

LSB Ephesians 4:11-16

11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming, 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being joined and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the properly measured working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Last week we introduced the concept of spiritual gifts. Christ gifts each and every believer with special areas of giftedness, not for their satisfaction and benefit, but for other members of the body.

Your gift is for everyone, but you. The other members of the body depend on what you supply, or rather what the Spirit of Christ supplies to the body through you. We're like an organism that is the sum of it's individual parts.

And we quickly looked at lists of gifts that Paul recognized, in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12. Varieties of giftings. Paul uses the metaphor of a human body. All the different parts that make up the whole. And the further metaphor is that the church with all of it's diversity is the body of Christ.

In all the different metaphors used to describe our association with God our Father, we have the metaphor of family. We are sisters and brothers, daughters and sons of God. There is the metaphor of vine and branches, our connection to God through the vine. I'm a little grape somewhere.

But of all the different metaphors, all of them were also used in the old testament in God's describing his association with Israel too, except for this one. We are the body of Christ. Individually members of a fullness that is Christ. Each member different from each other member, but combined together in a unity that completes a likeness of Christ.

So this morning, to get us in context and to refresh your memory, I've read the longer portion from verse 11 through verse 16. And even though we've looked at the other longer lists of various gifts and giftings combinations there is an undeniable order to this cause and effect. I can't get away from it even though I might like to; it's there.

11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ,

Cause and effect, cause and effect, cause and effect, all layered upon layered until we get to the desired result which is down in vs. 13 somewhere. A full representation of Christ. A complete picture of Christ.

to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ,

That's the goal, that's the end effect of all the layered causes working to that end. You could outline Paul's logical order to get to the end effect.

Apostles. Prophets. Evangelists. Pastors who are teachers. First cause separated by the word FOR

equipping the saints. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers are the first cause in the logical progression and the first effect is;

FOR

the work of service. Cause; equip the saints. Effect; for the work of

service

Then the work of service of all the saints is the cause for the next effect;

FOR the building up of the body of Christ.

Years ago, when I would build an array of cameras that had a very important role to play in the gathering of information that scientists would study in order to supply an end conclusion or answer to a question, a lot of money got spent.

If armies of people and millions of dollars of equipment come together to get an airplane to deliver a payload to cause a desired event that my camera array is going to capture in many thousands of moving pictures in order to arrive at a solution . . . no pressure . . . but if the event happens and I go out to get all the film from all those cameras, and the cameras didn't get the signal to run . . . oops. Sorry about your millions of tax payer dollars. It's a do over.

If that happened, and it never did on my watch, but if that happens you can count on a meeting with folks above your pay grade who will ask you, is there anything you need, that you don't have, that we need to get for you, so that you can accomplish your task.

That was a lot of responsibility heaped on one guy. But if you think about it, I'm in a bigger mess now than I ever was then. Because in Paul's logical order of cause and effect to get to a far more important result, I find myself in a place of responsibility far more important than wasting a few million tax payer dollars.

In vs. 11, the apostles and the prophets fulfilled their responsibility. Finished, once for all time. Completed and recorded in this book. Ephesians chapter 2 tells us;

*God's household, 20 having been built on the **foundation** of the apostles*

and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being joined together, is growing into a holy sanctuary in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

Christ is the cornerstone. The apostles and prophets are the foundation. That part is finished. You only need one foundation. The building is built on top of the foundation. The apostles and prophets effectually delivered the once for all time faith.

But the evangelists and pastor / teachers are up on the 20th floor still building the edifice. My responsibility, according to this passage, is to take the apostles and prophets foundational doctrines, now laid down for all time in this canon of scripture, and equip the saints by shepherding and teaching.

That's why James, who was half brother of Jesus, and who was the pastor of the initial church at Jerusalem, says in his epistle; James 3:1 *Do not, many of you, become teachers, my brothers, knowing that we will receive a stricter judgment.*

Teachers bear more responsibility and more judgement if they fail, because they bear the responsibility of equipping the saints. James says, don't be that guy, if you can help it.

I understood that concept perfectly. I didn't want this job, but I made the mistake of telling the Lord, if the door swings open, I'll go through. Within 6 months, it did, and here I am. No papers, no training, no seminary, but I am an elder with the responsibility of equipping the saints.

How do I do that? Exactly what we're doing this morning. This book. *line upon line. Precept upon precept. Here a little, there a little.* Isa. 28:10 And I wait. I can't cause the seeds to grow. All I can do is throw them out. After that, growth is up to God.

