

(Ephesians) Ephesians 3:10-4:22

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the church as the body of Christ, the eternal purpose of God, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the love of Christ, and how these things are essential for living a life worthy of the calling.

Duration: 59:17

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3, Ephesians 2:6, Ephesians 4:1-2, Ephesians 4:31, Ephesians 5:21, Ephesians 6:10

Topics: "Christian Living", "Gods Love"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of having a solid foundation in the first three chapters of the Bible before attempting to obey the exhortations in chapters four, five, and six. He explains that without understanding the love of Christ, it is impossible to truly obey the commandments to let go of anger and bitterness. The preacher highlights the four dimensions of the love of Christ - breadth, length, depth, and height - and emphasizes that this understanding comes through experiencing suffering and trials, not just studying scriptures. He concludes by encouraging believers to allow God to squeeze them in the grinder of life so that they can become better Christians and bless others.

Transcript

We turn today to Ephesians and chapter 3. We were looking at verse 10 in our last study, that the Lord wants to use the church, that means believers who are different from each other, that's been the theme for the last 15-20 verses, people who are completely different, becoming one with each other, loving one another, forgiving one another, bearing with one another, manifesting the unity of the body of Christ, of the family of God, and thus showing the devil what God could do in human beings. Now, in the Old Testament, God could point to one man Job and say, have you seen my servant Job? That's all that God could do in the Old Testament, to point to someone who was an individual. But in the New Testament, God wants to point not to an individual, He wants to point to a group of individuals who are different from each other, who have become one.

Not, have you considered my servant Job? But, have you considered that church meeting in that little building over there? A hundred different people who are so totally different from each other, they speak different languages, they've got different backgrounds, different levels of education, different cultures, so many different barbarians and Greeks, and yet they're one. God's looking for such churches, just like He looked for a godly man like Job in those days. That's what He's looking for.

And so we see here, it's only when God can find something like that that He can point that out to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was God's eternal purpose. Verse 11, This is in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What God did through Jesus Christ coming to earth was part of His eternal purpose. Way back before the worlds were created, God had a plan. The plan was, He would redeem people from the human race, purchase them, cleanse them in the blood of Christ, and make them one body.

See, once you have seen this, we'll really be ashamed of all fighting and quarreling in our homes, all fighting and quarreling in our churches, and the devil's aim is to prevent you from seeing it. If you see it, your life will be transformed. This is God's eternal purpose.

And to fulfill this, we have boldness and confident access through faith in Christ. And because we have boldness and confident access to the Father through faith in Christ, I pray to the Father. And He says, therefore, verse 13, He says, I don't want you to get discouraged at My tribulations on your behalf, for they are Your glory.

Don't feel sorry for Me, He says. I'm okay, I'm in prison. It's not very comfortable here.

I don't have a bed to sleep on. I have to sleep on the hard floor and there are mice and cockroaches and all sorts of things roaming around here. It's not very comfortable.

I get woken up pretty often at night. But, don't waste your time weeping for Me, because it's good for Me to be here. I'm getting sanctified.

So, He says, don't get discouraged, because My suffering is for you. When I come through this suffering, I'll have something to share with you people, which I probably would not have had if I had lived a comfortable life. You know that God's messages come through people who have suffered deeply.

Not something they sit down and analyze in an air-conditioned room, studying the Scriptures and listening to tapes, but something that's come through the grind of suffering and trial and pressure. He says, they are for you. They are for your glory, so that you can become better Christians, glorify God more.

God's going to take me through something, so that I can communicate something to you. He's going to squeeze me, so that some juice comes out that you can drink, like sugar cane that's squeezed in the grinder. How many servants of God are willing to serve God like that? To be squeezed in the grinder by God, so that something beautiful and sweet can come out of their lives to bless other people.

That was Paul's desire. And he says, for this reason, I've got nothing to complain about. I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and earth derives its name.

And he says, I'm not praying that God would release me quickly from this prison. No. Look at his prayer.

This man who's suffering in those Roman dungeons kneels down and prays for these Ephesian Christians. He says, I'm praying that God would grant you the power of His Holy Spirit. In Ephesians chapter 1, he bowed the knee and prayed that God would give them revelation from the Holy Spirit.

Now he prays for them that according to the riches of God's glory, they would be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man. Do you recognize that phrase, riches in glory? It comes in Philippians 4, verse 19, a much misunderstood verse. It says in Philippians 4, 19, My God shall supply all your needs

according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

That's not referring to material wealth at all. What are God's riches in glory? It's not in rupees or dollars or pounds or any such thing. God's riches in glory in Christ Jesus is the power of the Holy Spirit and the abilities the Holy Spirit can give us to live for Christ here on earth.

