

Ephesians 4:15-16 "Remembering Your 1st Love, Serve With Gladness"

EPH 4:15-16 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

For anyone who's had children it's a unique experience to see your kids at each level of their growth. When they're very small they totally depend on you for everything. But it doesn't take long before they begin to show their independence.

It seems that one day they're asking you to feed them and put their clothes on and the next day they don't want any help. We knew a family who brought their small children to a church fellowship and one of their kids walked through the door with pointed cowboy boots on. The only problem was that they were on the wrong feet.

You couldn't tell what direction he was going because the points were opposite of what they were supposed to be. The child was just beginning to learn how to dress himself and the parents wanted to encourage him. And so, even though he did it wrong they felt this would be a good learning experience.

Growing up is a learning process. And in the process of growing we all make mistakes, but hopefully we learn through them. I remember when I was 15 years old, my dad was teaching me to drive. Now when he learned to drive an automatic transmission he was taught to use both feet. One foot for the accelerator and the other foot for the brake.

And so naturally I copied his style. He would take me out on the road and I became relatively proficient at using two feet. But then he discovered that for me to take driver's education to lower my insurance rate I would have to drive the correct way using only my right foot for both the accelerator and the brake.

And so, he informed me that the next time we went out I would have to switch to the one foot approach. And it wasn't a problem. I've been known to be able to chew gum and walk at the same time and so it didn't seem to radically effect my ability to make the switch, until we got home.

I approached the driveway which had a second car already parked in it. I made the turn into the driveway as I had always done before, but for some reason my mind went back to the two foot approach, and yet my feet were confused and didn't make the connection in time. My right foot which was always used for the gas pedal only wouldn't hop over to the brake and yet instinctively it wanted to depress something.

It did. I pressed down on the accelerator and promptly parked the car in the back of the one already there. I remember my dad's expression, as by this time his foot was going through the floor board trying to brake for me. In a split second it was all over, and as I expected him to be totally upset, he just shook his head and later explained that it was partly his fault for teaching me incorrectly in the first place.

Bad teaching invariably has bad results. And for the Christian this holds true as well. And this is why Paul is encouraging these Christians in Ephesus not to be children any longer being tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine. We are to put away childish things and grow up in our faith.

But with growth comes privilege and responsibility. There was a time in my life where I was allowed to learn how to drive. I no longer need my dad in the front seat with me. For the believer we all learn as we grow in Christ, but our Lord expects us to grow and become responsible members of His body.

And the way in which we become responsible members is to not only avoid the waves of bad teaching which toss us here and there, but then to replace those bad teachings with truth; the truth of God's word learned in such a way as to take the whole counsel of His word and compare scripture with scripture as we seek the Spirit of God to lead us into all truth.

But gaining knowledge is not enough, any more than learning how to drive can be learned only through reading a book. It must be practiced properly. This is what James had in mind when he wrote, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

JAM 1:21-22 "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you. 22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

We must all accept the bible as the very word of God and yet it's not a word which is intended to only be listened to. All of us have listened to sermons and bible studies all of our Christian lives. We may watch teachers we see on T.V., or listen to teachings we hear on radio or tapes. But all of the listening in the world is not enough if we don't then take that teaching and apply it by walking in it.

We only deceive ourselves if that's our approach to the Christian life, thinking that somehow we can exempt ourselves from the responsibility we've been given by the Creator Himself to walk in a manner worthy of the calling we've received in Christ.

And so Paul emphasizes that responsibility in our text as he continues in EPH 4:15 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

Paul says, that to grow up in Christ we must be utilizing the truth of God's word to the degree that we speak it. But speaking it is not the only thing our text implies. The text also implies professing the truth, which could include living in the truth.

But to be able to live and speak the truth we must know what the truth is. And this is what Paul is trying to convey to these Ephesians. Bad doctrine or bad teaching will invariably effect our walk with Christ in an adverse way. But studying and adhering to the whole counsel of God's word will conform us into the image of Christ as the Spirit of God is working in us through His word.

