

DIVERSITY IN THE CHURCH, PT. 5; EPH. 4:15-16 (Ed O'Leary)

INTRODUCTION.

AS WE KNOW, ~ IN EPH. 4:7-16, ~ PAUL DISCUSSES THE DIVERSITY OF SPIRITUAL gifting within the body of Christ.

▶▶As we've noted, ~ God has built diversity into the church by variously gifting all of its people to serve in different capacities ~ in order to promote its growth and maturity ~ and to preserve and protect its unity.

▶▶In verses 7-10, ~ Paul mainly talked about spiritual gifting in general.

▶▶Then in verses 11-14, ~ Paul narrowed his topic of spiritual gifting down to talk about some specific leadership gifts, ~ or, ~ more specifically, ~ five groups of spiritually gifted leaders.

TODAY, ~ WE'LL EXAMINE VERSES 15-16. ~ BUT BEFORE WE DO THAT LET'S SET THE context for moving into these two verses.

▶▶Recall that in verse 14, ~ Paul tells us the result of helping believers reach the three goals listed in verse 13. ~ He also noted one area where stability and maturity in the faith will pay off, ~ and that's in the area of not being fooled by false teachers.

▶▶That is to say, ~ as a result of spiritually gifted leaders helping believers become grounded and united in sound doctrine, ~ helping us become spiritually mature in our behavior, ~ and helping us grow more and more like Jesus, ~ ¶¶

▷▷we will be spiritually stable and mature in the faith, ~ ¶¶

↳↳i.e., ~ we will not lack understanding, ~ we will not be highly impressionable, ~ gullible, ~ and foolish, ~ we will not be childish in biblical doctrine and behavior.

→→And we will not be confused, ~ fooled, ~ or influenced by any false teachers that come along, ~ no matter how clever their strategies are.

IN VERSES 15-16, ~ PAUL MOVES TO A GENERAL STATEMENT regarding spiritual growth, ~ but still connected to the context of spiritual gifting, ~ as I think we'll see at the end of the message.

▶▶¹⁵ Rather, ~ speaking the truth in love, ~ we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, ~ into Christ, ~ ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, ~ joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, ~ when each part is working properly, ~ makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." ¶¶ 1/9

PAUL'S MAIN POINT IN THESE TWO VERSES IS AN EXHORTATION TO BELIEVERS to grow up spiritually.

"RATHER . . . WE ARE TO GROW UP IN EVERY WAY."

▶▶ Here Paul sets a contrast to those who are unstable and immature.

▷▷ Instead of being unstable and immature in the faith and at the mercy of false teachers and their clever strategies, ~ Paul says in **verse 15**, ~ we "are to grow up in every way." ~ I.e., ~ we are to mature spiritually.

THE QUESTION IS, ~ "WHAT DOES PAUL MEAN BY THIS?"

▶▶ Well, ~ we can turn to three other NT passages that will help us begin to understand what Paul means.

IN 2 PET. 1:5b-7, ~ PETER HELPS US UNDERSTAND WHAT PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT.

▶▶ Here Peter lists seven qualities that we, ~ believers, ~ are to add to our lives. ~ I'll pause and comment as we got through this.

▶▶ "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue ~ [i.e., ~ moral excellence, ~ outstanding goodness],

▷▷ and virtue with knowledge ~ [in wider context, ~ Peter talking about knowledge about Jesus, ~ so Peter is calling us to grow in our knowledge about Jesus here], ~

↳↳ and knowledge with self-control ~ [i.e., ~ exercising complete control over one's desires & actions], ~ and self-control with steadfastness ~ [i.e., ~ patient endurance], ~

→→ and steadfastness with godliness ~ [simply put, ~ it refers to living the kind of life that pleases God], ~

↳↳ and godliness with brotherly affection ~ [i.e., ~ love for our fellow believers], ~

↳↳ and brotherly affection with love ~ [i.e., ~ unselfish and sacrificial love for everyone in general, ~ i.e., ~ for believers and non-believers alike]."

▶▶ So, ~ "to grow up in every way," ~ to mature spiritually, ~ means that believers are daily adding and growing in these seven qualities. ↴ 2/9

WE ALSO FIND HELP IN UNDERSTANDING PAUL IN HIS REBUKE OF THE CHURCH IN Corinth, ~ when, ~ in 1 Cor. 3:1-3a, ~ he rebuked the church there for behaving so childishly and unspiritually.

