

Ephesians 4:7-16

Unity Through Diversity

When I filled in last Fall, we covered Ephesians 4:1-6. Tonight we are going to continue with Ephesians 4:7-16.

As a reminder, Ephesians was written by Paul and is one of the Prison Epistles – these are the letters written by Paul during his first imprisonment after he returned from his third missionary journey. Apparently, during his first imprisonment, he was able to receive visitors relatively freely and through these visitors he could keep up with the condition of the churches and correspond with them. This is when he wrote the Prison Epistles - Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon may have been written and sent with Tychicus for delivery at the same time. Ephesians and Colossians are very similar in content.

Ephesians can be divided into two basic parts. Chapters 1-3 are heavily “doctrinal” and Chapters 4-6 are focused more on practical application – though I would call tonight’s passage mostly doctrinal. Really - all instruction is doctrine – so, in that sense, everything in the book is “doctrine”. But - when we say the first three chapters are heavily “doctrine” – it is the part of the book that reveals and explains theological truths – the things we need to know about theological reality – in order to understand how to live and please God based on this reality. To be able to live correctly, we must first know God and understand what truth and reality are. And the only way we can know God, truth and reality is through His revelation of these things to us in the Bible. For example, how would we know that we have forgiveness of sins, new life in Christ, our future glorification, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, spiritual gifts and many other theological truths if God had not revealed these things to us? We wouldn’t. This is why we have to study the Bible – the entire Bible - so diligently.

So – in the “doctrinal” portion of the book – Chapters 1-3, Paul gives us a lot of theological truth about the things God has done for us, about who we are now in Christ, and the work He has prepared for each of us to do. And in Ephesians 4:1, Paul exhorts us to live up to this “calling”. Here’s Hoener’s summary:

We see the calling first in chapter 1 where we have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in that the Father selected us, the Son redeemed us, and the Spirit sealed us (1:3-14)..... This calling is further seen in the salvation of the unregenerate by God’s grace and their placement in the heavenlies in Christ (2:1-10). This calling proceeds from the individual to the union of the Jews and Gentiles into one body, called the church (2:11-3:13).... Because of this calling to individual salvation and to a corporate body of believers, Paul draws the inference that we should walk worthy of that calling (4:1). (Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 502)

Chapter 4 begins with a call to “walk worthy of the calling with which you have been called.” There are five sections in Chapters 4 and 5 that begin with a call to walk. Here they are:

- **4:1 – walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called**
- **4:17 - walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk**
- **5:2 – walk in love**
- **5:8 – walk as children of Light**
- **5:15 – walk not as unwise men but as wise**

Tonight we are going to study Eph 4:7-16. But, since it is a portion of this first exhortation to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called”, let’s read the whole section – turn to Eph 4:1-16 –

¹ Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, ³ being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. ⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, “When He ascended on high, He led captive a host of captives, And He gave gifts to men.” ⁹ (Now this *expression*, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) ¹¹ And He 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 knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 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; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, 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. Ephesians 4:1–16 (NASB95)

Now - we covered Ephesians 4:1-6 last October. To briefly sum it up, it is an exhortation to behave consistently with everything entailed in our calling by God - what God has done for us and who He created us to be and do – and particularly the

unification of Jews and Gentiles into “one new man” – the body of Christ. Therefore, our walk should preserve the unity among believers that God has created. This walk is characterized by humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love among the Church, as well as diligence to maintain that unity. This unity is grounded in the Trinity and the work of each Person in the Godhead - One body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. Positionally, God has unified all of us in the Church – it’s a positional condition or state of being – and we are responsible living up to that position and manifesting that unity in our behavior.

Now – looking at verses 7-16 - as I said earlier, even though we are in the “practical” portion of the book, verses 7-16 is loaded with theological truth about some things we would not otherwise know. That Christ has given each of us gifts, and how the gifts Christ has given each of us are supposed to work together and cause the Church – and each individual believer – to grow. These verses explain how the diversity of gifts is purposeful and should function to help us grow in unity.

