

Ephesians 4D

- There comes a time in every church family when tough words must be spoken
 - Times when our leaders give us direct counsel, admonishing us to live up to our calling in Christ
 - After all no one in the body of Christ is perfect
 - No one is above correction
 - Yet in polite society, we usually shy away from confrontations and difficult conversations
 - We worry about perceptions, hurt feelings, losing friendships
 - Polite company overlooks flaws and avoids sharp words
 - And there is no society more “polite” than church society
 - Now, it’s a good thing to be concerned with preserving relationships
 - And it’s an act of love to overlook someone’s flaws or idiosyncratic behaviors
 - But when those flaws stand in the way of our corporate pursuit of godliness or the mission of the church, then we must respond
 - Our leaders must confront issues
 - And the body must rally around the weaker members and support them
 - But if things don’t improve, the leadership ultimately has a responsibility to the larger body to take action
 - We must rebuke, expel or otherwise discipline the offending member or members
- In the New Testament, we have a number of letters focused on misbehaving or spiritually immature churches
 - Typically, our thoughts turn to the letters to Corinth
 - This church had a reputation for carnality

- And Paul's letters record the many shortcomings in the way that church operated, including their misuse of spiritual gifts
- So Paul wrote to correct the church, and as you read those letters you find Paul moving between encouragement and admonishment
 - But Corinth did corner the market on carnality and immaturity
 - There was another church in the first century that struggled with rising above their pagan culture
 - And that church has not two but three letters written to it
- Of course, I'm speaking of the church of Ephesus
 - Besides the letter of Ephesians, we have two letters Paul wrote to the pastor of that church, Timothy
 - And add to those Jesus' short letter to Ephesus in Revelation and we begin to see how important this early church is in scripture
- By the midpoint of Chapter 4, Paul has explained the purpose of spiritual gifts in the body to this church
 - He told us that the Lord has gifted the body of Christ with a diversity of special abilities
 - And He intended that we put our spiritual ability to use in service to Him by strengthening the body of Christ
 - As we serve others in our spiritual gift, we make others spiritually stronger, so they, in turn, can serve better
 - And so the cycle continues
 - But this process only works if we all participate in such a way that we preserve the intended purpose and usefulness of our gift
 - Gifts must be developed before they reach their full potential
 - I may have the gift of teaching, but I can't teach effectively until I've applied myself to developing my knowledge and skills
 - This process doesn't deny the supernatural origins of my gift
 - It merely reflects God's purpose in equipping me
 - He wants me to spend time working in me by His Spirit so I will develop into a mature man in Christ even as I help others

- Secondly, these gifts must be regulated in the body so they work together in harmony
 - We can't have everyone doing everything simultaneously
 - We have times and places and even seasons when particular individuals serve the body
 - If we regulate gifts properly, everyone has a place and role, everyone is growing, everyone is maturing together in unity
- But when some are left behind or everyone is left to do things their own way, the gathering of the body deteriorates rapidly into anarchy and confusion
 - In the letters Paul wrote to Corinth we can see that outcome, which is why Paul commands them to "grow up" spiritually
 - He calls them to stop thinking and acting like children but to begin to mature in their understanding and behaviors
 - Child-like behavior in the church means thinking and acting like the unbelieving world
 - Holding to the same bad thinking and false teaching
 - Conceding to the same temptations
 - Embroiled in the same disputes, exhibiting the same pride, contempt and jealousies
 - And these same problems existed in Ephesus
 - So now in Chapter 4, Paul's letter takes on a decidedly negative tone, at least for a moment
 - Having explained spiritual gifts as tools to strengthen and mature the body, he now admonishes the church for failing to use their gifts to this appointed outcome

[Eph. 4:14](#) As a result, 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;

[Eph. 4:15](#) but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

[Eph. 4:16](#) from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

- Paul begins v.14 with the Greek word *hina*, which means “in order that” or “as a result” as my Bible said
 - The church’s spiritual gifts were given to the church to drive our spiritual maturity
 - And God accommodated our spiritual growth as Christians through this gift *in order that* we would stop acting like children
 - Simply put, spiritual maturity is supposed to result from the proper operation of spiritual gifts
 - And proper behavior is supposed to result from spiritual maturity
 - At the end of the day, it matters little how much spiritual maturity someone gains through study or serving if in the end they don’t act the part
 - If we can talk the theological talk but aren’t walking the walk, it’s nothing more than vanity
 - Notice Paul defines being “children” in the body of Christ as being tossed in waves and carried about by the wind
- Paul’s metaphors emphasize two aspects or qualities to child-like living
 - First, the immature Christian has a spiritual life that’s out of control
 - When I say “out of control” I don’t mean crazy or bizarre
 - I mean it the way Paul does...someone who has not gained control over their own spiritual growth
 - They are “tossed” and “carried” by others
 - They don’t determine their spiritual course in life
 - They haven’t determined their strengths and put those to work in service to Christ
 - And they have no insight into their spiritual weaknesses and they aren’t seeking the help of other gifts in the body to grow
 - They are floating along, jumping from one thing to another
 - Paul says they become victims of the trickery of men scheming deceitfully to entrap the ignorant believer

