

Speaking the Truth in Love

Ephesians 4:8-16 – p. 977 in the pew Bibles

Please follow along with me as I read.

⁸ *Therefore it says,*

*“When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.”*

⁹ *(In saying, “He ascended,” what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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. 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.*

Beginning with verse 8 we see that when Christ ascended, he gave gifts to the Church. But at this point in the passage we don't yet know what those gifts are for or what they're intended to do.

But verses 9 and 10 together form a parenthetical statement that is absolutely imperative for us to understand the whole picture of what Paul is saying in these verses.

He begins by mentioning that He who ascended, Christ, first *descended*. That is referring to His incarnation. Why is this important?

Mark 1:15 tells us. The time for Jesus' ministry had come and he opens His mouth and begins to preach. He says, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.” The reason this is important is answered in what Jesus came to earth to do. But before that, we need to fully understand why He needed to come.

Lately I've been thinking a lot about all the stuff that's going on in the world, and in this nation, and in the Church. Almost every single day we hear about another shooting, another terrorist attack. Anger and hatred have risen to monumental levels. Angry words and insults between people made in the image of God with differing opinions flooding our airwaves and our social media. People argue back and forth furiously about politics, differences of lifestyles, and conflicting worldviews.

Our world is broken. Sin and rebellion have ravaged humanity to the point that we're destroying one another.

But the greatest tragedy of all is that the church is doing the exact same thing that the world is doing. We arrogantly go about tearing one another apart with our words and crushing one another on social media.

And in all this we have completely lost sight of the fact that it was because of this brokenness that Christ descended into our world. Sin was reigning with its bloodthirsty destruction, leaving only calamity and chaos in its wake. The human race believed the great lie that they could actually live in rebellion against God.

It was in the midst of this that Christ came down and declared that He had come to set things right. And the only way things are set right again is when sin and rebellion are dethroned and Christ takes His rightful place as King to restore all things.

So He came and proclaimed this gospel, this good news. The King of the universe stepped into our chaos and called us to repent and believe. To submit to the truth of His reign.

He went on to destroy the reign of sin by suffering – doing the complete opposite of what this world was doing which was to put self first – and He took that sin to the cross.

And then God vindicated His kingship by raising Him from the dead.

All of this is in that little phrase in verse 10, “He who descended.”

But it goes on to say that, “He who descended is the one who *ascended* far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.”

In the Old Testament the idea of ascending was connected to the enthronement of a king after victory, when the spoils of the battle would be brought up to the house of God and captives would be led through the city.¹

By the way, those “host of captives” that Jesus led is us. Believers. Our sin was defeated by Christ the victorious King and we were set free.

The ascension marks Christ’s supremacy as a capstone over His victory over sin.

In other words, by His ascension Christ is now reigning – over all things *positionally*. He is the one who created all things, and He is the one who restores all things. The stage is set for His return when He will make all things new. So while Christ reigns positionally over all things now, He is reigning in the hearts of believers *actually*. This is very important for us to keep in mind.

And when He ascended, he gave the gifts of apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers in order to equip you and me – the church – for the work of ministry.

To do what? What exactly is this ministry that we’ve been given? It says, “for building up the body of Christ.”

¹ R.C. Sproul. *The Purpose of God: An Exposition of Ephesians*

Now stay with me here. Don't check out on me yet because we're getting to the best part.

What follows in verses 13-14 reveals to us that this ministry we are being equipped for is the ministry of truth. And this truth that we are to proclaim is the same truth of Christ's mission when He descended to the earth and the redemption that he secured by bringing the kingdom of God to this world of rebellion and chaos, and hate, and terrorism, and angry words that tear one another apart. We declare the truth that He came to set all of that back to being right with God again. To restore and heal that which is broken. And we declare the truth that because He ascended and now reigns, we call all people to forsake their rebellion and bow their knee to the rightful king.

But here's the secret: Verse 12-14 are talking about building something. What is being built?

Verse 12-14:

¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ 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.

These verses paint a picture of a community of people living under the reign of Christ, growing up to maturity in Christ-likeness. And what makes this community of people different is that we aren't living with chaos as describes in verse 14:

- We aren't to be tossed to and fro – because we stand together in the truth of Christ's reign.
- We aren't to be carried about by the waves – because we are to be anchored in the truth of Christ's reign.
- We aren't to be people who are deceived by human cunning and craftiness in deceitful schemes – because we have been set free by the truth of Christ's reign.