So – let’s start with Ephesians 4:7:

⁷ But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Ephesians 4:7

The first part of this verse tells us that “grace” “was given” to “each one of us”. “Each one of us” is referring to all believers – Paul, the Ephesians, you and me – all believers have been given this “grace”. What is this “grace” that was given? “Grace” is the word “χάρις” – which means “unmerited favor”. This verse is talking about a particular favor – a particular spiritual enablement - in context, this grace refers to the spiritual gift that each believer was given to enable that believer to do his or her job. Notice that this grace was given – passive – the gifts came from someone else. Notice also this grace “was” given – meaning the gift had been given in the past – a believer receives the gift at the time of belief. The last part of this verse emphasizes that our gifts come from Christ. It is His gift to each believer. He is the giver of gifts, and He determines what gift each of us has. Notice also this phrase “according to the measure of Christ’s gift.” This means that – not only does Christ determine what gift is given to a believer – He determines the amount of the gift that He gives. Believers with the same gift will have differing amounts of that gift. ⁱ

That’s pretty interesting – Christ gave each a believer at least one spiritual gift. He determined the kind of gift given. And He also determined the amount of the gift given. He knows the work He has for us to do and He gives us what we need to do it.

Now let’s move to Ephesians 4:8-10:

⁸ Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.”⁹ (Now this expression, “He

*ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)
Ephesians 4:8-10*

Verse 8 is a reference to Psalm 68 and Paul is using it to make a point about Christ and gifts. What is his point? Before we get to that, I need to point out a huge issue with this quote in verse 8. This appears to be a quote from Psalm 68:18. However – and here’s the problem – Paul changes the words. Here’s what Psalm 68:18 says:

¹⁸ You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, Even among the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell there. Psalm 68:18 (NASB95)

Here’s what Paul’s quote in Ephesians 4:8 says:

⁸ Therefore it says, “WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH, HE LED CAPTIVE A HOST OF CAPTIVES, AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO MEN.” Ephesians 4:8 (NASB95)

Notice these two changes Paul makes:

- **“You” referring to God is changed to “He” referring to Christ.ⁱⁱ**
- **“Received gifts” among men is changed to “gave gifts” to men.**

What is going on here? This is very difficult to figure out and a lot of real smart Biblical scholars have spent a lot of time trying to explain the changes.

Ps 68 is kind of long, and I don’t want to get bogged down on this point, but here is the way I have decided to look at this: Psalm 68 is a victory Psalm. According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary:

This is “a song” celebrating God’s triumphal ascent to Mount Zion. If the superscription of Davidic authorship is correct, then the occasion may have been David’s conquering the city (2 Sam. 5:6–8), or moving the ark to Zion (2 Sam. 6), or some triumphal procession after a victory, or his victories in general.....

The psalmist reviewed the history of Israel from the wilderness wanderings to the occupation and conquest of the land. He emphasized God’s choice of Zion, which resulted in Israel’s taking many Canaanites as captives and the Israelites receiving gifts or spoils from the captives. This is the reason he sang praises: God was marching triumphantly on behalf of the oppressed. David called on others to join him in praising their strong Lord.

Allen P. Ross, “Psalms,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 842.

I think Paul is using the quote as his starting point to demonstrate that our spiritual gifts come from a Person who – by virtue of His victory over all His enemies – has the power and authority over the universe to carry out His plan for the world, and His plan includes giving spiritual gifts to His followers in the Church.

Notice what Paul does after he quotes Ps 68 - In verses 9-10, he hones in on one particular aspect of the quote – the ascension.

⁹ (Now this expression, “He ascended,” what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.) Ephesians 4:9–10 (NASB95)

In Ps 68, God leads the Israelites through the wilderness and into the land that He promised them, conquering enemies all along the way. He ascends in victory to Mount Bashan (Zion), His holy mountain, and rules victorious from that position. It is interesting to me that the last verses in Ps 68 refers to God Himself giving strength and power to His people:

³² Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, Sing praises to the Lord, Selah. ³³ To Him who rides upon the highest heavens, which are from ancient times; Behold, He speaks forth with His voice, a mighty voice. ³⁴ Ascribe strength to God; His majesty is over Israel And His strength is in the skies. ³⁵ O God, You are awesome from Your sanctuary. The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people. Blessed be God! Psalm 68:32–35 (NASB95)

