

Body Works – Doing My Part
Ephesians 4:11-16

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy demanded that Linus change TV channels, threatening him with her fist if he didn't. "What makes you think you can walk right in here and take over?" asks Linus.

"These five fingers," says Lucy. "Individually they're nothing but when I curl them together like this into a single unit, they form a weapon that is terrible to behold."

"Which channel do you want?" asks Linus. Turning away, he looks at his fingers and says, "Why can't you guys get organized like that?"

This morning we want to talk about getting organized as we continue our series on Body Works. We are looking at Ephesians 4. I invite you to listen or follow along as I read verses 11-16.
(READ.)

Have you ever gone into a restaurant and ordered dessert first? Well, this morning I want us to begin with the end of the chapter. In Vs 17-32 we read that God wants us to live as children of the Light.

To understand this we need to begin by considering some of the biblical qualities and characteristics of the Light. What does the Bible teach us about the Light? First, in John 8:12 Jesus said that He was the light of the world. In 1 John 1:5 we read that God is light and that in God there is no darkness at all. In Psalm 104:2 the Word of God says that God wraps Himself in light. In 1 Timothy 6:16 we read that God lives in unapproachable light. In Revelation 21:23 we read that the Glory of God gives off a light so strong that the sun and moon will not be needed in heaven when God's Glory is fully revealed. Sounds awesome, doesn't it? Living in the Light.

It gets better ... the Bible says that we can have this Light. In 2 Corinthians 4:6 the Bible says that God made His Light to shine in our hearts. King David said in 2 Samuel 22:29 that God turns our darkness into Light. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus said that we should let this Light shine – "This little light of mine ..." The Light of Jesus in each of us shouldn't be hidden but should be placed high so that all can see the Light, and see from the Light.

But we have a problem. In 2 Corinthians 11:14 the Bible says that our enemy, the devil, masquerades as an angel of light. The devil is a pretender. He is a liar and a deceiver. He pretends to be an angel of light but he will always take us into darkness and destruction. In 1 Peter 2:9 we read that we have been called from darkness into God's wonderful Light. In 2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1 the Apostle Paul teaches us about what it means to live as children of the Light. Paul says: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and the devil? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people' (Leviticus, Jeremiah and Ezekiel). Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord almighty. Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God."

What an invitation! God is inviting us to be children of the Light. He will be our Father and we will be as His sons and daughters! All we have to do is believe in Jesus, who is the Light of the world. But we really do have a problem, and our greatest problem is not that there is an enemy the devil who masquerades as an angel of light. Our greatest problem is the human heart.

In John 3:19 Jesus said that men loved darkness rather than Light. If we turn down the lights in this room it can get pretty dark. But we know that light and darkness cannot co-exist. As we bring up the light it takes away the darkness. Light always has power over darkness. Remember how dark the room looked just a few seconds ago? That is how dark the human heart can be. But as the Light of Jesus comes into our world the human heart that is not yet fully surrendered to Jesus keeps looking longingly back at the darkness. Amazingly, with the promise from God to be our Father and to take us as sons and daughters, and with His promise to set us free from the power and guilt of sin, the human heart still considers the lure and enticement of darkness and

sin. In Proverbs 26:11 the Bible says that just as a dog will return to its own vomit, a fool will return to his or her sin.

God's Word is very clear. If we wish to live in the Light there are some things that God tells us not to do. Let's look very carefully at our chapter for today – Ephesians 4. In Vs 17 Paul begs for our attention: “So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking”. Remember that the Gentiles include all who were born outside of the Jewish race and religion. Symbolically, the Gentiles represent you and me and anyone who was once away from God.

In Vs 18 Paul begins to describe what live is like for these people. As we read this, I invite you to have the courage to ask the Spirit of God if this in any way describes our hearts. “They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more (Vs 18-19)”.

Does this at all sound like our world today? Darkened in our understanding. Separated from the life of God. Ignorant due to the hardening of our hearts. Loss of sensitivity. Given over to sensuality. Indulging in every kind of impurity. A continual lust for more.

In Vs 20 Paul reminds us that this is not what we are being taught about being like Jesus. In Vs 21-24 Paul reminds us that to be like Jesus we are taught to put off our old self which is being corrupted by evil desires. Some people change their ways when they see the light, others only when they feel the heat.