- Such was the case in Ephesus, where false teachers were contending with the leaders like Timothy
- And they were gaining a foothold by recruiting the spiritually immature within the church
- These spiritual children weren't grounded by a firm appreciation of biblical truth, so they were constantly tossed
 - The Greek word translated "tossed here and there by waves" is a euphemism for confusion
 - So when a new, false teaching comes along to tickle their ears, these children follow after it in ignorance
 - They are so confused in their understanding of their own faith, they have no hope to stay on course
- Or if a new spiritual book (like "The Shack") or some program (like "40 Days of Purpose") captures their attention, they quickly flock to it
 - Paul says they are carried away by every wind of doctrine
 - "Wind" suggests something fleeting, lacking substance, something that's here one moment and gone the next
 - Lacking maturity, these children of the faith chase after the latest spiritual fad like a child chases leaves blown by the wind
 - And these fads come and go because they make no meaningful impact on the spiritual maturity of the body of Christ
 - Even worse, these winds of doctrine distract the body from a proper study of God's word which produces lasting change in our hearts
 - The root problem for every spiritual child is they have no plan for where they're going in their spiritual life
 - They don't understand the big picture of what God is doing in their life
 - So they don't know where they're trying to go
 - They volunteer sporadically to serve in the church and often in places where they have no spiritual gifting

- At the same time, they pass by the very opportunities to serve or learn that God prepared for them and they desperately need
- They participate in their faith like someone rooting for a sports team
 - You may have heard that football is a game played by 22 men who desperately need rest
 - And it's watched by 50,000 people who desperately need exercise
 - Similarly, the spiritually immature children watch others at work in their spiritual gifts when they desperately need to get in the game themselves
- Obviously, Paul wouldn't have said these things to the church in Ephesus if not for the fact that they weren't taking advantage of spiritual gifts in the body
 - So in v.15 he calls for the church to speak the truth in love
 - What "truth" needed to be spoken in love?
 - By the context, we can only assume Paul is talking about correcting, admonishing and exhorting those who needed it
 - Those in the body who aren't participating at all
 - Or aren't doing the right things, or are simply working in the wrong ways or in the wrong places...need to know
 - Someone needs to speak this truth to them, though in love
 - We encourage those who have self-doubt
 - We teach those who are acting in ignorance
 - We exhort those who are lazy or hesitant
 - We admonish those who are acting sinfully
 - The only thing we *can't* do is remain silent or speak absent a sincere love for the person
 - If we love one another, we want each other to grow up into a mature reflection of Christ, as Paul says at the end of v.15
 - We want to be like the one Who leads His church
 - Or at least that should be our goal

- And so we serve one another in our gift, we receive service from others and we speak up in love when necessary to ensure this body is working as God intended
- If you want a preview of how this process is supposed to work, consider Paul's analogy in v.16
 - When everything is working in the right way, you have first a "whole body"
 - We use the term "body of Christ" commonly, but sometimes I think we think of the work merely as a synonym for collection
 - Like I might say Mozart had a large body of work
 - But in the Bible, the term body points to a different collection
 - We're not merely a collection of Christians...ideally we'll work together as if we were a single organism
 - A single, like-minded body moving in the same direction with a common purpose
 - Like the human body, each part plays an essential role together
 - But Paul says we will be fitted and held together
 - These two Greek words are reminiscent of a description of a stone mason's handiwork
 - Fitting stones means selecting the right one for a particular use
 - Sizing it up and then shaping it gently until it's perfectly suited to serve a place in the building
 - Then it's put in place and held together
 - The stone would be held in place not by mortar but by the support of the surrounding stones
 - It was held together by the other stones that were equally well-fitted to their places
- That's the goal for this body of Christ
 - Our spiritual gifts are tools in the Hand of the Master Carpenter, Jesus
 - He knows where we are best suited to serve Him in this body

- And He uses the gifts of others around us in the body to gently knock off our rough edges, spiritually speaking
- So that we fit into place perfectly
- And then He holds us there by surrounding us by other believers who are fitted to their respective places as well
 - They teach us to strengthen us for the walk ahead
 - They encourage us through trials
 - They pray for us continually
 - They perform music to help us worship
 - They cook and clean, mow and paint to nurture and comfort us
 - And they call us when we're absent and correct us when we're in error
- And yet these things must be regulated, according to the proper working of each part, Paul says
 - That phrase is so beautifully worded in the Greek
 - The Greek word translated "proper" means literally poetic meter
 - And the word "working" can mean energy or action
 - So Paul is comparing the functioning of everyone together as like poetry in motion
 - Like all the instruments in a symphony playing in harmony
- I see glimpses of that ideal at times here at Oak Hill Bible Church
 - When we work together in service to a family in need
 - Or when we come together for a work day at the church
 - Or when we rally to support a missionary in need
 - It's poetry in motion
- But every church knows times when things aren't quite in sync
 - When some parts are moving, but some are still

