

Small Group Leaders Notes

Ephesians 4:14-16

Context

This passage continues the key themes of maturity and every member ministry that we saw last week.

Here's a summary of v11-14 to see the flow;

A path to maturity...

God gave... apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers

to... equip his people

for... works of service/ministry

so that... the body of Christ may be built up

to... maturity, the likeness of Christ

then... we will no longer be infants

Notes

v14

Infants - There is a strong contrast here between the mature person of v13 and the immature children of v14. O'Brien helpfully notices that in v13 the mature person is singular (i.e. united) whereas in v14 the immature are children (plural) which suggests immature individualism. There are obviously times in scripture when we are encouraged to be children (e.g. Mark 10:14 and 1 Peter 2:2.) We need to understand that the image of little children is used in different ways in the New Testament, sometimes positively and sometimes negatively. In Mark 10 Jesus highlights the humble dependence of little children. In 1 Peter 2 Peter highlights positively how babies crave milk. Here Paul is using negatively emphasising how little children are constantly flicking from one thing to another as they chase the latest fashion and must have toy.

Tossed back and forth - The picture here is of the immature Christian being like a small row boat in the middle of a great storm in the Atlantic Ocean. As Christians and churches we can so easily be pulled in every direction by every new fad and craze in the church. Instability and ignorance are marks of immaturity in Christians just as they are marks of immaturity in children.

every wind of teaching - We should not be like little children who are ignorant of the false teaching that is out there. Particularly in today's world where so much 'Christian' teaching is available on the internet and shared on social media we need to be even more alert as to teaching that is not just unhelpful but simply wrong. Paul is clear that this false teaching is not accidental instead it is the result of "the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming." People can look good and sound good and have a great following and yet be wolves who are out to harm

the church. This makes it all the more important that Christ has given the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists and the pastors and teachers who will teach the truth to equip God's people.

v15

Speaking the truth This is a well known and often quoted verse but it is worth paying close attention to what it says. Notice that it says "speaking the truth" not "speaking truth." This is not just about speaking truthful things to one another instead of lying to one another. This is about speaking THE truth of the gospel to one another (see 6:14.) In other words the way that we grow and mature is by helping one another see the implications of the gospel for our lives as believers. The gospel is not just how we come to Christ it is also how we grow in Christ.

in love Love is prominent throughout Ephesians (see Paul's climactic prayer at the end of ch3.) Throughout chs4-6 there are several times when Paul encourages us to love one another (see 4:16.) These instructions to love are summed up in 5:1-2. It is important to notice that Paul is calling the church to combine love and truth rather than choosing between the two as we so often do. John Stott is on good form when he says;

"Thank God there are those in the contemporary church who are determined at all costs to defend and uphold God's revealed truth. But sometimes they are conspicuously lacking in love. When they think they smell heresy, their nose begins to twitch, their muscles ripple, and the light of battle enters their eye. They seem to enjoy nothing more than a fight. Others make the opposite mistake. They are determined at all costs to maintain and exhibit brotherly love, but in order to do so are prepared even to sacrifice the central truths of revelation. Both these tendencies are unbalanced and unbiblical. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love; love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth. The apostle calls us to hold the two together, which should not be difficult for Spirit-filled believers, since the Holy Spirit is himself 'the Spirit of truth', and his first fruit is 'love'. There is no other route than this to a fully mature Christian unity."

mature in every respect God doesn't just want us to grow in a doctrinal unity (though that is important.) he wants us to be mature in every way. Here we are back to the theme of v13 where God's goal is that we become mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. In other words God wants his people (corporate not just individual) to become like Christ in every way. This will only be complete in the new creation but it is to be our goal now as a church. Our goal is to be united and mature faith, knowledge and love, every more reflecting the perfect man Jesus Christ.

v16

every supporting ligament There's a fair bit of debate over what or who Paul is referring to here. One possibility is to say that he doesn't mean anything in particular and having referred to Christ as the head of the body he is just embellishing the metaphor and therefore he doesn't mean anything in particular. Others suggest that "every supporting ligament" refers to the ministers of the word (v11) who support and facilitate the rest of the body doing its ministry. If this is the case then there are parallels between the pattern of v11-12 and v16. If I were you I

wouldn't spend too much time wondering about this. The big point that is clear is that Christ is the head of the body, it is his body, and every part of the body has a job to lovingly do so that the whole body will be grown up and mature.

grows and builds itself up as each part does its work - As Paul finishes this section we are back to where we began in v7. Christ has given grace to all his people because all have a part to play in building up the body. As Richard Coekin puts it simply "Church growth is a team game!" Building and growing BEC is not an individual sport like Tennis or Golf. It's a team game like Rugby where everyone has a different vital job to do otherwise success (growth and maturity) will not happen. There can be no passengers because the local church isn't a bus it is a body. When I don't commit to lovingly serve in a local church it is not just me who suffers, the whole body suffers.

In summary v1-16 teach us that as BEC we need to "maintain our unity, contribute our ministry and grow in our maturity" (Coekin.)

Big Idea BEC will only grow and mature as everyone lovingly serves one another with their gifts.

