

Ministry On
Ephesians

4:7-16



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Given at Cedar Falls
August 1977

It is rather striking to me that our brother would have closed his message with a verse from the very portion that is on my heart this afternoon. As we think of what he was saying as to entering into all that is ours in Christ, it brings us into definite connection with Christ our Head. This too is on my heart, but from a different portion of Scripture. Please turn with me to the fourth chapter of Ephesians.

We had a great deal about Christ our Head in our Bible studies, and I want to enlarge on those thoughts. This part of chapter four of Ephesians, I believe, brings out the heart of His work among us as our Head, of how we are connected to Him as Head, and of how He works through us being our Head, directing us in the power of His Spirit as members of His Body. Let us read a few verses beginning with the seventh verse:

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature

of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

The truth that is contained in these verses is not generally known and still less practiced. We are shown in these verses the source of ministry for the Church and the foundation upon which that ministry is based. We are shown who are the instruments of that ministry and the guiding or controlling power of it. Christ risen is its Source, the Spirit its power, and believers are the instruments used in this work of Christian ministry.

In these verses we read nothing whatever of human authority, or human control, not even by those gifted ones that are mentioned. This is a grand thing for us to grasp. Just by way of an introductory remark I might say that however gifted a brother may be, he has no more authority, or louder voice, as it were, in the assembly than one who may not be so prominently gifted. So what we are looking at in these verses, then, is not government in the assembly. It is not the assembly itself and its authority in discipline, but it is ministry to the body from the Head through those who are fitted for ministry. This we want to seize upon very definitely, and hold it fast; because if we would, then we will experience in our lives what it means to hold the Head, to give Him the place that is His. Then we will know, understand, treasure in our hearts and practice the truth that is contained in these verses. We might say that these verses give us the heart of the truth of Christian ministry. This same truth is found in other epistles, but here we see especially the Head brought before us, His place as Head, and our relationship to Him as members of His body.

As we go on to comment on these verses, we see in the first verse that we read, verse seven, that unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Every one of us has a place to fill. He has fitted us according to His mind and will, by His grace to meet some need in the body, to perform some ministry, to do some work that He would direct us to do. As we read in a verse, I believe it is in the twelfth chapter of first Corinthians, "He hath set the members in the body as it hath pleased Him" for a specific work. This verse gives us that same thought — "unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ." We are given grace. It is that which flows from Him TO us FOR others.

We are then shown from Whom these gifts come. "Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men." The gifts of His body come from Him as One who is risen and glorified. We are connected, then, to a risen and glorified Head. These gifts were not given by the Lord when He was here on the earth among His people. They were given after He became Head of His church in the glory where He ascended having gained the victory that we needed. We were held captive by Satan in his power, held in the chains of death and the bondage of sin. But Christ went down into death and led captive that which held us captive. He took death under His own power and so spoiled the strong man. Thus Satan is a defeated enemy. Death is no longer our foe or something to be feared. Rather it is the servant of the believer. As we often say, should the Lord call us home that would be to be ushered into the presence of God. We have been delivered from that captivity in which we were held. He, the Lord, has led captive that which held us in its captivity. He has led death under His own power. And we know that the day is coming when death and hades will be cast into the lake of fire, as well as Satan himself. And so we see that He gave gifts unto men after He had gained that victory for us. We see then in these verses His wonderful power

wrought on behalf of His assembly. The Man who ascended out of death is the One who has brought deliverance for us who were under Satan's power and He has enriched us, given us gifts. This is what Christ has done to put each of us into his particular responsible place in His body, the church.

Now the next verses, nine and ten, go on to show us that He was the One who was in the glory past and is the One who descended. What a descent that was! He came down from His glory, He became a servant and a man. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, bearing our sins in His own body there. He went down into death and spoiled that strong man's house, delivered us and rose again. He has ascended to the glory where He was before. It is beautiful to see that. These two verses show us, we might say, the whole picture of His glory and His triumph.

Therefore, it says in verse eleven that "He gave some, apostles and some, prophets and some, evangelists, and some, pastors and teachers." What we have brought before us in this portion of scripture are those who are gifted rather than the gifts themselves. So we are brought to see those who He has gifted for the work to which He has called them. Now this is not a complete list of gifted ones or of the gifts, if you will. I don't suppose we could find a complete list in all of the Word of God. And there is no need for this because each one in the course of time learns what his gift is. And we all can see those gifts in operation, for it is evident when a child of God is working and serving the Lord. We can see what gift or gifts one has according to the work that is being done. It is obvious. Then, too, we want to avoid comparing ourselves among ourselves. We should not be occupied with the gifts, but with the Giver and with the ministry that He gives.

