



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Ephesians 4:13-16

“The Work of the Ministry, part II” -- TRANSCRIPT

Let's bow together in a time of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for Thy word, again. We praise Thee for the Epistle to the Ephesians and the magnificence of the doctrine that the Apostle propounds in this great letter.

We thank Thee that we are able to open it and read the things that he wrote to the believers in Asia Minor. We thank Thee for the Holy Spirit who has been given to us as teacher, and who instructs us in the things that have to do with the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for him as the head of the church. And we thank Thee for the relationship that we share as members of his body. And we thank Thee for the gifts that have been given to that body.

We pray, Lord, that we come to recognize our own gift, and also by the power of the Holy Spirit, exercise that gift in the body of Christ, that the whole body may be built up and edified.

We pray, too, Lord, that we may have that conception of the relationship that we have to one another, that will not affect our relationship to the Lord Jesus, but also will affect our relationship to one another, knowing that we are essential, one for another.

And we pray that in our study now, the things that we study may bear their fruit to that end.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen

[Sermon] This is really a continuation of the study on the work of ministry as set forth by the Apostle Paul in the fourth chapter of the letter that he wrote to the Ephesians. And if you were here then, you may remember that I began by asking the question, what is your conception of the ministry in the church? Or even of the minister? Is your conception the conception of an administrator? A servant? An evangelist? Comforter? Just what is your conception of the minister of the word of God, and your conception of ministry?

I didn’t make reference to this, but I have in previous messages at one time or another. Someone has said that a football game is 75,000 people desperately in need of exercise, cheering on 22 men who are passionately in desire of rest. [Laughter]. Well, there is a likeness to the Christian church, in the sense that the common concept that the minister in a Christian church is that he’s the leader of the congregation, and that, consequently, leadership responsibilities fall on him, and he’s responsible for the success or failure of the congregation. If he does his work well, the congregation of the church will make progress, and if the church does not make progress, well, it’s probably his fault.

John Stott has a book on Ephesians, and in the course of the particular exposition that undertakes Ephesians 4:11-16, he comments on the different conceptions that men have of the minister and the church. One of them, he says, is the likeness of a pyramid. That is, the minister is sitting on top of the pyramid, and arranged underneath him in serried ranks of inferiority are the congregation.

Or, he says, the concept is sometimes that of a bus, with the minister of a congregation the driver of the bus, and the members of the congregation sitting in the bus, having turned everything over to him, many of them sleeping, some of them sightseeing, but not really helping at all.

He goes on to say that the concept in the New Testament is something entirely different. And I think, remarkable for Mr. Stott, who is not only an outstanding expositor of the word – one of the finest – but also an Anglican minister, and his own concept he says, is of a plural leadership of the church, that is the leadership of the elders. And that’s remarkable, and I’ve noticed Mr. Stott has made it since he’s resigned from his position of rector of All Saints’ Church in London. But that’s what he says is his concept.

And he said when he came to the United States a few years ago, he went into an Anglican congregation which had been the recipient of a good bit of charismatic teaching. And this congregation in Darien, Connecticut, on their bulletin – I believe it was called St. Paul’s Church – St. Paul’s Church, so-and-so the rector, so-and-so the assistant rector, and then the congregation – this was on the bulletin – the congregation, ministers. And he thought that was very good, because it at least set forth the idea that every member of a Christian church is a minister.

Well that is really what the Apostle Paul was saying. And if you were here last week that was one of the major points that I wanted to make. That is, the minister is not a person who stands up and carries on the ministry of the local church. But rather, he is one who equips, by the teaching of the word of God, others to do the work of ministry. So that the work of gifted men – the gifted men that he refers to here are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:11 – these men are gifted men and they are given to the church of Jesus Christ in order to equip every one of us to do the work of ministry.

I commented on the fact that verse 11 has common – verse 11 and 12 – these verses have often been misunderstood, and, I think, partially because of the translation in the Authorized Version. Paul says, according to the Authorized Version, he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints, for the perfecting of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ. And the impression has been given, by the reading of that text, that we have three

duties here arranged, one underneath the other, but correlative, really, in force – number one, number two, number three – and they represent the work of men who have the gift of utterance. They are to perfect the saints. And, secondly, their second duty is to do the work of ministry and, thirdly, they are to edify the body of Christ.