I'm poor at shepherding, but you're getting taught. What do you expect out in the frontiers in Tonopah. You get bottom of the barrel. BUT none of you are off the hook, because there is a banquet feast of good teaching available on line these days.

Our little extended family is enjoying a mini revival these days. My grandson discovered the banquet feast and began filling his spiritual tank with listening to John MacArthur. Every day. On line. Grace to You podcasts. 28 minutes long. And his mom started listening. And my middle daughter started listening. And growth! Everybody's realizing a few minutes a week does not a christian make. There's more to this being a christian stuff.

I would encourage every person here to go do that. gty.org Start by listening to the daily portion, 28 minute podcasts. Every day, every day. We have a banquet feast available with a few pokes to our telephones. If you drive to work, download the podcast and listen while you drive.

OK, back to our Ephesians passage.

11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ,

See, fwiw, if I'm doing my part equipping, I'm off the hook for the rest. The work of service building up the body of Christ, that's y'all's job. Get to work. I've been waiting patiently for 11 years for the fire to catch and take off.

Kidding aside, we all understand, it's the Lord that builds the church. We can't make it happen. Only He can cause thriving.

Psalms 127:1 Solomon wrote; *Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.*

We wait patiently for the Lord to accomplish whatever it pleases Him to do in Tonopah. But I would encourage you. We're perfectly situated for God to do something astounding. He loves to pick the little out of the way places that are as good as helpless to do something mighty. That way He gets all the glory. If something important did happen here, everyone would know, it was God that did that. So keep your seatbelts fastened.

13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ,

This verse reminds us, we're going somewhere. There is a maturity that we're striving for in this life. We don't just get saved and then stall and wait for the rapture. The christian life is a non stop movement towards a goal. Jesus. There is to be change. Growth. Movement. Continually until we see His face

John the apostle speaks to that idea beautifully.

1 John 2:12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you have known Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you have known the Father. 14 I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

John recognizes 3 categories of normative christian experience. Babies. Little ones. Little children. Old folk, who have the wisdom of long years doing battle. Finishers as John Piper calls us. We've got snow on the roof but we're still in the fight, and wisdom from the many battles behind us. And young men. Men in full stride. Strong young men, strong with the Word of God that abides in them. Out on the front lines of battle.

Nobody gets a free ride in this deal. Babies and little children . . . they grow. Nothing more ridiculous than 30 year old children. We have no respect for that. Children grow. There's no room for "failure to launch" christians. Grow up. Get to work. Get in the fight. Stay in the fight. That's the normal progression for christians.

And you'll notice, although you may have to turn back the clock a bit, but in rural places, children don't get to be useless for long. A good farmer or rancher has got his 9 and 10 year olds working.

This idea of adolescence until you're 30 is NOT biblical. You get fed, and as soon as you can carry some load, you go to work.

My daughter is a manager at Costco. And she was telling me about hiring kids. I love Costco for this. They'll wait until it's about 101 degrees in the summer, and they'll hire 30 kids and send them all out in the parking lot pushing carts. In the heat. It takes about one day for that 30 to become 8. Or less.

And she says the prizes are the kids that started out at In-N-Out burger. She says those kids come out of that place and they already know how to work. She loves hiring kids from In-n-Out burger.

Christians who are still in the children group can get to work. No, they don't go out to the front lines and get shot at, but they need to get to work doing something. Pushing carts, spiritually.

That way when they've got this book abiding in them and come of age spiritually, they can shoulder some responsibility. Spiritually. We're like a starvation ranch in the sage brush in the 1930's. Nobody gets a pass. Everyone needs to be busy. God designed His church that way.

Small children out in the cotton fields working with their parents so the family doesn't starve. We look at that now with sadness, but kids rarely die from having to work. Instead they get built up. And guess what. Then

when you get to verse 14, there's some backbone in place. Some roots that go down deep for when the hurricanes come.

14 so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,

I can picture a conversation between the devil and some top demons about the year 1562. This demon says; I've got a great idea for some mischief. Let's get some false teachers to start teaching a Word of Faith doctrine where you can get rich and get everything you want by naming and claiming. A sort of pyramid where the guys at the bottom are working their way up higher in the pyramid and always getting the nubes at the bottom to kick money higher up in the pyramid.

And Satan says; Are you nuts! It's the reformation. The word of God has been translated into the peoples language and put in the milkmaid's hands. Everybody's got God's word. It's a great idea, but you're going to have to wait until about 1960. Then it'll fly.

