

INTRODUCTION:

Back in the 1970's, a Liverpool postal worker by the name of Andrew Richardson, declared his apartment to be the independent nation of Granbia.

- After a while, though, he lost interest, and the apartment reverted to England by default.

In 1964, Leicester Hemingway, the little brother of Ernest Hemingway, built an 8 by 30 foot floating bamboo platform 7 miles off the coast of Jamaica, anchoring it to the ocean floor with a Ford engine block.

- Mr. Hemingway said, **“I can stand on the platform, walk around on it, salute the flag, all of which I do periodically.”**
- He bragged to reporters, **“There are no taxes here, because taxes are for people not smart enough to start their own countries.”**
- Over time, however, part of his country was destroyed by fishermen looking for scrap wood, and the rest sank in a storm.

In 1969, when the Western Australia Wheat Quota Board limited the amount of wheat he could grow, Leonard George Casely took his 18,500 acre farm and seceded from Australia to form his own country.

- He designed his own national flag and motto, printed his own money, and set up his own parliament. Australia refused to recognize his sovereignty, so in 1977 he declared war.
- Nothing came of that, so he backed down two days later and re-established diplomatic relations.
- Even today, I have read that Casely claims he pays no Australian taxes, but he admits he makes payments to the Australian government as an **“international courtesy.”**

I think we all understand that kingdoms come and go—sometimes very quickly.

- But even the strongest of nations do not last forever.
- In fact, as powerful as our own nation is, it also will someday pass away.
- As we look at the Scriptures, though, we find a fascinating statement from an angel of the Lord as he appeared to Mary in **Luke 1:30-33**.
- The angel said, **“Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end.”**

Roughly 600 years before this statement was made, the prophet Daniel also made a prediction about this same kingdom.

- Daniel said, **“In the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed, and that kingdom will not be left for another people; it will crush and put an end to all these kingdoms, but it will itself endure forever.”**
- And then, in the book of **Colossians**, Paul tells us that when we became Christians, God **“...rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”**
- The church, then, is a kingdom that will last forever.
- However, there is something very unusual about the Lord's church, because as we study the Scriptures, we find that the Lord has entrusted this everlasting kingdom into the hands of imperfect men and women.

This morning, as we look together at **Ephesians 4**, we find several statements about what we might refer to as the “**transfer of power**.”

- As the church was being established, as the church got on its feet (so to speak), the Lord made some special provisions to make sure that the church got off to a good start.
- Before we get to our text, you might want to glance with me at **Ephesians 4:7-13**.
- In **verses 7-13**, we find that as the church was established, God entrusted His kingdom to mere mortals...like all of us here this morning.

In **verse 13**, we find that the goal was for the church to grow up into a “**mature man**.”

- In many ways, that goal has already been accomplished.
- The Scriptures have now been completed, and there is no longer a need for miraculously inspired apostles, prophets, and so on.
- And yet on the other hand, we also know that the growth of God’s kingdom is an ongoing challenge.

Some people ask...

- What are we here for?
- How should the Lord’s body function?
- How can we accomplish the mission set before us?
- How can we keep on working without losing the enthusiasm that we first had?

All of this brings us to the text for this morning’s lesson— **Ephesians 4:14-16**. And as we read, I’d like for us to notice three things...

- A special challenge.
- A solution for the problem.
- And then an ultimate goal that all of us here this morning can continue working on.

Ephesians 4:14-16

14 *As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;*

15 *but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,*

16 *from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

- I. As we start by going back to **verse 14**, **WE FIND FIRST OF ALL A VERY SPECIAL CHALLENGE**. **WE FIND A DANGER—AN OBSTACLE THAT NEEDS TO BE OVERCOME**; because in **verse 14**, Paul warns us that “**WE ARE NO LONGER TO BE CHILDREN, TOSSED HERE AND THERE BY WAVES AND CARRIED ABOUT BY EVERY WIND OF DOCTRINE.**”

Certainly as the church was first established, this would have been a very special concern.

- First of all, we have the reference to Christians as “**...children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine.**”
- Then we have the other side of this double danger—as Paul warns about “**...the trickery of men,**” who are skilled in “**...craftiness...**,” and “**...deceitful scheming.**”
- And so we have naive people being challenged by men who are crafty and deceitful—not a good combination.
- It is easy to see why Paul is so concerned!

We are reminded, then, that the church will always face this challenge.

- On one hand, there will always be new Christians...or perhaps those who are simply weak by neglect...who will have the tendency just to be too easily influenced by their most recent teacher.
- It seems like we all have the tendency to be swayed by those who are eloquent or by those with the most outgoing personalities.

