2-17-19

Ephesians 4:14

In our study of Ephesians, our current section, chapter 4 verses 1-16, focus on the unity of the church and how the Lord provides for that unity. We have seen that Paul goes back and forth between metaphors of the church being a building and a body; both of which are a unity. Paul needs a couple ways of describing our relationship with Christ and with each other. The relationship is beyond what we can comprehend and is unlike anything else we experience; so, we describe different parts of it and hope, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to develop an overall idea of the relationship.

Paul has told us that we are bound in peace by the Holy Spirit; that we have a high calling as disciples of Christ and children of God and we need to act like it; we are to be patient and loving with each other; and we all have gifts that are for the glory of God and the upbuilding of the church. Paul mentioned four specific gifts, apostles; prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers; who are given to equip the saints in their work for Christ.

Our gifts are to be used to bring the body of Christ to maturity. Our goal is to be like Jesus. The church is to reflect Jesus to the whole world; to shine like a bright light that guides the way to truth. We are to let the world know about Christ, while at the same time continually knowing Him better ourselves.

After telling us what we ought to be, in verse 14 Paul tells us what we should not be; we are not to be children. To be a child is to be easily led in different directions; to have our thoughts changed by whatever we are told. It is to be controlled by our emotions and whatever desire happens to be present at the time. These things are true because a child hasn’t had enough time and experience to determine truth and hold firmly to it; a child hasn’t learned to control their emotions or that their immediate desires aren’t necessarily good. We all know people who are physically adults yet haven’t learned these things. We do not want to be Christians whose walk with Christ is in this category.

A Christian who is childish is “tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine”. An immature Christian is susceptible to “trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming”. There is a lot here for us to consider. The first question needs to be “How do I keep from being tossed about and keep from being tricked?” Well, we start by looking back at what Paul has been telling us.

Jesus raised up apostles and prophets as a gift to the church to equip the saints; in other words, to mature them. As we are told, these apostles and prophets form the foundation of the church, with Jesus as the corner stone. So, what do we have today that preserves the teachings of the apostles and of Jesus? We have the New Testament. What do we have today that preserves the Spirit led words of the men that begin to reveal God and foreshadow all that is revealed in the New Testament? We have the Old Testament. In other words, we have the Bible. The Bible presents us with the foundation of the Church.

As an aside, yes, a person can be saved without a Bible. They can be told the gospel, accept it, and they will become a member of Christ’s Kingdom; they will be in Christ. But that Gospel message is preserved for us in the Bible. Additionally, they will not be able to mature in Christ unless they study the Bible or are taught directly from it. Without Biblical teaching, it is easy to be led astray because there are no defenses; a person has no guidelines to follow.

So, the Bible is foundational to the church, to Christianity. And that is why it is under so much attack. If you want to destroy a building, there is no better way than to weaken the foundation. If the foundation is removed, the entire building will fall. Contra wise, if a building has been burned down, what’s usually left? It’s the foundation. If the foundation remains, the structure can be rebuilt. You can be assured, that anyone who picks at any part of the Bible is driven by satan.

It is satan who drives the liberal theology that tells us that certain parts of the Bible aren’t true. That Mary wasn’t a virgin when Jesus was born; That the Old Testament describes a different God than Jesus; That Jesus can’t be completely God and completely human; That Jesus isn’t the only way to salvation; that the Bible is a nice book but not inspired by God. This is just a short list of the common teachings heard in many churches today.

But the Bible is the inspired word of God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

From the writings of the apostles, and from the warnings of Jesus, it is obvious that false doctrines and false teachers began almost immediately. Those false teachings I mentioned a few moments ago are not new and things we are aware of. I thought it might be beneficial to look into some of the more current attacks that are being propagated. We need to be aware that attempts to weaken the foundation not only still exist, but are intensifying.

Perhaps you remember a few years ago some headlines that even made the secular news. It was claimed that documentation was found to support that Jesus had a wife; that He was married. This story caused some problems among Christians. Some began to question the Bible because the Bible didn’t tell us about this. Conversation ensued about how this might change things and what this might mean for Christians in general.

The mature Christian response to something like this is to know that it is false. It is false because we can believe the Bible and the Bible is clear that Jesus devoted His entire life to His ministry; there was no room in God’s design for Him to have a wife. Jesus was perfect in His relationship with the Father; He had no need of a wife for completeness. A mature Christian would also be ready to gently guide anyone who was confused or concerned by this kind of report.

It turned out that the documentation was found to be a hoax, so the secular news just dropped the story which is why it simply disappeared. Even if it had not been a hoax, even if someone had actually unearthed some first century piece of paper with this information on it, we as Christians would still reject it as false because of what we are taught in the Bible.

Another example that is currently taking place involves several high-profile pastors with very large congregations. The claim is made that Christians needs to ignore the Old Testament. Although the popularity of this claim is fairly receipt, it is nothing new. It came up in the second century where it was declared heresy; and has since occasionally resurfaced. In addition to denying the Old Testament, emphasis is placed on the love that Christ has for us to the point of distorting the picture of Christ given in the New Testament.

The motivation behind this kind of teaching is to bring more people into the church. The argument is that modern people will not tolerate the kind of things we read about in the Old Testament. The idea is that reading about God commanding entire nations being wiped out, the death penalty for seemingly minor infractions, the strict rules that were given to the Israelites, and what appears to be an endorsement of polygamy doesn’t sound like a loving God and will push people away.