Psalm 68 depicts God descending from heaven to lead His people and defeat His enemies, and then ascending to rule from Zion in victory. Paul is saying that this corresponds to what Christ has done. Christ’s birth united Deity and humanity in one person – Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man – at the same time, and without mixture of the two natures. So - through the incarnation, God descended to earth. In His humanity, Christ laid aside the independent use of His attributes as God, and depended solely on God the Father in perfect obedience, even to the point of His sacrificial death in which He suffered the penalty for all the sins of humanity. Christ was bodily resurrected demonstrating that His sacrifice was acceptable to God, as well as demonstrating His victory and power over death. Through this, Christ accomplished absolute victory over all His enemies - and God exalted Him – He ascended above all the heavens – above all creation – and seated Him at the right hand of God - and He – Christ – a human being - rules the universe victorious from that position. As victor, He has all right, power and authority to carry out God’s plans – which are His plans - for the universe.

Notice that, in verse 10, Paul tells us that His ascension – His victory – was necessary so that “He might fill all things”. What does it mean by “fill all things”? The word “fill” is “πληρωω” – which means “to fill” something up. “All things” –

means what it says – everything – the universe. Christ is seated at the right hand of the Father, with all right, power and authority to carry out His plans for the universe. And at this time in history, He is in the process of “filling all things”.

How is Christ “filling all things”? In the context of this passage, He is doing it through His Church, in preparation for the time He comes to get the Church at the rapture, and ultimately the time in the future when He will return to earth to rule on David’s throne during the Millennial Kingdom. There is a sequence in the way God’s plan is being carried out through Christ.

Paul referred to this earlier in Ephesians 1:22 and 23:

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. Ephesians 1:22–23 (NASB95)

So – through His perfectly righteous life, sacrificial death on the cross, and His resurrection overcoming death, Christ was victorious over all His enemies – sin, Satan, death, and the world system – and God the Father resurrected Him and exalted Him to the highest position of power and authority in the universe – above all the heavens. From that position, Christ is carrying out His plan for the universe. And a part of that plan is to “fill all things” – and during this dispensation, He is using the Church as His tool to do this.

Each of us is a part of the Church, and a particular aspect of His filling of the universe through the Church are the gifts He gives to each one of us to enable us to serve – to do our job. Hoehner said it this way:

“...the object of Christ’s ascension was to allow Him to enter into a sovereign relationship with the whole world, and in that position he has the right to bestow gifts as He wills.” Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 537.

So - That’s the basic point Paul is making with his reference to Ps 68 – that Christ has ascended in total and complete victory over all enemies. As victor, He has absolute right, power and authority to rule the universe, and that right, power and authority includes the giving of gifts to us believers.

Now, verses 11-16 are one long sentence in Greek in the next verse – in verse 11 - Paul lists some people who have certain particular gifts – which are to be used to equip all the rest of us to use our own specific gifts in service to Christ. They are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. I’m going to call these people “Body Builders” - they are people who Christ has given what I’m going to call the “Body Building” gifts.

Let’s briefly describe these gifted people. We don’t have enough time to go into them in great detail because my goal tonight is to focus on the point Paul is making

with the whole of the passage. So - who are the apostles Paul is referring to in the passage?

As used in the New Testament, the word “apostle” means a person who has been commissioned by another person or group to accomplish some purpose. In our terms, an apostle would be an authorized agent or delegate. The term “apostle” can be used in a general sense and a technical sense. In the general sense, the term just means an agent or messenger who was sent out to do something or deliver a message. In the technical sense, it means an official delegate of Jesus Christ. I’ll quote Harold Hoehner on this:

“.. an apostle is an official delegate of Jesus Christ, commissioned for the specific task of proclaiming authoritatively the message in oral and written form and of establishing and building up the churches. There are three kinds of apostles mentioned in the NT: those who had been with Jesus in his ministry and had witnessed his resurrection (Acts 1:21-22); Paul, who was born out of season (1 Cor 15:8-9); and those who receive the gift of apostleship.” Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 541.

