

Speaking the Truth in Love

by Tim Conway

This sermon delves into Ephesians 4:11-16, focusing on the importance of unity in the body of Christ and the role of each member in building up the church. It emphasizes the need for speaking the truth in love, growing up into Christ, being connected through joints that supply nourishment, and working properly as parts of the body. Love is highlighted as the key for self-building, sacrificially caring for others' best interests, and fostering a healthy church environment where each part functions to build up the whole.

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Description

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Transcript

Ephesians 4. We are in the midst of an ongoing study of the book of Ephesians. I want to focus in on verses 15 and 16, but let's just pick up some context here. We'll begin in v. 11.

And He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes. V. 15, this is what I want to deal with today. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ, from Whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

Verses 15 and 16, very complicated. Not just in the English, in the original. It is a complicated sentence.

You have all sorts of modifiers taking place here. It's not a clean sentence. Not at all.

But for its complexity, what I want you to do is just notice the language. Notice v. 15. We are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head.

We have a Head. But let's keep reading here. And then you go into v. 16 and you have the whole body.

So you have the whole body and you have a Head. And the whole body is joined and held together by every joint. You know, a joint like an elbow, a shoulder, a knee, a knuckle.

That's a joint. We have joints and, if you keep reading, parts. Each part.

That's each member of the body. Each part of the body. It ought to be clear with all the complexity, it ought to at least be clear that Paul is describing the church with one of his favorite metaphors.

The church is a body. The body of Christ. Now, what I did was I just sat down and seven questions just came to my mind right off to ask of the text.

V. 15 and 16. I'm just going to ask seven questions, seek to answer them, and hopefully that in and of itself will help to considerably unwrap these verses for us. The first thing I want you to see is this.

Or the first question I want to ask is this. V. 15, rather speaking the truth in love. It's a basic question.

Who's speaking? Rather speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ. I only pose this question because when we consider speaking in the context of the church, speaking, we've got the church, the body, and speaking. Well, you know as well as I do that the tendency is to think of preachers and teachers in the pulpit.

But that clearly is not the primary speaking that Paul has in mind here. How do I know? Well, I mean, look at it. Just get the feel of this.

Look at v. 14. So that we... well, that's all of us. So that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Rather, speaking the truth in love. Now, the ESV, the NAS, they throw the we back in here right after this. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way.

Well, all they're doing is carrying over the we from v. 14. That's who's being involved. I think it's obvious to everybody that there is nothing specific here about preachers and teachers.

Yes, that came back in v. 11, but that's not what's on the table right here. He's got in mind we all. And how do we all no longer be children? How do we all no longer be tossed to and fro? Well, we all are speaking the truth in love.

And you can see that because he reiterates this again in v. 16. Each part is working properly. When each part is working properly, what happens? It makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

There's your love. In v. 15, it's speaking the truth in love. In v. 16, it builds itself up in love.

We build ourselves up in love as we speak the truth to one another in love. That's the picture. And by the way, he's going to reiterate this again when you get down to v. 25.

And you can all see that. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor. You see this speaking of truth? It's each one of us is speaking the truth with his neighbor.

That's how the church is built up here. Speaking the truth in love. There's nothing specific about pastors, preachers, teachers.

Of course that's essential. Back in v. 11 and 12, we see how that fits into the big picture, but that's not the issue here. It's just important because what I want to show you is that what's being called for here is your responsibility.

It's not something you sit back and let somebody else do. This is God speaking to you and letting you know what you have a responsibility to do in order to build up this church. Okay, next question.

What does speaking the truth in love mean? Here's the first thing. You see the speaking. All your Bibles have it.

Speaking. Speaking. The verb for speaking is not the typical one that we would find in Scripture for speaking.

This is an unusual word. Basically, Bobby was telling us in the first hour how you take a noun and make an adjective out of it. You've got Bible.

You can make it an adjective by making it biblical. You have a type. You can make it an adjective by calling it typical.

Well, the same thing happens when you want to take a noun and create a verb out of it. Typically what you do is you put an ing on the end of it. Right? If you've got skis, skiing.

You got a boat, boating. That's what we do in English. Well, the same thing happens in Greek.

And you know what Paul did here? He took the noun for truth and he just basically put an ing on the end of it. Truthing. Rather, truthing in love.

We're to grow up in every way into Him who is the head. It's only used one other time. I'll mention it in a few minutes where that's at, but it's basically the idea of confessing the truth or professing the truth.

But it's not just speaking it, it's the actual doing of it as well. It's the idea that I arrive at the truth. It means to be true.

You are true. You are living up to the truth you have and you are speaking that truth. That's the idea here.

That's key. This is the recipe by which growth in the church is maximized. You have truth.

You attain to truth. You live up to that truth. You communicate that truth with one another and you build up the church in love.

That's the picture. Now, let's think about that. In love, we speak the truth in love.