In this verse, eleven, He is bringing before us what we might call those who are more in the public eye, though by no means

should those who are in the public eye overshadow others or think that their work is more important. Let me turn to a verse that might help us see this. It is in first Corinthians chapter fourteen. It says in the first verse of that chapter that we should "desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy." Then it goes on to say in the third verse, "He that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification and exhortation and comfort." Now this is a more general, though a no less needed area of ministry wherein the many may be active as the Spirit of God manifests His power in their lives according to the direction of the Head. This is what Corinthians gives us: the gifts as spiritual manifestations, the evidence of the Spirit's work in us. (It is obvious that the Spirit is the prominent One here, just as Christ the Head is the prominent One in Ephesians.) And so the Head of the body will lead His members to do this work according to His will in the energy and the power of His Spirit. He will lead most if not all of us to do this work of prophesying in every needful situation, at every time of need. Prophesying is the bringing in of specific scripture and its application according to a definite and specific need. We believe that our meeting this afternoon is of that nature.

To further comment on prophesying, it is not merely to hear those that we recognize as more prominently publicly gifted than others, but to hear from any who, in the liberty of the Spirit, may have a word from the Lord suited to our needs. This is an important and vital area of ministry. And a great deal of the ministry that we get today is from those who prophesy. As we consider ourselves this afternoon, there are not many who are gifted in a prominent public way, no, not many. We can look back several generations in our history and see that there were, in those times, many more than today. (I use the word "prominent" only in the sense of what is seen in the public eye, and only in that sense, because in the body no gift can overshadow another whatever its character may be. This overshadowing might be

true in men's eyes, but it never can be in the eyes of God.) All of this is very important truth for us to learn because of what we generally see in the professing christian world today. And we must not allow ourselves to be affected by what we generally see. We must refuse it; we must see what God has to say and in wisdom yield to His will. It is in this way that we will grow up to perfection, as we shall soon see in the following verses. The work of prophesying, then, is vitally important. It is that which most of us, if not all, — I am not afraid to say ALL — could do if we had more heart for the Lord, for His glory and for the blessing of His people. We are going to see how these thoughts come before us in our chapter in Ephesians, how every one of us has responsibility and work to do. I trust the Lord will make it good to us, and that we will have our hearts open to hear and to benefit by the truth.

As we go back to Ephesians, let us look a little at the gifts or the gifted ones that are mentioned, these that Christ risen has given to His church, who are therefore under His control and direction as the Giver. And there is no sanction by man necessary for these to be used. No direction or control of these ought to be tolerated. But what ought to be is that we recognize and benefit by every one that the Head of the church raises up and that we accept every ministry that the Lord provides for us according to our many and varied needs. We need to get our eyes off those who are used. We need to get our hearts set upon what the Lord has to say to us through those whom He sees fit to use. Only in this way will we come to perfection, learning to fulfill the ministry for which we have been fitted by the Lord for the benefit of the body.

The first two of these, the apostles and the prophets, are those that God gave to lay the foundation of His assembly. The written word of God came through these, that is, all that pertains to New Testament revelation, which is the fullness of truth concerning

Christ and His Church. They were those who had the authority to establish doctrine concerning Christ and the Church and to teach it. They planted the assemblies throughout the Roman world through the inspiration and guidance of the Head as they preached the gospel of His glory. Thus, the apostles and prophets were used of the Lord to lay the foundation, just as verse 20 of chapter two tells us. Today, we build upon that foundation. We cannot continue to lay it, for it has been laid in the apostles and prophets. But we build upon what they laid, and we are to take care how we build. First Corinthians chapter three teaches us this line of truth. Then, since the work of laying the foundation is finished, the apostles and the prophets are no longer with us, that is, not in the flesh. But in the gospels and the epistles we have them, and their authority remains. It remains in the Word of God which they were inspired to write, and there is no other authority for God's people today, nor is any other needed. It is easy to see, then, that no one, however gifted he may be, has authority in himself. The written word is the authority and all the authority that we need. Any claim to authority in man or continuance of apostleship is only pretension. But some may ask, if there are no apostles or prophets how can assemblies be established where they don't exist, and haven't missionaries established assemblies in heathen countries where none were? The answer is easy. The Lord directs His gifted ones to preach His gospel all over the world. And as men are saved they are established in the truth that we have in His word. They are built on the foundation that was laid by the apostles in the beginning. Nothing new has been given since the apostles were inspired to write. Nothing new is needed. The same truth that established believers in the beginning is the same truth by which we are established today. The truth worked perfectly then and it works perfectly now. And if any changes have come in it is men who have changed; neither the Lord nor His truth has changed.