There is a lady, named Theresa, who contacted me through facebook on our church website and she had a very special prayer request for a friend of hers. This is what she said about her friend...

“This girl is a super smart Christian. The things she was saying the last few months were so weird. like she was mentally losing it. this doctor , macaphy, has convinced her that its the end of the world and God sent him to be the last great prophet and he is replacing Jesus as our messiah. he is now the only way to heaven. he took her off meds that she needed or could die. he convinced her to move in with him and leave her husband, kids and friends. he cut off her cell, there is no internet. she isnt allowed to talk to family and friends.”

It really is amazing to me the things that people will fall for even today—It’s amazing to think that there will always be people teaching what is false who will take advantage of that tendency.

- Paul describes these men as using *“trickery.”*
- From what I understand, he uses a word here that ultimately goes back to the idea of **“throwing dice”**—the idea of using sleight of hand to trick someone—almost like a magician with a card game.
- Only these men will use their trickery to deceive.

As Paul warns in **Romans 16:17-18**, *“Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.”*

- That’s what Paul is warning about here in **Ephesians 4:14**.
- We would love to assume that all teachers are pure and honest, truly seeking the Lord’s will, but Paul warns us that even in the church, some people are not that way.
- He tells us to keep our eyes on those people and to turn away from them.

A similar warning is given in **Jude 12-13**, where Jude refers to false teachers by saying, *“These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.”*

The Bible, then, is very clear in warning about this challenge, this danger, this obstacle that we need to overcome.

II. Thankfully, though, Paul goes on, and **HE GIVES A SOLUTION, HE GIVES A CURE**—he doesn’t leave us hanging, but he tells us what we can do about this, as he refers (in **verse 15**) to **“...SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE.”**

We notice that Paul starts **verse 15** with the word **“But.”**

- In other words, he is showing a sharp contrast.
- As opposed to drifting along being deceived by the trickery of deceitful men, Paul wants us to fix the problem, by **“...speaking the truth in love.”**

One of the first things we notice here is that Paul's solution requires *"speaking."*

- As Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 4:13**, *"But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also speak."*
- In other words, the natural result of believing in something is to speak up about it!

The gospel truth must be spoken!

- No one who truly believes the gospel can keep quiet about it.
- You might remember that the Jewish leaders tried to stop Peter and John from talking about it in **Acts 4**, but Peter and John refused to stop as they told the leaders, *"...for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."*

Paul, though, also says that as we speak the truth, we must always do it *"in love."*

- There are some people today who seem to think that these two ideas are mutually exclusive—that we must choose—we can either speak the truth, or we can speak in love.
- But Paul would have to lovingly disagree.

Sometimes we need to remind ourselves that speaking love without truth is actually quite deceptive, and is not loving at all.

- Maybe we could imagine someone who is so loving and so tender that he just can't bring himself to risk offending someone by telling them the truth.
- And so, as he holds back whatever needs to be said, he has actually (very unlovingly) caused someone to be lost forever.

I can think of so many phone calls that we get on the church line where people have some good Bible questions.

- One young man wanted to know if it was alright for him and his girlfriend to move in together.
- Well, at that point, I had a choice to make.
- I could tell he really wanted to do it.
- His mind was already made up, but apparently his conscience was holding out—deep down inside, he probably knew it was wrong, but he was about to do it anyway.
- And so he looks in the Yellow Pages and for some reason ends up on the line with a gospel preacher.
- I could tell he was looking for a blessing.
- He was looking to be given the go ahead.
- But as a Christian with God's word open on my desk in front of me, holding the phone in my right hand and flipping pages with my left, it was my solemn duty to *"speak the truth in love."*
- In truth, it would have been very unloving to tell that young man to go for it.
- On the other hand, I also had a responsibility to pass along God's message *"in love."*
- And so I didn't rail down on him about how he could possibly be so sinful and selfish, but we had a calm and civil discussion on the word of God.

We know that even truth, if it is spoken without love, can do more harm than good. We remember Paul's instructions to the young preacher Timothy in **2 Timothy 2:24-26**. Paul said...

- 24** *The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,*
- 25** *with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,*
- 26** *and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

You see, it's that "*gentleness*" and non "*quarrelsome*" approach that leads people to "*the knowledge of the truth.*"

- Paul, then, gives us an alternative to always being tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine.
- He tells us that we should be "*...speaking the truth in love.*"

III. As we move along to the rest of **verse 15** as well as **verse 16**, we find that Paul doesn't just point out the **CHALLENGE** and give a **SOLUTION**, but he lays out a **VISION FOR THE FUTURE**—he gives us a **GOAL** as he describes the ideal of **GROWING UP BY WORKING TOGETHER IN UNITY.**

As the Lord's church here in Salem, Illinois, our goal is for every single member to work together—resulting in growth and the building up of the entire congregation.

