

Ephesians

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it is our intention this morning to finally conclude Paul's letter to the Ephesians. I lost track of when we started it, but I think it was probably a couple of years ago.

But we've been meandering our way through this epistle, and it is another of those documents that simply has no bottom to it. It doesn't make any difference how deeply you search in Ephesians.

You're not going to hit the bottom of anything. Matter of fact, that's true of the Word of God in general, because it's simply inexhaustible. But as much as lies within us, we just kind of go through it and glean from it what we can.

And we note now on our page of 6E of Ephesians chapter 6 that Paul is winding down, and he has already requested prayer from those saints at Ephesus that he may be able to open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel for which he is an ambassador in bonds.

He may be able to speak boldly as he ought to speak. And the basis for that bold speaking, of course, has to do with what he knows. And what he knows is in regard to the gospel of the grace of God that transformed him, arrested him on the road to Damascus, and created in him a new creation in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 2 6] It's the most radical thing that can happen to a human being in this life, is to have one's inner person actually invaded by the Spirit of God who regenerates and forgives and pardons and makes new on the inside.

It is that grace of God that only grace can perform. And it is an internal act. It is not done through the mechanism of a church. It is done through the mechanism of one sinner and one Savior doing business.

And it begins with an acknowledgement of one's sin, a recognition that there is nothing you can do to rectify your situation, casting your cause upon the person of Jesus Christ who died for your sins.

That's what results in regeneration. It is a new beginning for life. And Paul says, I want you to pray for me that I may be able to speak this message with boldness.

And we pointed out to you last time that one is able to speak boldly about a given subject, provided that they have firsthand knowledge of that subject, and that they are thoroughly familiar with it.

[2 : 4 8] And Paul was thoroughly familiar with the gospel of the grace of God. He did not speak tentatively. He did not speak reluctantly.

But he spoke boldly. And sometimes that can get you into a lot of trouble. Because there are those who would rather a message be kind of iffy.

Take this if you wish. However, if you don't wish, there are other things you can take, and it's entirely up to you. Much more popular message for the masses. But Paul's message was a message that was narrow.

It was confined. It was deliberate. It was positive. And it delivered. It was worthy of being delivered with boldness.

This one thing I do. And this one thing I know. That's the essence of his message. And I'm reminded of what he wrote also to the Corinthians.

[3 : 51] And maybe we ought to return to that for just a moment. Because it is the resurrection season that's upon us. Good Friday is upcoming.

By the way, I just make mention of Good Friday. Someone said that they took a public opinion poll asking people, What is it about Good Friday that makes Good Friday good?

Why is it called that? And there was a pretty pathetic percentage of people who addressed themselves and referred to themselves as Christians who even knew what was good about Good Friday.

How did it get that name? And of course, it is related to the fact that Good Friday was good for us. But it was something else for the one who made it that.

He poured out his life unto death so that we might have a Friday that is an ultimate Good Friday. It's good for humanity because as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

[4 : 53] And Paul delivers the essence of this gospel. You've got your Bible in 1 Corinthians 15 when he said, Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel, the good news, which I preach to you, which also you receive, in which also you stand, and there is the basis for stability, it is standing, by which also you are saved.

If you hold fast the word which I preach to you, unless you believe in vain. And that's a tremendously important statement.

It is a kind of a conditional thing. Unless you believe in vain. And the word in vain means to no end, or unless your belief is empty and void and worthless.

How could that be? And he is putting a qualification and a condition on that. And he's saying, Everything that I preach to you is of primary importance.

And I deliver that to you, first of all, this is this good news, this gospel. Unless, unless you have believed in vain.

[6 : 15] And he presents a kind of a hypothetical. What would that be? How could anyone have believed this message in vain? Well, as usual, the context is the key.

So we just have to keep reading, and we'll soon learn what he is talking about. I delivered to you of first importance. That means this is my number one item on the agenda.

This heads everything else. This is job one. First importance. What I also received, that Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day, according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, or to Peter, then to the twelve.

