

Ephesians 4

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If you have a Bible, you'll want to turn to Ephesians 4. And let me just say that I love this passage like many others, because it just stands out so crystal clear. But sometimes we don't get the point. And I want to begin before I actually read through this because I'm limited in time tonight and that is to say that I had a friend that told me about a conversation that a friend of his told me about. So I assume it's true, but it may be apocryphal. I don't really know. But here's the way the story goes.

A grandfather was sitting in his easy chair in his house, waiting for his grandson to come. His grandson was about to take off to go to college the next year and he had not done so well in school. So he didn't have much scholarship, and he was coming to visit his grandfather. And, you know, why don't you? He was going to ask for money for help, to go to school. So the grandfather sat in his easy chair and he said, okay, well, tell me what your plan is. And this innocent, I suppose, but at the same time, naive eighteen year old said, well, granddad, what I'm going to do is I'm going to go to college and I'm going to change the world, the whole world. His grandfather sat back in the easy chair like this and he said, well, boy, when you get a real plan, come talk to me. Well, that's the way it is, isn't it? A lot of times sixteen, seventeen, eighteen year olds are very optimistic about what they're going to do with their lives. They have big dreams and big visions, but they don't know how to get anything done. And then grandfathers have become, I guess we would say more practical but actually cynical. And they want to know what the plan is and maybe they can get behind it if there's a real plan. And what we would all wish we could have is somebody who had the enthusiasm of an eighteen year old, and yet the wisdom of the grandfather, in other words, have a huge vision that drives your whole life, but at the same time have a way of reaching that vision.

Well, I'm happy to tell you that the Bible tells us what that is, both sides of it in Ephesians chapter four. And what I want us to do is just take a look briefly as we're together and to see first what the vision is, and then secondly, how that vision, by God's mercy, is expressed in a plan. Both may surprise you. But let's start off with the vision. Chapter four, verse one. *I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.* Wouldn't that be a nice thing to do with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace? Well, that sounds nice. We all want to get along with each other. We want the body of Christ to be one. You'd be shocked if you were to take a look at the whole Bible to see how much from Genesis to Revelation it emphasizes the unity of the people of God, the unity of Israel as the people of God, the unity of the church, as the people of God from cover to cover. It's one of the great hallmarks of the Bible. It's the vision that should be before us. Let's keep reading though, and just see how much the Apostle Paul sounds like an eighteen year old. He says, there he goes on in verse four. *There is one body and one spirit, just as you were called into one hope that belongs to your call.* Okay, that sounds nice, but now listen. Verse five. *One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.* Whew! That's a mouthful, because the realist in here are going to say one Lord. Yeah, but

we understand who he is differently. One faith. Well, you know, we have all these denominations and their idea of what the Christian faith is, is so different from the other groups that make up the church. One baptism. This is a Presbyterian church, you know, and not all churches baptize their babies like you do one baptism. You can see that the apostle here is not speaking so much about the kind of realities that you see with your eyes, but he's saying that there's something behind all of this mess that the body of Christ is, and that is we're unified. There's a unity here, and he's also casting his vision to the future, because his dream is that one day this will be absolutely true. One day when the Lord Jesus comes back and brings the new heavens and new earth, the people of God will have one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, who is in all, over all, and through all. That's our dream. That's our hope. Our hope. It is yours. Because the glory of God is expressed in the world to come by the multitudes of people from throughout all of history, from every part of the earth, who have come to faith in Jesus being one people in the worship and the honor of God. What a glorious vision that is. It's a magnificent one. And if you do not grasp that, if it is not deep in your heart to see the body of Christ exemplifying that and moving toward that goal today, then you're missing one of the great joys of the Christian church. One of the great wonders of being a part of the one body of Christ, that's the vision side. Can you see it? Okay. But remember what the grandfather said when his grandson said to him, I'm going to go to college and I'm going to graduate and I'm going to change the whole world. He leaned back and he said, well, when you get a real plan, come talk to me. So here's what the apostle does. In the verses that follow, he talks about how Jesus is going to make all that vision happen step by step by step. It's a magnificent passage, just absolutely magnificent the way he spells out the plan. Now the plan begins in verse eight, but we're going to skip verse eight and verse nine, because it's one of the most difficult passages in the whole of the New Testament to interpret, especially in light of how few moments we have together. But what I want you to see is beginning in verse ten or pardon me, verse eleven, and he that's Jesus, who went to the grave and rose again, and ascended on high. And he. Jesus gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds or pastors and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. You might be shocked to know, but that in chapter one, verse twenty three, he mentions the fullness of Christ. He says, the church is the fullness of Christ who fills all in all. The vision is still there. Unfortunately, we live in a day when people have just sort of accepted this idea that as the history goes forward, as we move closer and closer to the return of Christ, the Christian population of this world and the Church of Jesus Christ is going to be shrinking and shrinking and shrinking and shrinking to the point that maybe it will be one or two people that still believe in Jesus when he comes back. That's not the vision that the apostle has here. The vision is still there. One people, one God, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father over all, through all, and in all the fullness of the measure of Christ who fills all in all. It is a dream. It is a vision of the future that drove the Apostle Paul to spend his entire life to sacrifice his life for the mission of the church. Not that he was in a losing cause, but that he was in a winning cause. But I said in these verses he points out the practical steps. When Jesus ascended into heaven, he led captive a host of captives. That's you and me and every other Christian that's ever

