

Title - The Role of Evil in Ephesians 4:11-16 through the lens of Human Learning and the Framework of “Story” by Dan Allender

Program of Study – Master of Arts in Theological Studies

Presentation Type – **Choose one of the following:** Oral Presentation

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Abstract:

Numerous scholars have provided analysis and presentations of the significance of Ephesians 4:11-16 for the church today. Although many hold a consensus regarding the historical and cultural context of the epistle, literary analysis has divided the view of this pertinent passage regarding the role of Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Shepherds, and Teachers (APEST). Unfortunately, the debates over APEST roles as discussed in this pericope have overshadowed an essential topic also addressed: the role of evil. Many commentaries appear to oversimplify the concept of false teaching only recognizing how it pertained to the immediate cultural threat that was present in the New Testament.¹ To protect appropriately against false teaching in the church, one must first understand the complexity of human learning. Dr. Dan Allender has created a method of engaging the role of evil in our lives called “Story Work” which recognizes the complexity of human learning. His framework in this space illuminates the pervasive role of evil in our lives and even in the church. The failure to address false teaching has created an Achilles heel of weakness in the church today. Simultaneously overlooked is the role that evil plays in the promulgating of false teaching. By integrating the work of Dr. Dan Allender regarding the role of evil, delving deeper into the literary context, and engaging the larger literary narrative of the

¹Arnold, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 267; Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Vol. 42, *Word Biblical Commentary*, 258; MacArthur, “Ephesians,” In *The MacArthur Bible Commentary*, 1694.

epistle, this author hopes to interpret “false teaching” consistent with a whole biblical theology and extend the understanding for the church today.

Christian Worldview Integration:

A common overlooked or glossed over issue in Ephesians 4:11-16 is the role of evil. The church seems to generally shy away from learning about the enemy, as if the concern is that we become too familiar with evil. Yet the truth is that all human beings are already familiar with evil because we live in a fallen world; what we are not familiar with is recognizing it and naming it. David in Psalm 23 comforts Israel (and all God’s people) by declaring, “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.” Jesus recognized the reality of evil when he taught his disciples to pray: “deliver us from evil.” If we are ignorant of evil that only makes those in the church an easier target to deceive. In fact, the premise of ignorance as a setup for harm is evident in Ephesians 4:14, “so that we may no longer be children.” An essential function of maturity and growth in kingdom living is to be able to recognize when something is from the enemy. The language in Ephesians addresses three specific things we should not be “shipwrecked” by given the metaphor of wind and waves: (false) “doctrine/ teaching,” “human cunning,” and “craftiness in deceitful schemes” (v.14). We can better understand these three “enemies” in terms of their differences and impacts to human learning.

Although the tendency is to oversimplify these three enemies as being swayed by “false teaching” in an explicit sense alone, it is important to recognize that human beings do not merely learn in the context of explicit teaching. The enemy often “craftily” utilizes subtlety and half-lies to make the content easier for us to consume (apparent in Gen 2). In addition, what the metaphor

implies is that the ship is succumbing to an *ecological environment*. In fact, most of human learning and development occurs in the context of a whole ecological environment; “All of the ecological environments we inhabit as humans partake of various kinds of connections (interpersonal, social, educational, societal, etc.) and create a number of interactive exchanges through which we mutually influence one another positively or negatively.”² This mutual exchange encompasses not only an understanding of the ecological environment that we learn in but also a psychological understanding that we learn from experiences with other people. In order to protect against members of the church integrating false beliefs into their theology and teaching them to others, we must understand the many modalities of learning. Therefore, a more elaborate understanding of these verses and an extension of the dimensions in which evil deceives, even in the church, is imperative for Christians today.

² Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, 134.