

Ephesians 14-05-11a

This is Sunday, the 11th of May, 2014. We're in the book of Ephesians, chapter 4. We have come to verse 9. Let's take a moment to prepare ourselves and to make sure that we're ready to concentrate and to benefit from the truth of God that He has put in this particular part of His Word on this particular page at this time in our circumstances and with our current set of challenges. This is a tremendously significant part of God's Word, and whether you look at our situation globally, nationally, community-wide, or in our own homes and in our own individual souls, the things that Paul is covering here are very pertinent.

They're very applicable. You cannot find all Scripture as God-breathed and profitable, but there are times when there is a powerful energy drink right in the middle of God's Word, and this is one of those passages. If you couldn't take your whole Bible off to some far-off place, you'd want to grab this set of pages and have it with you as part of the essentials.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer, and then we'll begin. Father, thank You for the many ways that You have expressed Your grace toward us in these preceding days. We thank You for provision.

We thank You for preservation. We thank You for keeping us safe and keeping us healthy. We thank You for the challenges that You have sent our way, the things that You have allowed through the wall of fire to benefit us, to bless us, to help us to grow, and to renew our appreciation for You and for all of the wonderful blessings that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank You for Him. We thank You for His example, His willingness to leave the realms of glory and walk in our midst and show us how the Christian life can be lived in the presence and power of Your Spirit and in the power of the truth of Your living Word. We pray that as we look at this section of the book of Ephesians this morning that we will, each of us, be able to see and understand the truth that it contains, that it will motivate us, that it will enliven our view of what this life is and why You have given it to us.

We pray that as we try to live in its light that we will be a blessing to each other, that we can be a blessing to those that surround us, and that we can reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus in the time that remains to us in this life. We pray it in His name. Amen.

Ephesians chapter 4, Paul beseeches us to walk worthy of our calling, endeavoring to keep unity, because there is one body and one spirit. And the body of Christ, the one body, is us, we. Look to your left, look to your right, look behind you, look in front of you.

This is the local body of Christ. And it is the, you know, there isn't a good synonym for relationship, really, and it's one of the most overused words in the English language. In the Christian community we say fellowship, but it is the dealings we have with one another, the time we spend, the words we say, the attitudes we express, what we do and don't do with respect to one another.

That's relationship. And this is where this truth lives and breathes. This is where our calling is expressed.

You cannot fully enter into the Christian calling and the Christian walk without fellow believers. I've told you before that I have always had a great admiration for the Boy Scouts, scouting and everything that it stood for, especially in its earlier days and up until, and still really, a lot of the core values that it stands for are the best things about being an American, the best things about being a Christian in terms of selfless dedication, of honing your skills, doing and being your very best. And they organize scouts as troops.

You have a scout troop and you have troop leaders and you do scouting with other scouts. That's kind of how it works. If you're way off in an area where there are no troops, they've got this, what I consider to be a rather anemic program called the Lone Wolf Scout, at least they did back when I was a kid because I looked into it.

I wanted to be a scout. My dad had been involved in scouting. I knew lots of people that I admired that had been scouts.

I wanted to do it. Well, there weren't any out there in the wilds of Rogers County. So I got to looking around.

There wasn't an internet. I went to the library and looked it up and they said, well, we've got the, you know, if there's no troop in your area, you can be a Lone Wolf Scout. Well, that utterly discouraged me.

I didn't want to wander around in the woods trying to camp by myself using, you know, I've got my shelter half but then nobody else has got the other half. You build the whole thing yourself, you know, light the fire, try to earn the badges and mail stuff off by, it's like scouting by correspondence. I mean, are you kidding? You just can't be a scout all off by yourself.

It's a, it's a group, it's a troop. You, a big part of it is learning to work with other people. You've got, you know, a variety of people from all backgrounds and they're brought together by these common goals and these common skills.

And one of the biggest benefits of it is learning to work in and through that community. Wonderful program. Well, the whole Lone Wolf thing, it doesn't work and it doesn't work in Christianity either.