That's what we see. If you want to understand, Philippians 4, 19, you've got to come to Ephesians 3, verse 16, where Paul prays that according to the riches of God's glory in Christ Jesus, the Ephesian Christians will be strengthened with power through His Holy Spirit in the inner man so that they can be strong in their inner beings to overcome sin, to overcome the flesh, to overcome the world, to overcome the devil and be effective for God and that their heart would be so cleansed that Christ, verse 17, may dwell in your hearts or as it's translated elsewhere, that Christ may feel at home in your hearts through faith. Make His permanent residence there that Christ's address would be care of your heart because it's always clean, always humble, always broken, always open to the influences of God's Holy Spirit.

That is God's will that Christ may feel at home in your hearts. Now, you know there's a difference between staying in a home and feeling at home in somebody's house. There are a lot of people in those homes you can visit, you can stay, they allow you to stay there but you don't feel at home somehow.

There are other people's homes where you go and stay and you feel completely at home. And that's what he's saying here that Christ should feel completely at home in your heart. And that you being rooted and grounded in love, rooted and grounded in love, that means your permanent address is love.

You're rooted as a tree and grounded as a building. You know a building, you go back 20 years later and the building's got the same address. It's there.

Your address must be love, grounded in love, the love of God. That's my permanent address. Love for God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind.

Love for my fellow believer. That's my permanent address. You'll never see me move from here.

That's what he's praying for them. He says Christ can feel at home only in such a heart where such a person's rooted and grounded in the love of God. And when you are in that position where you love all of God's people, love God with all your heart, you'll be able to understand something of the love of Christ you'll never be able to understand otherwise.

Because it says in verse 18 you can understand the love of Christ only along with all the saints. You cannot understand the love of Christ all by yourself. Brother, sister, did you hear that? You cannot understand the love of Christ by study, by experience, all by yourself.

If you close your heart to one saint of God, you close your heart to some revelation of God's love that you could have had through that saint. That's why I say to you, open your heart to saints from other denominations, from other groups, who know the Lord, who love the Lord, who may not agree with you in everything. Their form of baptism may be different.

They may not believe in speaking in tongues like you do. Or they may believe in it. Open your heart to them.

You'll know the love of Christ which goes beyond knowledge. How to know it? If it goes beyond knowledge, how can we know it? To know the love of Christ, verse 19, that surpasses knowledge. To know the, verse 18, the breadth and the length and the depth and the height.

There are four dimensions here, not three. Breadth and length and height and depth. Up and down and left and right.

Four dimensions of the love of Christ. The height of it. The depth of it.

The breadth of it. The length of it. In terms of time and space and everything.

To be able to grasp it. And you can only do it with all the saints. And when you know the love of Christ like this, you will gradually be filled up to all the fullness of God.

This is an amazing thing. Now we know that the fullness of God dwells in Christ. But here it speaks of that fullness of God gradually filling up, not an individual Christian.

No, impossible. But the body of Jesus Christ. I having a little, and you having a little, that the glory of God gradually fills up like a vessel, like a glass getting filled with water.

God's fullness filling His body. This is what the church is supposed to be. Such a wonderful thing.

Not the pathetic thing that we see around us. Because we haven't seen. We haven't seen Ephesians 1-3.

Now, unto Him, He says, He concludes His prayer. Who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think. God is able to do far beyond all this.

All this is fantastic. But now He says, God can do even more than all this. Beyond what we even think.

But God is able to do it only according to the power that works in us. If God is not allowed to work in you, He is limited. Notice what it says, God is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we ask or think.

A lot of people stop there. It doesn't stop there. It says, according to the power that works in us, means as much as He is able to work in you, He can do beyond what you ask or think.

To Him alone be the glory, in the church, and in Christ Jesus, to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. So there we conclude the first three chapters of Ephesians, the doctrinal section, laying a foundation, individual salvation, corporate salvation, the body of Christ, that God might be glorified in all things in Christ Jesus, according to His power working in us, so that we might live that life that glorifies God.

If we get solidly established in these foundational truths that we have heard and understood, and that the Spirit reveals to us in chapters 1 to 3, we are ready to move into what He teaches us in chapters 4 to 6. Turn today to Ephesians and chapter 4, and verse 1. The first three chapters that we have studied in the last few sessions contain the doctrinal part of Ephesians. There are no exhortations in those first three chapters. Everything that follows in chapters 4, 5, and 6 is built on the foundation of what we studied in the first three chapters.

You are going to have a lot of problems in the Christian life if you try to obey chapters 4, 5, and 6 without the foundation of chapters 1, 2, and 3. The reason I mention that is lots and lots and lots of Christians are doing just that. The end result is a life of burden, legalism, judgmentalism of others, and many problems in

their personal life. Depression, discouragement, all types of things because they try to obey God's commands without getting the foundation.