It's interesting, but other commentators you read – such as John Walvoord – tend to put apostles into only two categories - those who had been with Jesus in his ministry and had witnessed his resurrection – and those who had witnessed the resurrected Christ (which includes Paul). However, the New Testament refers to other men as apostles, such as Barnabas (Acts 14:14), James (Gal 1:19), Andronicus and Junius (Rom 16:7), Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess 1:1, 2:6), and doesn't say that these others witnessed the resurrected Christ. So, they either were not apostles in the technical sense, or there is a third category of apostle – as Hoehner's quote indicates. We are not going to go down that trail tonight.

Now, all of the men who Christ gave to the Church as apostles were also given the gift of apostleship. The gift of apostleship included the ability to prophesy and to proclaim new revelation from God. Also, according to 1 Corinthians 12:12, true apostles were able to authenticate their message with signs, miracles and wonders. Since the gift involved the proclamation of new revelation, as well as the ability to perform authenticating signs, wonders and miracles, the gift of apostleship is not operative in the Church today.

Next – the prophets - who are the “prophets”? According to Hoehner:

“... the prophet was one who was endowed by the Holy Spirit with the gift of prophecy for the purposes of edification, comfort, encouragement (1 Cor 14:3, 31), and further, to understand and communicate the mysteries and revelation of God to the church (1 Cor 12:10, 13:2; 14:23, 30-31). The prophetic gift may include a predictive element (1 Thess 3:4; 4:6, 14-18;

Gal 5:21). Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 542.

Since the completion of the canon of Scripture was closed when the apostle John wrote Revelation around 96 AD, the gift of prophecy is not operative in the Church today.

Next, we have evangelists - who are the “evangelists”? They are people who have the gift of evangelism – they are specially gifted in proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers. We are all supposed to do this, but evangelists have a special evangelistic calling and the gift that goes along with it. This gift is operative today.

Who are the “pastors and teachers”?

The Greek word for pastor is “ποιμην” – a “shepherd”, a “guardian or leader”. The Bible portrays a pastor as a shepherd of a flock – leading them to the right places, guarding them, feeding and watering them, caring for them.

“Teacher” is just that. A teacher. Due to the way the clause “pastors and teachers” works in Greek, there is a debate as to whether the term is referring to one gift – the gift of “pastor/teacher” – or to two distinct gifts – the gift of pastor and the gift of teacher. I believe the term to refer to two gifts that are related. According to Greek scholar, Dan Wallace:

“Eph 4:11 seems to affirm that all pastors were to be teachers, though not all teachers were to be pastors.” Daniel B. Wallace, Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament (Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1996), 284.”

So, based on that, there will be persons in the church who have the gift of teaching, but these people may not have the gift of pastor. On the other hand, a person who is a pastor should have both the gift of pastor and the gift of teaching. Obviously, these gifts are operative today.

One other thing to note – 1 Cor 12:28 indicates that the gift of “apostle” is of first importance in the Church; next was “prophets”, and then “teachers”.

Now – let’s move on to verse 12 and 13. Verse 12 tells us the purpose to be served by the Body Builders - why Christ gave them to His Church. He gave them “for the preparation of the saints”. They are supposed to use their Body Building gifts to prepare all believers - the saints - to use their other gifts. Remember, every believer has at least one gift. And these Body Builders have been given to us – the Church - to prepare us to use our gifts.

How do they prepare us? Well, the apostles and prophets were used by Christ to build the foundation of the Church. Look at Ephesians 2:19-20:

19 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, Ephesians 2:19–20 (NASB95)

Beginning with Pentecost, the apostles and prophets were used by Christ to proclaim the gospel, establish the initial churches, and write the New Testament books that completed the canon that we have now. Their job was done when the canon was completed. We were given the New Testament through them. So – they have given us the content of the Word of God concerning Christ and His words and His work and the Church and our future hope that is the foundation on which the Church is being built.

Today - evangelists are used by Christ to proclaim the gospel revealed through the apostles and prophets and add new believers to the Church. Christ uses pastors to train, care for and protect the believers Christ has given into their care and help them grow to maturity. And He uses teachers to clearly and accurately interpret and communicate the Word of God – critical for the proper training of everyone – including the evangelists, pastors, and other teachers.

