one of those real sweet people and sometimes sweet people are sort of misguided. You think, well, they're just trying to be so sweet. So she was thinking of things to do for Ann.

It helps if you know Ann because Ann has about the same attitude I do about just being very hard to encourage. If you get down, you can just be perverse and not want to be encouraged. So this girl made a big card and she took digital pictures of everyone, put their picture on it, had each one.

She pasted the picture inside a little heart and asked each person to write a little message to Ann and then she put them all on a big heart. She was going to take it down to the hospital room. I thought, wow, okay.

So she took my picture and I wrote a little thing in there. She took it down. And then she bought some kind of a little stuffed bear and she was going to take that down also.

And she got busy taking the card. She forgot to take the bear. So she made a special trip down to take this little bear.

And I thought, boy, knowing Ann Criswell, it's a total waste of time to go to all this trouble to get this little bear and take it down there. Well, see, it's not my gift. Ann slept with that little bear every single night until she died.

It was a wonderful thing. And that girl just had a gift. She has a gift of encouragement and a gift of comfort.

And you just don't know. And I would have never in a million years given... And if it crossed my mind, I would have said, that's the last thing in the world. But it's not my gift.

There are people who have a gift. So watch for your opportunities. Pray, make sure you're in fellowship, and then follow the leading of the Lord.

Everyone has their area of gifting. You have a capacity. You have a potential that builds up fellow members of the body of Christ.

It's God-given. And when it functions in the energy of God's Spirit, through God's Word, it's going to be a blessing, and it's going to glorify God. And don't be looking at other people and saying, well, I wish I could do that, but I can't.

Or, why didn't they do this and that? We have our hands full trying to figure out how to function ourselves. This is walking in love. This is speaking the truth to one another in love.

This is letting the love of God manifest itself in and through us. And it doesn't take our effort. It shouldn't be a drudge.

If you find black clouds gathering in your mind, then don't do it. It's not the leading of God. If it's something that you have to generate and you have to work at, this is something that God does in us and through us.

And when we are in the right place, where we should be doing what we're supposed to do, it is the natural outflow. How hard does a tree have to strain to produce its natural fruit? I've got a mulberry tree in the backyard. It can push mulberries out like you cannot believe.

And it doesn't sweat and strain and fret and agonize. It just exists as a mulberry tree. If we exist as people of God, nourished up by the Word of God, sustained and energized by the Holy Spirit, that fruit is going to manifest.

So, this builds up the body in the sphere of love. It's in the sphere of love. It's God's love translated through us.

We don't look at each other based on... I love what Bob Thieme said a long time ago about the difference between different kinds of love. Love that is divine in its origin is based on who and what the lover is, not who and what the lovee is. It isn't based on the quality of the object of love.

Genuine love that has God as its source is sourced in who and what God is. And we, expressing the love of God, is going to be based on who and what we are, not who and what the object is. It doesn't depend.

Wouldn't it be an awful thing if love depended on us? If someone loving us, or if God loving us, depended on us, because we will inevitably fail. You see this in marriages, where there's a beautiful woman and a guy marries her and everything is great, and then some horrible disfiguring accident takes place and the guy leaves, or she gets some disease, or has a double mastectomy or something, and then the husband leaves. Well, you're not who you were when I married you.

I just can't stick around anymore. That's love based on the quality of the object. Well, the quality

of the object changed and the love went away.

God's love, thank the Lord, is based on who and what He is, not who and what we are. We have standing in Christ, and God's love for us will never change. And that's the kind of love we should develop for others.

We look past behaviors, we look past flaws, and we learn to be channels for the love of God that's based on divine character, divine power. So that's why Paul says, continuing in Ephesians 4 verse 17, This therefore I am saying, and solemnly declaring in the Lord, that no longer are you to be ordering your behavior as the Gentiles order their behavior. Now, who's he talking about when he says Gentiles? In this context, he's talking about those who don't know God.

He's talking about the outsiders, those who have yet to hear about God, who are unbelievers. They order their behavior in the futility of their mind, being those who have their understanding darkened, who have been alienated from the life of God through the ignorance which is in them, through the hardening of their hearts, who, being of such a nature as to have become callous, abandon themselves to wantonness, resulting in a performing of every uncleanness in the sphere of greediness. If you are not objective and seeking to be a benefit to others, you are going to be subjective and seeking to please yourself.

There are only two choices. It's like a light switch. It's either on or off.

You are either living to be a blessing to others, or you are living to please yourself. You are either living to please God, which is being a blessing to others, or you are living to please yourself. It's just like Jesus said, you can't serve God and mammon.

Mammon is everything that pleases me. But as for you, not in this manner did you learn the Christ. Since indeed, as is the case, you heard and in him were taught.