God wants us to be made like new. And how does that happen? In Vs 23 Paul says that we are made new in the attitude of our minds. This reminds us of Romans 12:2 where the Word of God tells us that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. Would you like to change your life? Do you want to change your habits ... your lifestyle? Then we need to renew our minds. This is a powerful lesson that we will consider in a few weeks as a part of our Celebrate

Recovery series in September. But for now we only have time to acknowledge that renewing the mind is key to becoming like Jesus.

The Apostle Paul goes on to teach us in Vs 25-32 what we need to be willing to set aside in order to be more like Jesus and to live in the Light. Let's look at what he says. We should not lie. We should be truthful to our neighbor. In our anger we should not sin. Let's take a quick time out here. Anger is not a sin. There is such a thing as righteous anger. There is enough evil and injustice in our world to create a just anger in God's people. But the Bible says that we should be angry and sin not. It is possible for the people of God to experience and to express anger in a way that does not lead to sin. But Paul goes on. He tells us not to let the sin go down while we are still angry. To do so only gives the devil a foothold in our hearts. This is a good word from the Lord for each of us – for spouses, parents, children, friends, neighbors and for all of our Deer Flat family ... if you feel anger do not let the sun go down before you deal with the anger you are feeling. If you need to talk with someone, go to them. Give them a call. And if there is no one to go to, take it to God. When we hold the anger in either by suppressing it or by fueling it we only make a prisoner of ourselves.

But the Apostle Paul still isn't finished. Don't steal. Do something useful with your own hands. Have something to share with those in need. Don't let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths. Wow – there is a great lesson for all of us. How much more like Jesus would we be if we could only speak what is helpful in building up one another?

Paul tells us not to grieve the Holy Spirit. How do we grieve God's Spirit? Husbands, imagine your wife gently warning you that if you say or do something you might later regret it. But, we ignore her warnings and say or do it anyway only to find out she was right all along. If that happens too many times, we grieve our spouses. It is as if we begin to leave a bruise mark on the loving and caring spirits of our spouses. So it is with the Spirit of God. When the Holy Spirit speaks into our conscience about something that we are contemplating saying or doing that will not help us be more like Jesus, if we go ahead and do it anyway we grieve the Holy Spirit.

Paul is almost finished, at least for now. He says that we should get rid of all bitterness and rage and anger and brawling and slander and every form of malice or mean thinking toward others. Paul closes in Vs 32 by exhorting us to “be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”. Imagine how these verses alone could transform our Deer Flat family and help us discover even greater unity as the Body of Christ. Imagine how living out these verses could help us all become even more like Jesus. Imagine how living out these verses could help us better help others be like Jesus. “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”.

During World War II, Hitler commanded all religious groups to unite so that he could control them. Among the Brethren assemblies, half complied and half refused. Those who went along with the order had a much easier time. Those who did not faced harsh persecution. In almost every family of those who resisted, someone died in a concentration camp.

When the war was over, feelings of bitterness ran deep between the groups and there was much tension. Finally they decided that the situation had to be healed. Leaders from each group met at a quiet retreat. For several days, each person spent time in prayer, examining his own heart in the light of Christ's commands. Then they came together. Francis Schaeffer, who told of the incident, asked a friend who was there, "What did you do then?" "We were just one," he replied. As they confessed their hostility and bitterness to God and yielded to His control, the Holy Spirit created a spirit of unity among them. Love filled their hearts and dissolved their hatred.

When love prevails among believers, especially in times of strong disagreement, it presents to the world an indisputable mark of a true follower of Jesus Christ.

Vs 1-16 teach us about unity in the Body of Christ. Unity in the church is very important to God. In John 17 as Jesus was praying in the Garden just before His arrest and trial and death. He prayed that His church would live in unity. In John 17:23 Jesus prayed, “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved Me”. When God’s people live in unity there is an increased power in our witness to a watching world. Our world is more likely to believe in Jesus when God’s people like and sound and act like Jesus by their love for one another. In John 13:34-35 Jesus said, “A new command I

give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

Two people can live together but not live in unity. You can tie two cats together and throw them over a clothesline; they may be together but it won't be a picture of unity!

To love one another as Jesus loves us, and to live in unity as the Body of Christ known as Deer Flat, there are some things that God tells us to do. Let's look together at Ephesians 4:1-16. Paul begins by pleading with us as a prisoner of Christ to live a life worthy of our calling to be like Jesus. He carefully lists some of the characteristics of "a worthy life". Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient. Bear with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Why? Because there is one body (the church) and one Spirit – "one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all". To understand these verses we have to think community. I need to say again that there is no "lone ranger" Christianity. Our Christian faith can only be lived in community with God's people. We can only be like Jesus as we seek to live in love and unity with one another.