So that the concept of the minister of a church is: well he’s a man who preaches the word and he has three responsibilities. Number one, he should perfect the saints, equip the saints. Two, he should do the work of the ministry, so we think of the work of the ministry as the work of a preacher. And thirdly, he should be responsible for the edifying of the body of Christ, or the church.

But we tried to show last week that that is not what Paul says. These phrases, the perfecting of the saints, the work of ministry – for “the” is even absent in the Greek text – and the edifying of the body of Christ are subordinate phrases. That is, the second is subordinate to the first, and the third is subordinate either to the first or second, the resultant meaning is the same.

So what Paul is really saying is these gifted men, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, are given for the equipping of the saints – that’s their one duty, to equip the saints – that the saints might do the work of ministry that the body of Christ might be edified. So that the work of the ministry is not the work of the gifted man; he’s simply to equip them from the word of God. He’s to teach the Scriptures so that they, built up in the faith, strengthened, given doctrine of biblical knowledge and the application of it, are then able to carry on ministry. Everyone is a minister in the body of Christ. So you are a minister in the body of Christ.

Now, I was accused last week of being a chauvinist. And, unfortunately it came right from home. It came from my own family. I was accused of being a chauvinist, because I said he gave gifted men, and I didn’t say anything about women. And I must admit, that is exactly what I did say. I spoke about gifted men.

Now I don’t want to defend myself, I just want you to notice that verse 8 does say, “Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” So, there is some justification for speaking of gifted men. But, I do want to qualify what I said, because some of you may have been seriously misled by what I said.

Now my daughter, when she criticized me for that, she did it with a smile on her face, because she understands as well as I do what this passage means. It is true that women do have gifts. Not only do they gifts, of course – we all have spiritual gifts – but women also have gifts of utterance. Now we all know women have gifts of utterance [laughter], but I’m speaking about utterance gifts in the church or in carrying on ministry.

It is true that there are women who are not only able to teach the word of God, but able to teach the word of God very, very acceptably. It’s not unusual at all, for a woman to be able to teach the word better than a man. That’s not unusual.

The only thing that the New Testament sets forth is that a woman is to carry on that kind of ministry – an utterance ministry – in a slightly different sphere. But when we talk about gifted men, we do want to acknowledge that it is certainly the possession of many women that they have the gifts of teaching, or exhortation, or other gifts. I am personally doubtful of the fact that there are gifts of prophecy, now, but there were gifts of prophecy then, given to women. Philip the Evangelist, had some daughters who were prophetesses, the New Testament says. All of the Apostles were men. But nevertheless, women do have, not only spiritual gifts, but gifts of utterance. And we do have some in Believer’s Chapel, who are very gifted in the teaching of the Scriptures.

So, with that in mind, when I say gifted men, I’m speaking generically. That is, gifts have been given to men, but that does not preclude the gift, an utterance type of gift, to a woman.

Well now we’ve come to verse 12, and the Apostle has stated for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ. And I

believe that we stopped right there. I mentioned the ministry of the head to the body in the giving of those gifts, and then we had just begun verse 11 and verse 12 where the ultimate purpose of the head’s gifts was given; that is, to equip the saints to do the ministry.

And I think I had also, at the conclusion of our study, made reference to the fact that you will notice that the edification of the body of Christ, referred to at the end of verse 12 – for the edifying of the body of Christ – that’s really the ultimate end of these gifts that the Lord Jesus Christ has given to his body. And I also made the point that everything that has to do with the edifying of the body of Christ comes ultimately from the word of God. He says he gave some apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers.