Just as the truth is in Jesus, that you have put off, once for all, with reference to your former manner of life, the old self, who is being corrupted according to the passionate desires of deceit. Moreover, you are being constantly renewed with reference to the spirit of your mind, and you have put on, once for all, the new self, who after God was created in righteousness and holiness of truth. Wherefore, having put off the lie once for all, be speaking truth, each with his neighbor.

This harks back to verse 17 and 18, where he talks about speaking the truth to one another in love. Speaking truth, each with his neighbor, because we are members belonging to one another. Be constantly angry with a righteous indignation and stop sinning.

Do not allow the sun to go down upon your irritated, exasperated, embittered anger. That's a great fleshing out of that Greek word. Your irritated, exasperated, embittered anger.

And stop giving an occasion for acting to the devil. The one who is stealing, let him no longer be stealing, but rather let him be laboring, working with his own hands that which is good, in order

that he may be having that wherewith to be sharing with the one who is having need. Every word that is rotten and unfit for use, out of your mouth, let it not be proceeding.

But whatever is good, suitable for edification with respect to the need, in order that it may impart grace to the hearers. Stop grieving the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed with a view to the day of redemption. All manner of harshness and violent outbreaks of wrath and anger and brawling and slanderous speech, let it be put away from you, together with all manner of malice.

And be becoming kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as, and just as, also God in Christ forgave you." Well, that's a great introduction to the letter we have here from Jesus to the church at Ephesus in Revelation chapter 2. Let's turn there now. We have already covered the substance of chapter 1. We have seen that this is a message from Jesus Christ who introduces himself as the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty. John gets this revelation in a vision, a manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not a personal visit. John doesn't rest his head in Jesus' bosom. They don't commune over a little breakfast meal or something.

This is an official capacity visit. The Lord Jesus Christ is here and he speaks formally and John records his message formally. Jesus says in verse 18, I am he who lives and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore.

Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of death. Write the things which you have seen and the things which are and the things which will take place after this.

Of course, John in this chapter is writing what he has seen. He describes the vision and the manifestation of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says, The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the, and your translation says, angels.

A better translation here is messengers. And without agonizing over this, we know that angelos in its root form means messenger. In its basic usage, its secular usage in Greek, you know, most Greeks didn't believe in anything such as an angel.

And so in common Greek, in Koine Greek, in the parlance of the day, when you talked about an angelos, you were talking about a messenger, a representative, an emissary, someone who conveys a message. Tychicus was the angelos who took the letters that Paul wrote to Laodicea and to Colossae and to Hierapolis and eventually to Ephesus and the other churches in Asia. So, these seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches.

Now, does that mean that someone is going to be traveling to the seven churches? It does not.

What does a messenger do? A messenger delivers a message. So, who delivers the messages in the churches? It's the pastors.

And this is the common understanding, this is the traditional view and I think it's accurate. These are not guardian angels of the churches, they are not Michael and Gabriel and this is not a celestial operation. And the reason is these letters are addressed to people who have problems.

They are addressed to representatives in the churches. And John would have committed these after he wrote down these letters, he would have committed them to men who could get in a boat, sail from Patmos, go to the coast and travel in and find these churches in Asia. This circle of churches.

We looked last time and saw that the reason these seven churches are selected is they are on a major circular route. You can travel kind of like the interstate of the day and get to these churches. And then from these churches many of the other major churches, some of which were even larger than these, can be easily reached.

These are along the main artery, the main backbone of Asia. And by going to these seven churches then those will become distribution points for the minor churches that are also scattered throughout the region. And of course eventually to all of the other churches who had an interest in the word of God.

Now we have revelation in our Bible and everybody gets to see it. But these seven churches were the churches that John himself ministered to when he was able to travel before he was banished to Patmos. And because he would occasionally make a side trip to these other churches.

But his circuit, he was a circuit riding preacher just like we used to have in this country 150 years ago. His circuit was these seven major churches. And then what he said could be copied down and carried by messengers to other churches.

So these messengers and the pastors who recited at Ephesus and Laodicea and some of these other churches, Smyrna, Pergamos, could then go and themselves be circuit riding preachers. They could go to the other churches in their region and present the word. So by delivering this message to the messenger at Ephesus he could not only minister it to his own church but then he could go out from Ephesus to the smaller churches in the region.

The churches met in houses. There were small groups scattered throughout the region. So he is going to go re-transmit this message in his circuit.

W.A. Criswell had what they called quarter time churches back in his seminary days. And while he was going to seminary then one Sunday a month he would go to each of these churches. And those churches could only meet once a month because there wasn't a full time pastor.