Fast forward to 2024 where you click on You Tube and you can find the most bizarre things going on . . . in the name of Christ. Absolutely bizarre.

I was up at Megan's house wiring a new hot tub for Eric and Megan and working by myself last monday, and I was listening to a podcast. This wacko church puts on a "stronger men" conference, and they've got a shirtless non christian sword swallower who goes up a pole, like a striptease pole and swallows the sword and then comes flying down and God miraculously saves him in time before he hits the ground and finishes the job with the sword. Bizarre. That's supposed to make stronger men???

And then another equally wacko guy whose name you might recognize, he used to be one of these young restless and reformed guys but he started getting lots of X rated visions about everything his people are out doing, clearly sees them in the X rated acts, well he's written a book about the

Jezebel spirit. Jezebel spirit this and jezebel spirit that.

So he's at the stronger men conference as a speaker and after the non christian half naked pole dance sword swallower guy he comes up to his turn at the stronger men podium and declares the half naked sword guy on the pole is from Jezebel. He's got the Jezebel spirit. And the guy putting the wacko conference on goes and drags the other wacko off the stage.

Folks, this is happening in the name of Jesus. I mean, if you're a non christian on you tube looking for porn, you might stumble onto this deal and it would be way more bizarre and interesting than the porn you went there to watch. And Jesus name is attached to it.

OK. Let me read vs 14 to you again, and you tell me what it means.

14 so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,

Strong men come from a heavy diet of the Word of God. According to the apostle John. In the Word of God.

And furthermore, men who are strong from growing up in the Word of God would look at this stronger men conference and say; That's nothing but *children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,*

When you've got a firm foundation in this book, you do not end up at that conference. Right? The devil was right. That wasn't going to fly in John Calvin's day, but in 2024 you can pull it off. Make Jesus a laughing stock.

How many times have you been listening somewhere and you say to yourself, that just doesn't sound right. That seems off. Can't put my finger on the exact place where the Bible says that isn't right, but it just seems crooked.

Even if you feel like you're only getting 10% of what is taught up here each week, don't be surprised when the Holy Spirit prompts you, *that thing that guy just said; that's crazy talk*. A steady stream of sound doctrine builds up your resistance.

And that's good because there's no shortage of craziness that claims to be christian these days. Your resistance muscle is built up and strengthened by sound doctrine. Line upon line. Precept upon precept. Here a little, there a little.

You're like a little sail boat out on a sea of craziness, and sound doctrine is the ballast weight below the surface, unseen, and the more sound doctrine you take in, the more ballast weight down under the surface, so when the craziness storms broadside you, a hundred mile an hour wind of crazy hits your sail broadside, that ballast down there will tip you back upright.

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ,

Vs. 15 is the antithesis of verse 14. Vs 14 is what not to do. Vs 15 is what TO do.

Don't be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,

Do speak the truth in love, and grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ,

Caution: Speaking the truth, in love, is what the world calls hate speech. The world has a false definition for what they term love that is different than real love that christians who are forgiven understand and experience. We are called to lovingly warn people that all sin will be punished. God promised that. All sin requires punishment.

So then, Do I hate you if I lovingly try to warn you that what you are doing is an abomination to a holy God who has sworn in His wrath that no sin will go unpunished. That's actually the most loving thing possible that I can do.

You're walking into a train tunnel and a quarter of a mile back I saw the train go into the other end. Don't go in there. A train will run over you. You will die if you insist on going into that tunnel. Believe me.

You hater. You just hate me and don't want to let me do what I feel is best. Someone make a law against this hater telling me to not enter the tunnel.

That's kind of how it goes. And we know ahead of time that truth will trigger a hateful response from the person you're commanded to tell the truth to in love.

Vs. 15 isn't a suggestion. It's an order. And, oh trust me, part of me wants to let the guy just go on in there. You're so smart and I'm a hater, well go on ahead then. See ya. That's my first reaction.

Sometimes the truth is like a cool glass of water when we're parched. It's easy to speak the truth in love then. But sometimes the truth is like chemotherapy, without which death is imminent. Either way, love requires it.

That's why I hide behind this pulpit with all you gentle folks out there who are parched enjoying the truth. I'm just enjoying the easy part. It's hard to speak the truth to people who love their sin and hate anyone who doesn't affirm the sin that God abhors.

*15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to **grow up** in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ,*

Where does christian progress and growth come from. This verse is a

formula for growing. Truth causes growth. And not just any kind of growth, truth causes growth towards a goal. A desired end. Christ.