Unfortunately, these things are not only found in the world, but also in the church. These are signs of spiritual immaturity. We are called to be in unity with one another, but all too often we find ourselves at odds with one another. That's why it says that the ministry we've been given is:

for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ 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

As we all grow in the knowledge of the Son of God, we mature spiritually and we grow in our Christ-likeness. **The vision here is that together we become a living example to the rest of the world of what Christ came to die for.**

We become a living example to the rest of the world of what it looks like when a people live submitted to Christ's reign. Wherever Christ's truth is embraced, Christ's reign is manifested to the rest of the world, and we, together, become a microcosm of what God intends to do with the entire cosmos.

We are to be an example to the world of what it looks like to be a people who don't trust in man, nor governments, nor earthly rulers, but in God alone.

We are to be a living example to the rest of the world of a people who are not driven by fear of what is to come or what some ungodly ruler will do, or what might befall us. Because our hope is in another King who rules all the earth and all the heavens.

But see this is why it's so important for us not to bicker and fight with each other. But if one person is trusting in one candidate, for example, and fearing the other, then that's when we begin to tear each other apart. We cannot think that we can trust in man and still live as a community living under the reign of Christ. We cannot think that we can live in fear of what this person will do or that person will do and still live as community living under Christ's reign. Because that's when we begin to tear each other apart just...like...the...world.

We cannot live and base our actions on the fear of man, and we cannot live and base our actions on the trust of man. Because it is that fear and misplaced trust that create divisions and cause us to be angry when our brothers and sisters don't agree with us. We feel threatened. We feel betrayed. And we get angry and lash out. All because we fail to live as a community of people who trust in the reign of Christ.

So how do we do this?

The answer is in verse 15. "Rather, speaking the truth in love..." We don't just speak the truth to the world, although that is one thing we do. But this passage is saying that we build up the body of Christ, this community of believers, by speaking the truth *to one another in love*. We are to care for one another just as we would care for a part of our own body. And we do so by ministering the truth to one another because we need each other in order to grow up in Christ and become that community of people who live as an example to the world of what it looks like to live as redeemed people submitted to the authority and reign of Christ.

But it's important to note that this truth that we are to minister to one another is not our own opinions, but rather the truth of the Word of God being rightly divided.

Christ is the center of it all! That's why it says in the rest of verse 15 and 16,

we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶from whom the whole body (this whole community of people), 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.

What holds this community together is when each member is working properly. That is, when each member is speaking the truth to one another and helping one another grow up in Christ, but doing it in love.

It is important for us to remember that when we are engaged in speaking the truth to another brother or sister in Christ, that we call attention to the truth in an extraordinarily compassionate and tender and loving spirit.²

God has ordained for this community to be made up of members who are all submitted to Christ. And He has also ordained that this submission is to come about through the help of one another. We each have blind spots, we get duped by lies, we misperceive things, and we need each other to help us to live out our submission to Christ. If we are to live consistent with Christ's lordship, I need you to show me where I have embraced falsehood and fail to live consistently with my faith, and I must be willing to humbly consider what you bring to the table.³

Hebrews 10:23-24 says,

²³ *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

²⁴ *And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works*

But it takes both truth and love. We must speak the truth to one another, but we must do it in love.

Tim Keller once said, "Truth without love is imperious self-righteousness. Love without truth is cowardly self-indulgence." Both are selfish.⁴

Or as John Newton once said, "Our natural temptation is to say what we should not say, or to not say what we should say. One is cruel arrogance, the other cruel cowardice, and neither is love."⁵

I would like to close with this poem from Amy Carmichael:

If I belittle those whom I am called to serve, talk of their weak points in contrast perhaps with what I think of as my strong points; if I adopt a superior attitude, forgetting "Who made thee to differ? And what hast thou not received?" then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I take offense easily, if I am content to continue in a cool unfriendliness, though friendship be possible, then I know nothing of Calvary love.

If I feel bitterly towards those who condemn me, as it seems to me, unjustly, forgetting that if they knew me as I know myself they would condemn me much more, then I know nothing of Calvary love.⁶

So the next time we have a disagreement with a brother or sister in Christ about something, let's not resort to tearing each other apart with our words, or angrily crushing each other on social media.

But rather, speaking the truth of Jesus Christ in love to one another, as Christ gives us the grace to do so, let us sit down together with an open Bible, and with humble hearts, and with prayer,

² Sproul, 107.

³ Tony Reinke. www.desiringgod.org/articles/speaking-tuth-in-love

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Charles R. Swindoll. *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations and Quotes*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 356.

trusting in God and not man, and not being fearful of man, but let us build each other up in truth.
And let us do it in love.

Let's pray.

For the benediction this morning, let's take to heart the words of 1 John 4:7:

*Beloved, **let us love** one another, for **love** is from God, and whoever **loves** has been born of God and knows God.*