On the surface, this almost sounds reasonable. The motivation of bringing more people into the church sounds good. But again, maturity and knowledge of the Bible shows the problems. First off, the Old Testament shows a very loving God. Time and again, He gives people new chances and shows mercy to those who don’t even seek it. The Old Testament makes sure that we realize that God is more than just love; He is a God of justice. If we don’t understand that, then we don’t have a full picture of what He has done for us through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, there is no greater argument *against* polygamy than the Old Testament, with all its accounts of the misery it caused.

More importantly, the mature Christian will understand that the Old Testament is God’s word. It is the work of the Holy Spirit who uses the word to bring people to Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, not simply words on a page that bring a person to Jesus. If a person rejects Christ on the basis of something they read in the Old Testament, they would have rejected Christ anyway. Also, importantly, if someone accepts Jesus based on a watered down and incorrect presentation of the Gospel, then they have not accepted the true Gospel; they have accepted a false one.

These preachers who discount the Old Testament are deceived; it appears that their motivation, which is to get people into the church, is good. But some discernment shows where their personal deception has come from: arrogance. While the majority is not always right, these preachers stand against 2000 years of Christian history, the New Testament writers who quoted the Old Testament to back up their arguments, and Jesus Himself, who quoted from the Old Testament to show His fulfillment of it.

The next current false teaching I want to mention has been around for a few years but is still prevalent and growing. It is known as “The New Perspective on Paul”. This is much more wide spread because it is being taught by numerous Christian theologians instead of just a few preachers. Because of this, the teachings are accepted by larger denominations and church groups and affect many more people.

To begin with, anytime we hear about some “new” teaching about the Bible, red flags need to go up. Our God is unchanging.

The new perspective on Paul is much too involved to go into here, but its basic tenant is that we have misunderstood what Paul was saying ever since he wrote. These new theologians have just gotten right what everyone has gotten wrong for the last 2000 years. The problem, they say, is that we haven’t had the same perspective that first century Jews would have had. Therefore, Paul didn’t have a problem with the Jews who held to Judaism or have a problem with works-based salvation. He also simply wanted the Jews to treat the Gentiles better. It goes on to say that Christ’s work wasn’t about salvation and it denies the teaching of justification by faith.

To simply read the New Testament shows the problems with all these claims. Not only in Paul’s writings but also in the letters of the other apostles and in the Gospels themselves. This, again, points to how important it is for a Christian to read and study the Bible. One who knows the Bible will not be deceived by these things.

But once again, a mature Christian will see the problem in the first basis of the new perspective. The basis is that we don’t understand first century Jewish thought. There is actually something to that. That was 2000 years ago and was a completely different culture. It is not hard to believe that we don’t understand how they thought about things and actually, I’m sure we don’t. Here’s the problem with the basis; the letters of Paul were not, ultimately, written by Paul, they were written by the Holy Spirit. If the Bible simply had human authors, then we would have to be concerned about Jewish thought at the time. But Paul’s mind, thoughts, and hand were directed by the Holy Spirit. Because of this, the words in the Bible are not tied to a particular time or way of thinking about things.

We say, and the Bible tells us, that the words we read are living and active. They are divine, spoken by God, and so, transcend any culture or time frame. While there may be nuances that we understand better by studying the culture, the basic tenants of Christianity are clear and will not change.

One last example that bypasses secular media, preachers, and theologians and goes straight to the people is published books that claim Christian authors. While there are many, I want to talk about one in particular. There is an author by the name of Sarah Young. Her first book was entitled “Jesus Calling”. The last I saw; the book had sold over 15 million copies. That is huge for any book let alone one that falls in the Christian category. It is basically a devotional. Since it hit the market, she has written a sequel, it has been adapted to children’s books, and has a DVD.

There are a number of problems with her writings. Foremost, her claim is that what she writes comes to her directly from Jesus. Jesus tells her something and she writes it down as He speaks. What this claim means is that she is writing inspired Scripture; her writing would carry the same weight that the Bible would. We know, from the Bible, that the Scriptures are closed; therefore, what she is writing comes from somewhere other than Jesus.

At best, she is writing from her own mind; at worst, her words have a demonic source. Her method of writing is to sit quietly, pen in hand, and write what comes to her. What this actually involves is emptying one’s mind; a form of meditation. Meditation is fine if we dwell on some aspect of God or Jesus or Scripture; but to empty the mind is to invite something in; it is to let down our guard. We are not to do that. Part of the armor of God is the helmet of salvation; we are to protect our minds as well as our hearts.

When we are mature in Christ, we will not be like children. We won’t be thrown into a panic when we hear that Jesus had a wife. We won’t be led astray by well-intentioned but misguided preachers or by those who intentionally twist Scripture in order to defend their position. We won’t be deceived by an enjoyable book that makes us feel good and all our friends are recommending. We are called to mature in Christianity, to grow into the fulness of Christ. We are not to be passive in this, but to work for it in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer

Almighty God, we do praise You for Your great mercy and for the salvation You have provided for us. We also thank You for the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit, who leads us and guides us and calls to mind Your Scripture at the proper time.

As Jesus warned us, there is much false teaching in the world and many false teachers. As the apostle John told us by Your inspiration, the spirit of antichrist is working in the world. We beg Your protection from these things.

First, put it foremost in our minds how aware we must be of the danger. Give us discernment to recognize anything that is against Your word. Open our minds to any false teaching so that we may never stray from You. We cling to You for protection, You are our only fortress, our only guide.

We pray in Jesus’ name

Amen