It is mentioned in chapters 1, 2, and 3. What was the foundation that we looked at in chapters 1, 2, and 3? That God chose us, God blessed us with every blessing of the Holy Spirit, cleansed us in the blood of Christ. We have a calling. God has found inheritance in us.

His tremendous power, the power of resurrection in Christ is available to us. His mercy is great upon us. He offers us everything in grace.

He wants us to be united with people totally different from us. In one body He is building a body, a family, a house. And He reveals to us this is a mystery that two can become one, many can become one.

And we need the revelation of the Holy Spirit. That is what Paul prays for in Ephesians 1 and the power of the Holy Spirit that he prays for in Ephesians chapter 3 so that we can be rooted and grounded in love, filled with the love of God in our hearts. Now, once we have got that foundation right, the revelation and the power of the Holy Spirit making us partakers of God's own nature, blessed with every spiritual blessing, every blessing of the Holy Spirit, seated in the heavenly places in Christ, all things under our feet, linked together with other members of Christ's body, then we can obey every exhortation that is found in chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6. There are some very strong exhortations.

You will never be able to obey them. Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church. Chapter 5. Stand against the wiles of the devil.

Chapter 6. Let no anger or bitterness be found in you. Let it all be put away. Chapter 4.31 How can you obey these exhortations without the foundation of chapters 1, 2 and 3? So that is important.

Now we come to this practical section. Paul says, Therefore... The very first word is therefore. Therefore means because of all that we have considered in chapters 1, 2 and 3. Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling which you have been called.

He called himself the prisoner of Christ Jesus in chapter 3, verse 1. He repeats that here again. He is not ashamed to be known as a prisoner. A lot of people would like to be known with various titles.

Titles that bring them honor. You know, there are all types of titles that Christian leaders take on today to get honor for themselves. And you have heard them.

I don't need to repeat them here. What did Paul call himself? The prisoner for the Lord's sake. Far greater in God's eyes than all these pompous titles that Christian leaders take today.

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, entreat you. Paul is an apostle. He could have exercised his authority, told people exactly what they should have done.

But he entreats. He beseeches. He humbly requests.

And that's the way we should minister the word of God. In lowliness of mind, esteeming the others as more important than ourselves. We are servants and they are masters and we are called to serve them.

Entreat you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called. You have been called with a particular calling. Walk in a manner worthy of that calling.

You've understood that calling in the first three chapters. It's a fantastic calling. No angel has such a calling.

No prophet in the Old Testament had such a calling. It's a unique calling to be a son of God in Christ Jesus. Walk in a manner worthy of that calling.

And again in chapter 4, verse 1 onwards, right on to chapter 5, verse 21, you see again the working of the Trinity. You see Father, Son, and Holy Spirit repeatedly coming forth in these chapters. This is a work of the whole Trinity.

And what is the first thing that we need to do? Humility, verse 2. With all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love. The reason we can walk like this is because we've been seated in the heavenly places, blessed with every spiritual blessing, empowered by the Holy Spirit. These are all in the previous three chapters.

Without that, it's impossible. Don't try walking like this. It will be impossible.

And in this walk, the number one thing is humility. Humility is the ground on which all the fruit of the Spirit grows. If you look at the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5, 22 and 23, you don't find humility even mentioned there.

Because that's the soil on which all that fruit grows. With all humility, with all gentleness, you know that there are only two things that Jesus ever told us to learn from Him. Matthew 11, 29, He says, Learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.

He never told us to learn from Him how to preach. He never told us to learn from Him how to pray. He never told us to learn from Him how to evangelize.

What He told us to learn from Him, He didn't even tell us to learn from Him how to heal the sick or do miracles. He told us to learn from Him how to be humble and gentle. That should be something we spend our life trying to learn from Jesus' example.

If you want to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called then, ask God to show you the meekness, the gentleness and the humility of Christ. And that that will become your nature. With all humility and gentleness.

And when you have humility and gentleness, you will be patient with others. You'll show forbearance to others in love. The living Bible says, be patient with each other.

Making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. If you love a person, you'll make allowance for his faults.

If you don't love a person, you make no allowance. You are hard on that person. Every little mistake, you're going to come down on hard.

But if you love that person, you'll be patient. If you're humble and gentle, you'll find no difficulty. Bear with other people in love.

And this is the way we preserve the unity of the Spirit. Being diligent, verse 3, to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Why is it there's so much tension among believers? Because there's so little

humility, so little gentleness, so little patience, so little forbearing of one another in love.

And that's why the unity of the Spirit is not maintained. We're to be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Again, that word peace.

Peace is the test by which we know whether our bond between us and another brother is strong or not. The Holy Spirit is the one who unites us. But we're the ones who are to be diligent to preserve that unity so that it's not lost.

There's a great need for that unity among God's people. It doesn't mean meeting in the same building. It doesn't mean belonging to the same organization or the same church.