But there are those gifted ones who do remain, though

apostles and prophets have passed. And they are the evangelists, pastors and teachers. Each of these is necessary for the perfecting of the saints, with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body, as verse twelve tells us. I take this rendering of the verse from the translation of J. N. Darby.

First let me say that these terms, evangelist, pastor and teacher should never be used as titles. And yet how common a thing it is to hear of pastor so-and-so, or evangelist so-and-so. All that this does is to unduly elevate the one that the Lord has so gifted. Surely we ought to honor all who labor in the word and in doctrine. Scripture teaches us to do this. But to give titles is not in the word of God. The only One worthy of a title is the Lord Jesus Christ, and "holy and reverend is His name." Psalm 111: 9. He alone is worthy of such language or any title. And so Christ gives gifts, not titles, to men.

As we think, then, of these gifted ones that remain, it is obvious that the evangelists are the ones that the Lord uses to go out with the gospel to the lost, to those who are dead in trespasses and sin. They have the special gift that it takes to work with souls, so as to bring them consciously into a sense of their deep need in the presence of God. God uses them to bring the needed word that will plow up their hearts and consciences, and to direct them to the One who has met their need, the One in whom they must trust for salvation. Thus are men saved by the gospel of the glory of Christ. We all can do the work of an evangelist, but we all are not evangelists. Only the evangelist has the tender, loving, compassionate yearning over souls with which he draws souls to God.

And then the pastor is the one, I believe, who is especially fitted to shepherd the sheep and to feed the lambs. As souls are

saved, they are turned over to the pastor. He gives them the necessary feeding through the word that settles their souls, bringing them into their place of security, joy and happiness in the Lord. And then, too, the pastor is the one who is used of the Lord to help the Lord's people meet the problems that may arise in our lives from day to day. He is able to discern the problem at its roots and he is able to bring just the part of God's word that will heal and restore. His is the gift that is used to firmly establish souls in the faith and in the enjoyment of Jesus as Lord. He is a shepherd of God's flock. He is not the exclusive spiritual leader of a church, for there may be numerous pastors in a local church according to scripture. Nor is the flock his flock; they are the Lord's. Nor can one go to a school or seminary to learn to be a pastor. It is a gift that Christ the Head gives. It is such things as these that we see so commonly among professing Christians that we must refuse if we are to be effectively used of the Lord in His work of ministry to His assembly.

Now a few remarks as to the teacher. And let's say right here that the teacher is a separate gift from the pastor. Some Christians think of these two as always being combined, or as one gift. But it is not so. They are separate gifts although, of course, we might find them both in one man. The teacher is the one who teaches us the deep things of God. All doctrine is made plain and can be readily grasped by those being taught. Thus the people of God get the "meat" of the word and are established in all truth. And we all are, therefore, able to detect the counterfeits of Satan and refuse them. If we are established in all the truth, there will be no problem to recognize error when it is presented to us. And so we grow and are matured by the teacher as the Lord leads him in the ministry of teaching. Again, one cannot learn to be a teacher in any school. He is fitted for and directed in this ministry by the Head.

So all of these gifts, as well as any others that we may want to

think of, are given to the Assembly by Christ our Head. They properly function under His direction without any human control whatever. And they are responsible solely in their ministry to Christ. And because of this they feel a responsibility to every member of the body. There is, therefore, a dual responsibility, first to the Head and then to the body.

One further remark as to the evangelists, pastors, and teachers. They may or may not be public speakers. Consider again the pastor. Very often his work is done best and most effectively on a one-to-one basis. Much pastoral work is done in private counselling sessions, perhaps most of it. So a pastor is not necessarily a preacher. Consider the teacher. He may function best seated among a small group of believers. In his work of teaching he asks questions and invites comments, thus drawing out those he teaches. In this way he learns just what is needed, and thus he teaches and expounds. He may have no gift whatever in speaking in public, but he is a teacher Christ has given to His assembly. This holds true for the evangelist also. If he meets a person privately, he may wonderfully and effectively draw out that soul to the Lord. In the quietness of privacy, where there are no distractions, much deep soul work can be done. I have no doubt that many souls are saved in just a setting. And so we see that the common way of understanding these gifts, as preachers only, is not true. Not many are preachers. But if you don't have the ability to be a preacher it does not automatically mean that you do not have one of these gifts. Don't let the lack of preaching ability deter you or discourage you from using one of these or any other gift that the Lord has given you. Simply look to Him, and He will guide you in the use of that which He has given.