Certainly, Paul is not merely talking about being just nice, likable, or friendly. I suspect that the Apostle Paul would, by lots of people, not be considered a nice guy. Oh, he loved.

But he said hard things. Our Lord Jesus Christ said very hard things. And I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with being nice or likable or friendly.

But that's too often the picture put forward by this world around us. You notice how the world tries to define what Christianity... People will tell us, well, Christianity is like this. This is what it's like.

Oh really? Why do you think that? Well, they've invented what they think Christianity is supposed to be like. The world basically has this idea Christians are harmless. There is an aspect to that.

But Christians, as long as they're nice and loving and show a friendly spirit, never condemn or judge, as long as they're never insistent about anything, as long as they're agreeable and smile at everything, the world will basically leave us alone in our patheticness. Right? In our weakness. Now, there's a good way to be weak.

And there's a bad way to be weak. And I'm talking about the way the world likes to... You know, as long as the church is unoffensive, inoffensive, I guess, and they're not uncompromising, they don't insist on the truth, then as long as we don't criticize or denounce or condemn anything... But why? Because if the world hears that, then they count us to be devoid of love. So the world says.

But we would do well to remember what's being said here. We are to speak the truth in love. That's important.

Truth. That means we're unbending in our love. And there's a reason.

I mean, is there not reason to be unbending? People go to hell through deception. Being blown about by every wind of doctrine. There's human cunning.

There's craftiness and deceitful schemes. What is being schemed? It's the destruction of men's souls. There's a devil who seeks to deceive, to destroy, to damn.

We're not playing a lightweight game here. And I'll tell you this, truth sets men free. Truth saves men's souls.

Truth. Thy Word is truth. Jesus Christ is truth.

We are to preach the truth in love. Truth. We're not told to cultivate some sort of vagueness or obscure kindness.

Well, we're just going to be kind no matter what anybody says, what anybody does, what anybody believes. We're just going to smile at everybody and we're just going to be the nice guys and we're going to be known as the church or as the religion that just tolerates everything and we pat everybody on the back and we smile and we say, well, it's all going to work out. That's not the idea.

This is not some kind of ambiguous or obscure or unclear loving spirit. Brethren, we must be uncompromising when it comes to truth. We cannot hesitate to be narrow.

We must not put niceness before truth. Ever! Because error destroys. Error damns.

And you know what? You've got people, they come across looking nice, but really, they don't want any conflict. And they're not willing to love people enough to tell the truth. I was thinking as Bobby was going

through that, you think about Peter.

Peter was preaching to the people and he said to them, you killed your Messiah! Or you think of the Apostle Paul, you foolish Galatians! Yeah, you think Peter loved those people. Paul loved those people. Remember what that rather at the beginning of v. 15 means.

You see it? Rather. What does it mean? It means this is in contrast to v. 14. You have v. 14.

If you want to escape that, being blown about by every wind of doctrine, tossed to and fro. You've got all this human cunning and craftiness and deceitful schemes going on. If you would escape that, rather you speak the truth in love.

You see what that's being set over against? All the error that's out there in the world. We don't tolerate that. We don't fall into that.

It's not, oh, just allow every wind of doctrine to shake you all over the place and be Mr. Nice Guy. That's not it. It's if you really love people, you're going to speak the truth to them.

That's the issue here. We have got to insist on a standard of truth. Oh, the world tells us everything is relative and there's a truth for me and there's a truth for you.

That's not true. Jesus said, Thy Word is truth. This is true.

This book is true. And outside of this, I'll tell you this, there may be other things in the world that are true, but what I know about this is God promised to preserve His Word. And He has not promised to preserve the psychology books or the history books or the newspapers or the media and what's being slung around on the internet.

He did not promise to preserve that. He did not promise to protect that. He did not promise to keep that infallible, but He promised to keep His Word infallible.

And Jesus Christ said, Sanctify them with Thy truth. Thy Word is truth. Where are you going to go? Where are you going to go for the standard? You see, this is the thing about truth.

If you're going to tout truth, you better know what it is and you better have a standard by which you're going to measure everything else. And when you've got that standard, it is not love for you to depart from that standard. Because by that truth, we're going to measure everything.

Because by that truth, we're going to see what's true. By that truth, it's going to cause us to be able to see and discern and measure things and evaluate things. And what we want to do, brethren, is we want to come face to face that how else am I going to discern anything? How else am I going to judge anything? How am I going to measure anything? It's not some kind of sentimental, flimsy kindness that tolerates every wind of doctrine that just blows along.

We've got to have a standard of judgment. Truth is something... You know what truth is? Truth is something that I can articulate to you and I can set forth in distinct dogmatic propositions. I can say to you, Jesus Christ is God.

That is a proposition. I can state it, it's true, and it doesn't change. And it's that.

You see, that's what Paul's calling for here. He's calling for narrowness. He's calling for rigidity.

He's calling to stick to this book. He's calling us to be biblical. He's calling us to one standard.