But it does mean loving one another, being patient with one another, forbearing one another, and preserving the unity despite other differences there may be between us. Because, this is the reason for this, there is only one body. When Jesus was on earth and He walked for 33 years, He didn't have two bodies.

He had only one. And after He ascended up into heaven, He still has only one body. There is only one body.

The ones you can see in your local church, the others you can see in your hometown there, others you see once in a while from other places, there is only one body. One Spirit. There is only one Holy Spirit who is in that believer and in you.

That person who's got a different doctrine of the Holy Spirit and you've got a different doctrine of the Holy Spirit. But it's only one Spirit in both of you. And there's only one hope of your calling.

What's that? That Christ is coming back in glory. That's the hope that we have as we look into the future. That Jesus Christ is going to come back.

When you look at just these three things, one body, one Holy Spirit, one hope of our calling, and there is only one Lord. There's one Lord Jesus Christ. And there is only one faith.

Now, we're not talking about various doctrines. One faith. One true faith.

There is only one faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We're not talking about faith in little, little doctrines. No.

It's faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. One baptism. One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

Here are seven things mentioned. One body. One Spirit.

One hope. One Lord. One faith.

One baptism. One God and Father. And that's why we need to preserve this unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Think of those seven things and you'll see how important unity is. Let's turn today to Ephesians in chapter 4. We were looking at the seven things mentioned in Ephesians 4, verse 4 to 6, because of which the Holy Spirit, through the Apostle Paul, is calling us to preserve the unity of the Holy Spirit among God's people. A greatly needed exhortation for our day.

Be diligent, verse 3, to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Because there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. There is only one Father.

There is only also one baptism. Many people say, what about my child baptism? That was not a baptism at all. Baptism is immersion.

That is the only baptism there is in Scripture as you read everywhere. There is only one baptism. We don't have to be baptized a second time if we have been baptized once correctly after we were born again by immersion.

But the word baptism itself is a Greek word which means dip or immerse. So there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. You see the whole Trinity comes there.

The Spirit in verse 4, the Lord Jesus in verse 5, and the Father in verse 6. All three together form the Trinity. But, and to each one of us is grace, was grace given according to the measure of Christ's gift. The Lord not only gives gifts to all men, He also gives grace to all men.

Grace and gifts are linked together. If we try to exercise both, notice both are mentioned here in verse 7. Grace and gift. Which is more important? Which did Jesus have? He had both.

The problem today in Christendom is again imbalance. Some emphasize grace and some emphasize gift. What have each of us been given? Gifts, yes.

Grace as well. That's the point here in verse 7. And it's good to recognize that every gift we have been given is Christ's gift. It's not mine.

Whatever gift you may have, it's Christ's. It belongs to the head. He's the head.

The head determines whether you're a hand, or an eye, or a leg, or a ear. And the head uses these parts of the body. So, it's Christ's gift.

And therefore, it says, He's quoting from the Old Testament, When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, and He gave gifts to men. Now, this expression, He ascended, what does it mean? Except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth. He who descended is Himself also He who has ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.

We'll just spend a few moments looking at that, because it refers to the time after Jesus' death. When He went, it says here, to the lower parts of the earth. In those days, all those who died, whether they went to be with God, or were eternally damned, went to the lower parts of the earth.

Jesus said to the thief on the cross, Today you'll be with Me in Paradise. He also said another time, The Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights. So, Jesus was in the center of the earth.

Not His body. His body was on the surface of the earth, in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea. But Jesus Himself was in the heart of the earth, where Paradise was.

He was there with the thief who was saved in the last minute. So, Paradise was in the heart of the earth. And there was a big gulf, and across the other side of the gulf, again in the heart of the earth, was hell.

Abraham and Lazarus were in the Paradise section of Hades, or Sheol, the lower parts of the earth where departed spirits go. And the rich man was in the hell part of Hades, or Sheol. Hades is a Greek word.

Sheol is a Hebrew word. Both mean the lower parts of the earth where departed spirits go. It's not actually hell where the rich man went, and where people go who reject Jesus Christ.

That is not the hell. That's not Hades. Hell is one section of Hades.

Paradise is another section of Hades. Hell is one section of Sheol. Paradise is another section of Sheol.

And Jesus went to the Paradise section along with the dying thief who was converted. The other thief went to the other section. To hell they could see each other, as we see in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, which by the way is a true story.

And from there he ascended on high, it says. And when he ascended on high, he took a whole lot of captives captive. And he gave gifts to men.

Now this expression, he ascended, what does it mean, except that he also had descended into the lower parts of the earth. And he who descended is also the one who descended far above all heavens that he might fill all things. So what we see here is that Jesus, when he ascended up from that Paradise section, he did not go alone.

