

## **Growing Up Into Christ – *Ephesians 4:14-16***

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Well I want to start our message today by telling you a true story that has some spiritual applications to the passage we'll be studying today in Ephesians chapter 4. Before we get started, I need to know how many of you have been seasick before? Well hopefully this story won't be too painful for those of you who get seasick because it's about an experience on the sea that would've caused even the most experienced of sailors to get seasick. So here we go.

It was a dark and stormy night on the Mediterranean Sea. A violent wind called a nor'easter had rushed down from the land and was having its way with a ship and its crew. Because the wind was so great the ship could not face the wind, and the crew had no option but to give way to it and allow the ship to be carried along wherever the wind would take it.

When they came into the shelter of a small island, they were barely able to get the ship under control and began to be afraid that they would run aground in the shallows. To try to prevent this they let down the anchor and allowed themselves to be driven along with the anchor down. But even with the anchor down, the boat continued to be driven along by the wind for many days and nights and the small island was left far behind. As the days and nights dragged on, the crew began to get so desperate that they started throwing the cargo and the ship's tackle overboard.

The storm was so great that neither the sun nor the stars had been visible for many days and the crew gave up all hope of being saved. Finally after 14 days and nights of this, the sailors began to get the idea that they were starting to approach some land, and after taking some soundings and noticing that the water was getting more and more shallow, they began to be afraid that they were going to run aground and be dashed to pieces by the waves. Some of the sailors even tried to sneak one of the lifeboats off in order to save themselves. Desperation can drive people to do some pretty crazy and self-centered things.

Finally the ship ran into a reef that was situated where two seas came together and the ship began to be broken up by the force of the waves. Fortunately God had some big plans for the crew of the ship and miraculously he enabled every last person to make it safely to shore, even though the ship was broken to pieces by the waves.

Now this story may have been very familiar to a lot of you, because it's found in the book of Acts, when Paul was on his way to Rome and was eventually shipwrecked on the island of Malta. I tell it now because the passage we studied in Ephesians last week and which we will complete today, outlines some very powerful truths about our growth and about the body of Christ that promise to build us up spiritually to the point where we will be able to successfully navigate even this amazing, powerful, violent storm that I just described. As we, individually and as a unified body, walk out the truths that Paul shares with us in Ephesians chapter 4 verses 11 to 13, we will be able to continue to do God's will and successfully navigate whatever storm Satan tries to throw our way.

The sailors in the story I just told you were simply being driven along by the wind and there was absolutely nothing they could do about it. But what we'll see today is that God outlines a path whereby we never have to be in that situation where we are simply being pushed along helplessly and the best we can hope for is to just survive. Let's read Ephesians chapter 4, verses 11 to 16 to start out our study today:

***11 And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. 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.***

## II. REVIEW

If you'll remember, last week we saw that Jesus Christ has given out spiritual gifts to every member of the body of Christ, and that several of the gifts (apostleship, prophecy, evangelism, pastoring and teaching) are specifically designed by God to be used to fully equip and prepare each of us for action. These gifts are meant not to just give us some good head knowledge, but rather to lead us deeper into that love relationship with our God and Savior whereby the love He has for each of us flows over to others, and we begin to offer His love to each other through both words and practical acts of service. When this happens the body of Christ is built up and we begin to be accurate reflections of who Christ is to each other and to the world around us. And this process is to continue until every last one of us reaches maturity and until the body of Christ is truly unified and working together for the glory of God, rather than wasting its time with petty divisions and arguing and strife.

## III. THE FIRST RESULT OF THE EQUIPPING PROCESS: NO LONGER CHILDREN

So as we begin today in verse 14 of Ephesians chapter 4, the first three words show us that we are about to find out what the result will be of a successful equipping process, whereby the body of Christ is built up and we all attain to unity and maturity. And the result is twofold. The first result we see involves a change in who we are. Paul says, **"As a result, we are no longer to be children..."** So at the beginning of this process, as we briefly touched on last week, we are children, helpless babies that need to be spoon fed, have their diaper changed frequently, and can never be left alone. We are like the believers Paul describes in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 3, verses 3 to 7:

**3 And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. 2 I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? 4 For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not mere men? 5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was**

***causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth.***

When we start out as new believers, we are like spiritual newborns, unable to eat solid foods. We're just learning what it means to leave behind our old ways and sin patterns and we barely understand even what it means to be a Christian. And sadly, there are many Christians who remain in the infant stage and continually resist God's efforts to draw them on to maturity. And Paul shows us what it looks like when Christians are not moving on to maturity and are instead continuing to walk in their flesh and their old nature. He tells us that jealousy and strife are the symptoms that will show up when there's a lack of growth and maturity in a Christian's life. So if you find yourself participating in or causing strife to arise in the body of Christ or if jealousy is affecting the decisions you're making and the way you're treating others, you might want to take a look at your walk with Christ and ask God to show you where you're holding up the growth process.