After that, he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now. That is, as of the time Paul was writing this letter, there were yet five hundred survivors, to whom Christ appeared at one time.

It must have been some kind of a congregation. But some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all of the apostles, that is, the twelve. And last of all, as it were, to one untimely born, he appeared to me also.

[7 : 53] For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God, there is that grace of which we spoke earlier, I am what I am, and his grace toward me did not prove vain.

Now there is that word again, empty, worthless, of no account. But, I labored even more than them all, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

Whether then, it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believe. Unless, you believed in vain.

To no end. Under what circumstances, could they possibly have believed in vain? That's the case he's going to go on and build.

And, the answer is really very, very simple. It would all be in vain. This gospel would all be in vain. To no end. Worthless.

[9 : 02] If Jesus Christ really was not raised from the dead. If he wasn't, and everything I've said to you is a lie, and you have believed a lie, and it is all to no good end or purpose.

That, would have been to have believed in vain. So, he tackles that possibility, with the verses that follow. If Christ, verse 12, if Christ is preached, that he has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say, that there is no resurrection of the dead.

You know, this goes all the way back to Job, who is generally considered to be a contemporary of Abraham. And Job posed the question, if a man dies, shall he live again?

And he remarked that, though this body of mine will be destroyed, the physical body, will be destroyed by worms, yet in my flesh, which will of course be a renewed body, I will see God.

And he had a concept of the resurrection way back then. And now Paul is simply elaborating on that. And he says, if there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, if that is an impossibility, if it's completely out of the question, then you can put Christ in that category too.

[10 : 34] Because if there is no such thing as a resurrection of the dead, then that cannot be true of Christ either. And if you have believed that he did, because you are staking your future life, your eternal life, your resurrection life on that, and it never really happened, you have believed in vain.

Your faith is vain. Our preaching is vain. All of this stuff called the gospel and the grace of God, it's all worthless. Last Sunday we were talking about this in connection with communion and Palm Sunday, about how people approach the subject of the resurrection today, in a day and age when we're dealing with political correctness and even religious correctness, and the position is taken that the resurrection is true for those who believe it to be true.

For them it's true. But for those who happen to disagree and do not believe that Christ actually was raised from the dead, then for them, he wasn't.

The beauty, of course, of that kind of reasoning is, nobody has to be wrong. And that's what political correctness is all about. You do not have the right to tell anybody that they are wrong in their belief, because all faith systems, regardless of what they are, including no faith, they are all of equal value and validity.

And none is preferable to another. This, of course, negates the whole concept of missions. Because if you do not have something that is genuine to offer in place of something that is false, what are you doing?

[12 : 36] All you're doing is offering an equal. Because to whomever you are offering it, whatever they believe is already equal to what you believe.

It negates the whole concept of conversion, of change, of rejection, of acceptance, because everything is on the same plane. One faith is as good as another.

So, what's the point in conversion? Convert from something that is right to something that is right? That doesn't make any sense. There has to be a broader definition.

There has to be something that is wrong in order for something that is right to replace it. That's the whole concept of the gospel. Man is born wrong, and because we are born wrong, we need to be made right.

God has made provision for that. It is through the gospel. We do not understand the dynamic of how this works. We just know that when someone comes to the conviction that they, in and of themselves, are undone and unacceptable to God as they are, because of the sin factor, because of the sin factor on our part, and because of the holiness factor on God's part, that establishes an essential incompatibility.

[14 : 05] And to bridge that gulf, we need something or someone to stand in the way. And that's where Jesus Christ comes in. The whole thing is predicated upon the lostness of man, because if man is not lost, then he doesn't need to be saved.

And this is exactly where a lot of people are today in their reasoning that I'm just as good as anybody else. And the truth of the matter is, you are just as good as anybody else, but all the rest of us are lost too.

So that puts everybody on an even keel, and the only hope is in a Savior. And that's what Paul is all about. That's what he's talking about here. That's the gospel that he has called upon to deliver, and we are as well.