He came to earth, he was on earth for 40 days, and then he ascended. And when he ascended, as we read in Acts 1, all those people who were locked up in Paradise, or Abraham's bosom down in the heart of the earth, were taken up with Jesus into the immediate presence of God, into the third heaven. So we see that that is what's referred to here in verse 8. And that's why today Paradise is no longer in the heart of the earth, where Jesus was for three days and three nights.

No, today Paradise is up in the presence of God, because Jesus went up and took the whole Paradise section of Hades up into the third heaven. And that's why when Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12 about Paradise, he says he was caught up to Paradise, not caught down. He was caught up to Paradise and calls Paradise as being in the third heaven, the immediate presence of God.

There is where Paradise is located today. And that took place at the ascension of Jesus Christ. And from there, from His ascended place, He took captives captive, took a whole lot of captive.

People were captive in the lower part of the earth. He took them up. And then from there He gave gifts to men.

Now this is after He ascended. That's very important to note that. That He ascended up into heaven, poured out the Holy Spirit, and through the Holy Spirit through all these twenty centuries He has given gifts to men.

What sort of gifts are these? He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors, and teachers. So there are five different gifts given to the church. Christ as the head has given these five specific gifts.

They are people. Now the gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 are gifts that individual believers have. Like the gift of prophecy, or the gift of healing, or the gift of wisdom, or knowledge, or discerning of spirits, or speaking in tongues, or interpretation, etc.

But here, it's referring to people being given as gifts to the church. These are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Now all these five are there in the church today.

This is not referring to the twelve apostles who walked with Jesus and who began the ministry on the day of Pentecost. No. Because these are apostles who were appointed after Jesus ascended.

It's very clear in verse 9 and 10. He ascended, verse 8, and then he gave gifts. So it's the one who ascended who gave gifts, whereas those apostles were appointed as apostles before Jesus ascended.

So that makes it very clear. These are apostles who were appointed in the church after Jesus ascended up into heaven. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.

The Lord has appointed such people to build up the church. The purpose of these gifts is mentioned in verse 12. For the equipping of the saints.

That means these people are not to do all the work. They are to make the saints equipped. They are to train the saints to do the work of service.

Now they are not the ones doing the service. Notice in verse 12. These people are to equip all the members in Christ's body so that those people, verse 12, do the work of service and thus, verse 12, the body of Christ is built up.

So God's not called apostles to build the body of Christ. God's called apostles to equip the saints, to equip the believers so that they build up the body of Christ. And there's a growth in that body.

Apostles are those who we could say move around sent forth by God. The word apostle itself means one sent forth. Sent forth by Jesus personally and from their ministry in the Acts of the Apostles, we see what their ministry was.

It was establishing churches, appointing elders, sorting out problems when those problems arose in those churches, being an elder brother to the elders in the churches to guide them, keep in touch with them, watch over their spiritual growth, to maybe remove elders if needed, and to give direction, teaching, etc. to churches. They were like the fathers of the spiritual fathers in the church.

So that's the ministry of an apostle. And then the prophets are those who speak God's word, as it says in 1 Corinthians 14.3, to build up, to correct, to rebuke, to challenge, to encourage, to comfort, to console, to speak God's word according to the specific need of a particular group of people at a particular time. Like the Old Testament prophets came forth with such a ministry.

A particular message to the people of Israel at a particular time. And then there were some who were evangelists. And these are people who go out and bring the heathen to Christ.

People who don't know the Lord. Bring them to Jesus and bring them to be a part of the body of Christ. Evangelists are not to work on their own.

They are to be to work together to bring people to be a part of the body of Christ. And then the shepherds, the pastors, are the ones who care for the lambs and the sheep and the little ones. And then the teachers, those who teach God's word and instruct people concerning what the scriptures teach.

And together they were to build up the saints so that they are equipped to build the body of Jesus Christ. All these gifts are needed. And we need to thank God for them and seek God for them.

Let's turn today to Ephesians and chapter 4. We were looking last week at the gifts that Christ has given to the church. Mentioned in verse 11. Five gifts of human beings whom God has given to the church.

Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. God has given these gifts, and we considered last week what these ministries were. It's not necessary for a man to claim to be an apostle.

The important thing is the ministry. It's not a question of calling oneself a prophet or an apostle or something like that, like a lot of people do. These are not titles.

A lot of people use these as titles. These are not offices. These are gifts.

The Bible says so specifically. God has given them as gifts. So it's not for someone to call himself by these titles.

They are to function in this gift which God has given them. If God has made a man an apostle, he doesn't have to call himself an apostle. He must fulfill an apostolic ministry.

Establish churches, appoint elders, and give guidance to the churches, and be an elder to those elders. If a man is a prophet, he must fulfill that ministry. He doesn't have to call himself a prophet.

The people who call themselves are usually doing so to exalt themselves. We're all brothers. We're not here to call ourselves apostles or prophets.