▶▶ Recall, ~ he could not address them as spiritually mature people. ~ And that was because they were controlled by natural, ~ human impulses, ~ i.e., ~ their sinful nature, ~ rather than the Holy Spirit.

▶▶ So, ~ "to grow up in every way," ~ to mature spiritually, ~ implies the opposite. ~ It means that we are being controlled less and less by our sinful nature ~ and more and more by God the Holy Spirit.

WE FIND FURTHER HELP IN UNDERSTANDING WHAT PAUL MEANS IN HEBREWS.

▶▶ Recall, ~ in Heb. 5:11-6:1, ~ the author also rebuked his original readers for their spiritual immaturity.

▷▷ Note in 5:14, ~ he says, ~ "But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil."

↪↪ This discernment includes intellectual as well as moral discernment.

▶▶ So, ~ "to grow up in every way," ~ to mature spiritually, ~ means that through biblical training ~ a believer has gained the skill to make appropriate moral choices ~ and to distinguish between true and false doctrine.

I THINK THESE PASSAGES GIVE US A GOOD IDEA OF WHAT PAUL MEANS IN EPH. 4:15 when he says believers are to "are to grow up in every way."

▶▶ So rather than remaining unstable and immature in the faith, ~ and rather than being at the mercy of false teachers and their clever strategies, ~ believers are "to grow up in every way," ~ to mature spiritually

▷▷ As Heb. 6:1a exhorts us, ~ "Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity."

↪↪ The verb for "go on to" implies progressive development

NOW, ~ I'D LIKE US TO LOOK AT THE PHRASE, ~ "SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE" in verse 15.

WITH THIS PHRASE, ~ PAUL IS ASSERTING THAT ONE OF THE MEANS BY WHICH WE grow up spiritually is by "speaking the truth in love." ⇓ 3/9

▶▶ Later, ~ Paul will tell us that believers are not to lie to one another, ~ that we are to speak truthfully at all times. ~~ But that's not what Paul has in view here.

▶▶ In the wider context of [verses 11-14](#), ~ Paul discussed both sound and false doctrine. ~~ And obviously, ~ sound doctrine is the truth ~ and false doctrine is a lie.

▶▶ And in the immediate context of [verse 15](#), ~ as we just noted, ~ rather than being unstable and immature in the faith ~ ¶¶

▷▷ and rather than being at the mercy of false teachers and their clever strategies, ~ Paul says that ["we are to grow up in every way."](#)

▶▶ So ["truth"](#) here in [verse 15](#), ~ refers to sound doctrine. ~~ I.e., ~ the body of God's revealed truth that Scripture contains.

▷▷ From Genesis — Revelation. ~~ It is all sound doctrine.

▶▶ So when Paul says ["speaking the truth in love,"](#) ~~ he is asserting that one of the means by which we grow up spiritually is by ["speaking sound doctrine in love."](#)

▶▶ ["speaking the truth"](#) refers to much more than just plain speaking it. ~~ Broader

▷▷ It refers to accepting biblical doctrine, ~ speaking it out loud in the church worship service, ~ i.e., ~ e.g., ~ through preaching, ~ teaching, ~ and exhortation, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ discussing it with our brothers and sisters in Christ, ~ holding firmly to it, ~ and, ~ I would suggest, ~ living it.

▷▷ And all of this implies and requires a good knowledge of sound doctrine.

▶▶ By ["speaking the truth"](#) in this very broad sense, ~ we will ["grow up in every way."](#)

NOTICE ESPECIALLY HERE IN VERSE 15 ~ THAT PAUL CALLS SOUND DOCTRINE "THE truth."

▶▶ He could have used the word ["faith"](#) as he did in [verse 13](#). ~~ He could have used the word ["doctrine"](#) as he did in [verse 14](#).

▷▷ But he chose the word ["truth."](#) ~~ No accident. ~~ Making a point. ~~ He is driving the point home that ["the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints"](#) is the truth.