Yes, we do it in love. But you've got to recognize, if ever there was somebody that was loving, we would say Jesus Christ was loving. He said hard things to people.

I mean, get thee behind me, Satan. You see, if somebody said that to somebody else in this church, you'd say, well, that wasn't loving. Listen, our Lord was a standard of loving.

Basically, the Apostle Paul said, I wish those people would castrate themselves. Well, Paul, was that a loving thing to say? You better believe it was. When he cares and he loves those churches in Galatia, and he wants to see them make it to the end.

You cannot avoid being carried about by every wind of doctrine unless you have a standard. Truth is not flexible. And yet, it seems to be today that the going thing, we need vague and inoffensive Christianity.

That's supposed to be the spirit of goodwill and kindness we're to show. And what happens? I mean, what happens when you actually have a people who say this is truth? What do people say? Narrow. They're bigoted.

You know what's common? They're a cult. That's it. They're a cult.

That is very commonly thrown around. Extreme, mean-spirited, fanatics. Listen, the business of the church is not to put men up in the pulpit, and it's not for us when we speak to each other to simply throw our opinions around, speculate about what might be true.

We are to communicate what is revealed in this book. Thy Word is truth. It's our sole authority.

And if it's not, then you know what? Every wind of doctrine becomes permissible. It becomes possible. Because we really don't know what we believe.

But what we do is we measure everything by this. And you see, what's valuable is when we're all moving through the church and we read this book and we're in this book all the time. You see, you're not going to measure up to what's being stated here in verses 15 and 16.

You're not going to be a part of the church that functions properly unless you have the truth in here, in here to be able to speak to others. And when you have the truth of this book, what this is a picture of is us speaking the truth. Thy Word is truth.

So we're speaking Scripture. And so we're walking around all the time with our minds, our hearts full of the Word of God. Why? Because we've been in the Word.

You can't let this thing gather dust and then think you're going to walk around God's people and be able to speak the truth in love. It's not going to happen. You've got to be in this book daily.

You've got to immerse yourself daily. Because I'll tell you what, if you're not in this book, but you're in the world and you're letting all that worldly influence come... James was just telling me beforehand about somebody in the church that's being a really worldly influence on somebody else. You know where that comes from? Maybe they're devoid of the Spirit, but at least this, they're not in this book.

And they're in the world and they love the world and they're surrounding themselves with the world. We need to be in this and we need to be saturated with this. And then we come together and we're measuring one another by it.

And we're, I mean, if I discern that you need comfort or you need a promise or you need a rebuke or you need, I mean, we're examining one another through the lens of this book. That's what has to happen. Brethren, brethren, the reality is this.

I mean, think with me here. What are we dealing with? When it talks about speaking the truth in love, obviously, it's not the truth that well, it might rain today or it has rained today or there's a mud puddle out there. I mean, that is true.

But what we're talking about here is truths that have to do with God, truths that have to do with Jesus Christ, truths that have to do with salvation, truths that have to do with sin, truths that have to do with the promises of God, faith in God. It's that foundation upon which our faith is firmly grounded. That's the kind of truth that we're talking about here.

Well, love. That's what we're talking about in love. Let's just say this, v. 14 comes before v. 15.

That's not love when you've got crafty schemes. A doctrine that blows people all around. That's erroneous.

That's not love. That's contradictory. That's contrasted in Paul's mind to speaking the truth in love.

Love is strong. You just need to think this. Love is strong.

Love is true. Love is pure. And love sometimes hurts.

In fact, the only other place in Scripture where this same Greek verb is used is over in Galatians. And do you know it's where Paul says this? Have I become your enemy because I speak the truth to you? Just think about that. Think about that.

People can feel somebody doesn't like me because they spoke the truth to me. That's what he saw. The Galatians were receiving the truth that he had articulated to them as Paul doesn't like us.

He's become our enemy. He says, have I become your enemy because I speak the truth? Listen, brethren, I'll tell you this. The most loving churches you will find are churches that are most ready to speak the truth to one another.

And I can tell you any number of times, I've been in a place where I knew I had to say something to somebody that I'll be quite honest, I didn't want to say to them. It wasn't going to be comfortable saying it to them. But it needed to be said because it was the thing that was going to help them or heal them more than anything else.

I don't like conflict. Who likes conflict? But speaking the truth in love, yes, sometimes you come up, you pat somebody on the back, they're discouraged, and you seek to encourage them and everybody goes away happy. Sometimes speaking the truth in love it leaves people feeling like he's my enemy.

And that's not the case. So, third question, what does growing up into Christ mean? Ephesians 4.15, rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the Head, into Christ. And it's actually a very strange image.

And all your Bibles have the preposition into Him. Into Him. Us? Now think about the imagery.

We've got a head and we've got a body. Now, isn't that a strange image to say to the body, grow up into the Head? I mean, maybe it's not strange to you. It's strange to me.

