

Ephesians

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[0 : 00] We are following our scripture sheet, and we are now on 4C, and that brings us to continuation of the fourth chapter of Ephesians, and it is the second part of the sit-walk-stand.

We told you that Ephesians is broken down into a very simple outline. The first two chapters have to do with sit, and that relates to the position that we enjoy in Christ.

We are seated with Christ in the heavenly. And chapters 3 and 4 deal with our walk, that is, the conduct of our life or our lifestyle, how we are to go about prosecuting this business called human life living on this planet.

And then the last two chapters deal with the necessity of standing and standing firm and being equipped with the armor of God, etc. So it is a realization of the position we have and how we are to function in that position and how we are to stand fast, in it.

So right now we are in the middle portion of this, and it is in 4C, and that's verse 12 or verse 11. We'll start with verse 11. Talking about the risen Christ, and this is so very critical.

[1 : 17] I wish there were a way to more successfully impress this upon the minds and hearts of people, and that is this. When Jesus Christ left this earth in the presence of his apostles, in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and in Acts chapter 1, He ascended to heaven.

The commission that he gave them when he departed was not his final word. That in and of itself is so key and so critical, and yet the words that Christ had to share after that are often lost sight of. Because those last few words that he gave to the apostles when he descended have been labeled, not by the scripture, but by man. They have been labeled the great commission.

And the tendency is to think that that commission is the one. That's the one that really counts. That's the great commission.

Well, who called it the great commission? Man has. God doesn't call that the great commission. Now, it is a commission. And I would be the first to admit that every commission that Jesus Christ gave is great just because he gave it.

[2 : 39] But, fellas, that was not the final commission. There is more to come. It is on the other side of glory. And it began when he addressed Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus.

It was a continuing word of the risen Christ. It was, if you will, and I can't think of a better term, especially in this day and age of computerese, what the risen Christ gave to Paul was an update to what he gave to the twelve when he was here on earth.

It is so sad that that is so often lost sight of. In other words, there is a new word. There is a further word. There is an ongoing word. And as I pointed out in time past, not only is the revelations that God gave to Paul an update of what the disciples received from the earthly Christ when he was here for three years, but even Paul's information that is given to us in the Pauline epistles, in the letters to the churches, Paul is going to be updated also.

And that's the essence of what's called the church Hebrew or the Christian church epistles, beginning with Hebrews and Peter and John and so on, and the revelation.

All of those are yet going to update what the apostle Paul gave, or what was given to the apostle Paul by our risen Lord. So we see a progression of doctrine here that is to be, that is undeniable in my estimation.

[4 : 19] And now we are told that his risen Christ, in verse 10, he that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things, and he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers.

So this is all new stuff. But Christ on earth did not do that. He called apostles to himself. He called disciples, and he made them apostles, and that's in Matthew 10 and so on.

And he gave them a commission, but it was an earthly commission. And it was a commission concerning the kingdom of heaven coming to earth and so on. Now, that has all been set aside to be realized at a later time, but it is not now a present reality.

Fellas, this is not the kingdom of heaven come to earth. We are not living in that. This is not a time when men have beaten their plowshares into pruning hooks and the knowledge of the Lord covers the earth as the waters cover the sea.

That's not now. We're not living in that. That kingdom concept has been temporarily set aside because Israel is the key strategic factor to the realization of that, and Israel is not on board with the covenant that Christ established the night he was betrayed when he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

[5 : 59] That was the arranging, the ratification of the new covenant that was spoken of by Jeremiah in chapter 31 when he's going to establish a new covenant with Israel and with Judah.

And yet, when this covenant was presented to Israel, based upon the finished work of Christ and his shed blood, Israel did not sign on.

They did not embrace that new covenant like they embraced the original covenant when Moses presented it to them and sanctified it with animal blood. The people responded, all that the Lord has said will we do.

They agreed to the covenant. That's the law of Moses. And they signed on. So there was a contract. There was a covenant that was established. And when Christ ratified the second covenant, the new covenant with his own blood, it was presented to Israel by Peter in Acts chapter 2 on the day of Pentecost, and again in Acts chapter 3.

And the question was, Israel, what will you do? And Israel said, we will not have this man to reign over us. They rejected the terms of the covenant.

[7 : 20] And God said, all right. And he set Israel aside. They are now a disobedient people. And they are set aside until the fullness of the Gentiles become in.

This is what Paul's talking about in Romans 11 when he says that blindness in part is happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles become in. So, in setting Israel aside, God turned to an entirely new entity that was never before even imagined.

It is not prophesied in the Old Testament. You won't find it there. It isn't supposed to be there. It's called the mystery. It's a brand new thing. We saw earlier in Ephesians where Paul said that this was not made known to the sons of men before.

As it is now revealed. And that's this whole new thing called the church. And it is a commission that God gave to the apostle Paul.