You can't be a Lone Wolf Scout for long. You may be by the brook Cherith and the crows may come by and drop you a morsel every now and again, but you notice that wasn't Elijah's whole ministry. He was there a while.

Jesus went out into the wilderness by himself for 40 days, but he didn't stay there. He didn't, you know, write stuff down on scraps of papyrus and send it back to, to train the disciples and to

preach the gospel of the kingdom in Israel, did he? It is community that is important. And whether you do it just simply for the sake of it, psychologically, whether you just do it spiritually or whether you do it geographically, isolationism is not an option in the Christian walk.

The genuine biblical person of faith is going to be connected to and cultivate connection to the rest of the body. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is. Why do we have that injunction? If people, you know, beach over the head with that, I used to, you know, be off hither and yon and well, have you found a church? Have you visited any? Well, yeah, I visited and I didn't like them, so I'm just going solo.

I'm, you know, playing a tape every now and again. That's my, that's my walk. You may have circumstances where that's the case, but not for long.

And we should always be looking. If you're a healthy young person in your late teens and early twenties and you don't have a steady boyfriend or girlfriend, there are times when you can't really be searching. However, you are going to be watching for opportunities to get back and engage in that search, yes? It's not like, well, you know, the monastic life really appeals to me.

You know, I've been down that road. I spent 15 years in that mode. And yes, there are times when you can't be actively prosecuting a meaningful dating life, but you are constantly watching for opportunities to do so because this is the way you're built.

If you are a healthy, red-blooded, heterosexual, American young man, you are going to want to date. If you are a healthy, red-blooded, American heterosexual girl, you are going to want to date, yes? Yes. Amen.

Yes. This is normal. We're not designed to walk around half a person.

You find that opposite, and of course the search is fun. You know, looking is fun. Finding is even more fun.

And being with for the rest of your days is the most fun. It just gets better. Looking is good.

Finding is better. Being with is the best. But you are always thinking about that.

It is part of the definition of your healthy life. This is an analogy, by the way, a biblical analogy for the healthy believer. Yes, there are times when you're not going to be able to find people to do one another stuff with.

Love one another. Pray for one another. Put the interests of one another ahead of your own.

Sometimes the others are elsewhere. But like any healthy, red-blooded believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are going to be looking for and cultivating and exploiting any opportunities to do that that come your way. You have to.

This is the calling. You're not a clipped fingernail of the body of Christ. You're an integral part interconnected with.

The reason I'm emphasizing this now, it is being really, the background has been painted, and Paul is now focusing and homing in on this, and the rest of this letter is going to be emphasizing this point. So we want to be ready for it. There is one body and one spirit, verse 4, just as you were called in one hope of your calling.

Y'all were called in one hope of your calling. One God and Father of all, above all, through all, and in all. I ran across somebody commenting on verse 6, and they said, well, even though the better manuscripts don't have you in there, you see you've got a little text note there, in you all, the reason people are more comfortable having it in there is they're afraid of pantheism.

You know what pantheism is? It's not the God Pan, the flute-playing God. It's like Pan-American. It means universal everywhere.

God is in everything. God is in the rocks. God is in the trees.

I'm worshiping God on the golf course on Sunday morning. You know, the preachers always bring this up. You can't go worship God on the golf course, even though you've got a great tea time, and you're out with the grass and the trees and the birds and watching the sunrise.

Well, I'm communing with God. You know, that's sort of a pantheistic idea. Well, God is in nature, isn't He? And I'll just worship Him in nature.

No. The in all here is in all of what we're talking about. God is in everything.

God is in everything we're talking about. Context. You don't just rip this verse out, put it on a flag and say, God is in all.

He's in a moon rock. He's in a piece of space debris. He's in the missing leg on this cricket crawling by.

Wherever His leg is, God is in that leg. God is in, you know, the amoeba. God is in anything you can think of.

Well, God is in it. That's not what this is saying, and that's not true. That's an abuse of the doctrine of omnipresence.