I know people who profess to be Christians and yet some of the teaching they've received and adhere to is cultic in nature and contrary to the truth of God's word, and it effects their lives in a way that is nothing short of bizarre.

I know people who won't walk into a house without first praying for Christ's blood to cover that house from any demonic influence. And though that may sound like a wise thing to do there is no biblical precedent for such weird behavior. That kind of teaching holds people in bondage thinking that somehow Satan has power and authority over them that they must counter with formulas and prayers to hold him at bay.

God's word is clear. Greater is He who is in us than he who is in the world. We have not been given a spirit of fear, and yet many Christians live their lives in fear thinking that Satan is going to get them when they least expect it. You can't be productive for Christ in that kind of environment of fear.

I recently heard of another example of a professing Christian who said that to have your prayers heard from God one must first wash their hands. I suppose this has to do with certain Levitical practices so that one could be ceremonially clean so you can approach God with clean hands.

This is legalism and bondage. And it is counter to everything the N.T. teaches us about Christ fulfilling the law which was a tutor to lead us to Him. Why would anyone want to bind themselves to such teachings? And yet people do it all the time thinking they have a biblical edge in approaching God.

There is only way to biblically approach the living God and that's through the Mediator who shed His blood on our behalf to reconcile us back to the Father. You can wash your hands till they're red and raw and it will not add anything to your ability to approach God. To that and other such bizarre teachings God would say, grow up. Stop thinking like children.

But our speaking the truth must be done in a way where we put others' best interest at heart. This is why Paul says to speak the truth in love. Lots of people are speaking the truth. But in many cases they're doing it as they hit people over the head with it.

Now, don't misunderstand me on this point. There are many cases where the truth of God's word can be delivered in love even though it may have to be given in a confrontational way. If this weren't true it would be next to impossible to go to a brother or sister who is sinning and confront them with their sin and the solution to their sin.

But even there, we approach them in a way where we understand that we are not above being caught in such sin ourselves. Paul brings this out when writing to the church at Galatia.

GAL 6:1 "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."

This is the way we grow in Christ. This is the way we mature, realizing that we are responsible to know the truth, to walk in the truth and to encourage others in the truth of God's word. But, it's also realizing that the truth cannot be separated from the One who gives it.

And this can be a real problem and is one way in which a church can become legalistic in their approach with Christ, even in the

truth. It is not the truth alone which is our sole motivation in our Christian walk, but the truth-Giver. Both must go hand in hand.

There are many churches who have their theological ducks in a row and who hold to the truth of God's word, and yet in many of those cases they might be considered to be spiritually dead. This is where the term dead orthodoxy comes from. Their faith is orthodox in that it is based on the truth and yet they are not doing anything with that truth except feeding themselves and becoming fat, without any exercising of that truth.

They pride themselves on having the truth and yet it is a truth without love for Christ because it lacks reaching out to people with that truth. In fact, it is this very church at Ephesus, whom the apostle John writes to and warns that they have fallen into this trap.

REV 2:1-4 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love."

How is it possible that the Spirit of God can commend a group of people for working hard and doing deeds for the Lord as they persevere, not tolerating wicked men who bring in bad teaching which would contribute to people being tossed here and there, and yet be warned to watch out for their deficiencies in their commitment to Christ??

How is it possible to have such truth and adhere to that truth and yet be accused of leaving your first love? There have been many explanations as people study this portion of scripture in Revelation, but one explanation which cannot be denied is that truth with love means more than simply delivering that truth.

It must include the idea that the truth of God's word which we possess must be first and foremost a truth which has a love for Christ at the center. It must be a truth which motivates us to love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, souls, minds and all of our strength.

When we take the truth as an end in itself then we've divorced the true application of that truth and we're left with a purely altruistic approach to the Christian life, where goodness for the sake of goodness is the goal. For the Christian that is not acceptable.

Is it enough to do good deeds if those deeds are not combined with truth and a love for Christ? If we are truly loving our Lord then we will do all things for Him. If we are truly loving our Lord then walking in His truth will be the means by which we bring honor to Him.

