

SESSION 5

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS CHURCH

Leader pages on pp. 118-121

THE POINT:
GOD COMMUNICATES
TO US THROUGH OTHER
BELIEVERS.

EPHESIANS 4:11-16, 25-29

¹¹ And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers

¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ

¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness.

¹⁴ Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit.

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MEMORY VERSE

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¹⁵ **But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ.**

¹⁶ From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

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²⁵ Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.

²⁶ Be angry and do not sin. Don't let the sun go down on your anger,

²⁷ and don't give the devil an opportunity.

²⁸ Let the thief no longer steal. Instead, he is to do honest work with his own hands, so that he has something to share with anyone in need. ²⁹ No foul language should come from your mouth, but only what is good for building up someone in need, so that it gives grace to those who hear.

KEY WORDS

To equip...work of ministry (v. 12)– God did not gift leaders to do all the work of the church. Rather their role is to prepare God's people to serve.

A stature measured... (v. 13)– The church's goal is that each part of the body, and thus the body as a whole, demonstrate to

unbelievers Christ's attributes and qualities.

Speaking the truth in love (v.15)– Truth and love characterize the speech of mature believers The single Greek term is more literally "truthing," "being true," "doing truth," or "dealing faithfully."

HOW DOES GOD USE OTHER BELIEVERS TO SPEAK TO HIS PEOPLE?

I have listened to several podcasters, preachers, and political pundits explain how Americans have become more tribal over the last few years. They have all pointed to social media as the culprit because it provides us with a sound board for our own thoughts. When social media connects people around something that is sinful, we grieve over their lostness. But social media can also point people towards the direction of Jesus and the Church.

Not every tribal commitment is bad. God designed His Church to be a place where people “from every tribe and language” (Rev. 5:9) could gather and

discuss the wonders of God. Imagine being at a family reunion where everyone’s favorite food is prepared, no one is tired from the preparation because everyone helped, and the conversation is lively since everyone wants to talk to everyone else.

This might sound like a fairy tale or a dream, but this is what the Church can be. When we focus on listening to God’s voice, as we engage with His word, empowered by His Spirit; we can evaluate our circumstances in Christian community – God speaks through His Church.

God Speaks Through Our Spiritual Leaders// Ephesians 4:11–14

Christ marshals all available resources to build up His church. God assigns Christians to local congregations for our benefit and for our growth. What is the evidence of spiritual growth? Christlikeness and stability. But the church also provides protection. As we sojourn together, we are guardians for one another against dangers that would hinder or cease spiritual progress in our lives.

Paul begins his listing of leadership offices in the Church by stating that “He Himself gave some...” (v.11). Notice the emphasis here. Paul wants us to understand that every person who has truly been called to leadership in the Church was chosen by Jesus Himself. They were handpicked by Him. The same word for give (*didōmi* in Greek) is used by Paul to explain how God gives us the “Spirit of wisdom,” (Ephesians 1:17) and gave Jesus as the head of the Church (Ephesians 1:22). In other words, if we can trust God’s Spirit to dwell in us, and we can trust Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, then we should also trust God’s chosen Church leaders.

Now, the Bible never calls us to blindly trust people just because they are in authority. In this case, Paul



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gives two criteria by which a church can judge if their leaders are truly hearing from God as they engage in ministry.

First, they should understand that they are also a member of the Church. In Ephesians 4:8, Paul cites from Psalm 68:18. The point of Psalm 68 is to explain that God is a victorious warrior who has conquered His enemies from across the world. During God's battles, He took some of the enemy's troops captive, then redeployed them to serve as members of His Kingdom.

Church leaders need to remember that they were captives, they were slaves to sin, just like everyone else in the church. Their leadership position does not give them the authority to do and say whatever they want. Instead, they are supposed to lead from a position of humility and common ground. If they ever forget that they came from the same place as everyone else, they cease to be useful as Christian leaders. They must be models of the same humility that Christ displayed as he "descended to the lower parts of the Earth" so that he could "ascend to far above all the heavens" (Eph. 4:9–10).

The second criterion is whether they are properly equipping the saints for the work of ministry, the work of service. If a church leader is only collecting money or just drawing large crowds and never concerned with serving others as Christ served, then this leader has misunderstood their role.

HOW DO YOU SHOW AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF RESPECT FOR YOUR CHURCH LEADERSHIP?

God Speaks Through the Body of Believers // Ephesians 4:15–16

Truth and love are not opposite poles divorced from each other. They are conjoined twins. Together they are the hallmark of the way God speaks through His church. They are literally inseparable from life in Christ. Paul's literal translation of the Greek verb says we are a people who practice "truthing in love." We live and do the truth as those who love one another. Truth can become hard if it is not tempered by love. Love can become sentimental if it is not tempered by truth. Truth unites. Lies are divisive. Lack of integrity is divisive.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO SPEAK TRUTH IN LOVE?