Verse 12 also tells us what these Body Builders are supposed to prepare us for. It says they are preparing us for “The work of service”. The “work of service” consists of the work Christ has for us to do as His servants. Remember Ephesians 2:10:

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. Ephesians 2:10 (NASB95)

We are God's workmanship – by grace He saved us – and we were created in Christ – our “new birth” – to do certain works God has for us to do. And God gave us the Body Builders – the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers - to prepare us – to train us and equip us – to do the work He has planned for each of us to do.

The last part of verse 12 tells us that what Christ intends to happen through us as we do the work we have been prepared to do by the Body Builders - the “building up of the body of Christ”. The Church – the body of Christ – is a living thing – an organic, dynamic thing. To use Paul's metaphor of a human body – the Church is like a human body – it needs to grow and to mature. And to do this it needs all its parts doing their parts. And the parts need equipping and training to be able to do their various jobs in building up the body – which is what the ministries of Body Builders are supposed to do.

Next, Verse 13 tells us what the goal of this Body Building process is – this is the ideal the Church is to attain to – and could attain to if everyone would do their jobs - three things –

1. the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God
2. to a mature man
3. to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ

This is the goal is for the whole Church – maturity measuring up to the maturity of Christ. The whole body of Christ is supposed to grow and mature up to Christ’s standard and the gifts are all given to accomplish that goal.

The first part of this goal is “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God”. The mature body of Christ is supposed to be unified in two aspects – unity of “the faith” and unity of the “knowledge of the Son of God”. “The faith” is talking about the content of faith. The things we all believe as revealed to us in Scripture. As we learn about the things revealed to us in Scripture, we learn more and more about Christ, The Son of God. As we apply what we learn in faith, we gain greater understanding of our faith and Christ. Understanding of the content of faith and the application of our faith are interdependent. It’s like the difference between knowing the rules of a game and actually playing the game. You can know the rules, but you don’t really understand the game until you play it. And the more you play the better you understand it. So – the Body Builders are supposed to do their jobs and prepare everyone to play the game, and the rest of us are supposed use our gifts and play - and this is how Christ intends for the Church to become unified in the content of Scripture and in the knowledge of Him.

The next part of the goal for the Church is to attain to “a mature man”. What is a mature man? The word translated “mature” is “τέλειος” – and it means “perfect, complete, fully grown, fully developed”. In the metaphor of the Church as the body of Christ, the Church is intended to become a “a grown up” from Christ’s perspective – it manifests doctrinal unity, stability, faithfulness and love in its behavior. It is no longer like the immature child that Paul is going to describe in the next verse.

The third part of the goal is to attain “to the measure of Christ’s full stature”. The Church is supposed to attain to the measure – “measure up to” –Christ’s stature – His complete maturity. Remember Christ is the fullness of God, and the Church is supposed to measure up to the fullness of Christ. A standard that is impossible to attain through our own effort apart from the power of God.

Notice something else about the order these 3 goals – they depend on each other. “Unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” is required for the Church to become a “mature man”. And the Church must become a “mature man” in order to measure up to “the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ”.

So, Christ gives each believer at least one gift. In addition, Christ has given certain Body Building gifts and the Body Builders - the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers - to His Church - to prepare, train and equip all the rest of us to use our gifts in service to Him – meaning - do the works He has prepared for us to do. And we are supposed to be faithful servants and actually use our gifts. Christ is working through each of us to grow and mature the Church – We are his tools – to build the Church up so that it measures up to Christ.

Now, in verses 14 and 15, Paul pivots from the goal for the whole Church – as a corporate body – to the goal for each individual believer. Verse 14 says:

14 As a result, we are no longer to be [so that we will no longer 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... Ephesians 4:14 (NASB95)

If you have a NASB translation, I believe you will see a note next to “as a result”. This note gives the alternative reading I show in brackets, and I believe that this alternative reading is probably better. The verse begins with a “ὅτι” clause – which indicates purpose – “ὅτι” is translated “in order that” or “so that” – so the verse is better read as a statement of purpose. So – Paul is telling us that the Body Builders were given to the Church by Christ “in order that” or “so that” we will no longer be children. This is talking about our individual growth. The Church as a whole is to grow, but in order for the whole Church to grow, the individuals within the Church must grow. The ministry of the Body Builders is essential to that growth.