If we use the truth in any other way then to first glorify Christ, then we've defeated the purpose of the truth and we become like the church at Ephesus which the world would conclude is doing the right thing, and yet our Lord Jesus said, 'you've left your first love.'

Christ's solution is to "remember therefore from where we have fallen, and repent and do the deeds we did at first."

Again, it sounds so strange to have to repent of good deeds, which for all intents and purposes seems so right. But, it's not the good deeds which these Ephesians were to repent of, but the way in which they approached these deeds, where Christ's love is excluded. They somehow left Jesus and their love for Him out of the equation.

And so, to repent of this and do the deeds they did at first is an exhortation to return to the love for Christ they had at the beginning of their walk and make that the focal point for their good deeds which would include sharing the gospel and loving your fellow believer as you use your gifts to build them up.

Jesus is the head, as Paul puts it in our text. And our growing up in Him must include the fact that He is our Lord and we must bow to Him as Lord in all that we say and do and think. But our bowing must realize that He loves us and as we submit to Him we show our love for Him as we obey and seek Him for all things, never presuming that we could do anything without Him.

But now Paul moves from this analogy of Christ being the Head and includes the idea that every head has a body. Now, I'm not suggesting that Christ is dependent on us to complete that body. Rather, Paul is simply saying that every body needs a head and in our case it is the Lord Jesus Christ to whom we are totally dependent.

EPH 4:16 "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."

Paul has been teaching a theology which includes the notion that God is one and is above all. There is no god besides Him. We saw this in verses 4 through 6 of this chapter. But then Paul immediately goes into the fact that this one God gives many gifts to many different people in the church.

And then Paul teaches that these gifts are meant to be used responsibly as we grow up in our faith. Not to grow in our faith, as we use these gifts, is to defeat the purpose of why the gifts were given to us by the Spirit of Christ. And part of the purpose of these gifts being given is to compliment each other as each is using their gifts for the glory of God.

For example, the gift of teaching might compliment the gift of mercy as we take the truth we've learned from God's word and apply it personally to people who need this mercy. The gift of hospitality can compliment the gift of evangelism as we fellowship with people, some of whom may be unbelievers, and then we use that gift to share Christ.

Every gift is important and every gift interacts with the others so that this one body acts in a unifying way to point both believers and unbelievers to Christ. Here in verse 16 Paul is showing us how we grow up together. It is impossible for the body to work as Christ intended if the body isn't working together.

Can you imagine if your foot decided one day that it would work independent of your other foot? You could be walking in circles for the rest of your life. Imagine if your kidneys decided that they wanted to do their own thing and work only when they wanted to.

My dad used to tease me when I was little and didn't know any better. I'd run into the house and he'd say to me, 'you better get to the bathroom.' And I'd say, 'how did you know?' 'Because I can see it in your eyes', he replied. I never knew what he meant by that until I got a little older. Evidently, my eyes were supposed to be some sort of fluid indicator.

I also learned later that it had nothing to do with my eyes being an indicator for my kidneys. Dancing around the room is what really gave me away.

Every part of the body, when working properly, will allow the rest of the body to work properly. The converse is also true. If parts of the body decide to hold out or work only when they want to, or if it's convenient, then the entire body is affected adversely.

Each of us have been given gifts by Christ so that we might use those gifts for one another and the world as we bring honor to the gift-Giver with those gifts and the proper use of them.

If we decide we don't have to use those gifts then that part of the body has to have someone else come and pick up the slack in that area, or it may get neglected all together. And so now we have a few people trying to do all the work of the body, and the body can only do that for so long before it begins to shut down from the over-load.

Paul says that the whole body is being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies according to the proper working of each individual part. You and I, as part of the body of Christ here at Calvary Chapel Port Charlotte, are held together in a sense as every joint and muscle and tendon and so on supports each other as each is doing its part.

When I was little, I once got impatient and climbed up on a shelf to get some peanut butter instead of letting my dad get it for me. I fell with the jar and it broke. I cut through my finger severing it and the tendons. What freaked me out the most was that I couldn't move my finger. I later learned that's what tendons do. They work with the muscles to allow the joints to move the fingers.