Paul contrasted the deception of heresy with the integrity of the gospel (v. 15). But how we speak the truth is important. It is possible for truth to be held and dispersed in a deceitful spirit; and even if deceit is not present, it is possible for mere doctrinal orthodoxy to become a very cold and lifeless thing.



DIGGING DEEPER THE WISDOM OF THE WICKED

We should not underestimate how subtle and persuasive false teaching can be. Paul warns that immature believers may be "tossed by the waves" and carried along by deceptive ideas (Ephesians 4:14). These teachings often feel overwhelming—like being caught at sea with no solid ground beneath us and no clear direction forward. Our response, however, should not be shame or a belief that we simply need to become more clever or spiritually sharp. While it is important to grow in discernment and learn to defend the faith, our ultimate safety rests in the firm foundation of the gospel and the support of the local church. Through discipleship, church leaders and fellow believers help us recognize truth and error. What feels confusing or dangerous to one believer may be easily discerned by another, which is why God designed the church to function as one body, "fitted and knit together" in love.

Where might you be relying on your own understanding rather than leaning on the wisdom and discernment God provides through His Word and church?

Love unites. Selfishness divides. If the church is the body of Christ, then love is the circulatory system of that body.

Christian love preserves community where it would otherwise cease to exist. A resounding theme throughout the Bible is that love is not only a primary characteristic of God, but also the imprint of His likeness in human beings, the indispensable family characteristic without which no one can claim membership in the family of God (see 1 John 4:7-8). Love is a way of life, a disposition, and a relationship of permanent commitment to the welfare of each other. It is the dynamic that propels, the catalyst that transforms thought into action. The primary characteristic of a biblical concept of love is *action*.

In the body of Christ, we exist as interrelated body parts (Eph. 4:16). We affect each other. We need each other. God works through the church to speak into our lives and cause us to grow. It is the goal that we will each faithfully fulfill our appointed function, contributing to the overall health and maturity of the church body.

Spiritual growth in our lives is contingent on Jesus being in charge of our lives. Jesus calls the shots—always! Out of our relationship with Christ, we relate to one another, and we cooperate with others in the church. Each of us is a critical point of supply within the body of Christ, a channel to receive and pass on life from Christ. And as He passes on life, He also speaks to us through His body, the Church.

God Speaks Through Individuals in the Church

// Ephesians 4:25–29

Paul urged God’s people to exchange the sins listed in the preceding verses (vv.20-24), for the corresponding virtues (vv. 25-29), doing so with purpose and clarity. When this happens, four crucial dynamics of life in Christ are immediately evident in the church:

We live with truth rather than dishonesty (v. 25).

We live with self-control rather than anger (vv. 26-27).

We live with compassion rather than selfishness (v. 28).

We live with encouragement rather than criticism (v. 29).

Why? So that we can be channels through which the grace of God touches the lives of others—unhindered and unsullied.



Those within the body of Christ should be well known in their communities as honest, reliable people whose word can be trusted—and even more so within the church. Our relationship with each other is very close: “we are members of one another” (v. 25). And a lie is a stab into the vital organs of the body of Christ. For our speech to be trustworthy, it must be untainted by dishonesty and deception — it must be consistent.

For the sake of our own growth and maturity, as well as others, God will use us to speak to someone else instead of or in addition to speaking to them directly. However, we limit our opportunities to be used to help others if we are not honest about our needs or struggles. We also cannot hear what God is saying to the body if we don’t consider how our words will affect our relationships.

When we don’t seek to deal with our disagreements and tension that can arise, we are giving the devil an opportunity to infiltrate the church. He is the father of lies and his presence in the church will make it difficult for both believers

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and prospects to trust God's Word. Just as the devil was able to deceive Eve, he can convince any one of us that we did not truly hear from God.

Thus, we should focus on staying unified and working through the tensions. Speaking truth will allow us to avoid "foul language" and speak in ways that provide the body of Christ with grace, with goodness that helps to build us up as the temple of God.

We need each other. In His wisdom, God has chosen to do much of His work in our lives through the local church. When God assigns us to a local church, it is so that He can work through us to build others up in their faith and work, and they can build us up in ours. This eliminates two selfish dispositions: inferiority and superiority. Inferiority says, "They don't need me." Superiority says, "I don't need them." No, we need our local church; it is critical in affirming and clarifying for us what God has said to us. And He continues to speak to us through others in the church.