The purpose, then, for all of these gifts or gifted ones being given is brought out in the twelfth verse and on. Let me read the verses from Mr. Darby's translation which gives the sense with much more force and accuracy: "These are given for the perfec-

ting of the saints with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ." We begin in this verse with what is individual. There is the need for everyone of us to be perfected and for the work of God to be done in our souls so that we may fill the place in which the Lord has put us in His assembly. Our thoughts, our ideas, our ways—everything about us needs to be adjusted according to His mind and will. (The word "perfecting" carries the force of "adjusting," I believe.) And the Lord is desirous of bringing into complete conformity to His will so that we may function as He has determined we should. This work of adjustment is accomplished as our Head directs His gifted ones into all the needed ministries for His body. As these ministries accomplish in us the needed adjustments, we too are fitted to carry on the ministries for which we have been fitted. Thus, we become yielded to our Head and we learn the place into which we have been put in the body, and we fill that place. And thus we see the individual thrust of that expression, "for the perfecting of the saints." And it becomes evident then that all of this is with a "view to the work of the ministry." Each member being adjusted to the Lord's mind and will, fulfills his ministry as directed and so the work of the ministry continues. And the work of the ministry has in view the edifying of the body of Christ. Edifying means the building up spiritually of the body. This verse begins with the work of God through the saints individually and ends with His work done in the body as a whole.

Let's pursue this line of thought for a bit more. There are many kinds of ministry. And it is easy to see that the line of truth given to us here precludes any thought that there is a select few through whom ministry flows. Now that is the common present-day concept of christian ministry, but I don't hesitate to say that it is a false concept. The work of the ministry is with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ. This work of the ministry perfects, or adjusts, every member of the body, and not only

that, but it is that same work in which every member ought to be engaged as time continues. Now, surely, we don't expect those who are babes in Christ to be understanding as to what their work and ministry is. Of course not. But this is where the perfecting comes in. As each of us, the babes included, grow and develop, as we are adjusted, we are going to see the place we ought to fill. Now all of this has in view, that which was true of these Ephesian believers, a healthy spiritual condition. The desire to walk with the Lord, to live well-pleasing unto Him is most important. As our hearts are true in their motives and as our desires are set on the Lord, it is then that we will be in a spiritual condition to receive the perfecting ministry. It is then that we will grow and will be made aware of the various needs of the body. And then we will perform the ministries to the body for which we are fitted. This "perfecting" work brings us into spiritual maturity. We are not occupied with our own personal needs, though we are thankful for it when the Lord sends someone to minister to us, for we all need the ministry of the other members. But we are mainly occupied with what we can do for the members of the body. Our chief desire is that Christ will be glorified through His saints. Spiritual maturity leads us to work and labor for the edifying of the body. And we **MUST** consider it in just this way: the edifying of the **WHOLE BODY**. Sometimes we limit our thoughts and desires to the immediate circle of fellowship. It is a good thing to be concerned about those we personally know and are in fellowship with. But if in our thoughts and desires anything less than the whole body of Christ is before us, we have become too narrow. Indeed, if we think only of ourselves, I say we are sectarian. The church which is His body is spread throughout the entire world and we sometimes meet some who are the Lord's who have been unknown to us. Our desire toward them and the work that we can do for them is no less important than what we can do for those that we know. Let us never forget this. The work of the ministry is with a view to the edification of the entire body. And so each of us has a

responsibility to each and every member of the body wherever we may find him. Each is indebted to all the members to fulfill his ministry.

The thirteenth verse shows us the duration of the work of the ministry and its ultimate accomplishment. It is "until we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect (or full-grown) man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." This is all in the singular because it is speaking of us as the one body, and not of us as individuals; it is of us collectively as the church of God. Thus, the work of the ministry will continue until each and every member is brought into the full truth of the Christ, that is, of who and what He is and what we are in Him. The work of the ministry will continue until His assembly is seen in perfect holiness and glory, when He will be glorified in His saints, when there will not be one jarring thing among His own.