“Children” is describing a state of spiritual immaturity – gullibility, childish understanding – and Paul goes on to vividly describe what childish spiritual immaturity looks like. “Tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” describes forces outside us throwing us around in confusion – like winds and waves can toss a boat around. These winds and waves are described as “doctrine” which means teaching – false teaching. Notice the word “every” – every wind of doctrine – all the many, many kinds of false teaching there are out there. Spiritual children are vulnerable to being confused by all kinds of false teaching that comes from all directions.

This verse also tells us that these “winds and waves” of false teaching comes through the “trickery of men, by craftiness” – “trickery” is the Greek word “κρυβεῖα” – which means “dice playing” and, according to Hoehner, implies the idea of “loaded dice”. Children – because they are so gullible - are very vulnerable to being manipulated and persuaded by trickery, craftiness and deceit.

And this verse also tells us this trickery and deceit is part of a scheme – or strategy – of deceit, delusion and error. I wonder whose strategy that might be?

Notice also the words “no longer” – What does this imply? It implies that we all start out as spiritually immature children and are in danger if we don’t grow. None of us start out spiritually mature. We must grow. We need the Body Builders to protect us against false teaching so that we grow.

Here’s the mental picture I get from this – a guy YouTubes a 10 minute video about sailing, and goes out and rents a sailboat and sets sail without bringing along a more knowledgeable and experienced sailor to warn him of the dangers and show him how it’s done. Wind blows from one direction and it looks like it’s going his way so he just goes with it, then wind blows from another direction and that way looks pleasant enough so he goes with that, then the wind starts swirling around, the waves get really rough, and he gets scared and confused and doesn’t know what to do or which way to go and so he just lets the winds and waves take him where they will - straight into the rocks. If he had taken along a good sailor to train him and show him how to navigate and maintain his course despite all the winds, waves and confusion, he would not have gotten wrecked on the rocks. And as time went on, he would learn more and more and be able to handle his boat on his own in all kinds of weathers.

That’s what the Body Builders do for us. They are supposed to train and equip us so that we will be protected against false teaching made attractive by trickery, craftiness and deceit. They were given to help us withstand these things and grow up spiritually - look at verse 15.

***15 but speaking the truth in love [holding to or being truthful in love], we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ...”
Ephesians 4:15 (NASB95)***

This is a contrast with spiritual immaturity. Christ’s will for us is certainly not to remain spiritually immature, and He has given us the Body Builders to train us up to maturity. Which includes being “truthful in love”. The NASB translates the Greek participle “ἀληθεύοντες” as “speaking the truth in love”, however, - once again - notice that there is an alternative reading shown in the NASB note – which says - “holding to or being truthful in love”. In context, because Paul is contrasting being spiritually mature with being spiritually immature, the alternative reading is better – and the clause is better read as “being truthful in love”. What does it mean to “be truthful in love”? Hoehner says this:

“In contrast to the preceding verse, the present word speaks of being real or truthful in both conduct and speech.... In other words, the believers’ conduct should be transparent, revealing the real state of affairs, as opposed to hiding or suppressing the truth (Rom 1:18) through cunning and deceit. Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary, Page 565.

This is an interesting thought and it makes me wonder if there isn't some sort of implication that the "child" in verse 14 not only is confused and deceived into following false teaching, but is also in danger of becoming like the false teachers – cunning and deceitful. Our speech and conduct should not suppress or hide what we know of truth and reality – this would be a form of deceit. We should reveal it – openly and honestly. We must "be real".

And this should be done "in love". This is vitally important. We know from many, many, many, many... bible passages that love is the realm in which we are to do everything. It is THE guiding principle and motivation and it tempers everything else. Everything should be done in love. I know all of us have heard lots of times what love is – but it is so very important, I'm going to repeat the short version – **love is that which seeks the best interest in the one loved.** 1 Corinthians 13 is a great passage that describes the love we should have for one another and it should be read frequently – just to make sure it stays in the forefront of your mind.

So, we are to become truthful in love. It is loving to be truthful – to openly and honestly reveal truth and reality through our speech and conduct. It is not loving to hide the truth. We demonstrate our love for another person when we are truthful with them. How we do this also can be loving or unloving – we should do it in ways that consider the best interest of the other person. Sometimes pounding someone over the head with the truth isn't loving. But sometimes that's what is necessary. Figuring out what is appropriate in a particular situation takes a lot of prayer, wisdom, empathy and consideration.