Is it not? I find that strange. If growing up into the Head, what Paul means is grow up into the image of the Head. Grow up into conformity with the Head.

Let's just grow in Christlikeness. That's understandable. But I don't think that's... I mean, that's definitely here.

That's part of this. But the feel is that he's talking about connectivity. That's what it feels like.

More like roots growing down into the ground. But of course, for him to all of a sudden go to a tree or a plant, he would have to change his metaphors and he'd be all over the place. But that's the feel.

What he's actually saying is we are to grow into Christ. Grow deeper. Greater connectivity is what he's got in mind with the word into.

And look, I think this because of what comes next. In Ephesians 4.16, from whom? That's from Christ. Now, let's just look at v. 16 for a second.

From whom the whole body. There's our noun. The whole body.

Now where's the verb? What does the whole body do? Can you find it? Where's the main verb here? The whole body is the noun. Where's the verb? Yeah, it makes the body grow. It's all the way at the end.

Everything else is modifiers here. That's one of the things that makes this really complex is just how much of these modifying statements you find between the noun and the verb. But that's the issue.

Here's what's being said. We are to grow up into the Head from the Head from whom the whole body makes itself grow. So it builds itself up in love.

The nourishment, the supply from Christ is given to us what is necessary. The nourishment comes from Him. That's why it seems it's not just growing into His likeness.

What Paul is calling for is greater connectivity. Tighter relationship. He's the source from whom we draw our energy and growth.

And apart from whom there can be no church, there never could be a church. Apart from whom there is no growth in that church and never can be. Apart from whom there's no proper working of any part.

We are to grow into Him deeper and deeper, connected. Brethren, I'll tell you the picture that came to my mind. I remember listening.

I saw an interview. There was a man in I think it was the first of the two Twin Towers that collapsed. And I think the second one that got hit was actually the first one that caved in.

And there was a fireman who was down on the ground floor when the building began to crumble. Floor by floor. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang! He heard it coming.

He said, this was the fireman, he said beside a staircase, there was just a little gap there between the wall and the stairs. And he went in there and he got in that corner and he said he got down in a ball and he had his fire hat on. And he could hear those.

How many ever 80-some floors? Bang, bang, bang, bang! They're all coming down. And he can't get out. He said he just wanted to crawl inside his helmet.

And you know what? There was a real present danger and he felt it. But brethren, I'll tell you this, the spiritual reality is that helmet, that head is Christ and wanting to just draw up in there and be lost, to be covered, to be protected, to go in deeper and deeper as I grow into Him. Less and less of me.

I mean, wanting to get inside that helmet, it's like I don't want any part out. This is the picture. This is the connectivity into Christ.

I want to crawl in there. I want to get inside. I want to be where I'm saturated, where I'm covered.

It's me, total immersion, saturation being swallowed in Him, absorbed and consumed. Listen, there is a parallel passage to this one in Ephesians found over in Colossians. I just want you to listen to it.

Don't turn there. Listen. Listen.

"...Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism..." This is moving away from Christ to basically beating up your body. "...worship of angels, going on in detail about visions puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not..." listen to this, "...holding fast to the head from whom the whole body..." You see, you hold fast. Why? "...from Christ the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God." I mean, there it is.

It's supernatural. Think about this. Christ.

Christ once lived. Christ was once dead. Christ lived again.

He ascended to heaven. He reigns there today. And as He promised, He's building His church.

He's not passive. He's not distant. You see what He's doing here.

He's active. He's the active head of the body. He is the supplier.

He is the nourisher. He is the sustainer. That's the first thing to see.

Christ is the living source of church life. And so, we grow up into Him. It's not just people coming in here with some dry truth.

That's not it. It's truth being spoken in love and a people that are well-connected with Christ, a people that come in here who have walked with Christ. Not in worldliness.

Not walked in their sin. But people who have spent a week... a week. We live by weeks.

But as Bobby was saying, that early church, they interacted a whole lot more than just on a weekly basis. This is the picture. A people who are embracing Christ.

A people who are holding fast to the head. A people who are growing up into Him deeper and deeper. Well then, four, what are the joints that hold us together? That was what growing up into Christ means.

But what are the joints that hold us all together? You see that in v. 16. "...From whom from Christ the whole body joined and held together by every joint." And we heard that in Colossians too. "...From whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments." Grows with a growth that is from God.

And here we have these joints. "...Held together by every joint with which it is equipped." The New King James says, "...by what every joint supplies." Lloyd-Jones feels like through every joint which serves for supply. The issue is this, there's a joint right here.

That joint does not in and of itself supply the nutrients, the nourishment, the blood, the nervous connections. It's not the source for this. What the joint does is it allows what's here to pass to here.

The joint is the connection by which the stuff here gets to here. You see, we are the parts. The joint is what connects me and you so that the nourishment that Christ pours into you can get to me.