It is easy to see that such unity and maturity does not exist now among believers in the body. Further, we must sadly admit that it will never be seen on this earth. It is that which will be true when we are with the Lord. The work of the ministry will therefore continue through all of time until the Lord comes for His assembly in the rapture. It is then that this thirteenth verse will be realized. But now, in the course of time, God the Spirit labors to bring us all into the unity of the faith, to bring us all into the knowledge of the Son of God. It is the truth concerning His Person and work and the glories that are His that bring us unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. As this truth lays hold of us in our hearts and minds, we mature spiritually. This maturity is seen, then, in the manner of life which results from the apprehension of this truth, which produces faithfulness and truthfulness in us as verse fifteen shows.

But let us never turn inward, to be occupied with ourselves in

any way. Let us never be fooled into thinking that self-improvement is possible. It is something that never can be accomplished, for the flesh is worthless. The only result of self-occupation is defeat. But let us rather pursue Christ and all the truth that centers in Him. And we shall have as much of the truth as we desire. We shall apprehend it as we study and meditate upon Him through His word. It is in this way that we are transformed into His likeness, that the fruit of the Spirit is produced in us. This is true godliness. Just think how it would be if every member of the church would know, enjoy and walk in the truth that we have before us? And let's make it real personal and include ourselves in this question. Let it be a challenge to our own hearts. How is it with us? Oh, what a wonderful witness there would be to Christ if each of us and every believer were in just the place the Lord has put us doing the work that He has given us to do! Our God and Father has given us all the treasures of heaven. All that His son as man is and has is ours. The work of the ministry is to bring us into the knowledge and enjoyment of His Son in the unity of the faith, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. This bears the repetition because it is what ought to be seen in the church now. God's purpose is for the world to see Christ in the Church. And He is seen as each member functions according to His will, as all the ministries are carried out by His direction in the power of the Spirit. Thus, the spiritual needs of the saints are being met, prayers for all men go up to God, souls are being saved and the material needs of people are supplied through the distribution of what is given in the assemblies. All of this shows godly order and is the witness of Christ to the world. Now we must confess that it is all done very imperfectly, to say the least. And we must hang our heads in shame when we think of our divisions and the ruined testimony in result.

Nevertheless, dear ones, in spite of our divisions we need to go on with the Lord. We must give Him His rightful place, both in

our individual lives and in His Church. And if there is any other motive than this for why we are together, it is a wrong one. The Lord Himself must be our Object, and no one or nothing else should be. Family relationship and personal friendship are not the ties that bind us together. And if our motive is merely to add numbers to the assemblies or to exert control over certain ones of the Lord's people, then we are merely another sect, and that is all. But if our desire is to hold the Head, to give Him His rightful place in our midst, then we are an expression of the Church. If we desire to be guided by our Head in the work of the ministry in whatever our gift may be so that His saints will come into the fulness of the Christ, then our motive is proper. We must never forget that there are believers who are hungering for truth. And the Lord will feed those who hunger. What a privilege it is for us to be used of the Lord to minister to them. Indeed, we are responsible to do so. And when it comes to adding numbers to the assembly's testimony, the Lord will do that work. Let us be His instruments in the work of the ministry and He will take care of building up the numbers. Oh, it is beautifully simple, isn't it? If each one did what he knows he ought to do with a whole heart and ready mind and went ahead and did it, what a work of building we would see, what refreshing, what reviving we would see in the assembly. And perhaps we'd see many more souls being saved. I don't know for sure if that's true, I only suggest it. But why don't we see more souls being saved? It seems that the Lord does not give us many conversions. Why is this? I believe this is something we all should ponder and look to the Lord about. We see, then, in verse thirteen, what Christ the head desires His church should be on this earth.

Now in verse fourteen we see quite a different state of things. It is a work of Satan to bring in confusion and uncertainty among the people of God. Satan's work is to prevent the growth of believers. He would like them to stay in an infantile condition, to be tossed and carried about by every wind of that teaching which

is in the sleight of men, in unprincipled cunning, with a view to systematized error. This rendering of the verse brings into full focus the enemy's efforts. Satan does not simply introduce wrong teachings, but he weaves all his false teachings into systems of error which are very plausible to human reasoning. Every sect in the world has its systematized error. It all has a measure of truth in it, just enough to catch the unwary who let down their guard. These systems are very attractive to the flesh, but the spiritual man is not deceived. He sees that what is attractive to the flesh is dishonoring to the Lord and he will have none of it. He sees the baseness of man's cults; He sees Satan's power in every one of them, whose point of attack is against the truth of the Person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so if we hear things that do not glorify the Lord, that do not give Him the place that is His, then we can be sure it is some kind of systematized error. All error detracts from the truth of Christ and leads away from Him. And, in result, all who follow such things are bound to find themselves in confusion. They hear a contradiction of voices. They are unsettled in their souls. They become fearful and uncertain; they are sure of nothing. They have no peace in their souls. In such a state, there can be no growth. They remain as "children," as babes. All of this is true because they are not getting the ministry which points them to the knowledge of the Son of God and to Christ the Lord as Head of His church.