Now in the case of each of these gifts, assuming that this last is one gift, pastor hyphen teacher, you’ll notice that each one has something to do with the word of God. So, the concept that Paul is speaking about here is the concept of men who have utterance gifts to teach the word of God, to equip us, to do the work that will lead to the edifying of the body of Christ. And I read the statement from Calvin, to the effect, in which Calvin says,

“He could not exalt more highly the ministry of the word than by attributing to it this effect. For what higher work can there be than to build up the church that it may reach its perfection. They, therefore, are insane, who neglecting this means hope to be perfect in Christ, as is the case with the fanatics who pretend secret revelations of the spirit (that is, they pretend they have prophets), and the proud, who content themselves with the private reading of Scripture and imagine that they do not need the ministry of the church.”

So Calvin made, I think, a very valid point that what leads to the edification of the church, the body of Christ, is the ministry of gifted men who bring the word of God to us. The word is the source of the edification of the body of Christ.

Now I’d like to just draw a little contrast here, based on that. You’ll note that it all comes from the word. He does not say that God has given to us educators, that they might instruct us. He does not say that he has given us organizers, that the body may be built up. He does not say that he gives us administrators, that the body of Christ may be built up. He does not say that we have been given counselors, or psychologists, or fundraisers, that the church may be built up.

In other words, the edification of the body of Christ comes from the ministry of every believer who is equipped for his task by the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastor-teacher, or, in their teaching of the word of God. It is the word of God that equips the saints for ministry. So the Apostle, I think, lays great stress upon that.

What is the aim and goal? Well, verse 13 says, “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.”

Now I want you to notice one thing here that I think is somewhat important. The Apostle talks about the saints both individually and collectively. In verse 12 he says that these gifted men have been given for the perfecting of the saints. Notice the plural, the perfecting of each one of us.

But then in verse 13 he says, “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man,” singular. So he looks at the church as composed of a plurality of individuals, but he also looks at the church as a plurality of individuals who, themselves, form one man. There is a corporate unity that exists in the body of Christ. Now if you’ll turn back to chapter 2 and verse 15, the Apostle says something of the same thing. He’s talking about the work of the Lord in his cross work, “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in

ordinances; to make in himself of two one new man, so making peace.” He talks about the formation of making Jews and Gentiles who have believed into one new man.

Now there’s another point in verse 13 that I think is somewhat interesting. He says till we all come in the unity of the faith. Now Paul, knowing what he’s written previously, I might raise my hand at this point and say, “May I ask a question, Mr. Apostle? You’ve just said in the context above that we already have unity. Did you not say ‘endeavoring to keep the unity of the faith or the spirit in the bond of peace’? And then you went on to speak about the sevenfold unity: one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all? Why do you say that we do have the unity of the spirit, and now you say that these gifted men have been given in order that we might form one new man till we come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man? In one case, you say unity. In another case, you say we are ultimately to have unity.”

Well, I think I know what the Apostle would say. He would say, well, there has been formed a unity by the very fact that we have been born again, regenerated, brought into the body of Christ and made a member of that one body. There is a unity. And we do, all who are in the body, affirm the things that he’s just spoken about: one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Those are things that we have together. And in that sense, we have a unity in the faith.

But then there are many ways in which we do not have a unity of the faith. For example, there are Baptists. There are Presbyterians. There are Anglicans. There are Arminians. There are Calvinists. And there are lots of people who are confused, neither one, neither Arminians nor Calvinists, just not rational. Now that’s a bad word – consistent, not consistent. Inconsistent. So, we don’t have that unity yet. And so there’s a sense in which we have that unity, formed by the Spirit, and deep down within, you

finally can even get a Baptist and a Presbyterian together if they are both believers. Or a Baptist and a Methodist together if they are both believers – that’s a little harder than a Baptist and a Presbyterian – but nevertheless you can get both of them together if they are both believers.

I just had a change of voice, in case you’re wondering why it sounds differently [laughter]. My voice comes and goes these days, but anyway, you have these basic unities that all Christians ultimately confess.

Now we have lots of ways in which we don’t have that unity. And so it is the work of the gifted men to teach us the word of God until we shall ultimately, as Paul says, come to a 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. Now, that will not happen until the whole church is gathered unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Then, we shall all be Calvinists. [Laughter]. Then, we shall all be one in Christ and we shall have soundness of biblical doctrine, those things in which we’re unsound shall fade away and we will have a true unity of the faith.