And what He pours into me can get to you. See, Paul is developing the imagery of the body and he recognizes that joints hold all of our body parts together. It's the same in the church.

We're all held together. Do you remember how this whole section started? Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit. That's what this whole unity.

We're held together. Paul is bringing that whole thought of unity to a conclusion. We're not a bunch of disconnected parts.

I remember seeing some pictures of the Civil War. You know how it was in the Civil War? They just cut your arms and legs off. It's like if they were shattered, those were the days before they could save you from infection.

And so, if it was messed up, it's like saw. And the picture outside of the medical tent was a pile of arms and legs. That's not the church! That's not what we're supposed to be.

Let's just say this, a pile of arms and legs, something is not good. It's not well. We would all acknowledge that in the physical.

But see, it's the same in the spiritual. If we're a bunch of scattered, disconnected arms and legs, see in the physical, that shocks us! But it should all the more in the spiritual. Because what's in the physical is not the primary thing.

What's in the spiritual is the primary. Paul is wrapping all this up. Just as the parts of a body are joined together, so we are joined.

A joint is a point of connection between one member and another. That's the issue. One part of our body connected to a joint.

We're connected. You see, that's what's supposed to be happening in the church. There needs to be a connection.

What is it exactly? Well, it's that connection that you have with other people by which the nourishment flows through you to others. Well, one of the ways that this is happening is speaking the truth in love. So one of the connections obviously is communication.

One of the connections is obviously the fellowship that we heard about in the first hour where we're fellowshiping together and we're speaking truth to one another. And by my speaking that truth, things are happening. Now there's other ways that that truth is expressed.

And by the way, remember, the Word has to do not with just speaking, but living out the truth. It has to do with knowing the truth, embracing the truth, living the truth, speaking the truth. That is the mechanism by which we grow up into Christ from whom and by which all the parts are made to work properly as they're connected together when all these joints are connecting us.

That's the picture. The reality is that a joint, what's happening there is yes, there's like a ball and socket and that keeps the thing together. Togetherness is one part of it.

But the other thing that's happening in that elbow is there are blood vessels that pass through there and there are nerves that pass through there. And you know what's happening? That which happens in the head is actually passes through here to here. And what Paul is teaching us is this, that Jesus Christ has designed the church so that He pours nourishment, help, supply, grace into this member and it comes from the head, but through the joint by that connection because if it's severed, it's dead.

But it's not severed. There's these joints that connect us and the nourishment flows through. And see, here's the deal.

Guess what happens in the body? If this stops working properly or if that joint is severed, then this dies. And that's the picture that we have. That's what's being, the spiritual nourishment of the head passes along the members from one to the other through the joints.

And the issue is that every joint is supplying the supply from the head. The joint is the connection through which that abundant supply is actually a vital energy passes which is put forth to each member. What you have to recognize is this, the Lord has designed the church so that each one of us have a gift.

Grace is given to each one of us. That was the truth back in verse seven. Grace is bestowed upon each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

But what happens is through our connectivity, I grow as the grace given to you passes through you, through the joint of our connection with each other. And so I am nourished and I am supplied. I mean, if you remember the whole picture here, the idea is, remember chapter two, Jews and Gentiles, one new man in place of the two.

You've got Jews, you've got Gentiles, you've got people of various ethnicities, various nations, various colors, various wealth, various education, who before now were separated, disconnected. But what? They become united in Christ. They form this harmonious society supplying each other for the growth of the whole.

That's the idea. Verse 16, the whole body, you see it? What does the whole body do? Remember where the primary verb is. The primary verb is at the end.

What does the whole body do? It makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. You see, Christ has designed the church so that there is a self-building mechanism. And if the joint is severed, that self-building mechanism is broken.

See, you notice what he's saying is each part has to work properly. That's the issue. So that brings up the fifth question.

What does that mean for each part to work properly? Well, consider what we have. The life is in the head. The life of the head flows to each part, but it doesn't stay there.

Because I'm joined to you, what happens? The nerve flows from me to you to you to me through the joint that connects us. That causes each individual member to grow and flourish all the more. The effectual operating energy coming from the head flows out into each part.

Each part has been created and designed by Jesus Christ with a certain capacity to function, certain gifts, and all of that in order to be joined to all the others in the church so that the nourishment would pass through. And to the degree Christ works in you and me, and then we connect with others, you see what happens. Grace flows to others.

And you can see that to this degree that this is taking place in this church. The life of the head is flowing out to all the members. Operates the growth of the whole.

The whole body makes the body grow. And the issue is this. Are we in the place where we're growing up in Him to receive the supply appropriately? Because He said, without me, you can do nothing.

And you have to remember that. That branch has to be attached to the vine in order to draw the nutrients. And if you're not growing up into Him, then you know what happens if you're not spending your week walking with Him and talking with Him and being in this Word.

You're not growing up into Him. You don't have truth to speak. And you walk in here and you're not going to function properly.

