

Therefore Is There for a Reason?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Bible Text: Ephesians 4:1
Preached On: Monday, August 26, 2019

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This morning, many of you will be relieved when I make this statement: please open your Bible to the book of Ephesians. Now for those of you that are guests and visitors, you may not understand the significance of that but we are in the midst of walking through a Bible reading plan here as a family of faith and for the last several months we have been in the minor prophets of the Old Testament, we have been in places of our Bibles where rarely, if ever, we have opened to those pages, but today is Ephesians, today is one of those books of the Bible inspired by the Lord, utilized through the hand and the pen of the Apostle Paul that is beloved by so many. In fact, probably outside of the book of Romans potentially, it is the book of Ephesians that is often the most beloved by believers.

Today we're gonna begin in Ephesians 4 and then we're gonna be on the totality of Ephesians, we're gonna go all the way back into chapter 1 and all the way through chapter 6, but I promise I will do so in the preferred allotted time. But that being said, you know, if you were to ask yourself if you had a very strategic important message to give to an audience that you desired to hear it, would you not want the largest potential audience possible? The reason I share that is this is what Ephesians is from the Lord's perspective. When you start looking at the congregations that he spoke to throughout Scripture whether it is the church at Rome, church at Corinth, Thessalonica, whether it's the church at Smyrna, Thyatira, Laodicea, wherever it is, the church of Ephesus is by far the largest of the congregations of which the Lord spoke directly to through what you and I know today as Scripture. In fact, there are some that believe that if you took an average worship service at the church of Ephesus, it would be greater than all the other churches the Lord gave letters to combined.

Today we think of large churches and oftentimes people come to me and say, "I grew up in a small church. I don't know if I'd be comfortable in a large church." Can I just share with you that compared to Ephesus, we are but a small, rural, country, little church. In fact, I've got a picture to show you of the remains of the church of Ephesus. This is the amphitheater in Ephesus today. Though it is a relic of days gone past, can you imagine some of you getting your seat at the top there at the 8:30 service? This amphitheater, though it held a multitude of different events, it did hold Christian worship services. It held up to 25,000 people at any one given time.

Now we hear that number and that's a large amount but it pales in comparison to a college football game in today's vernacular, so let's do the math here. Compared to the world's population which, by the way, had about 200 million people in those days, to have a church of equal size and population in today's contemporary society would mean that they would have a worship service at right under one million people. That is how large this congregation was. That's how many people attended in a regular worship event and so it is the letter to the Ephesians that's not just beloved by us but yet it was communicated to so many.

If you look at the book of Ephesians from kind of a bird's eye view, we easily divide it into two sections, the first three chapters and then chapters 4 through 6. The first three chapters are rich with doctrine and theology and communicating to us what we need as believers in Jesus Christ to believe. It is the last three chapters of the book of Ephesians that we will spend the majority of our time in today because it communicates to us not what we necessarily need to believe but in light of that belief, how should we behave? What should our lives look like? And that, for instance, really the big disconnect. So many times we have behaviors, we have mannerisms, we have actions that are contrary to a life lived for Jesus Christ and so we have to ask ourselves are they really a believer or are they a believer who is in complete rebellion in disobedience. Today when we look at the book of Ephesians, we see that our beliefs necessarily will impact our behavior, and if our behavior is not appropriate, we must check our belief.

I want to begin in chapter 4 right in the middle of the division of the book of Ephesians and I'm gonna hopefully point your attention to a word that may have been overlooked in your reading of Ephesians this week. It's one of those words that we see all the time grammatically but never really percolate on the impact. Notice in verse 1 of chapter 4 it says,

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

I think it is strategic that the Lord uses the word "therefore" at that point. In other words, he is building upon that which has been communicated about our belief to communicate to us that we should walk worthy of the vocation, therefore – hear me clearly – is there for a reason because that which we believe necessarily impacts the life that we ultimately live.