God is above all, through all, and in all, meaning that His power, His purpose, His design, His knowledge, all of the omni-attributes of God, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, there's nothing that escapes Him. There's nothing that's outside His control. There's nothing that happens without His permission.

He's above it, He's through it, and He's in it. God is in it in the immaterial sense, in the conceptual sense. So that you can't look at a circumstance and say, where is God? It's not valid.

But to each one of us, grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, it says, when He ascended on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Now, this He ascended, what does it mean? Really natural progression here in this letter Paul wrote.

Now this He ascended that I just quoted from the Psalm, Psalm 68, what does it mean? Well, your normal thing is, oh, remember, you know, He went out to the Mount of Olives and this, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye here gazing into the heavens? Well, you can kind of ask that about people who come to this next verse and spill dead seas of ink, worrying about the ascending and the descending. Well, how far did He ascend? How far did He descend? And that's the real question. People lose all sight of what's going on in the argument, in the passage, in the discussion, in the exhortation that Paul is giving, because what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? Well, lower parts of the earth.

Is it just the earth, meaning He emptied Himself, took on the form of a servant, came in the presence of men, or does it mean He went to Hades? And between the time that He died on the cross and the time He rose from the grave on Sunday morning, He went down and preached to the souls in prison. And this is the passage that says He descended into the lower parts of the earth. And there's a grammatical argument that is made here.

It's not so easy. You know my discussion on this from times past. This is just talking about Jesus was in heaven, He came to earth.

The lower parts are this earth. You and I live in the lower parts, i.e., the earth. However, there's a grammatical Greek argument here that says, because He, in verse 10, He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens.

Well, if He ascent, you know, I thought He ascended into heaven. Did you ever overshoot a thing? Ascending into heaven, whoop, went too far. I missed heaven.

I'm above it now. I'm beyond heaven. Got to back up.

You know, I was shooting for the turn and I got to put it in reverse, back up and make that left. I've gone too far. This is what verse 10 says.

It says He ascended above the heavens, plural. First heaven, second heaven, third heaven. Is there a fourth heaven or a seventh heaven or where did He go? It says He went far above the heavens.

Well, the grammatical parallel here is, if He ascended above the heavens, then He descended below the earth. See the logic of it? Above the heavens, below the earth, the idea being

comprehensiveness. Why did I belabor the over all, through all and in all for the Father? Because the same is true of the Son.

He is above all. He is through all and He is in all. Remember back at the end of chapter 1 of Ephesians? He put all things under the Lord Jesus' feet and gave Him to be head over all to the church.

Notice things is in italics there, last verse of chapter 1. God the Father put all under Jesus' feet and set Him over all to the church, which is His body, the church which is His body. Hands up anybody that's not church. Notice how I always ask the question so you don't have to raise your hand.

Everybody here is church, right? So you are His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Paul is revisiting the same concept, same concept. Back in chapter 4, this ascended, what does it mean? But that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth.

He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things, that He might be the fullness of Him who fills all in all. You see the connection, right? Why is Paul connecting back to that idea of chapter 1? Why is he connecting back to that? He is connecting back to it, yes? Would you agree? Hello? Would you agree that he's making the same point that he made at the end of chapter 1? He is, right? Why? Why here? Why now? I'm getting all ready to try to be peaceable to everybody and not divide and unity of the spirit, the bond of peace. I'm trying to figure out how to do that.

He's going back to this abstruse theological stuff about Jesus all in all, through all, above all, around all, under all, over all. Why is he going back to this abstraction when I thought we had turned the corner into the practical stuff? Because this is how you do it. You can't do it if you don't maintain an awareness of where Jesus is.

So like the Father, where was Jesus in the first advent? Born in Bethlehem, 33 years, where was He? He was here, right? He had a body. Where is Jesus now? The true living Lord, the Logos, that was in the beginning with God and was God, where is He now? He is above, He is below, He is in and through. He is all things, what's the last part of Ephesians 1 say? To whom? To the church.

