

## *“Ephesians & You: You Belong Here”*

### **The Family of God - Ephesians 3:8-13**

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**Jeff:** Well, I greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Let me encourage you, those Brave Men who attend the study, to be looking at the website, to be looking at the prayer requests. Sig is updating that and keeping us up to date with all of those concerns that we have for one another. Be lifting those up to the Lord, and hopefully we'll be able to meet together soon.

With that in mind, I wanted to say that I really miss all of you. But I have come to miss the harassment of Don Maurer. I didn't realize how crucial and essential that is to the vitality of this study. But when I'm here all alone and I don't get the harassment, the verbal tomatoes from Don, there's a sense in which I just don't know how to function in this role. So that being said, that's a particular struggle that I'm having. But hopefully that struggle will come to an end and Don will be able to take up his harassment sometime soon. We'll all hope for that.

Well, let's pray now, and then we'll turn to the reading of the Scriptures and get to our study. So let's pray together.

Our heavenly Father, thank You for this day, for the time You've given. Thank You for Your Lordship. And thank You that You exercise sovereignty over all of creation. We never forget that. And yet in hard providences that sometimes taxes us. But Father, rather than tax us, we pray that we would embrace these difficult providences. And we ask that we would come out all the stronger for them. Help us, Father, to be conformed to Christ's image by the power of the Spirit whom You've deposited in us, that we might indeed look more like Him. Let us be like the man of Psalm 112, the man who hears troubling news and is not distraught or troubled by it. Help us to remain steadfast and standing upon the Rock which is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And as we turn to Your word which is truth, we pray that we would take firm footing there, and that we would find a place not only to stand, but that we would find a place wherein we can be courageous. So Father, we ask and pray that with boldness You will give to us Your word and bless us in it, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, let me first of all talk to you about where we've been, and then where we're going. I said to you the last time that I was going to make these segments a bit shorter than normal. And I think that helps you to be able to watch them. I hope it helps you to be able to watch them and to be able to take a short period of time and sit down and invest in them.

Well, one of the things that I talked to you about the last time we were together as we looked at chapter 3 was something really important. I said that in chapter 3 what you need to understand is that we are on the last chapter of the first section. And that first section is chapters 1-3. The last section or the second section is chapters 4, 5 and 6.

What is it that divides up the book of Ephesians into that general way? Well, something very simple: it's grammar. In the first three chapters, one of the things that you learn is that all of the statements there are in the indicative. In other words, the statements

## ***“Ephesians & You: You Belong Here”***

there that Paul uses are statements wherein he tells us what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. “This is what I’ve done for you.”

And then in chapters 4, 5 and 6 we find a bunch of imperative statements. In other words, these are commands. This is what is expected of you.

There’s a sense in which we can understand the book of Ephesians as being built on the covenantal phrase “I will be your God and you will be My people.”

Now I want you to think about that statement, that covenantal phrase. “I will be your God, and this is how I will be your God. This is how I have been your God. These are the things that I’ve done for you. Now you will be My people, and this is how. And here are the imperatival statements that will help you to understand how it is that you will be My people.”

It’s interesting that the Westminster Confession of Faith, a document that was written in the 1640s, is divided up in that very same way. For instance, if you look at the section on soteriology, the section on how a person is saved, it’s very interesting; it’s divided up in an interesting way. For instance, in chapter 10 you have effectual calling and then justification, then adoption, then sanctification.

Now the interesting thing about it is what’s missing. Well, what’s missing is what comes in chapter 14 after the chapter on sanctification. In chapter 14 you have saving faith and then repentance, and then good works, and then perseverance of the saints, and then assurance of grace, and then the law of God, and so on.

Now oftentimes commentators commenting on the Westminster Confession will take chapters 14 and 15, on saving faith and repentance, and take them all the way back to chapter 10, and say, well, when we think about an *ordo salutis*, or an order of salvation, we typically think about effectual calling, and then conversion, and then justification, and so on. And so conversion is faith and repentance.

Now why is it that something like what we have here in the Table of Contents of the Westminster Confession is as it is? Well, the simple answer is this. What the divines or the theologians of Westminster are doing is dividing up for us their understanding of the way of salvation. They’re dividing it up for us in a covenantal way. “I will be your God and you will be My people.” In other words, this is how I’ve been your God. How? By effectually calling you, by justifying you, by adopting you and sanctifying you.

“Now you be My people. How is it that you are My people?” By exercising faith and repentance and good works, and so on. It’s a covenantal phrase that’s often used, not just in the Scriptures but, for instance, in the Confession itself.

So what we find then is that there is this way of understanding the book of Ephesians, the indicatives and the imperatives. Now the interesting thing is this. When you look at the book in that way, you come to chapter 3 and you realize that Paul is talking to us about the gift of the ministry. And you think about that not in terms of imperatives; we’re not to the imperatives yet. But you think about that in terms of indicatives. And so this is what God has done. He has gifted you with the ministry.