Now - notice the standard we are supposed to grow up to – we are supposed to "grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ." This is like the goal for the whole Church. This means that the end or goal of our individual growth is to become as spiritually mature as Christ, because He is the head of the body - our standard and our example and our power for growth. And we are supposed to grow up in "all aspects" - meaning everything – we become like Christ in everything. Each member of the body of Christ needs to grow up to the head of the body – Christ. And He gave the Body Builders to us so that we will be able to grow up in this way.

In verse 16, Paul is going to tie all this up and put the individual growth of each believer into the context of the growth of the whole body of Christ. Here's what it says:

15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ 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. Ephesians 4:1-15-16 (NASB95)

There is a lot here and it's kind of hard to explain. Verse 16 is talking about how the individual members of the body of Christ – the Church - work together to grow the whole body and build itself up. However, the source and power of this growth does not come from us - the first two words of the verse tell us where the source and power of growth comes from – Christ. It is Christ who supplies this. Not only is He the goal of our growth, He is the source of our growth. He is the vine we are the branches. He is the life. Apart from Him we can't do anything. When we live by faith, His power works through us.

Notice also that the body – the Church – is being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies. The words translated “fitted” and “held together” are very interesting words. I'm not going to try to pronounce these two words – they have lots of Greek letters and I'd just butcher the pronunciation. The word for “fitted” appears only here and in verse 2:21 and means “to join together so as to form a coherent entity, fit” – Hoener says it is a “skillful fitting” together.

The word for “held together” means “to bring together into a unit, unite”.

Both of these words show how the growth of the Church is occurring. They are present participles, meaning that the process is presently going on. And both are passive meaning that someone outside the Church is doing the fitting and holding together. Colossians 2:19 tells us it is a work of God. From Day 1 at Pentecost all the way up to today, God has been carefully, intentionally, skillfully fitting the Church together into a unit. And this will continue until the Rapture.

The clause “by what every joint supplies” should probably be read according to the alternative reading of the NASB – “through every joint of the supply”. The word for supply is “ἐπιχορηγία” and has the idea of assistance or support. This is referring to us – each individual believer. In this context we are the joints and we are connected to and assist and support each other. Christ is using each of us in this process of fitting and holding together His Church. We are the instruments, the tools, being used to grow and unite the Church.

Next clause - “According to the proper working of each individual part” – “proper working” is better translated “working in measure”. This is the third time in this passage, the word for measure – μέτρον – has been used. First, in verse 7 where we learned that Christ gave each believer a certain “measure” of one or more gifts. Verse 13 refers to Christ's desire that His Church grow up to the measure of His stature. Now this verse tells us that each of us must work to our measure – we are each supposed to do our job. This is the responsibility of each believer. As we just learned, we are the tools being used by Christ to grow and unite the Church. He will hold us accountable for doing our part – or not - when we stand in front of Him at the believer's judgment.

The last clause, “causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love”, is interesting because it contains the main verb of the verse – “causes” – and

the subject of the verb is at the beginning of the verse – “the body”. Also the verb is in the “middle” voice, indicating that the action is occurring within itself. So, it’s indicating that “the body is causing the growth of the body”. The body of Christ – the Church – is causing its own growth. That’s interesting. Christ has set this up so that the Church is supposed to cause its own growth. Now, this doesn’t mean that the body is doing this on its own apart from Christ. The verse is very clear that Christ is the source and power behind the growth. But Christ has given the Church all the power and resources it needs to grow and build itself up, and the Church is responsible for utilizing His power and resources to do the building.

And, finally, notice again that love is the realm in which the Church builds itself up. Everything should be done in love.