That's we, that's us. He is ubiquitous for the church. So if He's everywhere, what is the local expression of Jesus going to be? He's not going to show up at the pool of Bethesda and do a healing.

He's not going to show up on the mountain and call the disciples to Himself. He's not going to go to another mountain and be transfigured. He's not going to go to Samaria and sit by the well.

Because He is over all, in all, through all, where? The church. The church is going to go to the

mountaintop. The church is going to go to the pool.

The church is going to the Samaritans. It's us. He is now operating in His Godhood, His Godhead.

The fullness of deity in bodily form isn't here. We are the bodily form now. So Paul is reminding us in Ephesians chapter 4, look, if somebody is going to be the Lord Jesus on this earth, He has ascended.

He first descended and did His work here and opened the way, but now He has ascended. And it's important to remember, Jesus is not here. You don't hand off through prayer, let's say, ministry that we ourselves are supposed to be doing.

Oh Lord, there's a person in need. Help them. Jesus is not going to descend again and go help that person.

This is sort of the rationale that Paul is using. If you see an opportunity and there's someone whose interests can be served, you are Jesus for that person. You are the body.

And this is the one anotherness. If somebody is going to do it, don't throw the request to heaven and wait for Jesus to come down. It's us.

We do what the body of Christ does, which is minister and be a blessing and represent the fullness of deity in bodily form. This is why we offer our bodies, Romans 12, 1 and 2, that we reviewed, a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. What did Jesus do with His body? His original first advent body, what did Jesus do with that body? He offered it to His Father, holy and acceptable.

Was Jesus conformed to the world? No. He transformed the world. And this is what we are to do.

Be transformed by the renewing of our mind. Take out the mind of the flesh. Take out the mind of the normal human being that's looking out for number one and I'm going to get mine and I'm going to put up the defenses and I've got my interlocking fields of fire.

Anybody crosses into my zone, I'm going to riddle them with bullets because I'm taking care of myself. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Let this mind be in you, which was in Christ Jesus, because we're His body.

So He's going back to that Ephesians 1, in Him we have, in Him we are. In Him, the seventh branched menorah candlestick of God's glory. In Him.

He is over all, through all, in you all. Therefore He says, when He ascended on high, He led captivity captive. Captivity is kind of like the captors.

It's a difficult thing to explain and I'm just going to summarize it. When it says He led captivity, just

think captors. Who are the captors? He led the captors captive.

This is going to the Japanese prison camp and capturing the guards and capturing the guys who run the camp. They used to be the ones who controlled the prisoners. They are now prisoners being controlled by a greater force.

He led captivity, the captors captive. What is the captivity that He's talking about? The short answer is, the world, the flesh and the devil. The principalities and powers, the rulers of the darkness of this age have been taken captive.

Their power has been taken from them. When they went into the German death camps at the end of World War II, invaded Germany and released the few survivors they had in Dachau and Buchenwald and some of these other prison camps and took them captive, what did they do? They took away their power to inflict harm and to dictate horrific terms on the lives of other human beings. That's what the Lord Jesus has done to all the things that control us.

You remember back in the previous chapter, we once walked to, according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, those who are still captive to that power. It's the power in our flesh. It's the power of darkness around us.

That is the captivity. You can't escape it. How do you escape your own corrupt flesh? How do you escape the prince of the power of the air and the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age? Are you going to get in a rocket and go somewhere? You can't escape.

It is captivity. We are under its sway and under its power. The Lord Jesus took that whole system captive.

He controls it. Notice, He did not slay it. He took it captive.

In the second camp, He took it captive. He took it captive and He made it a slave. So He is the Lord of us.

So He is the Lord. And there's a moment in the book of Kings chapter 6 when Elisha leads the blinded Syrians, the sort of selectively blinded Syrians, into Samaria and presents them to King Joram. What does he say? Joram says, "'Shall I smite? Shall I smite?' Their time is not yet.

But aren't they the enemy? Won't they be back later on? Won't these same guys come back as a part of the siege in the very next section, verse 24 and following? Of course they will. Well, why didn't Elisha say, smite them, you've got them in your power, let's annihilate them. They are serving a purpose.