Now I want us to continue thinking about that this time. We thought about how ministry is a gift to us the last time. And now we’re going to think about how ministry

## ***“Ephesians & You: You Belong Here”***

connects us this time. And so I want to read to you from Ephesians chapter 3, and I’ll read verses 8-13. So listen to God’s word.

*“To me, though I am the very least of all the saints this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that He has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in Him. “So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.”*

Well, let’s just think about that particular section. And let’s think about that particular section under the idea of how ministry connects us with one another. And the thing I want you to notice is this. I want you to notice how it was that Paul had ministered his gifts.

You know, we oftentimes think about our own giftedness in the way of discovery. In other words, we discover what it is that we’ve been gifted with. Well, for Paul we need to remember that Paul helps us to understand that what is true for him is not just true for him, but it’s indeed true of us. And that is that God gifted him for the ministry. In other words, God gave him gifts in order to exercise them in His church. In other words, this is what God has done for us. He has given gifts to us that we might obey God and minister to the body.

So Paul helps us to understand that we have been gifted and he has been gifted. For instance, in verse 8 he tells us that he has been gifted to preach, in verse 9 to bring the light of the gospel to people. All of this is because he has been gifted. And in verse 10 he has been gifted to bring the wisdom of God not just to the church but to the entire world. So Paul has been gifted to preach. And he has been gifted to preach to bring light and wisdom.

There’s something else I want you to notice. When you look at verse 10, notice what he says. These gifts are to be exercised through the church. In other words, Paul sees himself as very committed to the church of Jesus Christ. That’s important, because no matter what other organization or parachurch ministry we are a part of, we need to remember that those ministries were not ordained by God. Those ministries aren’t in Scripture. The ministry that God ordains is the ministry of the church. That’s vital; it’s important; it’s Biblical. And Paul reminds us that his gifts were exercised first and foremost through the church. And so we need to understand that as we look at this text.

Now we need to understand then that the practice of spiritual gifts connects the people in the church to one another. I think that’s an important note about what Paul is saying. He’s not just saying, for instance, that he could satisfy the use so his spiritual gift by going to the marketplace and standing there and preaching to a vacuum of people. I mean, that is certainly a part of his giftedness. He does go to the Areopagus and he does talk to others. And that’s part of his giftedness, to proclaim light to a dark world. But that’s not the only part of his giftedness.

For instance, in the beginning of Romans he tells them, “I long to come to you and preach the gospel to you.” Now this is a church, a church that ought to know the gospel

## ***“Ephesians & You: You Belong Here”***

already. Why is it that he wants to come and preach the gospel to them? Well, the answer to that is amazingly easy and ought to be grasped by every Christian—that is, we need the gospel regularly. We ought to be preaching the gospel to ourselves regularly, because it’s something that we need on a daily basis. And so, in part, that’s the reason why.

But there’s another aspect to this. Paul understands that the exercise of his gifts connects not only him to others, but others to others. So he understands the connected nature of the giftedness that he has received. And he also understands that about others.

What about others? That’s a question I think we need to ask at this point. What about us? How is it that we fit into this chapter? Well, I think if you move ahead to chapter 4 and what I showed you the last time, he says to us in verse 7 of chapter 4 that “*grace was given to each one of us*” as well. In other words, it’s not just Paul that was given the grace. It’s not just Paul that was gifted with a spiritual gift to bring connection to the church, but to each one of us has been given a gift of grace, that we might also connect the church.

And we need to remember that. You see, spiritual gifts aren’t something that I decide upon. They’re something decided upon already. God decided upon the gift to be given to me. There’s a sense, then, in which I need to discover, as it were, what God has given to me. And I think that’s where people get tripped up. I think that oftentimes people take spiritual gift tests, and they sort of wander around and wander which gifts they have, and so on.

And yet I think that the process is fairly easy. I don’t think it’s as difficult as some make it. For instance, the question that one has to ask—and there are a series of questions that one might ask in terms of guidelines that will lead you into your spiritual giftedness--,but one of the questions that one might ask is something like this. And it comes right out of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. Again, it’s one of those documents that was written in the 1600s. That document begins with the question very simply. How do I glorify God and enjoy Him forever? And it’s that aspect of *glorify* and *enjoy* that I want you to think about.

For instance, when I think about spiritual giftedness, I’m really asking that twofold question. What is it that will glorify God, and what is it that I enjoy? A lot of people are allergic to that last part. They think that if they enjoy it that it can’t be any good. But that’s not the case, especially if you enjoy something that brings glory to God. I mean, if you do something that you hate, I would say to you as a pastor that that’s probably not your spiritual gift. If you say to me that exercising your spiritual gift is hard, that’s another matter. But if you say, “I can’t stand what it is that I do,” I would say that maybe you’re not exercising your spiritual gift. Maybe you’re in the wrong spot. It needs to be something that glorifies God and that you enjoy.