So, we have a unity. There is a unity that we are to maintain, and there is a unity that we are to attain when we enter the presence of the Lord.

Now one might ask, well, what are we to do in the meantime? These gifted men have been given to us that the whole body might be edified, but what goes on in between? Well now the Apostle in verse 14 through verse 16 speaks of the intermediate purpose of the gifts that the head of the church has given. Between maturity, when we all reach that unity, and the present state, there is to be growth.

Now there is ministry for this, too. These gifted men have been given to teach us that we might grow. In what way? Well, the Apostle speaks of it negatively and positively. Notice that he says in verse 14 that we are henceforth to be no more children. And then, in verse 15, but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things.

So, here we have the negative side and the positive side. Negatively, we are to be no more children. Positively, we are to grow up in him.

Now I think this opening statement of verse 14 is extremely important, and is very revealing. He says that we henceforth be no more children. Now that’s an interesting thing, that we should be called children. Because, there are so many likeness between children, naturally, and children in the faith, that it’s very instructive for us, I think, to compare children in the flesh and children in the spirit. What are the marks of children? Let me suggest some marks of children, and let me suggest some analogies in the church.

One of the things that characterizes a child is a lack of stability. Listen to what Paul says, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, (that is an expression that refers to the playing of dice) and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive.” Lack of stability.

Any new sight or sound is sufficient to change the purpose of a child. You notice that particularly in children. Nothing holds their attention for very long. To speak of it scientifically, they have a very short attention span. Now that is characteristic of new believers. When they are listening to the minister of the word of God, their attention span is often very short. Let me give you an illustration.

About four or five years ago, I gave some messages on Habakkuk. And in the course of the messages which were given on a Wednesday night, there was a couple that came in here who had not had a whole lot of Bible teaching just before that, became very involved in the Chapel, very involved in the Chapel at this moment, and as a matter of fact are here tonight. I hope they won’t mind me saying this, because they told me this on Sunday night.

But they also, now, had been listening to the messages on Sunday morning on Habakkuk. Messages that they said they had heard four or five years ago when they were given in the Chapel. And they were speaking about how much more they were getting

out of the messages now that they had been in the Chapel four years. Well now, we all have had that experience.

I can remember when I first started to hear the ministry of the word of God, if I could go out with a few ideas, well I thought I had accomplished something. I had been able to get something. It was all very thrilling to me. I sat there just entranced by the ministry of the word. Still do when the preaching is good. I was obtaining some things, but I was not obtaining what I would obtain now when I listen to the exposition of the Scriptures. Lack of stability. Lack of attention span. They’ve got to have something new all the time.

Now a second thing that’s characteristic of children is that they are easily deceived. Notice what Paul says, “No more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive.” So children are easily deceived. You can play trick after trick on children. I did it with all of my children. All of my children did it with their children. But my children’s children have a double-dose, because they are not only deceived by their father but by their grandfather, too [laughter]. So when my little children, my little grandchildren, are like this, I like nothing better than to play hide-and-go-seek with them in the house. It’s so easy to deceive them.

So I would go, I would hide, think of some unusual place. I would go in the bathroom and stand in the tub, of course, [laughter], they wouldn’t think of looking in the tub, they’d just take a look in the bathroom. You wouldn’t expect a grandfather – a preacher – to stand in the tub, would you? [Laughter] And so when they found out that’s where I was, well, I got in the clothes hamper. You wouldn’t expect a preacher to get in a clothes hamper, would you? But they were easily deceived. And then when they learned all of my little trick places, all I had to do was, when they started coming, and I could see them coming, all I had to say was, “Oooo [makes scary sound]” and their faces

would turn pale, and they would turn and run, and that was the end of the game for a couple of days. [Laughter] They wouldn’t come anymore. Children are easily deceived.

Well that is true in the Christian life. Christians are easily deceived. It’s amazing the things we are deceived by: by the false teaching, by the cults, and not only by the false teachers and the cultists, but even by other new Christians. And then some who are just a little above them, who don’t have any real deep comprehension of doctrine, but who have some really wild ideas. And so they are deceived by them. One of the duties of all teachers of the word is to seek to answer the questions that the children have. So, easily deceived. That is characteristic of them.