They have a bigger purpose than just being eliminated. Elisha didn't capture them so that, well, the army is that much smaller, you know, we're going to take them one at a time. No, they serve a

purpose.

They are going to be an object lesson. Their treatment and their release sends a powerful message to the northern kingdom. God uses them rather than just smiting them.

Smiting them is simplistic. It's one-ply thinking. It's moving one pawn on the chessboard with no thought for what damage that might cause to your position later on.

If you've castled your king, a little rule of thumb, don't move the pawns in front of him unless you're in real dire straits because that's your little line of defense. You've got three little pawns there. It's very difficult to attack the king.

You've got to kill a whole bunch of other guys and run a pawn down there to trap him behind his pawns. But those pawns serve a purpose. So don't move them.

You know, it's strategy. God leaves the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age in place. If Jesus triumphed over them, if He's taken them captive, why hasn't He just eliminated them? Why are we still living in a world that's got principalities and powers and rulers of darkness? Did you ever ask yourself that question? If the cross finished it, why isn't it finished? We've had 2,000 years of history since the cross and there's demons all over the place.

There's Satan that's holding sway. There's corruption. There's evil.

There's all of this stuff everywhere. If Jesus accomplished the victory on the cross, why hasn't He consummated the deal? Why hasn't He finished off the victory? Why didn't He slaughter the enemies? Why isn't the blood as high as the horse's bridles? Why aren't we taking seven months to bury the dead? Why is this still going on? Notice what it says. He took them captive.

They are captive. When something is captive, it's not dead. Well, I found those corpses out there and I took them all captive.

I'm dragging them behind my chariot here. Notice these captive corpses? The captives are alive. Why are they alive? Well, for whatever purpose suits you, but you have chosen to make them captives and not dead.

God in heaven, the Lord Jesus Christ, had decided that the principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this age are more useful at this time alive than dead, active than gone. But He has them captive. They are under His control.

You saw the bridge on the River Kwai, right? They had those captive prisoners, but they decided they could use them as manpower to build a bridge. Poor Alec Guinness. He gets so wrapped up in the mission, he kind of forgets there's a war going on.

And that's the big idea in that movie, is you get so occupied with what's right in front of your face

that you forget the bigger picture. And it's a great movie in that respect. He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men.

We covered that from the Psalm last time. It's a transformation of the passage. The original says, He received gifts from men.

Now He's giving gifts to men. In verse 9, Paul explains why he has made that change. What is this He ascended? What does it mean? Well, He didn't ascend until He first descended to the lower parts of the earth.

If He had stayed in heaven the whole time, the whole ascending, descending thing would not pertain. But if He ascended, He had to descend first, because we know His origin is heavenly, equality with God. So if it says He ascended, well, He had to first descend to these lower parts.

He who descended is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things. If He had stayed here and not ascended, He could still be Jesus walking about, doing good, healing, preaching, you know, sermons on mounts, handing out proliferations of bread and so on. But it was necessary that He leave so that He might fill all things, the all things of Ephesians 1. He has delegated the operations of one who is in the lower parts of the earth to you and me.

This is your identity. This is your mission. You are not here to do what you think you are here to do.

You are here to be the body of Christ manifesting the fullness of deity in bodily form. The Lord Jesus is back in His heavenly role, filling all things and being all things to the church. He took the captivity that restricted us and kept us from being able to be useful or be a reflection of God's glory.

He took that captive. He's dragged it off and taken it away. That power no longer constrains us.

It no longer limits us. It no longer prevents us from doing our mission. We have been released.

We have been set free. Set free to do what? Be the body. Be the unified body that has one spirit, one mind, and it is the spirit of Christ and it is the mind of Christ.

We are here for no other reason. This is why I said at the beginning, thinking about the lone wolf scout idea, Jesus didn't spend His whole earthly ministry in the desert. Did He often go by Himself for different things? He did.