breathed on this planet. He took them up with him, but as he did, he returned some of them back. And who are the ones that he sent back? He spells it out here, the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and the teachers.

Now, if I had wanted to build a worldwide kingdom, probably the first person I would have put in the ranking would have been The Economist. Next, I would have found a general who could lead an army. Next, I would have found a few practical businessmen who could put the economic theory into practice. Next, I would have found some police officers who could keep order and make everybody conform to the way. But that's not what the apostle says. The means by which the church is going to grow to this great dream, this great goal we have as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Do you hear it? Do you hear it? Apostles and prophets? The apostle himself says in chapter two is they are the foundation of the church. They do not continue today. We have a collection of their writings, The Apostles and Prophets of Jesus. It's in this book. We call it the New Testament. The church is built on this. It is the foundation. But even after the apostles and prophets of the first century were gone, there still remained certain ones who had the wonderful task of building up the body of Christ in unity and love throughout the world. And who were they? Evangelists, pastors and teachers. It makes me sad that in our own denomination, we have certain people that we designate as evangelists usually like in my case, I am officially an evangelist, not a pastor. And it used to be a teacher when I taught in seminary, but now I'm officially an evangelist. And it's not because I'm so evangelistic. It's just they didn't know what else to call me. Oh, he's doing something about missions, isn't he? Yeah. Evangelist. There it is. Right there. Notice the order. Evangelists like apostles and prophets. Evangelists are next. Those that proclaim the gospel to the lost. Those who bring the good News of Christ to the lost and dying world. But beyond them are the pastors. The pastors who shepherd you. When Jesus came to the conclusion that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few before he said that in the Gospel of Matthew, he looked out, Matthew tells us, and he saw the people. And they were like sheep, without shepherds, without pastors. And then last and probably least, Scott. Teachers. Professors, people who teach doctrine to the church.

Now, I want to ask you this question. What do all of these offices of the church have in common? Are they all rich or something? Is that the way the kingdom is going to be built out of them? Are they all clever? Is that the way that the kingdom is going to be built out of all of them? Are they somehow specially gifted in some manner that's, well, obvious to all of us? Usually not, but we can say this there is one thing, one thread that runs through all of those apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, and it is the thread that they are the custodians of the Word of God. The growth of the church in unity, spreading out through the entire world is coming through the ministries of those who are the custodians of the Word of God, the prophets and the apostles and prophets. First the foundation and then people that you know, evangelists, pastors and teachers. But those evangelists, pastors and teachers have to be aligned with something, don't they? They have to align themselves with the apostles and prophets who are the foundation. They can't make up the word of God themselves. They can't go off in their own ways and just decide, well, I'm going to teach this or I'm going to preach this, or I'm going to evangelize in this way. No, they have to align themselves to the true

word of God given to us by the apostles and prophets. This is the way. This is the practical means. These are the steps that the Apostle believes will bring about the great body of Christ throughout the world.