Another thing that is true of children is their lack of proportion. This results in a tendency to dispute about the trifles and neglect the weightier matters. And this is true of things in the spiritual life. You’ll find young Christians who don’t have any sense or proportion about what is important in the Christian faith and what is unimportant. That’s why when someone announces that he is going to speak on the United States and Bible prophecy the auditorium will be jammed and packed, and when he announces the Holy Spirit and the sanctification of the saints, well, there are many an extra seat in the auditorium. They don’t have any sense of proportion. They don’t have any sense of what is important or what is unimportant.

Another thing: their range of life is selfish. I, me, mine. In fact, I read some time ago – I don’t know how true this is – but if you watch little children, you will discover that it’s not before they’re two or three years that they will even know themselves as a distinct person. They even speak of themselves in the third person, so that their range of interest is usually selfish, and the selfish thing spans the entire area of their interest.

This is seen if you see two children playing in the room, and a third child comes in, and here’s a child over here who has six toys, and here’s a child over here who has seven or eight – six that belong to him and two that belong to the other one which he has managed to get. And the other little boy will come in and he’ll have one toy, and both of

those kids will want that toy that he’s got. That’s just characteristic of children. They are selfish.

And that is true of Christians. They are interested in my blessing, the things that help me. Or, I’m not helped by this. I’m not built up by this. They’re only concerned about themselves: my blessing, my interest. They don’t think about the whole body of Christ. They don’t have any sense of proportion. They’re easily deceived and easily fooled. And the result is disaster.

There’s another thing about children: they know everything. They are all knowing. They are provokingly infallible. I can remember when I served in a theological seminary on the admissions committee. The letters that we got were most interesting. One letter I don’t think I’ll ever forget. It came from a medical doctor. This medical doctor, you would think – he already was in practice – you would have thought, a medical doctor, they are normally unusually intelligent and wise – well, this man wrote, and his lines were something like this:

“God has led me to come to seminary. God has led me this, and God has led me that.” (now that was alright, but he also said) “God has led me to take Greek and Hebrew, and God has led me to take theology, but God has not led me to take...” (and he named two or three other courses which were part of the regular course schedule).

So, the registrar wrote back and said, “If you come, you will of course be required to take the other courses. You’ll have to take the others as well as those God has led you to take. That kind of puts you in an embarrassing position, you know [laughter], God has led him to take those but you’re requiring him to take some others, it’s a little embarrassing because you’re pitted against the Lord [more laughter], if you just go at face value, but we of course knew that wasn’t the real situation.

Well, we wrote back to this man, and I’ve forgotten exactly the exchange, except that when we finally wrote a letter to him, he didn’t get the letter, because he was already here in Dallas. And so he came in and said, “I’ve sold my business, I’ve sold my house, and God has led me here and has led me to take these courses.”

Well, we had to finally put our foot down and say God has led us to tell you to take these if you’re going to be here. Well, that was a clue. That was a clue to that particular individual. He later became a psychiatrist, changed his course of medical study afterwards, became a psychiatrist, and really was not a very successful one. But, the reason that he spoke like that was because he was a relatively young Christian. He was immature. He spoke, “God led me, God led me”—he knew it all. He knew more than the men who were there to teach him theological truths.

There’s another thing about children. They have a lack of reference for age, and for proper authority, too. You know, don’t trust anyone over thirty. I heard of someone a long time ago, who in these days of progressive education, said – a father said this – I never strike my child anymore except in self-defense [laughter]. Children do tend to have a lack of reference for age and authority. I’m not trying to pull rank on you because I would’ve said this if I were twenty-five and, I think, know what I know now. I didn’t know it at twenty-five, but if I had known it then, I would have said that. But it is characteristic of youths to not have respect for age and authority, and it’s characteristic of young Christians to not have respect for Christians who have been Christians for many years, and who may – not always have they – and who may have learned some things that it would be a profit for them to know.