And so we have opposites, or we have a contrast in verses thirteen and fourteen. And we can say with certainty that any teaching or ministry which does not set forth the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ as Head of His church and give Him that place among His saints gathered unto His name must be refused totally and completely. Because it is only this ministry which leads us to the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. If we hold the Head, not merely theoretically, but in practice, then we must

refuse anything and everything that detracts from Him or gives Him less of a place than is rightfully His. As Head He directs His members, and as we hold the Head we will yield to His authority. We will refuse all human authority. We will refuse the confusion of human systems and their discordant voices, and we will receive the Spirit's ministry that exalts Christ and brings us into subjection to Him.

Verse fifteen shows the result in us of spiritual growth and development. It says, "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ." The expression "speaking the truth" really involves more than just speaking. It can be rendered "holding the truth" or "being truthful." So it would take in our whole manner of life and not just speaking. We should not only be truthful in what we say but in everything that we do. Our lives, everything we do and say, should have the character of truthfulness in love. Being truthful in love we will avoid stumbling one another. We will do nothing to hurt anyone. We will use our liberty in Christ only for the edifying of the body and not for the tearing down. How important are our speech and our actions to every member of the body. Everything is important, nothing is unimportant. Indeed, I really believe that the ministry that each of us has as a member of the body is carried out every moment of our lives to some extent, at least. But we don't often think of it in that way. And it is not something that we can turn on at one moment and turn off the next. It tells us in second Corinthians that the assembly is the epistle of Christ. It is an open letter or open book, read and known of all men. Obviously, then, it is a constant and continuous thing. How vitally important it is then that we be truthful in love that we may grow up into Him in all things. I think this carries the same force as what is in Colossians where it says "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing." So, we are looking at truth in the inward parts, truth within us. We also see here the two essentials of godliness, light and love. Light and

truth are synonomous in scripture. Light is what is pure and is of God. Truth is pure and is of God. Light is God's intrinsic nature. Truth is the revelation of God. God is light. Also, God is love. And love is the activity of God's nature. God has thus provided for all of man's needs in Christ crucified. Love working in us toward one another seeks the other's good and blessing. We are partakers of the divine nature and this is its activity in us. So light and love come together in this verse, and these both dwell in the saints of God. So it is not merely truth held in a theoretic way but it is truth working in power. Thus there is the growing up into Him in all things.

Finally, in verse sixteen we have the spiritual mechanism of the body, under the direction of the Head as He supplies each and every need for our spiritual health, growth and development. "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." This is the conclusion or capstone of this line of teaching which we have been seeing in these few verses. This verse deserves some of our time in meditation.

Well then, what are we to do? What is the point of all of this? Why, just that we should accept this truth and act upon it. And we are to refuse everything contrary to these precious and vital things. There are many systems of men in the religious world. These are not of God. Satan is behind all systematized error and these systems are founded upon systematic error. But our God has His system and we have had it presented to us in this portion of His word. His system is orderly, it is perfect. Christ is glorified; His people's needs are met. Such is God's system.

I'll close with a brief reference to a verse or two from the fifth chapter and 25th verse of this epistle. "Christ also loved the

church, and gave Himself for it that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish." This is what we will be when we are with Him, and not we only but all the members of His body. See the greatness of His love to us! And this is what should keep us near to Himself, His love so great that He gave Himself for us! We say reverently, could He have given more? He gave Himself for His church. It is the dearest thing to his heart on this earth. Dear fellow brethren, the assembly ought to be that to us also. We ought to be willing to spend and be spent for that which is the dearest thing in the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is His church of which we all are members. Think of the measurelessness of His love that led Him to give Himself for His church so that He could have us with Himself in the glory fitted for God's holy presence, a glorious church spotless and without blemish in complete holiness! Could there be a greater motive for us to follow Him our Head, to let Him direct us as members in this work of ministry to His body? May God bless His word to our hearts.

Printed and Published in the U. S. A. by
MOMENTS WITH THE BOOK
A Nonprofit Corporation

609 South Thomas St., Box 322, Bedford, PA 15522

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