As you go back in the first section of what we know as the book of Ephesians, there is another "therefore." Some of your Bibles may utilize the word "now" but it's the same concept that in light of the information shared, it changes who you are. So I want you to go back into chapter 2, verse 19, and I want us to kind of, for lack of better terms, peel away the layers, what is it that we believe in Jesus Christ, because today at least in our culture, in our context, when you use the word "Christian," when you use the phrase "follower of Jesus Christ," can we all agree there's a lot of different definitions for that? And so the book of Ephesians makes it very clear what our belief is and in chapter 2,

verse 19, it says that as a believer in Jesus Christ, we occupy a very specific position. It says in verse 19,

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;

Interesting when describing our belief in Jesus Christ it says therefore you are no longer strangers, you are no longer foreigners, but you are fellow citizens of the household of God. If you want to see a picture of this, just do what I've done many times, that's go and apply for and acquire a passport and travel to another country other than this one. You go to the airport, you'll go through all the procedures, everything seems normal until you get to the airport of the other country, and when you get to the airport of the other country, they segment you, they divide you, they segregate you into two groups of people: those who are citizens of that country and everybody else. That's how it works. It doesn't matter if we as a country are considered their allies or their enemies, when you go into their country, they begin a process of investigating who you are, why you're there, and what you're up to because they want to know and what they do is they provide for you temporary, temporary admittance. They'll give you a pass, they'll give you a visa.

You know, it's interesting in the last few years that I don't get stamps in my passport like I used to. Do you know why? Because there are so many of us from this country who travel to country A and that country may be "an enemy" of country B, and if country A is stamped in your passport, country B is not nice to you when you come through the process. I've had my bags searched. I've had myself questioned. And by the way, can I just be very transparent, I've learned a really good way to get through customs and immigration of countries that don't necessarily like us. Are you ready? When you pack that which will be searched, lace the top with Gospel tracts and undergarments. Ain't nobody wanting to pilfer through that.

But yet the same occurs when we come back home, does it not? When you come, it doesn't matter what international airport you fly to, even in this country when you land in the airport what do they do? They divide you into two groups, correct? Those that are citizens and those that are not. And I understand there's a debate in our world today regarding these matters from a political perspective but I'm not talking politics, I'm talking theology here because there's coming a day according to Matthew 7 where you will appear before the Lord, we jokingly call it the Pearly Gates of heaven, and I've got news for you: there is no temporary admittance given, there are no visas that are offered, you are either a citizen of heaven or you are not, and when you arrive at that day in your life, you can't just say, "Oh, but can I have 90 days? Can I have an education visa? Can I have a work visa?" In fact, Jesus makes this statement in Matthew 7, "Depart from me. I never knew you." You see, when we talk about what we believe as Christians, understand we believe that we are citizens of the household of God, we believe that one day according to chapter 1 in Ephesians, we have a seat that is reserved for us in the heavens.

We are a part of his kingdom. We are a part of his state. We are a part of his household irrespective of what state and/or country we have a passport from here on earth.

That's our position but an important question to ask and this is back in chapter 1, is what is the process of becoming a citizen? That's an important question to ask, is it not? If you've spoken to anybody who has attempted to become a citizen of any country including this one, they will tell you it is an extensive process. It is a long process. It can be at times very frustrating and, shall we say, expensive process. I've got news for you, according to Romans 5, what we're about to talk about is absolutely free of charge. It doesn't cost you a penny. It can happen in a millisecond. You don't have to jump through a bunch of hoops, take a bunch of courses, in fact, in verse 13 of chapter 1 it says,

13 In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

I want you to notice what the Lord says about the process of salvation, how does one become a citizen of the household of God, how does one know for a fact when they breathe their last breath that they'll reside in a place the Bible calls heaven versus a place the Bible calls hell. It says, number 1, you have heard the gospel, you've heard the good news of your salvation, that Jesus Christ came, he lived, he died, he rose again and, yes, one day he's coming back. You have heard the gospel but you didn't just acknowledge it's truth for James 2:19 says that the demons accept the facts and believe, it says but you heard the gospel and you believed. That's where Romans 10:13 comes in where it says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." You hear the gospel which is a free gift, you believe on the gospel according to Romans 10:9-10 with your heart and with your mouth unto confession, then what does it say, you are sealed. You are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. Later it will go on to say that we have earnest money that has put down, that we have an absolute guarantee.

So as you walk through the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians, it says that the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, his birth, his life, his death, his resurrection, that when we hear that message, we believe on that message, we are sealed for all eternity, we are set in the heavens and we are now citizens of the household of God. We're not longer foreigners and we're no longer strangers. That is the belief, but remember what chapter 4, verse 1 said, ah, "Therefore I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation and the calling that the Lord has given you." If that is who you are this morning, and by the way if you're not, we're gonna talk about that at the end of the service, if you're a child of God, if you're a citizen of the household of God, it ought to change and affect the way you live your life that is contrary to what the world is selling and propagating to you.