And when you don't function properly, then you're not going to be... even if you're joined with somebody else, if you're sick and diseased, and if this becomes diseased and there's a joint there, this all the more becomes diseased or susceptible to it. I mean, one of the reasons you chop arms off is because you don't want the disease here to go here. And when there's a joint, that's what happens.

And if we're all intermingling and mixing, you know what happens? When people come in here all casual and worldly and sinful and not walking right with God, holding on to sin, unrepentant, they come in here worldly, looking like the world, reeking of the world. What happens? They haven't walked with Christ. They haven't spent ten minutes on their knees crying out to Him.

What happens? They walk in here and that part is not working properly and then the whole doesn't get built up the way it's supposed to get built up. That is the way Christ designed it to work. And that is the emphasis that we find here.

Are we going to receive it? Brethren, the thing is, we need to be walking with Him, talking with Him, growing up into Him. We need to expect Him to use us. Walk in the church and say, Lord, I don't know all the ways You might use me, but I'm going to step out and I'm going to step out here and if I look like crazy

or like a fool or like this or that, I'm going to try.

I'm going to try to channel grace. I'm going to try to talk to people about what I read from the Scriptures. I'm going to try to be somehow used in somebody's life.

What happens when each individual part of the body of Christ does not function properly? The body doesn't function properly if there are members in the body who are not functioning or functioning properly. The body doesn't function and what happens? By yourself, you don't work properly. Nobody was designed into this thing to be a lone ranger.

By yourself, it's not going to work. You must connect with others. Joined at the joint with each other to share what flows from Christ to them, onto you, and vice versa.

Remember, this whole spiritual machine runs on truth. What does truth do? I mean, truth. I come face to face.

Truth takes me deep into Christ. Why? I read this book. There's an awareness of what He's like.

There's an awareness of His Person. There's an awareness of His closeness. There's a confidence, a sense of the promises of Scripture.

But just an awareness. You read about Christ and there becomes an awareness of who He is. An awareness of His presence around me.

An awareness of what He says and does in certain situations. That gives me an awareness of what I might say and do in specific situations that I find myself in. There's a sense of His love, a sense of His sacrifice.

You just get your mind thinking about Him. We were singing the song today. There was a song there about I think it was Behold Your God.

But the palms of His hands, and I was thinking about as that spike was laid on His hand and the first time the soldier's mallet hit that thing. And that wasn't even the greatest suffering. I think about, okay, that happens in your hand or in your wrist.

What about when it goes through your ankle? What about when you've been hanging on that thing for several hours? What about when God departs and abandons, forsakes, because sin is laid on Him and God crushes Him? You think about what He suffers and you get your mind on Him. And you know, let this mind be in you. Didn't we not hear that read this morning? But how is the mind of Christ going to be there? How are you going to be saturated? How is it going to be swirling around you if you've been just sucking the world in? A sense of His power to kill sin.

A sense of the completeness of salvation. We learn what His voice sounds like. Truth.

This whole thing rides on truth. And then, another one. I'm going to be quick here, but what does it look like when a body grows? What's the manifest result? When we're working properly and the pieces are joined together at the joints, what is it? If I walk into a church where verses 15 and 16 are being carried out versus a church where they're not being carried out, what's the difference? What should I expect in a healthy church? What should I expect in a church where this is happening? What would the difference be? One thing I would say is balance.

You say, what do you mean? Well, look at v. 15. Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way. That every way jumps out at me.

Since speaking the truth in love is the way that we grow up in every way into Christ, it seems to me to suggest that we need to speak all the truths of Scripture in order to grow up in every way. Because there are some verses that apply to certain aspects of my life and some verses that apply to others. And so, we would need to be well-rounded if we're narrow in the truth that we focus on.

If we're these Calvinists and all we do is focus on five points all the time, I'm afraid we're going to miss a whole lot of what is necessary to grow up in every way. And just on that note, I would say this, I think in a healthy church, that's exactly what you're going to find. You're going to find a church where the truth is broad.

Remember, all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. And all of it is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction, and righteousness. All of it to make the man of God complete or perfect.

All of it. And so, we want to be well-rounded. And I would say this, I think when you walk into a church and you find that they're given to systems more than they're given to Scripture, that's a dangerous indication that they're not well-rounded.

They're very focused on a system. Places where you walk in and they use the system lingo, that probably leads to stunted growth. But what else? I would expect an emphasis on Scripture.

Why? Because we're supposed to be speaking the truth in love and Scripture is God's truth. There would be an emphasis there. I would expect that you have really biblical preaching that's coming from the pulpit.

Like when the guy gets up and preaches, people can really say, yeah, that comes from the Bible. Not where people are scratching their head all the time and I don't know if it's an opinion and he was pretty ambiguous. I don't really know what he was saying and nothing was for certain.

I'm not thinking people are going to be strong in a church like that. There needs to be dogmatic truth where you have preachers and teachers that are saying this is what Scripture means by what it says. I would expect the supernatural.