Also, children are alert to pleasure and they are dead to duty. What’s the most successful way of getting a child to do something? Why, to persuade him that it’s fun. It’s the Tom Sawyer method. And if you can do that with Christians, then you will succeed. And one of the ways to succeed with young Christians is to use the Tom Sawyer method. That’s done in much Christian work today, so that you have inexperienced, immature

people who are doing the work of the Lord. And it’s no wonder that there is great difficulty in many of our churches.

So, the Apostles says, that you be no more children. Those characteristics are characteristics of children. And one of the reasons that God has given us these gifted men is to deliver us from these things.

Oh, I forgot to mention one other thing. Have you ever noticed the relationships and companionships of children? Well, in the first place, they love dogs, cats, lizards, all kinds of animals. They love those things. Well, that’s also characteristic of young Christians. They don’t really seek out the kind of companionships that might be helpful to them. And so their companionships are companionships sometimes forbidden by the word of God. They seek out worldly companions rather than spiritual companions. Now, of course, we are to be in the world, and we’re not suggesting isolation. But we are suggesting that one of the important things for a new Christian is to develop some relationships that are more mature than you are or they are. And leave your old lizards, bugs, and other things that characterized your old companionships to others.

Now Paul goes on to speak of the positive side. He says that you be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, by which they lie in wait to deceive; (that is, lacking in stability, easy to deceive) but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. So, no more children, but now to grow up in him. Stability in the truth, and growth in love is the aim.

Now when the Apostle says in verse 15, speaking the truth in love, he’s not speaking entirely of speaking. That word, in the original text, probably involves more than simply speaking the truth. It probably involves doing the truth as well. It’s a word that really means “truthing” in love. It has been rendered “cherishing truth in love.” In other words, we ought to have a great love of the truth and we also ought to do the truth, but we must do the truth in love.

Now that is difficult to do. That is particularly difficult for me to do. Last night I was in a gathering of people, and in the course of discussion, reference was made to a certain person who had said to a friend of mine who goes to the Chapel here, “Well, we are not five point Calvinists, we are three point Calvinists.” Well now, I happen to know that the individuals involved do believe in eternal security or the perseverance of the saints, so it’s two out of the other three, and they also said we don’t believe in definite atonement, so that left total depravity, unconditional election, and efficacious grace, of which they believed one.

Now, if you understand biblical theology, you know that if you hold total depravity, you must hold unconditional election, you must hold efficacious grace. You might not hold definite atonement. But logically, probably logically you would, but you must, and clearly logically if you believed in total depravity, logically, you must believe that God elects unconditionally. That is, there isn’t any condition on your part which you perform that makes it, the election, both God’s work and your work. So you cannot say you’re a three-point Calvinist. That’s like saying over in our church, we don’t believe two times two equals four, we believe that two times two equals five. Well, what would you say?

Well, you’d probably be utterly astounded, first of all. But then, perhaps you’d go out and say, “Have you ever heard anything like that? That’s irrational. That’s impossible.” Well, it’s impossible to be a three point Calvinist. It’s impossible. Logically and theologically, it’s impossible. Just cannot do it. By the definition of terms you cannot.

Let’s suppose that that person says, “I don’t believe in total depravity.” Well, if he doesn’t believe in total depravity, well of course, he doesn’t have to believe in unconditional election, efficacious grace, definite atonement or perseverance of the saints. But, if he says he believes in total depravity, then by definition he believes a man cannot of himself believe. And if he cannot of himself believe, then his election is unconditional,

because there is nothing he can do to meet the condition. So then if you believe in total depravity, you must believe in unconditional election. And if you believe in unconditional election, election based on God’s divine, sovereign, good pleasure, and not on your foreseen faith, then you must also believe in efficacious grace, because you cannot of yourself believe and the Holy Spirit must bring you to faith. Those things stand or fall together. You cannot deny them.

So when a person says, well, they’re a three point Calvinist, well, I must confess, I get stiff, [laughter] my nose probably twitches a bit, my eyes get steely, and I think, this is a sad case. Now I have to think of what the Apostle says. He said, however, “Speaking the truth in love.”