I want to discuss three behaviors today that should be impacted by our belief, three things that for lack of better terms are easily measurable when it comes to looking at our behavior versus our belief. The first one is found in chapter 4, verse 17. I'm gonna deal with a subject matter that is not popular nowadays, it is not politically correct nowadays and I'm not talking about the world out there, I'm talking about the proverbial church in

here, is that we have been called as believers unto a life that is distinct, it is different, and the biblical word separated. In fact, 2 Corinthians 6:17 says, "Come out and be separated from the world." Our lives ought to look different, they ought to sound different, they ought to be different. We as believers in Jesus Christ have not been called to look just like the world, in fact, Acts 17:6 says we've been called to turn the world upside down.

Three areas of separation, the first one found in verse 17, it says,

17 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, 18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart:

We ought to be separated in the way that we think about things. Notice it talks about the blindness of heart, it talks about the vanity of life. No better study on this issue than the book of Ecclesiastes. You go back in the Old Testament, that wisdom literature, and you see a man by the name of Solomon. Here is this man that was declared to be the wisest in the world by God himself, here's the problem with Solomon, his behavior and his belief did not always line up. Oh, it started well but it took a real bad turn real quick. In fact, you read the book of Ecclesiastes, you know how it begins? Vanity and vanity, all this vanity. In other words, there's nothing worth holding onto, there's nothing worth investing in. He says, "I had all the money in the world, I acquired everything I could acquire. I acquired estates. I acquired houses. I acquired investments. I acquired servants. I had all the influence in the world. I acquired all the 'relationships' that a person could have. I had all the children that a person would want and when I came to the end of the day, I realized vanity, vanity, all is vanity." You realize that most of the commercials that we watch are trying to sell us things we can't afford to impress people we don't even like. It's vanity. It's all just wind that we can't capture with our hands and it says we need to be separate in the way we think about things. If our thinking lines up with the world, we need to take a step back and say, "Why am I advocating what the world is advocating?"

Go into chapter 5. It's not just the separation of our minds, it's also the separation of our bodies. Notice what it says in verse 1.

1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. 3 But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; 4 Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.

Notice what it says, it says as a believer in Jesus Christ there are mannerisms, there are behaviors that should have no part in our life. Notice it says "but," in other words, you want some examples? Let's make it very clear, "but fornication." That's a big fancy theological word for being with somebody in an intimate setting you have no business being with, in fact, 1 Corinthians 6, the church that was very fleshly, carnal, so to speak,

it says that you know that every sin committed in life is outside of the body except this one, should a man join himself with a harlot? Then why would a believer join himself to the world? You realize this is the issue that gets most of us in most trouble. In fact, you go all the way back to the book of Genesis 6, we had a huge flood that came on the earth, only eight souls were "saved" on that boat and why? Because the sons of God were with the daughters of men. We don't know the exact details and there's a lot of questions about what really happened but what we know is this, that they were together with the wrong people at the wrong time and God didn't like it.

You make your way to the person of Abraham, oh father Abraham, but we forget about Hagar and Ishmael and what fornication did. How about David? Oh, great King David yet we can't forget about Bathsheba. All throughout Scripture what do you discover? That time after time the magic bullet that the enemy so often utilizes is this subject matter right here. In fact, in Acts 15 and 16, the early church was gathered together and you had Jews on one side, you had Gentiles on the other. They have come from two different backgrounds yet the wall of partition had been divided. They were one in the body of Christ and they're trying to decide how do we do this thing? You know what their conclusion was? Three things: can we give money to help the poor? Sure. Can we just ask you not to eat food that is soaked in blood, we can't do that? Okay. Do you know what the other thing was? Flee fornication. One of the original denominational precepts of Christianity was to honor our Lord with our bodies.

We should not only have different thoughts, we should have different actions with our body, but we should also act different among others. Notice what it says in verse 7,

7 Be not ye therefore partakers with them. 8 For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: 9 (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth;) 10 Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord. [Listen to verse 11] 11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

In other words, we should be separate not just in our thoughts, not just in our deeds, but in who we celebrate, who we support and who we promote. You know, it's easy to say, "Well, at least I'm not guilty," but are you encouraging those that are?