And so let’s talk about that for a minute. First of all, let’s ask the question. How do we know what glorifies God? Well, we know what glorifies God by knowing the Scriptures. In other words, when we look at the Scriptures we find what it is that glorifies God. If we enjoy something sinful we can’t say that is our spiritual gift to practice. We can’t say, “Well, I enjoy this particular sin and I’m good at it. Therefore it must be the spiritual gift that I’ve been given.” It can’t be.

## ***“Ephesians & You: You Belong Here”***

Unfortunately for some people, you find this in humorous ways, but not so humorous in terms of their practice. For instance, I once had someone say to me—and I’m being very serious at this point!—they came to me and they said, “I think my spiritual gift is the gift of criticism.” Well, I don’t know how that edifies the body. I don’t know how that upbuilds people. You could argue that it’s a constructive criticism. But I think that the moment you begin to talk about your spiritual gift as being the gift of criticism, telling other people how they can be better in doing what they’re doing, I think that you are missing the point of Scripture’s teaching.

So what is it that glorifies God? Well, the Bible tells us: it gives us guidelines. It doesn’t actually tell us that this is what you should do and this is what you should do. But we know what it is that glorifies God by looking at the Scriptures.

Now we also ask ourselves well, what is it that I enjoy? In other words, for instance, if I’m liberal in my giving and I really enjoy being liberal in my giving, Romans 12 speaks to that. Or if I’m really good at administration, or if I’ve really been gifted in teaching and so on, these are the things that not only glorify God, but if I enjoy them, well then, I’m in the ballpark. And I need to be exercising them. And so glorifying God and enjoying Him in what I do, that’s important.

Another question that you might ask is, is this serving others? Am I finding that others see the things that I do as very fruitful and helpful? And I think that’s important as well.

Have I sought counsel about it? In other words, have I asked people? Am I very good at this? Am I exercising wishful thinking? Am I not really good at this and hopeful that I would be, that sort of thing? Have I sought counsel from honest people around me?

And then the question is this. Is there a place for me? And I think this takes humility. For instance, if there’s not a place for me at the moment, maybe I need to wait. And maybe I need to help in a way that actually uses my gifts, but actually helps to serve others. Am I good at waiting is what I’m really asking.

And so if you’ve asked those questions, let me give you some guidelines as they come from our text that may help you in the process of answering those questions. First of all, I think that what you want to do is to *find ways to practice your spiritual gift*. In other words, find ways to practice what God has given you to practice. You have to cultivate it, and cultivate what you’re doing with a purpose. Chapter 4, verse 11, talks about how teachers and preachers of the Word are there to equip people to better serve the body of Christ. You need to find a way and a place to practice your spiritual gift.

Ephesians 3:13 tells us something else. It tells us not to lose heart. Paul says, “Don’t lose heart because I’m suffering for you. Don’t lose heart because I’m practicing my spiritual gift.”. You don’t lose heart either. And I think that’s important for us. In the practice of our spiritual gifts, the development of our spiritual gifts, we can’t lose heart.

The other thing is that *we need to practice humility and reputation*. What do I mean by that? Well, simply this. In 2 Kings 3, verse 11, we find that Elijah is the successor of Elijah.

**Transcriber’s Note:** 2 Kings 3:11, NKJV. “*But Jehoshaphat said, ‘Is there no prophet of the LORD here, that we might inquire of the LORD by him?’ So one of the servants of*

## ***“Ephesians & You: You Belong Here”***

*the king of Israel answered and said, ‘Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah.’”*

**Jeff:** And yet Elisha is known by what he used to do when he served Elijah. He used to pour water over his hands. In other words, when the king remembers Elisha, he remembers him as a servant to Elijah.

Now that’s a wonderful way to be remembered. Here’s this great prophet. Elisha was a greater prophet than was Elijah. And yet he’s remembered by his servant attitude before he was this great prophet. That should characterize us at every point.

The other thing I would say to you is this. *Be a good steward.* In Matthew chapter 25 you have that parable of the talents. One is given five talents, another given two talents, and then another given the one. And you know the story. The one who has five talents doubles his talent. The one who has two doubles his talent. The one who has one doesn’t use his talent. And the point is that we’re to be good stewards with the gifts that God has given to us—not poor stewards but good stewards with the gifts that God has given.

And one last thing that I want to say to you that I think is rather important, and that is this. *You’ll get tired.* But don’t lose heart, because the grace of God who gifted you with the gift that you have will sustain you in its practice. And you’ll bring connectivity to the people of God in the practice of that gift by His grace. Well, the Lord bless you until we meet again.