↳↳ TPID, ~ God's word, ~ from Genesis to Revelation, ~ is the absolute truth. ¶¶ 4/9

▶▶ In 1 Pet. 2:2a, ~ Peter refers to God's word as "pure spiritual milk."

▷▷ Word Peter uses for "pure" indicates that there are no errors, ~ no impurities, ~ no flaws, ~ no dilutions, ~ i.e., ~ no watering down of truth, ~ in God's word; ~ ~ ¶¶

↳↳ and that God's word will not deceive or lead people astray. ~ ~ It can be trusted.

▶▶ And in Ps. 12:6, ~ "The words of the Lord are pure words ~ [i.e., ~ flawless], ~ like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times." ~ ~ # of completeness & perfection.

▷▷ The words of the Lord are flawless. ~ ~ His word is beyond all possibility of error, ~ impurity, ~ flaws, ~ and deceit.

▷▷ What God says is absolutely true and thoroughly reliable. ~ ~ We can rest fully upon anything He says.

▶▶ God's word is pure. ~ ~ There are no errors, ~ no impurities, ~ no flaws. ~ ~ There is no watering down of truth in God's word.

▷▷ And God's word will not deceive or lead people astray.

NOW LET'S GO BACK TO THE PHRASE "SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE" IN EPH. 4:15.

▶▶ The phrase "in love" presents us with the manner in which we are to speak, ~ hold to, ~ and live out sound doctrine.

▷▷ I.e., ~ we are to lovingly speak, ~ hold to, ~ and live out God's word.

▶▶ Sound teaching is capable of being promoted at the expense of love. ~ ~ This must not happen.

▷▷ In 1 Cor. 8:1, ~ Paul writes, ~ "Knowledge puffs up, ~ but love builds up."

↳↳ Mere knowledge puffs people up with pride, ~ Paul says, ~ ~ but love builds up. ~ ~ I.e., ~ love edifies and builds up and encourages one to grow.

▶▶ IOW, ~ we, ~ believers, ~ are to speak, ~ hold to, ~ and live out the truth of God's word in a way that edifies, ~ strengthens, ~ and encourages our fellow believers.

▷▷ And not in a way that is prideful or arrogant or condescending or tears them down.

NEXT IN VERSE 15, ~ PAUL INDICATES THE GOAL GOD SETS FOR OUR SPIRITUAL growth. ~ ~ And that is to become more and more like Jesus. ¶¶ 5/9

FOR CONTEXT, ~ ALL OF VERSE 15.

▶▶ "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head ~ [i.e., ~ of his body, ~ the church], ~ into Christ."

▷▷ Phrase "into Christ" identifies "him who is the head."

▶▶ Basically, ~ I would suggest that Paul is saying here, ~ "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way and so become more and more like Jesus."

THIS IS THE STANDARD AND GOAL OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH FOR EVERY BELIEVER.

▶▶ Our fellow believers do not provide the standard for our spiritual growth. ~ Let's be honest, ~ each one of us would provide a very faulty standard if we were. ~ And the goal is not to become like each other.

▷▷ We have a much higher standard, ~ a perfect standard, ~ and a much higher goal.

▶▶ If you recall, ~ a few weeks ago we said that Christ-likeness is the third goal that the five groups of spiritually gifted leaders help us achieve.

▷▷ For Paul to repeat it here in vs. 15, ~ shows was putting great emphasis on this.

▶▶ He doesn't want us to miss this.

▷▷ He wants us to truly grasp the extremely important truth ~ that everyone who claims Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, ~ who claims to be a follower of Jesus, ~ is to become more and more like Jesus.

▶▶ In 1 Jn. 3:3, ~ John writes, ~ "And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."

▷▷ In the context "hopes in him" refers to the confident expectation of Jesus' return and our future glorification.

▷▷ What John is saying is that the confident expectation of Jesus' return and our future glorification ~ should motivate us to take action now. ~ And that action he speaks of is purifying ourselves.

▷▷ We, ~ believers, ~ are to purify ourselves as Jesus is pure, ~ John says.

▷▷ And Jesus is our example to follow ~ and His purity is to be our goal. ~ We are to daily work toward elevating our purity to the same level as Jesus' purity. ↴ 6/9

▷▷ That's a pretty tall order. ~ And we can't do it under our own power.