In John chapter 18 we witness an interesting discussion about the concept of truth.

37 Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You yourself said I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." 38 Pilate said to Him, "What is truth?"

In the post-modern world truth is negotiable. There are no absolutes. Truth is whatever you decide it is for you. That's your truth . . . which isn't necessarily my truth. Truth is a moving target. There is no absolute truth.

Want to get your name in the paper and be remembered. Be the teacher who decided that $2+2=4$ is not only not true, it's paternalistic oppression. But I would caution you not to enter any building she designs.

There's nothing new under the sun. Our world will stand with Pilate at the judgement day and all say in unison; What IS truth.

Yet, Jesus gave us an absolute answer. The problem is; truth is elusive. Truth is for a select group who God has ordained who can hear it. *Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.* The world isn't disingenuous when it cries out in anguish, what is truth. When they reject Christ, they have rejected the sole source of truth.

There is no truth possible, without Christ. He invented it. He spoke it into being in creation. He owns it. Reject Him, and it's lost. Hopelessly lost.

Listen to the dichotomy of the haves and have nots as Jesus prays His high priestly prayer in the garden on the night before His crucifixion; John 17:

14 I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I do not ask You

to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.

When we are called out of this world and into Christ's kingdom, we are called out of darkness and into light. We are called out of a world that has no truth and into a world that is absolute truth. Thy Word is truth.

In my lifetime we've seen a notable prophecy fulfilled. Daniel 2:4 says; *4 But as for you, Daniel, conceal these words and seal up the book until the time of the end; many will go to and fro, and knowledge will increase."*

I asked google how many printed pages in 1950 compared to 2024 and google didn't know. In 1950 perhaps you could have counted all of the books ever published. Computers changed that. Now there are trillions of books of words. And soon none of it will mean anything because of artificial intelligence taking over the process of written words.

But consider this: There is in fact absolute truth written down, once for all time in this book we hold in our hands. Very manageable. It isn't lawyer speak. It isn't rocket science. God meant for fools to be able to understand His words. Thy Word is truth.

Therefore, all of the trillions and trillions of published words on billions of servers in thousands of libraries, world wide, can be compared to the truth standard, this book, and declared either true, or false. If it agrees with this book, it is true. If it disagrees with this book, it is false. That's pretty manageable. This book IS the standard of absolute truth.

This morning as I clicked on the computer to put the finishing touches on this manuscript a Pocket read popped up. Click bate. I chuckled at the title; **The Danger of Absolute Thinking Is Absolutely Clear** *Clinical psychology views absolutist thinking as unhealthy. Why?*

Danger:!! This book IS the standard of absolute truth. That gives a

whole new direction and application to verse 15.

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ,

The words of this book are the source, the food, that causes growth. There is a direct corresponding relationship to growth to maturity and usefulness as a christian, and this book. The words of this book are also the way out of the chaos of vs 14. Winds of doctrine like the pocket title I just read.

No book, no growth. No truth, no growth. Why is christendom full of stunted starved emaciated disfunctional useless christians. Direct correlation. The book is the truth. The truth causes growth. Not rocket science. Not lawyer speak.

I want to return to vs. 14 for a moment in view of the state of christendom in 2024. stunted starved emaciated disfunctional useless christians. Defenseless against the onslaught of this world system of evil and false teachings.

14 so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming,

There is a perfect storm brewing just offshore, heading for a land fall with imminent destruction and utter desolation in it's path. Listen to what Jesus tells the disciples on the eve of His death about christians in a future time.

Matt. 24:23 Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. 24 For false christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive, if possible, even the elect. 25 Behold, I have told you in advance. 26 Therefore, if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them.

A deception so powerful that no one can withstand it who is not chosen. A powerful deception and so-called christendom is populated with emaciated shells of christians, unfed, no defense against even the silliest easiest waves on the sea, and a tidal wave is heading right towards them. Like a perfect storm.

Get ready. Here's how; *15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ 16 from whom the whole body, being joined and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the properly measured working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

This final metaphor is very simple. It's a first century medical description of a healthy human body. Every part working with every other part to function as a whole. And Christ is the unseen part that holds all of it together. He is the life blood.

All of the parts supply all of the other parts, and a healthy body grows. Love, plus truth, plus Christ equals growth.

Oh, one last thought about absolute truth; It requires obedience. We have to apply these truths and live according to what this book requires. Thriving comes in obedience. Jesus comes along side and helps.