Why? Because we're to be growing up into Christ who is the Head. That is supernatural. That means I've got something the guy down the street doesn't have.

And I would expect that if I'm growing up into Christ and Christ is the Head, and Christ said I'll be with you to the end of the age, and Christ is with us, where two or three are meeting together in His name, there am I in the midst of that, I expect that something supernatural, something is going to happen in that church that doesn't happen in other places. What else? I would expect love. Why? Because we're supposed to be speaking the truth in love.

And I would expect love. And I'm not talking just about a bunch of nice people, but people who are lovingly honest with one another and don't allow sin to go unhindered or bad doctrine to go unchallenged. I would expect a church that is very Christ-centered.

Why? Because we're supposed to grow up into Christ who is the Head. There should be an emphasis there. I would expect a church that takes doctrine seriously.

Why? Because the antithesis to this speaking the truth in love is being blown about by every wind of doctrine. And obviously, doctrine is an issue. Speaking the truth.

Truth, I mean, if you're going to arrive at truth, you're going to be studying doctrine. I would expect a church that is very doctrinal. They're not just surface.

They're not, it's not all fluff. They take you deep. Why? Because we need to be anchored deep into truth.

Truth is the driving mechanism behind all of this. I would expect a church that is connected. What do you mean by that? Interrelational, where the people don't just come in here like Bobby was talking about in the first hour.

Come in here, nobody talks to each other. You know, they kind of have to force that in a lot of churches. Well, would you all stand up and turn around and greet each other? Why do you do that? Because they don't know each other.

It's like you don't know who's sitting next to you. This is the only time I've gone to my mom's church as an Episcopalian. That's exactly what they do.

Because why? You haven't seen each other since a week ago. And last week that person sat three rows up and I didn't talk to them at all. I mean, that's what you do where nobody knows each other.

But that early church in the book of Acts was plugged in with each other. And that's what you see here. Listen, if there's a joint, that means connectivity.

That means I've got to be involved in your life. You've got to be involved in mine. That means we're interacting together.

That means we're communicating together. It means we're loving one another. It means we're thinking about one another.

It means that there's involvement. We're a family. We're close.

We're knit. I mean, you've got joints and ligaments tying us together. I mean, it's like what? This part and this part, they know each other pretty well.

Why? Because there's a joint between them. And that's the issue. We're connected.

Ball and socket. I mean, you've got a ball and socket here. If we're ball and socketed together, there shouldn't be this distance and this alienation.

There should be a relative closeness and connectedness. Each part. This is another thing.

You would expect a church where each part is working properly or at least striving for that. What I mean by that is, you've got parts all over the place. And so it's a church where you actually have parts and pieces that make up the whole that are actively involved in building up the whole church.

It's not just the expectation that one guy's going to stand in the pulpit and his job is to build up the church. It's every part is involved some way, some how. That's what I would expect.

And you know what else I would expect? The body builds itself in love. What does that mean? That means that we're becoming something better than what we were in the past. If we're building ourselves up, it means we were smaller.

You know, if you're building a building, well, the building wasn't so developed and well-built last week as it is now if you're building that building. And if there's active construction going on. So you know what you would expect in a healthy church? Change.

You would expect that people are growing. You would expect that a static church is not a healthy church. Let's just lay that down.

So here's the last thing. Why is love the key for self-building? And that's what we see. We build ourselves up in love.

Why is that the key? We speak the truth in love. Love is essential because sacrifice is essential. Listen, it's kind of like the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment.

Do you remember what Jesus said? He looked around and He said, somebody touched Me. And Peter's like, Lord, come on, there's a crowd of people here. But how did He know somebody touched Him? Power had gone out of Him.

You know what's interesting? That's how the church is. Christ pours power, nourishment, supply, grace, help into you and through the connectivity of the joint. You're to channel that to others.

And when you do, we don't have anything that we haven't received from Him. That's true in every aspect. But you're giving what He's given to you.

That's why He gives you what He gives you. Not for you to keep it, but for you to be a channel. But that looks like something.

I mean, that looks like Jesus in a crowd and somebody reaches out and touches Him and He feels that virtue or power had gone out of Him. And I'll tell you what, if we're truly serving one another, we would feel the same. We would feel that something has gone out of us.

Why? Because something left us. Something has been imparted to others around us. You know what this means? It means your life isn't just one of self-pity.

Woe is me. Let me see how much I can drain out of other people. Love is necessary in all of this.

Why? Because love cares. I mean, love looks at other people and we care. We want to see others make it.

We want to see other people pleasing the Lord. We want to see other people healthy. I want that! And that's what love does.

Love is necessary because love cares for the best interests of others. It's not always recording all the wrongs done to myself. You know, I come to church and all those people... I mean, it's not always and forever bitter and upset and jealous and wronged and insulted.

Love seeks not its own. Love bears all things. In fact, perhaps, perhaps... I was looking for it.