So seminary students would go out and it's what they called quarter time churches. And if you were lucky you could get different seminary students and you could fill up the Sundays of the month by having a different guy each Sunday. But they had to spread themselves out to try to get some sort of ministry in those communities.

Well that's kind of what's going on here. So it's very appropriate that here the pastor instead of saying the pastors of the churches he says the angelos, the messenger. Why? Because he's going to carry this message to all of the house churches in his region.

His home, his main area of ministry here is Ephesus. But he's going to go to the smaller groups as well. So the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands the seven stars are the messengers of the seven churches.

And the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches. Those are the primary churches. We have this even here in Dallas where there will be some big church and then it's got satellite ministries.

It's got smaller churches maybe a Korean church or a Chinese church or a Hispanic church that is a satellite ministry or they'll plant an offshoot in north Dallas when they're downtown. Things of that nature. And those are nurtured and supplied and sustained by what comes from sort of the mother church the home church is able to minister to those groups.

That's what's going on here and that's why the church is a lampstand. What does a lampstand do? You put the light on that stand and it shines and illuminates an area. And that's what these churches did.

The church at Ephesus illuminated its whole area. Sent messengers around. Had ministries.

Had other people with spiritual gifts who could go to these other smaller groups these offshoot groups who weren't large enough maybe to sustain their own pastor. So that's what we have going on. We covered all that in chapter one.

We're now here in chapter two and let's read this letter now to the church at Ephesus. Notice that the letter is addressed to the messenger of the church at Ephesus. Why is that? Why doesn't it just say to the church at Ephesus write? It says to the messenger of the church at Ephesus write.

Why is that? Because there is a chain of command. In the military a lot of times you have an operational chain of command and an administrative chain of command. In the church they are the same.

The administrative and the operational chain of command are the same in the church. And the Lord Jesus Christ has called and commissioned shepherds. They are under shepherds.

That's what poimain means. We saw that in Ephesians chapter four. He gave some apostles on

the one hand.

On the other hand he gave prophets. Good news bringers. Pastors who are also teachers.

Shepherds who are also teachers. What do they teach? They teach the word that came from Christ. They teach the word as it's ministered by God the Holy Spirit.

But it is from Christ through the teacher to the congregation, to the people in the church. And we are not designed to operate as little independent. Some people say, I'm going to get a Strong's Concordance and a Brown Driver and Briggs Lexicon and I'm just going to study for myself.

I don't believe in a church. I don't believe in an assembly. I don't believe in having a designated teacher.

I knew a guy in my company at Annapolis who was that way. He was right here from Dallas. He passed away many years ago from some strange form of cancer.

He just decided that he didn't need to be subject to a pastor and he got a couple of English tools and decided he would feed himself. He turned himself into a Calvinist and went off high and right and got all mixed up and then ultimately passed away. I don't really conclude from that.

It was the sin of the death. But it was a very sad thing because we had many, many discussions and he just could not be convinced. He said, well, you know, I just have to study by my own lights.

God has gifted the church and it's not any better than any other gift. It's just different. It's like the priests in Israel were not superior Israelites.

Look at Hophni and Phinehas, the sons of Eli. They were the off scourings of the tribe of Levi, but that's the job they were assigned was to be the priests. Same thing with pastors.

Pastors have been assigned the hash slinging function. You're supposed to go to the mess decks and get the hash that those particular guys are slinging. That's the way it works.

You don't just say, you know what, I'm going to get packages from home and I'm going to live off care packages and I'm not going to eat in the mess decks. There is a system for being fed and you go and you get fed when you're supposed to get fed, where you're supposed to get fed, by the guys that are supposed to feed you. That's the way God set it up.

And that's what this implies. The message goes to the messenger of the church because he's the one that's supposed to deliver it. The Lord Jesus Christ could have just popped up in Ephesus.

Why did he bother going to John? Why didn't he bypass John, bypass the messenger, and just show up in Ephesus and say, hey there you Ephesians, you've lost your first love. Go back and do the first works and just deliver this message in person. Could Jesus have done it? Of course.

Why didn't he? He appeared in person when he was on this earth. He appeared on the mount of transfiguration in his glory. Now he's in his glory.

Why didn't he just go show up at the church? Well, at the time that this message is delivered, what's the chain of command? Apostles, pastors. Now the apostles are gone. So, who delivers the word to the church? Now that the canon is complete, you have the Holy Spirit, you have the word of God, the pastor digs it out of there and communicates it to the congregation.

So, that is reflected here. To the messenger of the church. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are designed to be assembled.

Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is. Why? Well, I can get my teaching off the radio. I've got a TV preacher.

I've got tapes. I've got books. I've got this, that, and the other.