- Some instruments are in tune, some not so much
- Some of our works rhyme while others are poorly chosen
- When everything is in sync, Paul says it causes the body to grow
 - I believe he is speaking primarily about the individual spiritual growth of each individual
 - Each of us move further away from child-like spirituality and toward a mature perspective
 - More importantly, we adopt mature behaviors and become stronger followers of Christ
- But I think Paul is also speaking implying numerical growth
 - Because the world is naturally attracted to symphonies and poetry
 - Because the immature believer will take note of a mature, stable Christian who isn't tossed about by the fads in other churches
 - Because mature Christians will flock to those communities that reflect their values and grow
 - And because mature, strong Christians naturally multiply by witnessing to the world around them
- In other words, the very things we want so badly, to grow and reach a wider audience, are best accomplished by how we grow one another here
 - As Paul says at the end of v.16, we need to build each member of our body up in love to get where we want
 - Speaking truth in love about what needs to change, about how each of us may become a more mature member of this body
- Friends, that's what it looks like when every joint in our body is supplying what we were designed to contribute
 - It's a beautiful thing, but it only works in a culture where we're willing to roll up our sleeves and get to work
 - We need to drop the pretense of our perfect lives which is only possible when we maintain superficial relationships

- We need to look and speak honestly about where we go as a body
- We need to speak in humility and listen with patience
- And the biggest threat to this unity is sin within the members of our body
 - By sin, I don't mean the occasional personal sins that everyone battles daily
 - I mean lifestyles of sin, adopted patterns of ungodliness that are condoned and even encouraged in the body
 - Often these sins fly below our radar, because they are common in worldly life
 - Paul addresses this enemy in the rest of Chapter 4, which we'll just step a little way into today

[Eph. 4:17](#) So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind,
[Eph. 4:18](#) being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart;
[Eph. 4:19](#) and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

- After teaching on the purpose of spiritual gifts and exhorting the church to seek to live as mature Christians, he then calls them out for failing in this regard
 - Here's an example of Paul speaking the truth to the church in love
 - He says the church must no longer walk as Gentiles walk
 - In this context Gentiles is a euphemism for unbelievers, those Gentiles of Ephesus who are not a part of the body of Christ
 - These Gentiles represent the past for those in the church
 - Once before, the believers in the church in Ephesus lived like the rest of the city
 - They walked as those Gentiles walked, Paul says
 - They lived in the futility of their mind
 - The Greek word for futility means emptiness or vanity

- Unbelievers live vain, empty lives, no matter how they may try to fill it with meaning or joy
 - They climb social and economic ladders that lead nowhere
 - They contend with one another in jealousy, anger and greed
 - They indulge their flesh in various ways and reap the fruit of their sins
- Paul says they become callous to sin and its consequences, so they give themselves over to sensuality
 - Sensuality is a pursuit of any stimulation of our flesh
 - It's not merely sexual, though it includes sexual sin
 - It's hedonism in all forms
 - Prompted by an emptiness in the spirit, they compensate by overstimulating the flesh, which is sin
- So they practice every kind of impurity with a greediness that can't be satisfied
 - A little drink isn't enough, so they need more
 - A little shopping isn't enough, so they max out the credit card
 - A little pornography isn't enough after a while, so they seek for something even more offensive
 - A little money or power or recognition isn't enough, so they do anything to get more
 - When it all falls apart, they shake their fists at God
- Paul says unbelievers are darkened in their understanding and excluded from the life of God because of this pattern
 - They think they understand the world and themselves but they have no clue
 - They don't understand how far they are from God
 - They don't realize they're putting their faith in a world that is going to be destroyed

- And they don't have a hope to avoid the eternal punishment awaiting them at death
- The unbeliever's sin, which is present from birth, hardens their heart to the love of God
 - So they ignore the Gospel message even when it finds its way to them
 - Only if and when the Lord chooses to penetrate their heart with His word can they be woken from this spiritual slumber
 - Praise the Lord that His grace worked in this way for our sake!
- Which is why Paul demands that the church in Ephesus stop living as if that wake up call had never come to them
 - We don't know exactly what sins were predominant in this church
 - But whatever they were, it's clear they weren't mature and they weren't maturing
 - They seemed to have a problem with honesty and with coveting and greed, as you'll see later in this letter
 - All in all, they hadn't made the transition yet from merely a person who *knows* Christ to a person who *follows* after Christ
 - Their misuse or lack of use of spiritual gifts was robbing them of that opportunity
 - And their continuing pursuit of the world was sapping their energy
- Do Paul's words sound like they were written to you?
 - Do you feel the tug-of-war Paul is describing?
 - Are you still searching for that place God wants to "fit" you into the body of Christ?
 - Or maybe you're serving but it hasn't lit a fire under your walk with Christ?
 - Or maybe that life you had before Christ is still the life you're leading now

- If that's you, then don't keep doing the same thing over and over again while expecting a different result
 - Rethink your priorities
 - Rework your schedule
 - Refocus on participating in the growth of this body so that you may serve the purpose God has for you in His body
 - If someone speaks truth to you in love, hear them and ask if the Lord is speaking to you through them before reacting
 - And let's all grow together in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