In Vs 7 Paul begins to speak of the grace of God that each of us has received. In Vs 8-10 we have this confusing teaching from Paul: "This is why God says: 'When he ascended on high, He led captives in His train and gave gifts to men' (quoting from Psalms 68:18). (What does he ascended mean except that he descended to the depths of the earth? He who descended is the very One who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)

Here is my understanding of these verses. God's grace is a special gift. God's grace causes Him to love us though we are undeserving. God's grace caused Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners. Once we find forgiveness in Jesus, God's grace allows Him to look at us as if we had never sinned. The Bible says that God's grace has been given to each of us. God's grace is so precious that Jesus left His throne in heaven to come to earth. Jesus died on a cross and submitted to the power of death for three days in the tomb. God's grace is so great and precious that it fills the whole universe.

In Vs 11 and in the following verses of our chapter, Paul begins to explain how God's grace fills the whole universe. Paul tells us in Vs 11 that God prepared a part for each of us to play. Some are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These are roles that God has designed for us. These may also be considered spiritual gifts that God gives to each of us.

In Romans 12:4-8 the Bible says: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it according to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."

We find this teaching about spiritual gifts given to each of us in 1 Corinthians 12 as well. "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men (Vs 4-6)." Paul goes on to say, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you has a part of it. And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then workers of miracles, also those having gifts of healing, those able to help others, those with gifts of administration, and those speaking in different kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But eagerly desire the greater gifts (Vs 27-31)." And Paul goes on to say that the greatest of these is love.

Now, let's take all of this back to our context in Ephesians 4. What is the Word of God saying to us? To live in the Light of God there are some things that we do not do and some things that we do. To live in the unity of the Body of Christ there are roles that God has given to each of us. And when we live out the part that God has for each of us, we are helping the grace of God fill the whole universe. We are becoming more like Jesus and helping others be like Jesus as each of us play our part.

Ephesians 4:12 outlines one of the primary roles of a pastor – to prepare God’s people for works of service. My role as the lead pastor here at Deer Flat isn’t to be “super pastor” and to do everything for everyone. Instead my role, and that of each of our pastors, is to help each of us in the Deer Flat family find and live out the part that God has for all of us. And when we together do this, the body of Christ known as Deer Flat is built up. And we reach an increasing unity in the faith. And we grow in our knowledge of Jesus. And we become more mature, “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”. After my message Pastor Doug is going to interview Lori Church and Dave Poppinga as they give us some information on how each of us can know the personal and specific part that God has planned for us.

Okay, what difference does this make? In Vs 14-16 the Apostle Paul goes on to describe this difference. What difference does it make for me, for you and me together? Vs 14 describes a maturity that comes to us, “We will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

Have you ever watched a boat on the water that loses its engine and doesn’t have an anchor? It is tossed back and forth at the mercy of the waves. Life can be like that when we are spiritually and emotionally immature. As we mature and become more like Jesus, we are not as easily influenced by the deceitfulness of the enemy and the darkness of the world.

Do you remember early in this message when I talked about coming into the Light of Jesus yet feeling lured and enticed back toward the sin and darkness? Do you remember how I said that we are transformed by the renewing of our minds? What difference does all of this make? If we want to be more like Jesus, and if we want hearts that are surrendered to God and filled with His Spirit, and if we want to live in unity in the Light of Jesus’ love and presence, then God is telling us what He wants us not to do and what He wants us to do. And one of the ways we live this out is to find the part that God has given to each of us to do.

And what difference does this make for our Deer Flat family? In Vs 16, the Bible says, “From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work”.

The heart of Deer Flat is to be like Jesus and help others be like Jesus. Our Deer Flat family is held together as each of us discover and find our part. God has given each of us a part to play. And as we discover and do our part the grace of God is not only transforming our hearts, God’s grace is transforming the Deer Flat family. We will live in greater unity and grow in our love for God and one another as we each do our part.

The heart of the Deer Flat family is to be like Jesus and to help others be like Jesus. We try to keep it simple and build our ministry around three invitations: to inspiring worship, to community in a transformational group, and to compassionate service. We want each of you to join us in offering one of these three invitations to help ourselves and others be more like Jesus. What is my part in helping the Deer Flat family grow and build itself up in the love of Jesus? Pastor Doug and Lori and Dave are going to come up now and help each of us answer that question.