We're members of the body of Christ with different functions. Evangelists. Pastors.

Again, pastor is not an office like many people seem to think it is today. It's a gift. It's a function.

You can have twenty pastors in a church and all of them working in a secular job. Those who have a care for the sheep. One pastor in a church may look after five sheep.

Another pastor in the church may look after another five sheep. They're all pastors. They're all shepherds caring for the lambs and the sheep and guiding them and encouraging them.

They may not be apostles or prophets or evangelists, but they're shepherds who care for the little ones. And then teachers who expound the Word of God, establish doctrine. Now, Jesus never appointed any women to be apostles.

And there are no women prophets in the New Testament. Except a false one, Jezebel. There are no women pastors or teachers, but there are many women who could have the gift of being an evangelist.

That's just in passing. These gifts are primarily given to men, but among evangelists there are many, many women through the centuries who brought thousands of people to Christ in many parts of the world who have gone on as missionaries. And the purpose of all these gifts is to equip the saints for the work of service to the building up of the body of Christ.

Now, when an evangelist just brings souls to Christ, if he has not added them to the body, he's not fulfilling his function as a member of the body. He's just doing an independent ministry. To do the work of an evangelist is to bring an unbeliever and make him a part of the body.

To use an illustration, if there's a potato on that plate, and I want to make that potato a part of my body, I have, my hand is to go out and take that potato and put it into my mouth. That's evangelism. But if I just put it into my mouth and keep it there for one week, it'll rot and stink, and I'll have to spit it out.

And that's what happens to a lot of converts who are not established in the body. They get, they're not inbuilt. They're not built in to the body of Christ.

And so, after a while, they just fall away. But once that potato goes into my mouth, my teeth take over, and then the throat swallows it, and then it goes to the stomach, and acids are thrown on it, and the digestive system takes over, and finally, lo and behold, one day that potato has become blood, flesh, and bones, a part of my body. Now, who did that job? Well, the evangelist did the first part of it, but he could only put it in the mouth.

Other ministries had to take over from there. The prophet throwing acids on it, in the stomach. That was an important ministry.

So, there are many ministries in the body of Christ that result in a person being incorporated into the body. That's how the body of Christ is built up. Built up numerically, and also built up spiritually.

The evangelist adds members, and the others build them up so that they grow in the Lord. And this growth has to continue, verse 13, until we all attain to the unity of the faith. Now, we haven't attained to the unity of the faith because of the limitations of our mind, but until we attain the unity of the faith, verse 3, we have to be diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit.

Notice the contrast here. The unity of the spirit is essential, verse 3. We've got to preserve that until we attain to the unity of the faith, verse 13. When you read verse 3 and verse 13 together, it reads like this.

Be diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace until we all attain to the unity of the faith. The Holy Spirit is realistic. Paul is realistic.

Because of the limitations of our mind, because of the carnal nature of our flesh, because of the fact that our mind has been warped by sin, and because our mind is only a little cup and we can't understand all of God's truth, we don't all understand the faith correctly. Now, when the Bible speaks about faith in God, that is dependence upon God. But when it speaks about the faith, it's talking about the doctrinal part of the faith, which we believe.

And in that area, we have not come to unity, and we will never come to unity until Jesus comes again. There are always going to be believers who see things a little differently from us. And we see it all around us.

Even in the same church, people have differences of opinion. But it doesn't matter. Until we attain one day, one day we will see everything alike.

One day we will think alike in every little area of the faith. But until we reach there, we have to preserve the unity of the spirit. In other words, the unity of the spirit is not dependent on the unity of the faith.

That's a very important truth that you need to understand. Your unity with other believers is not dependent on the unity, on being united in the same doctrine. The essential doctrines concerning the deity of Christ, His perfect humanity, His sinless life, His death, His resurrection, His ascension, His coming back in glory,

the eternal judgment, and all that we are agreed on.

But on other things, there must be freedom given to others to hold a different view. We preserve the unity of the spirit. Because the main area into which we have to grow up is the knowledge of the Son of God.

It says in verse 13, to know Jesus Christ, His eternal life. As we know Him better, we will learn to love one another better. We have to grow up to a mature man.

We are all immature at the moment. We have to grow up to a mature man. We have to grow up to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, verse 13.

So what all do we see there? The unity of the faith, the knowledge of the Son of God, the mature man, the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. We have to grow up into all of these. And it is to enable us to, this is what it means, to build up the body of Christ.

And it is to enable us to grow up into all of these, to build up the body of Christ, that God has given the body apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, so that they equip the saints, so that the saints encourage one another to build up the body. So this is what it means to build up the body. It's not just adding numbers.

It's people in the body growing up to know Jesus Christ better, the knowledge of the Son of God. It's people in the body growing up to maturity and not behaving like little babies, quarreling and fighting all the time. And growing up to the stature of the fullness of Christ.