IN THE BODY OF CHRIST, HOW DOES EACH PERSON HAVE A STAKE IN THE SUCCESS OF OTHERS?

DID YOU KNOW?

The Body of Christ was meant to live in community. Paul provides us with one example of how this works in Ephesians 4:28. A former thief should be given honest work that he can do with "his own hands" to change him into someone who can "share with those in need." The only way this can successfully take place within the context of the local church is if God speaks to various individuals. Someone must provide this thief with honest work and instruct him to use his hands for good. Someone must bring to his attention the other people who are in need. In all, this is a process that needs to take place in a community that speaks truth in love. His sinful behavior is not allowed to remain, but there also needs to be space for however long it might take this thief to understand the true value of working with his own hands instead of using these same hands to take from others.

Biblical Truth: "In the same way we who are many are one body in Christ and individually members of one another" (Rom. 12:5).

What service might you be able to provide for the success of others in your local church?

LIVE IT

Are you part of a church community?

A community can only function well when its members decide to function. It is true that people tend to just follow the crowd or follow the leader when they are in group, but this does not mean that the individuals involved do not make a choice. Every moment that we are connected to a tribe or group is due to us actively choosing to be there and participate. Choose to be a part of your local church!

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- **Investigate.** Look into ways that you can get involved in your local church. God might lead you to start a new ministry or help revive an old one.
- **Trust.** Ask God to connect you with someone in your local church to build a relationship with. Be prepared to work through the tensions growing in Christ together.
- **Listen.** Ask God to give you a word for someone else. Weigh what you hear according to Scripture. Expect God to help you move your church into the direction of maturity.

DAILY READINGS

1. TRIAL BY FIRE// ISAIAH 43:1-2

This passage of Scripture gives us a message of comfort and reassurance. God is telling us not to fear because despite the trials we must endure, we will persevere because we are His people. God made it personal saying He called His people by name and emphasized that they belong to Him. He is our Creator and Redeemer and He promised His constant presence and protection through life's inevitable trials. Deep waters and fire symbolize the severity of the trials. God does not remove the suffering He just covers us through them. He is faithful and sees us through our suffering. We don't have to worry about trials because God will keep us through them.

Thank You Lord for protecting us through every trial.

2. DIVINE DELIVERANCE// PSALM 34:17-18

When we go through troubles, it's easy to get discouraged. Sometimes we go to our friends, but they can't help us. This Psalm encourages us that when we cry out to God the Lord not only hears us; He delivers us from all our troubles. His deliverance provides us strength, hope, and eventual rescue, sometimes through growth. The Lord is personally present when we go through our emotional pain, grief, and suffering. He saves and restores those who feel defeated. God is compassionate and has the power to lift us out of despair.

God, thank You for deliverance from all my troubles.

3. WORSHIP THROUGH THE PAIN//ROMANS 5:3-4

Though we don't desire to go through suffering we must remember that it isn't meaningless. God designed His divine process where trials mature us spiritually. Suffering builds perseverance, which develops true character, and that character solidifies a deep, confident hope in God's promises. Perseverance is the ability to stay steadfast and patient under pressure, like metal

tested by fire. True character in this passage indicates a proven faith throughout testing resulting in resilient, Christlike believers. We must stand firm through suffering. God is building us to become stronger, faith filled believers who hope in Jesus and believe His promises.

Jesus, we praise You for building our hope in You while we suffer.

4. CLEAR COMMITMENT// PSALM 119:30-31

We make commitments all the time. We join ministries, get married, and take jobs claiming that we will be committed. When we are unhappy or disappointed we begin to backpedal out of the commitments that we made. Subsequently, ministries dissolve, we get divorced, and we quit the job. The psalmist decided to commit to God's commandments. He is saying that he chooses to set God's commands before him as a standard for him to always follow. He clings to them so he is firmly attached to God's instructions trusting that he can depend on them. He hopes in God to protect him against the ridicule and opposition that we face when we are faithful to God.

God help us commit to Your commandments despite opposition.

5. DO WHAT I SAY // JAMES 1:21-22

My mother used to say, "do as I say and not as I do." This confused me because of course as children we learn to model our parents' behaviors, not necessarily paying attention to what they say. God's Word and His character are the same. We need to do what He says and model what He does. These verses begin with "therefore" because it is connecting the anger discussed prior to the directives of removing sin and receiving His Word. It's assuring us that the answer to every struggle is the removal of sin and receiving and following God's Word. This should be a continuous process. Receiving the Word and being obedient to It is the key to spiritual growth.

Lord, we long to be obedient to Your Word.