Let me bring this to light in a very hopefully relevant example. I grew up in a home, I'm in a home that is saturated by sports. I mean, we are so grounded, I mean, last night was an ah-ha-hallelujah moment, college football's back. That's right. We watched two teams we don't even care about. Why? Because football's back. That's all that matters. And in the history of our home, there's been many a sport that has been played, soccer has been played at a high level, football is being played, basketball even at our height has been played, hey, every team needs a point guard, right? But there's been a rule in our house. It may seem like a strange rule to you but it's an important rule to mom and dad. It's that we don't mind you putting pennants and posters of teams and sports, but we do not allow any

time of on the wall or promotion of an individual personality that plays a sport. You say, "Why is that?" Because have you looked at the lives of those guys? Have you seen what they do in secret? And I know what some of you think, "Oh, but Tim Tebow, yes, he's still in the minors. I get it." How many of them have these illustrious careers and then we find out how they really lived behind the scenes? We don't want to promote, we don't want to support, we don't want to encourage our children to idolize, for lack of better terms, those who do that which they should not do whether it be in secret or in public, and thanks to 24 hour tv, now it's in public all of it, and thanks to twitter we get it within four minutes.

We should be separate. The second thing and the second behavior is that we should be surrendered. Notice down in verse 24. We find ourselves in the midst of a very controversial section of Ephesians. Beginning in verse 21 ending in verse 32, it talks about the roles of a husband, the role of a wife within a marriage, a covenant in relationship. I do want to call your attention to verse 21, it says, "Submit yourselves one to another," but I want you to notice verse 24, "Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ," our behavior should not only be separate from the things of the world, but we should be subject to, we should be surrendered to the Lord. I know you've heard me say this in the past but that hymn "I surrender all, all to Jesus, I surrender, I surrender all," we didn't write that song to say, "I surrender most. I surrender that which is convenient. I surrender that which is 90%. I surrender all." When the church is subject unto Christ, let me share with you something that you may have never heard but you need to: that means he calls the shots, not you. How many times have you had this prayer, "But God..."? You can say "but God" all you want but he says, "Hey, I'm God, you're not." We are to be surrendered to him, not rationalizing or justifying that which we desire and want but coming in submission to what he has called us of our lives.

The last behavior that's mentioned in Ephesians is actually found in chapter 6. We notice that our belief that we've heard the Gospel, we've believed the Gospel, we're sealed with the Holy Spirit, it means that our lives are now separate, our lives are now surrendered. Chapter 6 is the great spiritual warfare passage. You may or may not be aware of this, but every passage in your New Testament that involves spiritual warfare is not written to the lost pagans of the world, it's written to the believers. The moment that we were sealed with the Holy Spirit, the enemy put a target on our back, on our front, on our top, and on our bottom that says, "I'm coming after you." You get to verse 10 of chapter 6, it says, "Finally," as if, alright this is it, guys. This is the last part of the speech.

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his
might. 11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand
against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we wrestle not against flesh and
blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the
darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13
Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to
withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. [Listen to verse
14,] 14 Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having
on the breastplate of righteousness; 15 And your feet shod with the

preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God:

Allow me to make you a promise: if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, you've heard, you believe and you're sealed, and you make the conscious decision to separate from the vanity of this world, you make the decision to surrender your life, your decisions and your behavior to the Lord, I'll make you a promise that the enemy's gonna come after you like you've never seen before. Therefore what does it say to do? Stand. Don't run away. Don't cower and don't even duck. It says stand knowing that you're gird about with truth, you have the breastplate of righteousness, you have the helmet of salvation, you have the shield of faith, the sword of the Spirit, even your feet are covered. The picture that you have which is so difficult for us to grasp is what Zechariah taught us back in chapter 4 of that great book of the Bible, "It's not by might nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord."

You know that we can be separated, we can be surrendered, but then we can have difficulty standing. We stand in the midst of opposition. We stand in the midst of that which is unfavorable. We stand in the midst of sorrow. We stand in the midst of disappointment. We stand in the midst of discouragement. We stand. We don't give in. We don't give out. And we don't give up. You'll never stand if you don't believe. You'll never surrender if you don't believe. You'll never be separate if you don't believe. All of those aspects of behavior are necessitated upon belief.