Simply taking that one part out of the equation effected not only my finger but my mind as well as it through me into a panic. Everything is effected when other parts are not working properly. But notice what else Paul brings out in verse 16.

He says, that when each individual part is doing its job properly it causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love. What an awesome thing. Pastors and churches spend millions of dollars every year trying to figure out how to make their church grow. I get stuff in the mail all the time showing how attending this or that seminar will increase the size of your church from 15 to 25% in 6 months.

What they don't tell you is that simply getting warm bodies in the pew is not what Christ has in mind. The trend these days is to become entertaining enough to attract people to the church



together with having just the right programs to keep them in the pews.

But, as we see here in our text, the goal is not simply to get and keep warm bodies as though the church is somehow responsible to only provide for the individual without any cost to the individual.

How can the church meet the need of the individual if individuals are not using their gifts in the church? How can the church serve one another, when only a portion is serving? These are questions which Paul infers here for the Ephesians, which of course are questions for the entire body of Christ in every age.

The growth of the body, in both numbers and individual maturity, is dependent on those in the church acting as those joints and tendons and muscles enabling other parts to do their jobs with the gifts each has been given by God. No one is exempt, at least in the eyes of Christ.

And yet unfortunately, the trend has been to view the church as a sort of club-med where you go in and expect to use it as a spiritual health spa. Many expect all of the equipment to be there and to be used at their convenience. And after they've utilized all of the facilities they simply strut their new found shape and brag about what a great facility it is, knowing that they don't have to do anything but show up and work for their own sakes.

The body of Christ was never meant to be like that. The reason there are any ministries in a church is because people are there to be part of those ministries. But those ministries are there to promote other ministries as each individual person seeks the Lord to see how they might use their gifts in that body.

And this is how the body of Christ is built up in love. The love for Christ will be the motivation to use any of the gifts we have out of gratitude for His great salvation, but that agape love will then desire to love others with the gifts each has been given.

And as each is doing its part that part will grow and mature and love in such a way as to give their gifts away as they serve each other in the body of Christ. And as we do that the other parts will not only benefit but they will mature and grow in their gifts and in turn will become effective ministers to others who in turn do the same.

We've all heard the expression that every chain is only as strong as its weakest link. We are not like a chain in that sense in the body

of Christ which depends on its strongest links or looks down on its weakest. Rather, we have as the head our Lord Jesus who assures us that the gates of hell will not prevail against the church. He is the One who holds it all together.

But that should never give us reason to think that we can allow the few to carry the entire load. Many hands make the burden light.

In a couple of weeks we are going to walk through the door the Lord has opened in moving to a larger facility. In having more room and a new location we will have more opportunity for ministry and with that will come more responsibility.

The area in which we'll be located is right in the middle of one of the largest suburbs in Port Charlotte. In those neighborhoods are lost people who don't know Christ. In those neighborhoods are Christians who have opted not to be a part of a church because they feel the church is no longer relevant.

In those neighborhoods are children who have never heard the gospel. In those neighborhoods are kids who belong to gangs. In those neighborhoods are single moms whose husbands may be in jail or who have left the family because of extra-marital relationships.

As many people as there are, there are as many needs. This is why you and I are here. This is why Christ has called us to Himself, to be those ambassadors faithfully representing Him with the gifts He's given us, so that His body may grow as people come to Christ and as we make disciples, who in turn can serve in the body and encourage others.

What a great time to be a Christian. What a great time to live in a world where we may be the only way in which they will see Christ and learn of His love. Yes, to be a Christian carries a great deal of responsibility as we seek the Lord to be used of Him, but praise God He doesn't leave us alone in the process.

He's always there to encourage and strengthen us for the work at hand, whether it's ministering with our gifts to others in this body or if it's reaching out to a dying world with the love of Christ and His gospel.

Let us speak and live the truth in love as we all grow up in all aspects into Christ, who is the Head, from whom the whole body is being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies,

according to the proper working of each individual part which causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Let's always look to the Head who is Christ and give Him the glory as we walk in a way that not only pleases Him but serves one another as well.