Guess what? You have now limited yourself to only one spiritual gift out of the panoply that Christ gave the church. You've said, you know what? I just need the ministry of one gift and I'm all set. Well, not only do you lose the benefit of all of those other gifts from each individual that's in that assembly, but you have also cut yourself off from almost all of your opportunities for your own gift to minister.

It's not just that you don't receive, you also don't get a chance to give. Believers are designed to be assembled. They're designed to be ministered to by a pastor who is a teacher.

And whatever church you attend, wherever you are, the pastor needs to primarily be a teacher. There's lots of other things he can do, but teaching is what is worthy of double honor. Teaching is what feeds the flock.

Feeding the flock is the primary function of a shepherd. What did Jesus tell Peter after the resurrection? Remember, they were on the seashore? He calls Peter aside. What did he tell Peter all three times when he said, Peter, do you love me? Peter said, You know I do, Lord.

What did he say three times? Feed, feed, feed. The pastor that loves the Lord is going to feed the flock. That's his job.

How do you feed the flock? It's not by telling wonderful stories. It's not by being full of charisma. It's not by starting a bunch of programs.

It is by communicating to the souls of believers the counsel of God, helping all of us grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That's the purpose. So, that's why we have this phrase at the beginning of each of these seven letters.

To the messenger of the church at Ephesus, write. Because the church will be getting this message through a pastor. Just as you're hearing the sound of my voice right now, I didn't write this book.

I didn't come up with the truth that's in it. I am conveying it to you because I am the messenger of this church. And this message has been delivered through the apostle to me, and I'm delivering it to you.

At the same time, it doesn't mean that you cannot or should not study your Bible for yourself and meditate on its truth. It just means that when you come to a problem of interpretation or a problem of understanding, God has supplied a way to get that figured out. And that is the ministry of pastors and teachers plural.

You don't have to just listen to one. If you think I have something fouled up, find somebody else. Keep looking until the ministry of God the Spirit in your soul says, you know what? That rings true.

That satisfies my hunger. You will know if I teach you something wrong or any other pastor teaches you something wrong because it just won't sit. It won't lay down and knit with the rest of the word of God in your soul.

You know when you sit down and eat a meal that isn't filling, your digestion tells you. You still feel hungry. Or you eat something and it disagrees with you and you're uncomfortable for several hours afterward.

God has given you a system that will tell you whether or not you're being fed. And if you're not being fed, if you're hungry, if your stomach is growling or if you're getting a bellyache from what you're eating, what do you do? You change your diet. What should you do in the spiritual realm if you don't feel fed? Don't worry about the feelings of the pastor, good or bad.

Get yourself fed. It is your first responsibility to the Lord is to find the pastor that can teach you and can feed your soul. He is the messenger.

He gets the word of God and feeds it to you. And if you are nourished, if you're strengthened, if you feel the power of God active in your soul, you know you're in the right place. If not, then get busy and find what you need.

Because you can't stand at the judgment seat and say, well, you know, I just didn't want to hurt the poor man's feelings. Jesus is going to say, now whose feelings really count, mine or his? You want to please the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why we're here.

We are part of his body. We are here to reflect his love. And you can't do it if you're not being fed, if you're not learning.

And God put a plethora of pastors and teachers on this planet and in this country and in our area. We're the buckle of the Bible belt here. And so you have to do what pleases God.

And believe me, I for one will understand. If people come and can profit and benefit, great. If they can't, they need to go and find where it is.

And I will say, Godspeed, because you need to go where you get fed. The messenger of the church at Ephesus. What is the message? These things says, he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil.

And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. And you've persevered and have patience. You've labored for my name's sake and have not become weary.

Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen, change your mind, repent, do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you change your mind. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Well, these things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand.

What does this tell us? Pastors are accountable to Christ. You do not have to go try to straighten out a pastor that you think is errant. And again, I'm talking in the abstract here.

Nobody, I don't think is, you know, I don't have any problem with people trying to come up and tell me how to do things differently. But it happens. It happens in churches.

It happens in the body of Christ. It happens in churches all around us, where people think, you know, we need to put some pressure on that pastor to do things differently. Now, feedback is one thing.

Constructive criticism is one thing. Giving him something to go on. Is this helpful? Is it not helpful? You know, suggestions.

There's nothing wrong with that. But to have a board in a church that drives the pastor, that hems in the pastor, that squeezes the pastor through a little, you know, they used to have that Play-Doh. You'd get the cans of Play-Doh and then they came out with these little plastic things shaped like squares and stars and holes.

You put the Play-Doh in and you squeeze it through and it takes the lump of Play-Doh and turns it into a little extruded piece of clay. Well, a lot of pastors are subject to that in their churches. And

this Scripture tells us those...