So, let’s summarize Ephesians 4:1-16:

In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul exhorts us to “walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which we have been called”. This walk is characterized by humility, gentleness, patience, tolerance, and love among the Church. Unity in the Church is grounded in the Trinity and the work of each Person in the Godhead. The Church IS united – that is a work of God. But walking in unity is our responsibility, and we are to be diligent to preserve our unity. And in verses 7-16 we learn that walking in unity is necessary for the Church to grow and mature. Verses 7-16 explain that gifts – and the diversity of gifts – are purposeful and are specifically given to each believer by Christ as the means through which Christ grows the Church. Certain gifts -the Body Building Gifts - are intended to protect, equip and train believers. Believers are supposed to be equipped and trained to use their specific gifts to do their specific jobs. All of us must work together in unity and in love –assisting and support each other - in order for the Church – through the power supplied by Christ - to build itself up and grow up to maturity – grow up to the stature of Christ.

Ok. So – there are a lot of implications and applications of this passage that we could talk about. But tonight, let’s focus on some big picture stuff.

This passage tells us something about what Christ is doing now. He has ascended far about all the heavens to a position of rule, power and authority over the universe. However, He has not yet exercised His power and authority to remove Satan from Satan’s rule over the earth. He has the right and power to do it, but that’s not the plan for the current age. He will do that later. Right now, Christ is exercising His power and authority to build up His body - the Church. There is a definite strategy Christ is using to do this:

1. Christ is using the Church as the means of building itself up to maturity. Using the power supplied by Christ, the Church is supposed to build itself up.

2. Christ has given every individual believer in the Church a job in building up the Church. Christ has given every believer at least one spiritual gift. This gift is to be used to do the job.

3. Christ is using certain people –the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers - who I’ve called the “Body Builders” – for the purpose of equipping and training the rest of us to use our gifts so that we can do our jobs.

Ok, now, what are the implications of Christ’s strategy:

1. All believers are responsible for participating in the building up of the Church. It’s not just the professionals. Every believer has a gift and every believer is responsible for using that gift to the fullest.

2. All gifts are important to the building up of the Church, and have their function to perform in the body. The growth of the Church is dependent on the proper functioning of each individual part. The Church is an organism and all parts are connected and if one part fails, the whole body suffers.

3. All believers begin as immature children and vulnerable to danger. All believers must mature. That is why pastors and teachers are very important to the Church – they have the gifts required to help believers grow up. So - it is essential that pastors and teachers do their jobs. If they don’t, their flock won’t mature. They won’t be able to use their gifts properly and they will succumb to the deceit and trickery of false teachers and false doctrine. They are sending their sheep out for slaughter. You can see this in the state of church in America now. For generations, pastors and teachers, and the seminaries that produce them, have abandoned the accurate literal grammatical historical teaching of Scripture, and they themselves have been deceived by false teaching, and many, many, many believers in their churches are shipwrecked and are not really even interested in serving Christ and participating in the growth of the Church.

4. Believers who don’t have the gifts of pastor or teacher have to remember that they are responsible for using their gifts and doing their jobs. First and foremost, is making sure we are being trained and equipped by good pastors and teachers. We all start out as immature children and we are responsible for making sure we take the time and make the effort to be taught and trained through the accurate understanding of the Bible by gifted pastors and teachers. If we don’t do that, we are like sheep amongst wolves and we will be eaten alive. We won’t be able to use our gifts and do our jobs well, and the whole Church will suffer.

5. But, at the same time we are being trained, we are to use our gifts as best we can in service to Christ. The Church grows and matures when every member of the body does his or her job.

So, the bottom line is this – Christ’s will for the Church is that it grow and mature. The Church grows and matures as every believer uses the gifts Christ has given up to the full measure given. Every believer starts out as an immature child and must be trained and equipped for service. That is the responsibility Christ has entrusted to pastors and teachers. It is every believer’s responsibility to make sure he or she is trained and equipped for service, and then to go out and use the gifts to do the works he or she has been gifted to do. To the extent anyone doesn’t do their job, however, small or insignificant it may appear to be from a human perspective, the Church will suffer, and that one will have to stand in front of Christ and account for the damage done to His Church. Our jobs are not insignificant to Him. He has His plan, He has determined our jobs and our gifts, and we will be held accountable to Him for how we used them.

ⁱ (See Romans 12:6).

ⁱⁱ This is an example of a Christ for God substitution, since Psalm 68 is referring to God and Paul substitutes Christ for God. It’s an indication of the deity of Christ.