↳↳ But we can do it, ~ because God the Holy Spirit indwells us and empowers believers to work toward the goal of elevating our purity to the same level as Jesus' purity.

→→ As Paul tells us in Phil. 2:13, ~ "it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

AS WE GROW UP SPIRITUALLY IN EVERY WAY, ~ WE WILL BECOME MORE

THEN IN VERSE 16, ~ PAUL ADDS A NOTE REGARDING THE BODY OF CHRIST, ~ the church.

"FROM WHOM THE WHOLE BODY, JOINED AND HELD TOGETHER BY EVERY JOINT with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

▶▶ This is somewhat of an awkward reading and a little hard to understand.

▶▶ I suggest the point here is the following.

▷▷ The source and supreme head of the body, ~ the church, ~ is Jesus.

▷▷ And the whole body, ~ i.e., ~ the whole church depends on Him.

▷▷ He has placed each part of the body in its right place ~ i.e., ~ He has placed each believer in their right place.

▷▷ Jesus makes the whole body, ~ i.e., ~ the whole church, ~ fit together perfectly.

▷▷ And when each part of the body performs its own special function properly, ~ i.e., ~ when each member of the church exercises his or her spiritual gifts, ~ ¶¶

↳↳ it helps the other parts grow, ~ i.e., ~ it helps other believers grow spiritually, ~ and causes the body, ~ the church, ~ to grow strong in unselfish and sacrificial love for one another.

I WOULD LIKE TO BRIEFLY CALL OUR ATTENTION TO THREE OBSERVATIONS HERE.

▶▶ 1st, ~ Jesus is the source of the church. ~ Col. 1:18b, ~ "He is the beginning."

▷▷ The context is speaking about the church. ~ Simply put, ~ this means that the church finds its origin in Jesus. ~ A work of God ~ and not a work of human beings. ¶¶ 7/9

▷▷ And that's why the church can never be destroyed, ~ because it's existence does not depend on us ~ but on God.

↳↳ In [Matt. 16:18b](#), ~ Jesus said, ~ "I will build my church, ~ and the gates ~ [or forces] ~ of hell shall not prevail against it.

→→ Jesus promises us that the church will not be destroyed by the evil powers arrayed against it.

↳↳ God's reaction to the efforts of Satan and sinful humans to overthrow Him, ~ to stop the gospel from spreading, ~ and to destroy the church? ~~

→→ [Ps. 2:4a](#), ~ [NIV](#) ~ "The One enthroned in heaven laughs." ~~ God laughs at

▶▶ The second observation from [verse 16](#), ~ Jesus is the supreme head of the church.

▷▷ Recall, ~ back in [Eph. 1:22b](#), ~ Paul said that God the Father gave Jesus to the church as head over all things.

▷▷ And in [Col. 1:18a](#), ~ Paul writes, ~ "And he is the head of the body, ~ the church."

↳↳ "he" is emphasized. ~~ Could be translated as, ~ [LEB](#) ~ "he himself is the head of the body, ~ the church." ~~ "he himself" means "he and no other"

▶▶ The third observation from in [verse 16](#).

▷▷ And this is perhaps Paul's main point in [verse 16](#), ~ since the whole paragraph deals with spiritual gifting. ~~ I.e., ~ the significance of each believer exercising their gifts.

▷▷ For each believer to grow, ~ and for the whole church to grow strong in unselfish and sacrificial love for one another, ~ **each member must perform his or her own special function properly.**

↳↳ Paul shows us here the absolute importance of each believer exercising his or spiritual gifts.

▷▷ In order for every believer here and North Hartland to be aided in their spiritual growth ~ **??**

↳↳ and for our local fellowship to grow strong in unselfish and sacrificial love for one another, ~ every believer here, ~ all of us, ~ must be exercising our spiritual gifts.

CONCLUSION.

AND THAT BRINGS US TO THE END OF THIS SECTION OF EPHESIANS, ~ 4:7-16.

▶▶ Next week we will begin to look at [4:17-24](#). ~~ I encourage you to read that paragraph a number of times this week to familiarize yourselves with it and to see the full context.

▷▷ Also continue to encourage you to continue reading Ephesians at least once/week to keep the overall context in view as we examine the details.

LET'S PRAY 9/9