And he has charged him with the responsibility of going not only to Jews but to Gentiles, non-Jews, everywhere.

[8 : 30] And preached this new message. Death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's called the gospel of the grace of God. And it is that precious gift that has been given to us to proclaim today.

So, in connection with this, this ministry of the gospel of the grace of God that he gave to the apostle Paul, we read in verse 11. And he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

For, here's why he gave them. For the perfecting of the saints. For the work of the ministry. Now, this is a curious expression.

And it is one that is lost sight of all too often. And because of this, we have, in most of our church circles, been pretty much reduced to a clerical, pastoral mentality.

The pastor is the professional. He's the hired guy. He's the expert. He's the one that's supposed to do the ministry. No. That is not the way it is.

[9 : 42] Read the text carefully. He gave these officers for the perfecting, for the maturing and developing.

And nobody is into perfection. That's not a good translation. Actually, the word, the word, the perfecting, as it is used most of the time in the King James, it comes from the concept of completion.

Of filling up. Of completing. It's not speaking. It's not speaking in terms of the pastors and teachers are responsible to perfect the saints.

In other words, to make them perfect people. We all know what an illusion that would be. You've got an imperfect pastor trying to make perfect saints. That's nonsense. So, it's talking about completing. Maturing. Developing. So that they are able to stand and function on their own. And, and here comes the gist of it, guys.

[10:44] So that they, the saints, can do the work of the ministry. Oh, my. And so often, the concept is, the pastor is the one.

He's the one who's trained. He's the only one who is capable and competent to do ministry. The rest of us just sit there and listen to what he has to say. No, no, no, no, no, no. The pastor, more than anything else, is to be a saint equipper.

However, he is to outfit and to furnish the saints with the information they need so that they can go out and do the ministry.

In a one-on-one type situation where you live, where you work, you are to be functioning as an ambassador for Jesus Christ. Even though you may not have some official title, you have Christ in you, and that Christ in you needs to get out to other people.

That's the burden of this passage. For the, look at some of the way it is rendering here. Rhames renders it with a view to the fitting of the saints for the work of ministry.

[12:03] For the perfecting of the saints to labor in their appointed service. 20th century New Testament says, to fit his people for the work of his ministry.

Fellas, we are all supposed to be ministers. It isn't just somebody who is ordained of men and has an REV in front of his name.

He's the only one who can minister. No, no, no, no, no. We are to be a functioning group of lay people who are able to minister one to another with confidence, with compassion, with enlightenment.

We are to be what the scripture calls the iron that sharpens iron. You quit me, and I quit you. And together we sharpen and enable and equip and encourage each other. That's what this is all about. God forbid that this should just be the job of the pastor.

[13:06] Man, that would be one monumental task. I wouldn't even consider it. I wouldn't even consider it. But the pastor is to equip those in the congregation under his influence so that they are able to stand on their own.

And look at the rest of this. For the edify of the body of Christ. This word in the Greek comes from our English word edify. An edifice.

Which is a building. And you build it up. You establish it. And that's what pastors are to do. We are to edify, build up one another.

And believers in the body of Christ are to edify, build up one another. It's just the opposite of tearing down. And we all know that sometimes some people seem to think they are God's official wrecking crew.

And they tear down things. They don't build up. They just raise things. They tear them down. They beat down people. They criticize people. Some folks think that they are called upon to be other people's Holy Spirit.

[14:22] And you just listen to me and I'll tell you what you're supposed to believe and how you're supposed to act and all the rest. Rather than edify, encourage, and build up. And there's a lot of that that goes on.

For the edifying of the body of Christ. And look at it. Till, verse 13. Till, or until, we all, that is within that body and that sphere of influence, come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

This is a fuller knowledge, a more complete knowledge, unto a perfect man. This is a mature, unto a mature man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Every single one of us, every single one of us, has plenty of room for spiritual growth and maturity. You never arrive in this life. Each and every one of us remains a human product under construction.

[15:27] Nobody has the right to say, hey everybody, you want to see what a finished product looks like? Look at me. I have arrived.

Well, la-ti-da. If you have arrived, one thing you left behind, and that was humility. None of us has arrived.

Guys, we are all, we are all a study in progress. We are just at different levels. A newer Christian is at a more low level of learning, maturing, and developing.

But, somebody who has been in Christ for several years ought to be further along in this thing we call the Christian life. Ought to be reflecting some growth, some maturity, some development. We all know, we all know how tragic it is. We look upon it as tragic when someone comes into this world, and some of us here have personal experience of this, of a child that does not develop, either physically or mentally.

[16 : 39] And we call this a retardation, a stunt in growth, either physical growth or maturity and knowledge and understanding.

And we just kind of shake our heads and say, that's a tragic thing. And it is heartbreaking. There's no question about it. But here is an occasion that God has provided everything that is needed so that no one needs to be spiritually retarded.

If you are spiritually retarded, you are not able to function in the sphere that God...