I couldn't find it. I think I read one time where John Piper actually felt like maybe the joint itself is love. That that's what connects us.

And I wouldn't argue with that. But here's the thing. The body builds itself up in love by speaking the truth with one another in love.

And for that to happen, there must be interaction. We've got to get close. We have to nurture openness with one another in this church.

But there's a couple of problems. And one of them is this. For some, we could talk type A, type B personality.

But for some of us, it's just scary to go deep. Oh, we can shake hands and we can look somebody in the eyeball and say, how are you doing? But getting beyond just the surface and getting to where we're really connected past just the cordial greetings and the minor fluff, we get scared to go deep with people. That's one problem.

And there's another one. The fact is if you start getting involved in people's lives and you start probing, we as Americans, we really are thin-skinned. We get so easily offended.

That's another problem. So you've got people that are scared, and sometimes their fear is all the more solidified when, well, I tried to speak to them and they didn't like me. They counted me their enemy.

Well, that's what they counted Paul too when he was trying to do something loving. And I would say this, look, love will love even at the risk of what might happen to oneself. Remember, it's sacrifice.

Jesus loved and He gave His life. And a willingness to be the bad guy, and you know what you'll find in the church? Somebody's got a glaring issue in their life and no one else will tell them. But you feel like the Lord has pricked your heart to be faithful to them and you go to them, and then you're the bad guy.

Okay. But you know what? Which one actually loved? Kind of like the Samaritan seeing the guy on the road. In some ways, the people that didn't deal with the problem are like the Levite, like the priest who just walked by on the other side of the road.

That's really what happens when people see things and they don't speak the truth in love and help the other person to grow. And I'll tell you what, when you help that other person to grow and that part begins to work properly, then they begin to be this channel for grace. See, the church is building itself up in love.

And when you help build them, they will help build others. And this whole thing has a chain reaction effect in the church. Brethren, you know what I see in these verses? Christ.

He's the Source. Christ gives grace to each one of us. So there's this direct Christ imparting to each one of us.

Then you know what else I see here? He raises up apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers to equip us for the work of ministry for the building up of the body. So He directly works. He raises up leadership in the church.

And then He uses each of us to grow each other. It's like there's a three-fold way in which He works. That's how much help we need.

He comes at us from all these different directions. The truth is, brethren, we've got lots of problems. Seriousness of Christian problems, personal weaknesses.

You know what? He doesn't say, go to the Christian psychologist. Do you know what He assumes? He assumes that when each part in the church is working properly, that's how the church builds itself up and that's how it grows. When we speak the truth in love.

You know, the best Christian counselors you're going to go to are going to be the ones that tell you the truth. But the picture here is not that something separate from the church is what's needed, but that it's right here. That He has equipped the body with all the pieces and the parts to be joined together.

And so He, as this From Whom, the whole body, we're joined together, held together by all these joints. Is it love? Yes, there's love that holds us together. There's got to be connectivity.

This is the picture. This is the picture of a healthy church. This is what we want to cultivate here.

And that means loving each other, speaking to each other, going deep with each other, being involved in each other's lives, coming close, not being thin-skinned. If you are thin-skinned, hopefully those around you will still be faithful to you, even if it chafes you and rubs you wrong, even if you count them your enemies. May God give us those who are faithful in this church to speak the truth in love.

You think about it. Paul comes off all this glorious doctrine of the first three chapters, and when he enters into chapter 4, he gives us these first 16 verses to show us how the unified body of Christ builds itself up, and what a healthy church looks like, how it functions, what's happening, what the chemistry, the dynamic is within that church. And this is it.

And now he's going to go on to talk about the new man. And there's going to be practical expressions of how we're working all this out in our midst. And that begins in v. 17.

It's a new section. This is it. This is vital to a healthy church.

Father, may You grant this reality. Lord, we don't want to just read about it. We want it to be a reality.

We want it to be true. And I pray, Lord, give us... Oh, we need the Spirit. Pour the Spirit out that we might have the fruit of the Spirit.

And I'm primarily thinking about the love that is in that fruit that will constrain us. And we remember the truth. As much as we do it under one of these, one of the least of Your little ones, we do it to You.

As much as we seek to help one of the least of Your little ones in this place, as much as we seek to come alongside, as much as we seek to nurture, to speak the truth in love, to protect, to rebuke, to comfort, to help build up, we do it to You. We remember those words and You'll count it as done unto Yourself. And I pray, increase our love.

Increase the love. As we seek to build ourselves up, we see that the whole body builds itself up in love. And so we desperately need that.

We desperately need that. And we know that it comes from the fruit of the Spirit. And so we would cry out to You, please, if we then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, we're asking You, please.

We see a willingness. You express Your willingness. How much more will You give the Holy Spirit? To who? Lord, You say to those who ask.

So we ask, give us that which will cultivate the health of this church. I pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.

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