In other words, more and more, walking as Jesus Christ would walk on this earth. That is the building up of the body. Paul had a tremendous passion to ensure that all believers in every church would grow up to this maturity.

And in view of this calling, as a result, we must not be children. See, he says we must grow up to be a mature man. The contrast, verse 13, between a mature man and a little child.

You know what that is. Little children don't have discernment. They put all types of things into their mouth, and that's how a lot of believers are.

They don't know what they should take and what they shouldn't. They sit watching all types of television programs. They don't know what to reject and what to accept.

Like little children putting dust and mud and filth into their mouth, they put every type of thing into their minds. That's one of the clearest proofs that they are children. You see a believer watching various types of television programs, and you'll find pretty quickly whether he's a mature man or a child.

A mature man's got discernment. He knows what to eat and what not to eat. He knows which channel to turn off and which to turn on.

As a result, we're no longer to be children. And most believers have no discernment at all. And if you don't have discernment, the best thing is not to watch anything, and to concentrate on getting to know Jesus better and His Word better.

God's desire is that we grow up. We're not to be tossed here and there by winds of doctrine. That's another mark of children.

They're never steadfast. They're never steady. One day, they're taken up with this doctrine.

And after some time, they're running after another doctrine. After some time, they're running after some other emotional experience of what they call is the Holy Spirit. It's not Holy Spirit at all.

It's just emotions. Then they go after some other doctrine of making money, or something like that. They're always tossed here and there by the trickery of men and the craftiness and deceitful scheming.

There's a lot of crookedness among a lot of preachers nowadays in Christendom. And many children, many believers who are like little children, are tossed here and there by these waves and winds of doctrine. It's like a ship being beaten by the waves.

And there are men who trick believers because they want their money, or something like that. We must not be children. We must grow up.

The Holy Spirit has come to make us mature men. Let's respond to that call of God in our lives. Turn to Ephesians in chapter 4 in verse 15.

It's speaking here about the saints building up the body of Christ in verse 12. Not the apostles and prophets, etc. It's the saints who build up the body of Christ in verse 12.

It's very clear that the New Testament teaches that every member of Christ's body is supposed to build up the body of Christ. And an apostle does his job only when he's equipped the saints to do that. You read verse 11 and 12 and you see it so clearly.

A prophet does his job only when he's equipped the saints to build up the body. An evangelist does his job, and a pastor and teacher only when they have equipped the saints to build up the body. When every member in Christ's body has been equipped to encourage one another and to build one another up.

And we are to speak the truth in love. This is all part of building up the body. As we speak the truth in love, we grow up, verse 15, in all aspects unto Him who is the head, even Christ.

Here again you see the balance. We need love and we need truth. The glory of God was seen in Jesus Christ full of grace and truth.

We're to speak the truth always, but we're to always speak it in love. We must speak in love always, but we must speak the truth. And as we speak the truth in love, we grow up in all aspects to Him who is the head, even Christ.

We grow up to Him. That is spiritual growth. That means becoming more and more like our head, like Jesus.

And it is from Christ that the whole body, verse 16, is fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies. In other words, every single member of Christ's body must have a living connection with the head. And no pastor, no prophet, no apostle, no teacher, no evangelist should ever come between a believer and the head.

A lot of people are doing that today. They don't allow that individual believer to have a living connection with Christ. They come between.

They do everything for Him. They find God's will for Him. They don't allow that person to have a living connection with Christ, and so that person doesn't grow.

This is one of the great tragedies in Christendom today. Every person must have a living connection with Christ. And it's from the head that the whole body grows.

And it says here, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies. We don't realize, for example, how important the joints in our body are. Take the right arm, for example.

There's a joint at the shoulder. There's a joint at the elbow. There's a joint at the wrist.

That itself is three. A number of them at the wrist, enabling us to move the wrist in many directions. And there are two joints in the thumb and three joints in each of the fingers.

Do you see how many there are? At least 17, if not more, in one arm. And it's because of the joints that you can bend your fingers, bend your elbows, move your wrist, hold things, move your arm, throw balls and write and so many things. In fact, everything you can do with your hands is because of the joints.

Now, if you had very strong fingers and very strong forearm and very strong upper arm, and if the joints were not working, your hands would be useless. You see how important the joints are? And joints speak of fellowship. Here is a strong upper arm and a strong lower arm, but if they don't have fellowship, that arm, both arms are useless.

It's far better to have a weak upper arm and a weak lower arm and a good joint. It's better to be two weak brothers who love one another in fellowship than to be two strong brothers who can't get along with each other. That'll be like a stiff hand, which cannot be bent.

So it says here about that which the joints supplies. According to the proper working of each individual part, every single part of the body has got a part to play. Each individual part.