So if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, let's follow the logical sequencing here. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, that is empty, worthless, and your faith is also empty and worthless, because you have put your faith in something that has no reality to it.

These are all hypotheticals that he is posing here. It is a what-if kind of thing. Moreover, verse 15, we are even found to be false witnesses of God, which is another way of saying, we're all a bunch of liars, because we have testified to something that is not true.

[15 : 33] And that puts us as false witnesses. We witness against God that he raised Christ whom he did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised.

For if the dead are not raised, then not even Christ has been raised. And if, these are all suppositional, and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless, you are still in your sins.

You're right back to square one. There is no remedy, there is no hope, there is no life, it is all pointless, all worthless. Your faith is empty and void.

And then, those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. And the meaning, the implication, of course, is they have perished permanently.

There is no resurrection. resurrection. Because this, you can take to the bank. If Jesus Christ did not come back from the dead, if he was not raised, why in the world should you think you will be?

[16 : 48] If there was no way the Son of God could manage it, then there is no hope for you or for me. But because he lives, we too shall live.

It's all the difference in the world. those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, if this life and the faith we have in Christ is good, but only for now while you're living, and then when you die, it's all over.

That's the end. There isn't anything. Then, we are, of all men, most to be pitied. We really deserve sympathy and nothing else because we have built our life and our future upon a lie sinking sand.

That's the hypothetical that Paul is preaching here. That's what it would mean to have believed in vain. but now, but now, but now, verse 20, two really precious, priceless words, but now, contrast, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who are asleep.

for since by a man came death, that's Adam, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.

[18 : 36] And I don't know about you, but I am unable to make these alls mean something different. Each all means the same thing as the other alls mean in each of those verses.

We cannot say, well, the all here refers to X all, but the all here refers to a different all. The same all is being talked about and it is a powerful concept.

Christ being the firstfruits is a play on the agricultural concept with which all of these people in the Mideast were familiar because when the crop was planted, the time for harvest came, there were always some stalks of grain that ripened just a little bit before the others.

Maybe they had more nutrients in the soil, maybe they were more positioned to take the sunlight or whatever, but there's always a few things that ripen first and they are called the firstfruits and what the firstfruits indicated was there's going to be a whole lot more to come later.

This is just the beginning. So Christ is the firstfruits of them that slept. He is the initial of the resurrection and his resurrection guarantees as the firstfruits that there's going to be a general harvest.

[20 : 08] All the rest are coming later and Christ is the first one to have been raised from the dead. We know that Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he was not raised with a resurrected body.

He was restored to the body that he had before. As far as we know, I think it is a valid assumption that Lazarus had to die again.

because he didn't have a resurrected body. He had a raised body, but not resurrected. Christ's body was resurrected in that it was glorified.

And none of us here really understand exactly what that means, but we do know that it had to do with a corruptible body putting on incorruption, which means a body that is subject to decay no longer being subject to decay.

That's incorruption. And this mortal body, which means a body that is capable of dying, puts on immortality, which means it is incapable of dying.

[21 : 18] That's the kind of body that Christ came forth from the grave with. That's the kind of body that we are going to receive in the twinkling of an eye when the trumpet sounds and the dead are raised in Christ and we are caught up to be with them in the air.

So shall we ever be with the Lord. This is our hope. And when we use the word hope, we use the word in the biblical sense, not as people use the word hope today.

When we use the word hope, we mean maybe. It's got an if. It's got a question mark with it. We hope that we're going to get sunshine all day long today.

What that means is we really don't know whether we will or not. We may or we may not. It's iffy. It's iffy. The biblical hope has no condition attached to it.

It is an absolute certainty. Kids would call it a slam dunk. It's definite. When Paul says that Christ is in you, the hope of glory, glory, it doesn't mean because Christ is in you, maybe there will be a glorified body and maybe there won't.

[22 : 39] You just have to kind of wait and see. No, no. He never uses a word like that. He uses the word as an absolute certainty. The best word you can use to replace or for a synonym for the biblical word hope is confidence.