What happened when Jesus was by Himself? Personal development, personal growth, if you will, personal spiritual reckonings. He goes out to be tested by Satan. This hardens and strengthens His spiritual condition.

He often leaves the disciples and goes off to do what? What does Jesus do when He leaves the disciples? Pray. These are things, we look at the Lord Jesus who is our example and we say, well, if I find myself in an isolation case, what can I do? What should I be doing? Why would God have me by myself? One thing is, I can pray. I can look for guidance in and through the spirit and the word that I have to be sure that I am on the right track.

I can examine myself and make sure I am in the faith. I can keep short accounts. I can learn and grow in grace and knowledge.

I can avail myself of the freedom from distractions of people to focus and to concentrate and to practice the things I have already learned to be that reflection. If I'm not in the classroom and if I'm not with other learning, growing people, maybe I am out there as point man. Maybe the reason I don't see anybody else is I'm on point.

Maybe I am in the rear because I'm wounded and I'm ineffective. Maybe I'm not ready to go out and it's time for me to heal up. It's time for me to mend broken bones.

It's time for me to wait until they can take the stitches out and then I can go back. There are reasons to be in isolation. They are all temporary.

They are all temporary because we are a body and our calling is to function collectively, mutually supporting because we are still made of flesh and it is dangerous to remain too long on your own. Jonah stayed on his own and started getting weird ideas. Moses was out on his own and started getting weird ideas.

David was out on his own and started getting weird ideas. It is not good to be isolated from the people of God. It is not good to be isolated from the fellowship and from the body because you can't do the one another's and others can't do the one another's for you.

You've got to maintain. You've got to be looking for. Think of it like dating.

How hard is it to say, boy, you know, I think I might go join a club. Maybe I'll join a church. Maybe I'll go out, circulate, be where people are because I'm hungry for that sort of companionship, that sort of fellowship, that sort of interaction.

I'm built for it and I miss it. I would love to have the company of somebody besides my fellow Marines or whoever it might be. It's natural and it is natural for a believer to seek out the assembly, the fellowship, the company of other believers.

Iron sharpens iron. A man sharpens the countenance of his friend. God blesses in ways.

Why? Because of these gifts. It's the gifts. There is a divine dynamic.

There is a divine power in the gift that you have. Every single one of you has a special gifting

from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. We are in Him.

And because we're in Him, we have this divine energeo, this divine creteo, this divine dunamis, those five powers that He talked about in Ephesians 1, in all, in you all, to the church. He is the head, but we're connected to Christ. And because of that, we have a unique supernatural ability to bless other believers.

You may not know how. You may not be able to put a name on it, but it is there. If you're a body of Christ, you know, people have often wanted to, you know, is there any of the Lord's DNA? You know, if we could find a piece of the true cross and get some blood, you know, we could... Seriously, there are people who want to go to the Catholic relics and they think, well, some of the ones might be real.

Could we get the Lord's DNA? You know, what was this? Listen, you and I are body of Christ. And because of our connection to Christ, we have something that isn't physical, it's spiritual. And it is a gift.

It is unique to you. You can do it in ways that nobody else can. You are able to be a ministry.

You are able to be a blessing uniquely where God has placed you, when God has placed you. And to fail that opportunity is to miss the calling. It is to not walk worthy.

So, we don't want to miss it. That's why we're in this passage. That's why this passage is one of those pages, if you're going to be Robinson Crusoe-ing it, take this page with you so that you can think about it and meditate on it, because you're not going to be Robinson Crusoe for long.

You're going to be connected with other people in the body, and if you're by yourself for very long, it is just a chance to get ready, to improve, to be loaded up and have a full charge on your spiritual batteries for when you are reconnected with the body. It is always, biblically I tell you this, it is always temporary. You will be with believers.

You are now with believers. And you've got to be ready. There is a divine energeo in you that is designed to benefit, designed to bless, designed to fulfill the calling and reflect the glory of Jesus Christ, and there's nothing better than fulfilling and exercising that gift and that calling.

Nothing better. It is the purpose for which we are made. Let's pause here and take our break.