

Membership Matters: Session 3

The Work of the Ministry: Speaking Truth in Love

The Christian lives wholly by the truth of God's Word in Jesus Christ. If somebody asks him, Where is your salvation, your righteousness? He can never point to himself. He points to the Word of God in Jesus Christ, which assures him salvation and righteousness...In himself he is destitute and dead. Help must come from outside, and it has come and comes daily and anew in the Word of Jesus Christ...But God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him.
– Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*

What Jesus Gives

- “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,” Eph 4:11
 - Eph 4:7-10 is a reflection on the gifts that Jesus gives upon His ascension to the right hand of the Father (“grace was given” vs. 7)
 - What’s the common denominator between all the gifts listed in vs. 11?
 - Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers
 - (The word for “shepherd” is the same word for “pastor”)
 - Pastors and teachers are not two different offices, but joined together. In Greek, if you want to join two nouns together into a hyphenated pair, you use one article (“the”) with a conjunction between them (“and”)—so “the shepherds and teachers” is really “the shepherd-teacher.”
 - The common connection between these: offices that speak God’s Word

What Pastors Do

- “...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,” Eph 4:12
 - Who are the saints?
 - See Eph 1:1
 - God’s gift to the church are those who speak God’s Word *so that* the church is equipped to do...
 - The work of the ministry
 - Building up the body of Christ

What the Church Does

- “...until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” Eph 4:13
 - “until...” implies a goal. What are we aiming at in our ministry to one another?
 - Christ-like-ness

- “mature manhood”
 - “to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ”
 - Unity of faith and knowledge
 - (In Greek, both faith and knowledge of the son of God are governed by ‘unity’—so, it isn’t 1) “unity of faith” and 2) “knowledge of the son of God” as two separate things. It is unity that comes from both faith and knowledge of the son of God.)
 - Paul’s emphasis on unity can be seen in Eph 4:1-6. What does it mean to walk in a manner worthy of the calling of Christ? Unity.
 - But we are unified *around something*. Not a “unity at all costs.”
 - Therefore, we must be wise and competent enough in the Scriptures to know when a matter is unimportant enough that we can agree to disagree to preserve unity, and when we must break fellowship when the faith and knowledge of the son of God is being compromised.
 - So, God gives pastors to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry, to build one another up—what does that look like? It looks like striving to practice a Christ-exalting unity, a relational harmony with one another, with the aim being to make our church look more like Jesus.
- “...so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.” Eph 4:14
 - What happens if we don’t do the work of the ministry?
 - Three word-pictures given
 - We remain children
 - We are like a small boat battered by a storm
 - We are like Adam and Eve, deceived by the serpent
 - Participation in every-member ministry isn’t an inconsequential calling. We can preserve one another from making a shipwreck of our faith.
 - “...holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” – 1 Tim 1:19-20
- “Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,” Eph 4:15
 - *Don’t* let 4:14 happen to you, *Rather*, do this: speak the truth in love
 - What is the “truth” Paul is referring to hear? Since he just spoke about false doctrine in vs. 14, and then contrasts vs. 15 with the strong “Rather”, we should understand the “truth” here to primarily be “true doctrine.”
 - But this isn’t limited to the narrow band of “truth” we find in systematic theologies. This “truth” looks like the truth we find in Paul’s letters—a blend of abstract and practical doctrines.

- Why “in love”? Because, of course, you *can* speak the truth without love. And Paul makes it clear, that without love, nothing matters (1 Cor 13:1-3).
 - Therefore, we bear not only a truth-speaking obligation, but a relationship-forming obligation. Truth must come from and be clothed in love.
 - What happens when we do this?
 - We “grow up in every way into him”—this is how we fulfill the ministry of vs. 13
- “...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.” Eph 4:16
 - Paul’s favorite metaphor for the Church is the “body.” Each and every “joint” refers the individual members of the church (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-21)
 - “Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God,” (Col 2:18-19)
 - Consider: where does the nourishment come from here?
 - Notice the conditional statement: “*when* each part is working properly”
 - When we do our part, when we speak the truth in love, the whole body grows and builds itself in love.

Summary: King Jesus has given gifts to His Church. One of those are pastors who teach God’s Word to the people so that they are equipped to do the work of the ministry, to build up the body so that we are unified in faith and knowledge. If we don’t do the work of the ministry, we will remain naïve children who are easily deceived. So, let’s not do that. Let’s speak God’s Word to one another because we love each other and we know that the body of Christ is nourished and grows through the Word of God. When we all do this, our church will grow in love so that we will look like Jesus.

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