Our confidence is in Christ. There is no question mark. Because he lives, we too shall live. If only we have hope, if only our confidence in Christ is for this life only, we are of all men most miserable.

It's a beautiful, beautiful thing. Questions or comments, anybody, before we conclude? Food's going to be here shortly. Any thoughts? Questions?

Kevin? Yeah, at the end of Ephesians, Paul's talking about something that gets us, all of us, in a whole lot of trouble, man.

And you know, I've went through this. And in our church, we're getting ready to go through a change too, because Pastor Coleman is retiring in February. And we got this new, young pastor that's coming in.

[23 : 51] Just like Reverend Coleman was talking, he said, I know some of y'all are going to leave. You know what I mean? Because of his youth. Okay, let's go right here. The 20th verse, the 20th through the 22nd verse.

For which I am an ambassador in bonds, that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak. But that ye also may know my affairs and how I do.

Tychiskus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things. Now this is what Paul said, who I sin.

So that means he's been sitting up under, you know, sitting up under Paul. You know what I mean? Yeah. He's Paul's disciple. Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know your affairs, might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.

Amen. How many times have you seen how I call it, you know, my grandmother used to call it, you paying more attention to the messenger than you paying attention to the message.

[24 : 58] Oh yeah. You know, this person might not be able to fill the void. This is what Paul is telling them, you know, that I want to hear from Paul.

I ain't trying to hear from, anybody know what I'm talking about? Sometimes you have your picks of people that you want to hear from. because you have been hypnotized to the sound of an individual's voice instead of hypnotized.

Anybody ever know what I'm talking about by being hypnotized to the sound of the individual's voice that preach? If that's the only person you want to hear, don't nobody else, can't nobody else give it to you like them, but you never know who God is placed for you to hear because it'll be a child that can come and give you a message that will, you know what I mean, that can help you in life.

But at this time, people have, and especially in this day, anybody know what I'm talking about in this day? You can get hypnotized to the sound of a preacher's voice in a heartbeat that you don't even want to move on in here.

You might see somebody else come in, oh, he can't give it up like him. And I'm just saying, anybody know what I'm talking about? And go elsewhere. where? I'm just, you know, this is what Paul is telling, you know, let the spirit work in you.

[26 : 10] Don't look at the, don't look at the messenger. That's what we have. We have tendencies. I've done that. Don't look at the messenger. You know, that would be like, how can I put this?

There's a church right here, and there's a church right here. St. Marble's saying, Kevin, I'm preaching over here at this church, right here. And I said, Marble, I'm coming. I'll be there, man, you know, with his word.

But across the street, they're having this big old gallery of Big Hinn, Jensen Franklin, T.D. Jakes, all right over across the street. How many of you know would get up and say, well, Marble, something came up, and I just, you know, somebody came up, and I just, but for those, Marble might have the message that you needed to hear because every message ain't even about, might better not be about your situation.

Anybody know what I'm talking about? And that might have been where the message was. You don't look at the messenger. Well, sometimes, sometimes the messenger is very important because sometimes the messenger, I'm speaking from experience.

A church I went to, he had a different style, the pastor had a much different style of delivering that message.

[27 : 31] And when he did not, something was gone, and someone had the substitute for him, that substitute has an entirely different style of delivering that message that made it much more clear to me.

and I'm talking about Pastor Wiseman. He has a much different style than where I was at.

I was, let's see, there was two, three, I can think of three ministers. others. It was from Blessed Hope.

I'm counting Bill Ford as one of them. There was two others. And both my wife and I got much more out of the message.

The way the messenger delivered it, I think is a big, is a big difference. Anybody can get up and read from the Bible and jump around and whatever they want to do.

[28 : 37] Yeah. But when they get into it, invent and explain it to you before it comes to you personally. Right?

Yeah. That can actually work both ways, like he said, because our church experienced just the opposite. We had a great pastor, one that actually started our church, and he died.

And there were so many people in our church that when we went to candidate for pastor, we would get one in, gone. Because they were all expecting him to be judged for one we lost.