Now there are two things you can do, it seems to me. Number one, you can get real angry, and you can say, “That is illogical! You cannot believe something like that! You don’t know what you’re talking about!” And then, of course, they’ll probably be so angry, because if it’s true, all things being equal, they probably have not reached the stage of growth theologically that perhaps you have. Well, you have just shut off opportunity to ultimately point them to the fact that total depravity does not go with conditional election, or with the other doctrines to which they may hold.

But, the other extreme is: I just won’t say anything about it. I just won’t say anything about it. I’ll just be their friend. And then, of course, what you do is countenance false teaching. What you do is negate the revelation of God. You’re not standing up for the truth.

So, we are faced with an alternative, always. We must stand for God’s truth, but we must do it in love. Now, I don’t want to contend that I’m like that, because I’ve offended a lot of people in my career. I’ve been many years at offending people, and I’ve offended a lot of ‘em. I regret it. But I do think that it is important for us to stand for the truth, but we must stand for the truth in love.

One of the reasons that I think I understand the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God is because I had a couple of friends who would just talk with me. And when I would express my viewpoint when it was a little contrary to the word, they would say, well how then do you explain such and such? And they would say it in a nice spirit, and I would explain it very authoritatively, and they would drop the point. And then a week or two later it would come up again, and they would approach it a little differently. And they were very kind and nice to me, and they labored with me, and they gave me some things to read, and finally, of course, the Holy Spirit illuminated me so that I came to understand the doctrine of the sovereign grace of God.

It’s difficult for us to remember that all of us at one time or another were conflicted with a lot of inconsistencies, and irrationalities, in our biblical thinking. And no doubt I still have some. I don’t know what they are, because, of course, I’d like to change them if I knew. But when Paul says here we are not to be children, but we are to grow by speaking the truth in love, I think he’s saying be an adult. Have a love for the truth, but have a love for the individual. And in the true biblical sense of truthing in love, cherishing the truth, seek to minister that truth.

I love the little story of Howard Moody Morgan. G. Campbell Morgan had a number of children. Four or five of the men went into the ministry. Mr. Morgan was an outstanding expositor. They all were interested in the Bible.

They were having a discussion around the table one time about what was the best translation. And this was many years ago, and I don’t know the translation they were talking about, but I do know that Mr. Morgan used the American Standard Version. And so he, undoubtedly, spoke for that. And the English Revised Version was also used. Somebody probably spoke for that and several other versions. And finally, Howard Moody Morgan, who also became a minister and was a minister in this country, spoke up and said, “Well, the translation I like best is mother’s translation.” And what he meant by

that was, simply, mother’s Christian life. And the way in which she translated the truth into Christian living.

Well, that’s what I think Paul means when he says speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, who is the head, even Christ. And then he speaks of Christ “from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth,” – we are the joints, we are the joints in the body – “working in the measure of every part,” – we are parts – “maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.” So the Apostle says, then, the gifts have been given to the body that the saints may be given to do the work of ministry so that the whole body as each one of us fulfills our particular task, the joints, the parts of the body, the whole body may edify itself in love, receiving everything from the Lord Jesus Christ and living out the body.

I wonder where Paul got this illustration of the body, and it’s functioning, and how if we don’t function, as individuals, the body is afflicted with paralysis. Do you know who was with him when he wrote this particular epistle? Luke was with him. Luke was the beloved physician. He understood bodies. He understood how bodies worked. And I wonder if the Apostle didn’t derive some of his understanding of the body and a relationship of the individual parts to one another from Luke the physician.

You see, when we don’t really operate within the body, the body becomes a paralyzed body. If I don’t teach with my same irritating way, constantly, the body loses something. Isn’t that amazing to think that the body loses something if I don’t function? The body loses something if you don’t function. The body does not function perfectly if there are members in the body who are not functioning. There is a measure of paralysis in the body.

So may God help us to come to know what our gifts are, and may God help us to exercise them and to exercise them in love. Let’s close in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are grateful to Thee for these words that the Apostle has spoken. O, that we may no more be children but grow up into him in all things.

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For Jesus’ sake. Amen.