Do you believe that? Or have you imbibed this notion that what we have is a lost cause? Well, let me tell you something, because this is a prelude to a discussion that Scott and I are going to have about Third Millennium Ministries. The reason we call ourselves Third Millennium Ministries is because we are now in the third Christian millennium. Think about that for a moment. Okay. Started in two thousand and one. Remember Y2K and everybody thinking it was going to be a disaster. It's not a disaster. It's the best Christian millennium yet. And why is it a best Christian millennium yet? It's because this word of the apostles and prophets, through evangelists and pastors and teachers, it has gone to more parts of the world than it has ever been throughout the whole history of the world. There are more followers of Jesus in this world today than there have ever been in the history of the world. It's a good day to be a Christian. We are winning the war. No, Jesus is winning the battle for this planet and he is not failing. And it is coming through these means the evangelists, the pastors, and the teachers. But what if those evangelists, pastors and teachers are just making up things because they don't know the apostolic word? They don't know the prophetic word? What if they are not aligned with the foundation of the body of Christ? Disaster. And so we call ourselves Third Millennium Ministries because we believe that this is the best millennium yet by far more Christians in more parts of the world than have ever been before. But also because we noticed something. The vast majority of pastors and teachers and even evangelists around the world do not have the opportunity to learn the Word of God. How can the church be built if those people do not know the Word of God? That's the problem. And this should be your deepest prayer. Concern for the church is that the leaders of the church, evangelists, pastors, and teachers will be given the opportunity to learn the Word of God like you want your pastors to know it. But they don't. The experts will tell you that nine out of ten pastors in the world today have had less than one hour of formal training in the Bible. That's a recipe for disaster. But it can be turned around. It can be turned around so that where the church is growing fast in the world, the leaders will know the Word of God and be able to teach it and preach it and proclaim it in their lands. And what a glorious day that would be! What a wondrous day that would be. Because this is the practical means by which the kingdom of God will grow on this earth. Can somebody say, I've got it? Good. Thank you. I know it's hard to do even on Sunday night. Do anything but sit there. The vision is so very important because when evangelists, pastors and teachers know the Word of God, something happens, the church changes. And I want you to see how this is true, that these offices, verse thirteen will do this until we attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. Verse thirteen to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Do you see where he says it will take us? Look at verse fourteen, so that we may no longer be like children, tossed to and fro by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, and by craftiness in deceitful schemes, but rather speaking the truth in love. We are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ. There are a lot of deceitful schemes out there harming the body of Christ. But when the evangelists, pastors and teachers of the world know the Word of God as custodians of that word, they give it to their people, then this is what we see the growth, the maturing, the spread of the body of Christ

throughout the world. What a glorious, what a glorious path. But notice how he says this will happen. He says again, take a look again at verse. Fifteen. Rather than being tossed this way and that, we will be speaking the truth. Oh, we like that, don't we? Speaking the truth. No, that's not what he says. Good evangelists, pastors, and teachers will be teaching us in how to speak the truth in love. Have you ever known preachers and teachers who use the truth like a hammer? To destroy people who disagree with them over the smallest, tiniest little bit of teaching. It happens all the time. And sadly, we are often the ones that are most guilty of that. But the apostles vision is not that the leaders of the church will bring that about, but that godly leaders of the church will cause us to start speaking the truth, but in a special way, in love. How many of you men here have ever been to a baby shower and been the only man in the room? Has anybody ever done that? Yeah, I see the preachers raising their hands. Yeah, exactly. It's one of the great privileges not of being a pastor. Is that often you're asked to come and pray a blessing over the mother, things like that. So, men, I want you to listen up. It's a little bit of a stereotype here, and we're into stereotypes today. So I have to warn you, it may not be your experience, but I suspect it's sort of like this still in Alabama. Here's the way it runs, men. If you haven't seen it, the mother to be sits in a chair in front of the room, and behind her are tables filled with gifts. And the crowd, the people who have come, her friends who have brought the gifts, they all sit down and she sits down. And now it's time for her to receive the gifts and thank everyone. And here's what happens. She picks up a box and she says, and she must do this after reading the card. She must do this. This is the loveliest gift wrapping I have ever seen in my entire life. Thank you so much for taking so much time. What color is this exactly anyway? I can't really tell. It looks a little bit like purple, but I know there are different shades. It's just amazing, isn't it? And then she carefully unwraps it, carefully unwraps it, opens the box, and she gets the nineteenth bib of the day and she says, thank you very much. Puts it back in, goes to the next one. Man. There's a lesson in that. If you're going to give the significant woman in your life a gift, wrap it. Because the wrapping of a gift tells most women something very boldly and very plainly. Do you know what it tells them, I love you. You're special to me. Now, ladies, let me tell you something you may spend a lot of time wrapping Christmas presents. Father's day presents, birthday presents for your husband, or for your special man. Let me tell you something about him. He could not care less about wrapping. Okay, order it from Amazon. Get it in a brown box just handing the brown box. He'll rip it open and pull the hammer out that you got him. Okay. Or the gun. Or whatever it may be. Okay. He doesn't care about the wrapping. I know you do, but he doesn't. So let's get with this thing and start communicating with each other. But there's a lesson to be learned from this that applies to what the apostle is saying here. We want the truth. We want the proclamation of the truth. We want to learn the truth because that is the way in which the kingdom of God will grow on this planet. But in order for the truth to be a growth factor for the God's people in this world, that truth, like a gift at a baby shower, must be wrapped up in love. Love is patient. Love is kind. Love does not seek its own way. Love does not boast. It must be wrapped up like that. Patience, kindness. The fruit of the spirit. And only wise evangelists, only wise pastors, only wise teachers can bring that about in the body of Christ. And if we do that, then we will see the church grow to the measure of stature that belongs to the fullness of Christ. I love this

passage. What a wonderful thing, because the Apostle has the enthusiasm of an eighteen year old and the wisdom of the seventy five year old all wrapped up in one passage.