Applications

Speaking Everyone in BEC is a gospel minister. That does not mean that we will all stand up and preach and teach but it does mean that we are all to be involved in 'gospelling' one another. We are to be talking about the gospel with one another and helping one another to see how the gospel is to shape and direct our lives as believers. The gospel has implications for every aspect of life (work, parenting, old age, anxiety, depression, fear, envy, pride, grief etc.) Formally and informally we are to be lovingly (crucial) helping one another to apply the gospel to our lives. In a sense the gospel is like a cream that we are to rub into every part of us as individuals and as a church. We need one another to help us do this. Some groups are great for building the sorts of relationships where we know one another well and can have these sorts of conversations. It is often difficult to have these conversations on Sunday mornings especially when we might be sat with people that we don't know so well but we can still be looking to talk about what we have heard in the sermon over coffee after the service. Again you might want to review some of the material from 6 steps to loving your church.

In the questions below there is a case study which you could use to help one another begin to think about how the gospel applies to different situations.

Serving and building As with the previous passages one of the key implications from this passage is that we all think hard about what gifts and opportunities we have to build up the rest of BEC. We are all different and Christ gives us different portions of grace so we all have something different to contribute to seeing BEC grow. You could talk about different areas of church life where people can serve. Service doesn't just have to be signing up to be on a rota. There are all sorts of different ways we can serve. Perhaps you and your group could brainstorm some different areas of service.

Questions

I have written quite a lot of questions and you probably won't have time to use all of them so feel free to focus your time on particular areas of application. If it were me leading the study then I would give most of my time to the case study and the talking about how we can practically speak the truth in love to one another.

Starter - In what sort of ways can children be like little boats tossed back and forth by the waves of a storm?

v14

1. How can Christians and churches be tossed back and forth by the waves of a storm?

We are really just trying to get the group to think about what v14 would actually look like today. For example such Christians would never really know their own minds. They are always following the last celebrity preacher that they heard regardless of whether what the preacher said was true or not.

2. Can we see something of ourselves in v14?

We must avoid thinking that we are immune from such immaturity so encourage the group to honestly examine themselves. We want to sit under God's word and let it expose us so we can change and grow rather than just discussing the Bible and how it applies to others. If that is all we are doing then we are hypocritically wasting our time aren't we?

v15

3. Are you the sort of person who is more likely to speak the truth without love or to love without speaking the truth?

We all have different personalities and temperaments so some of us will be more likely to 'fire from the hip' and 'tell it like it is' with little love. Others of us are so scared of offending people or hurting them that we never confront people with the truth even when that would actually be the really loving thing to do.

You might want to encourage the group to consider why they tend to behave as they do. What are their motivations?

4. Can you think of a time when another Christian lovingly helped you apply the truth of the gospel to an area of your life? What was it like?

5. What do you think holds us back from doing this?

6. How do we need to change so that this is something we do more of?

From my experience this is something we are not very good at and yet Paul is clear that these sorts of conversations need to be going on if we are to grow.

7. Read part 1 of the case study below. What do you make of Andy's response? What is good? What could be better?

Andy probably does what most of us would do. We sympathise and share experience but we haven't really got anything more to offer. On the one hand Andy is loving and caring but on the other hand you could argue that a loving friend would try to do more.

8. Read part 2 of the case study. What do you make of Tony's response? What is good and what could be better?

Tony has suddenly got something to say from the Bible which is good but again you'd question how loving he is being. You might also question how effective his words will be. My guess is that Greg already knows what the Bible says he should be doing. What he really needs is for a friend to help him see how the gospel connects with his life and the situation he is in.

9. Like Greg we often know the 'Do's and Don'ts' of the Bible but if we are really going to change and grow then the gospel needs to work in our hearts. What has the gospel got to say to Greg in his situation?

This might be a tough question for people to answer but it is an important one. Think about how the gospel will motivate Greg to be a better husband and be a better father and prioritise spending time with God's people? You might want to focus on just one of Greg's problems. The aim is not to identify what Dave should do (Tony has done that for us) instead we want to think about how the truth of the gospel will fuel this change.

10. How might you go about lovingly speaking the truth of the gospel to Greg?

This question is the natural follow on from (.9)

v16

11. What will happen if only part of BEC is working to build up the body?

We won't actually grow and mature to become more like Jesus. We might grow numbers and some people might grow individually but that is not Christ's goal for his church. He wants us to grow spiritually (as well as numerically) and he wants the whole church to grow. We all have a part to play.

12. What different opportunities do we have to play our part in building up BEC so we all become more like Jesus?

Here's a chance to brainstorm ways of serving so that we build one another up. It will be important to emphasise that everyone can do something and that everyone is needed. Don't just talk about ideas, come up with some concrete resolutions of what you are going to do.

Speaking the truth in love Case Study - Greg, Andy and Tony

Part 1

Greg is a 46 year old man in our church and has arrived at something of a crisis. He is overstretched at work and his marriage is suffering. He leads a home group, but is missing meetings and his own devotional life is in bad shape. Recently he stayed late at the office and got into conversation with a female colleague. They went out for a drink and though nothing 'happened' he realised afterwards just how close he was to letting things go too far. This incident persuades him something needs to change.

One Sunday Greg gets into conversation with his friend Andy. Having explained his situation, Greg is pleased that Andy sympathises with him and agrees how hard a proper work-life balance can be. Andy describes his own difficulties and then conversation moves on. Greg is glad to have 'shared' his problem, but knows he has no new advice and no spiritual perspective on his situation

Part 2

Next Greg goes to see his Tony. Tony listens carefully to his story before opening the Bible with him and telling him that he needs to love his wife (Eph 5), be a good father – which means spending less time at work – (Eph 6) and that he should flee temptation (1 Cor 6). He tells him to read his bible regularly and make home group a priority in his schedule. He urges Greg to see this as a crisis point and that if he doesn't act now it will be too late.