- Can we imagine what it would be like if every member attended every service, if every member practiced hospitality, if every member cared for those who are sick, if every member actively taught the good news here in our community?
- Imagine how our small number could revolutionize the Salem area!

As we think about working together toward a common goal, it might be hard to think of any better example than a pit crew during a race.

- Now, I have to admit that I am not an avid fan of racing, however, in the very few races I have watched, it was watching the pit crews that drew me in.
- In less time than it takes for most of us to put our seat belts on, a good pit crew can change four tires, fill the tank, wash the windshield, give the driver a drink, and make some vital adjustments to the car.
- It happens so quickly and efficiently, because each member knows his job and does it right.
- A good crew will work together in unity.

In a similar way, each member of this congregation needs to work together with every other member—in unity.

- We must all find our place in the church and then serve our hearts out.
- If you need something to do, let me know...

Recently, I posted a couple of small posters on the bulletin board right out here in the lobby about the World Bible School

- We have an unlimited supply of World Bible School students that we can teach.
- World Bible School will send us the answer sheets of Bible students in Africa and they are always looking for anyone who is willing to correspond with these students and answer Bible questions that are asked of you.
- My friend, Isaac Daye, in Sierra Leone could probably send us hundreds of Bible Correspondence students if we asked him!
- Another thing that we can do is write to or to personally send money to the children's homes that we support and encourage the leaders in those organizations to keep up the good work.
- We can visit those in the hospital or bring a meal to someone who just got out of the hospital.
- When was the last time that we invited a fellow Christian into our home for a simple meal?
- There are so many ways that we can serve, and Paul would encourage us to work together for the good of the whole body.

There is an old legend about a man who had a vision of heaven and one of hell.

- The vision of hell showed a huge table and a vast assortment of amazing food.

- But in the vision, no one was able to eat.
- No one could bend their elbows, so their hands could not reach the food and take it to their mouths.
- In misery, they were struggling and suffering—actually starving with the food right there on the table.

The vision of heaven was exactly the same.

- A huge table, lots of good food, the unbending arms.
- But in this vision, the people were being fed.
- They learned that while they could not feed themselves, they could feed one another.
- By serving others, the entire group was being fed.
- I think we can say the same thing about the Lord's church.
- As we jump in and serve, the entire church grows together in unity.

CONCLUSION:

As we look back through history, we realize that many nations have come and gone (Granbia, Hemmingway's raft off of Jamaica, the farm in Australia), and yet the church has continued.

- The Lord entrusted His kingdom to imperfect men and women, and yet the church has continued to grow.
- Paul encouraged this growth in **Ephesians 4**.

First, he warned us of the **DANGER**—that we would be tossed here and there by every wind of doctrine.

- In light of that warning, he gave a **SOLUTION**—that we would speak the truth in love.
- And then he left us with a **VISION FOR THE FUTURE**—that we would work together in unity—growing closer together and serving one another as we should.

One of the greatest ways for us to honor Jesus Christ is to do everything in our power to make this congregation the kind of church that Jesus would be proud of—a church that speaks the truth in love and grows together in unity.

INVITATION:

If you have not yet been born into the family of God, we would encourage you to follow the Scriptures and take several steps in that direction.

- The Bible teaches that all people have sinned and fall short of God's glory.
- Thankfully, God sent His own perfect Son as a sacrifice for our sins.
- We respond to that sacrifice by turning away from our sins.
- This has to be the hardest step in God's plan. Sometimes it means stepping away from a relationship.
- Sometimes it means making restitution.
- Sometimes it means making some huge adjustments in our finances.
- Sometimes the changes can be very painful.
- And yet the Lord tells us in **Luke 14:28** that we must "*count the cost*" before becoming His disciples.

Once we have made this very difficult decision, we are then ready to publicly confess our belief that Jesus is the Son of God.

- We read about this in **Matthew 10:32-33**, where Jesus said, "*Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.*"

Once we have come that far, we are then ready to make an appeal to God for a good conscience.

- **1 Peter 3:21** tells us that we do this through baptism.
- We are immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins—not as a sign that we've already been saved, not to join a church—but to be covered by the saving blood of Jesus—being buried with Him in His death (**Romans 6**).

As we come up out of the water, we begin a new life.

- We are born into God's family...and that is the invitation we are offering this morning.
- If you have any questions or concerns, we would love to talk with you.
- If you have counted the cost and are willing to do whatever it takes to follow the Lord, we hope you will let us know right now.
- Let's stand and sing...