Yeah. And that's a bad deal. That's a bad deal. Nobody's going to be the same as somebody else. So that's what he's saying. The message is what's important. Right. And whoever gives it, gives it.

Yeah, I remember, I remember hearing, I think it was Reginald Thomas, if I'm not mistaken, he succeeded Donald Gray Barnhouse at 10th Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia.

[29 : 45] And Barnhouse had an international ministry and a national radio program. And I'll still say to this day, I have never heard anyone speak the king's English in elocution and delivery like Donald Gray Barnhouse.

And when he passed away, I think it was Dr. Reginald Thomas that was called to replace him.

And someone said to him, well, Dr. Thomas, you've got some very big shoes to fill with Donald Gray Barnhouse passing off the scene.

And he said, well, thank you. With all due respect to Dr. Barnhouse, I brought my own shoes. You know, each person has a chemistry, a delivery, and with some people, they connect better than they do with others.

And that's not good or bad, it's just different. That's all. And people are different, and they learn differently, and they perceive differently. And that's something that Paul dealt with when he wrote to the Corinthians in that first chapter.

[31 : 03] He said, word has gotten to me about you folks that there are divisions among you in the congregation there. Some of you are saying, I am of Cephas, that's Peter, and some I am of Apollos, and some I am of Paul.

Paul. They each had their favorites that they lined up behind. And Paul was kind of put off by that. And he said, tell me, was Paul crucified for you?

Where do you get off this thing? I am of this, I am of that. Choosing your favorite kind of preachers. Each one who has a message to deliver has a different style, a different methodology, a different way that he goes about it.

And with some people, that really connects. With others, it doesn't connect so well. And that doesn't make anybody right or wrong, it just says that people are different, and they have different tastes and different preferences, and it's a mix.

But the important thing, as Kevin's pointed out, what has to be kept central is the message. It is the truth that is told more than the truth teller.

[32 : 24] And I'll tell you what, I've come to the conclusion, I really have come to the conclusion, that the Apostle Paul, I don't think, was a captivating speaker at all.

I remember as a young Christian, I would think, boy, I'd give anything to be able to hear Paul preach. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if there aren't a whole host of preachers today that would outshine the Apostle Paul in so far as their delivery and their elocution and everything.

Paul says, I was with you in trembling and in much fear. And they said that his speech wasn't all that great to listen to and he certainly wasn't that great to look at. You know, God, but the thing that made the man was the man's message.

It was critical, that message. And that's what gave him boldness. It wasn't that I am so persuasive and I have such a wonderful way with words and I am a captivating speaker and all that.

I don't think Paul was that at all. I think his success was in that incredible message that he had to deliver. that message of the grace of God was just amazing.

[33 : 32] I think what Frank said, if I might, is you may listen to somebody, you may read this, you may listen to somebody, I still don't understand what I just read, but you can tell me and I understand the subject.

Well, I hope so. I appreciate that. That's why I gave up preaching a long, long time ago and I discovered that I'm not a preacher and I never will be. So I just, satisfied myself with trying to be a teacher and for me that works a lot better.

Yeah, Kevin. This is what Paul is trying to get across to these people, these people right here. If God has no respect among persons, he said he has no respect among no persons, whether you're a preacher, a teacher, whatever, there's no respect among persons.

And he made that clear through Peter. Okay, Jesus was the last one to preach right before he died. In the next sermon that was preached, and you've got to remember that this man that preached on the day of Pentecost denied Christ three times.

That's right. Peter, he preached and 5,000 people came to Christ Jesus through his ministry. Well, I don't know why. Everybody has different annoyances, don't get me wrong, everybody has different annoyances, but the Bible says he didn't have an ear, but listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.

[35 : 02] Amen. I mean the spiritual ear, because if you got the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit teaches you everything, that means you should be able to comprehend whether it's Lutheran, whatever, it's all about Christ is being preached, you should be able to understand in some way if the Spirit is leading you.

Amen. Thank you. Thank you, Kevin. Hey, I appreciate you all being here this morning and enjoy your breakfast and the day ahead.