Remember this, my friend. You've got a part to play in the body of Christ. Otherwise, the body will not grow up.

And the growth of the body, the building up of the body is done in love. It's as we love one another that the body grows. The body builds itself up in love, it says in verse 16.

How do you know whether a church is growing? It's not in terms of numbers. Do they love one another more? Do they care for one another more? That's the thing. Do they speak the truth in love? That's the test.

Then the body is being built up. Then the apostles and prophets and pastors and teachers and evangelists are doing a good job. And all the saints are growing up.

And all the saints are involved in the ministry, not just a one-man show as it is in many churches, where all the saints are doing their thing. That doesn't mean all the saints are preachers. Preaching is not the only gift in the body of Christ.

There's just one gift among many. How many tongues do you have in your body? You don't need more than one tongue. But there are many other functions.

What about encouraging people? What about visiting and praying for the sick? Many ministries like this. There are many, many gifts which different members in the body of Christ can exercise. What about helping others with money and hospitality and food and so many things? There are many, many gifts in the body of Christ.

Thus, the body is built up. But all the gifts function in love. Notice the balance between gifts and love in Ephesians 4. The same thing in 1 Peter 4. Gifts and love.

The same thing in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. Gifts and love. The same thing in Romans 12.

Gifts and love. Always, wherever gifts are spoken in these chapters that I just mentioned, there's always gifts and love. Romans 12, 1 Peter 4, Ephesians 4, 1 Corinthians 12-14.

Always, gifts and love go together. Gifts without love are like an electric wire without any insulation. If you touch it, it'll kill you.

At the same time, just the insulation without an electric wire inside doesn't produce any power. What do you need? You need a wire which is insulated to protect people from being killed. There's tremendous power in electricity.

But we wouldn't have uninsulated wires running around the house. It would kill people. We'd rather live without it.

You could go out at night and touch it accidentally and kill yourself. Insulation is required for every bit of wire which carries electricity. And the more power, the more insulation, you know that, the more God equips you, the more you need love.

And that's the balance. And again He says, therefore, in verse 1, and now therefore, therefore, I say this and affirm together with the Lord, the Lord and I are saying this together, verse 17, that you should not walk as the Gentiles walk in the futility of their mind. Notice the things He says.

We should not be children anymore, verse 14. We must not walk any longer like the Gentiles. We were children once upon a time, but no longer.

We did walk like the heathen people walk, but we don't walk like that anymore. There must be a distinct difference between the way a Christian walks and a non-Christian walks. The difference must be light and darkness.

They walk in the futility of their mind. That means their mind is blinded, confused, empty. They're like a blind man not knowing where they're going.

But you know where you're going. You know the difference between a blind man walking down the road, not knowing where he's going, and a man with clear eyesight walking. That should be the difference between a Christian and one who doesn't have that faith, a heathen.

Being darkened in their understanding and excluded from the life of God. When a man has not surrendered his life to Jesus Christ, his understanding is darkened. He's excluded from the life of God because of ignorance.

It's not because he's evil. It's because he's ignorant and because his heart is hard. Why do people reject Jesus Christ? Because of the hardness of their hearts.

They become callous. When a man keeps on rejecting, rejecting, rejecting Christ, his heart becomes hard. And when a man's heart becomes hard, you can see the result of it.

He goes into a life of sensuality, practicing every kind of impurity and every kind of greed. Greediness and impurity are put here in the same category. Now, a lot of people would put impurity as a terrible evil, but they wouldn't put greediness in the same category.

They don't think greediness is such a bad thing. To be greedy, to have something which we don't have, material things usually, but here the Holy Spirit puts greediness and impurity in the same category and says, these people have become callous and the proof of their callousness is they are so insensitive to impurity. And they practice all types of greediness.

But he says to these Christians in verse 20, you didn't learn Christ in this way. What does it mean to learn Christ, verse 20? It's a lovely expression. It means we must make Jesus the study of our life.

A lot of people study the Bible. They go to Bible colleges and seminaries to study the Bible, but here it says about studying Christ. Learning Christ.

You did not learn Christ in this way. If indeed, you have heard him and have been taught in him just as the truth is in Jesus, it should be the lifelong study of a Christian to know more about Jesus, how Jesus lived, the life and character of Jesus should be his study. That's what it means to learn Christ.

And it's as we learn Christ that our behavior changes. The Holy Spirit shows us the glory of Christ and changes us into that likeness. And then he says concerning your old way of life, your, you had this old nature of yours.

Throw it away, he says. Put off the old man which is corrupt according with the lust of deceit. Put it off.

God has crucified the old man with Christ on the cross. He's condemned it. Now what you need to do is agree with God's judgment and say, I'm going to put it off.

I agree with you, Lord. I will put off that old man from my life so that I can walk in newness of spirit as the Holy Spirit shows me the way Jesus walked on this earth.

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