I also really love how this 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians passage applies to what we're studying in Ephesians. Notice that the gifts Christ has given, in this case apostleship, are to be used not to glorify the person who has the gifts, but rather to serve others and to promote growth in the body of Christ. Paul and Apollos were simply servants of God who were using the gifts that had been given to them, but it was God who was causing the growth and to whom all the glory was due. It wasn't about Paul or Apollos or Peter and how important they were, it was about God and salvation through Christ and the gifts were only effective as the apostles were relying on God and trusting in Him to bring about the growth and the change in people's lives.

So back in Ephesians, the first result is that we are no longer to be children. And how does Paul describe these children? They are described as being ***“tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming...”***

When we remain children in our faith and do not move on to unity and maturity, we are like that ship I described on those stormy nights in the Mediterranean Sea. No matter how many anchors we drop, or how hard we tried to maneuver our boat through the storm, we are at the mercy of the wind and the waves and we will be carried wherever they take us. When the storms of life break upon us or

when Satan brings ungodly people preaching new doctrines into our life, we will be easily led astray from the simplicity of our faith in Christ.

Now that word “doctrine” in the text tends to scare a lot of people because they associate it with arguing about minute points in Scripture or allowing gray areas in Scripture to become divisive in the body. Most of us I believe have witnessed Christians allowing their convictions on gray areas in Scripture to divide them from other believers and distract them what we really should be about. Maybe even some of us here have even been guilty of that at times. But the word "doctrine" is not as scary as it sounds and really just means teaching or instruction.

So please don't tell me you're not into doctrine, because what you're really saying is that you're not into teaching that is based on the word of God. And if you're not into the word of God and knowing it inside and out, then your process of moving from being a spiritual child to a full grown adult is going to be very slow and may even stall out completely.

But the doctrine or teaching being spoken of here in Ephesians 4 verse 14, is not a good kind of doctrine. What's being spoken of here is teaching that involves a deliberate twisting of Scripture meant to accomplish a person's self-centered goals and purposes. And what's clear from the verse is that it is intentional. We're talking here about trickery, craftiness and deceitful scheming. We're talking about people who are under the influence, whether they know it or not, of demonic purposes meant to undermine the purposes of God that He is working to accomplish within his dearly loved children.

Sometimes we can unwittingly buy into the world's notion that all people are basically good and that if we just give people a chance they'll do the right thing. But if we believe Scripture, there's not a person in the universe who is basically good and who always has good intentions and who is just trying to do what's right. As the old Bob Dylan song goes, "You gotta serve somebody...it might be the devil...or it might be the Lord."

None of us are neutral here. There's no “Switzerland” in the spiritual universe. Every person is on one side or the other, though the vast majority of unsaved people have no idea that they're being used as a pawn of Satan to try and thwart

God's purposes. Let's not be naïve and forget that there's a battle going on and the stakes involve the eternal destiny of every person in the universe. There are people out there who may appear to be Christians, but who are actually on a mission to lead people away from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ.

And when we remain children in our faith and don't move beyond the basics to a deep and thorough understanding of the Word of God, we will be easily carried away when storms come and when ungodly people try to carefully introduce new teachings that distort the word of God. These unbiblical teachings can be described as winds that blow through. There are some really strong winds blowing through right now in America throughout many so-called evangelical churches. And someday those winds may even try to overpower this little body of believers right here in Union, Oregon. That's another reason why we need to be active and prepared and fully cooperating with God's process of equipping us for the work of service. We need to know God's Word inside and out and allow it to transform the way we think and live our lives. We are no longer to be children, but rather grow to unity and maturity in Christ.

#### IV. THE SECOND RESULT OF THE EQUIPPING PROCESS: SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE, WE ARE TO GROW UP INTO CHRIST

This brings us to verse 15 of Ephesians chapter 4 and to the second result we will see as a result of the equipping process. Now verse 15 starts with the word, "but," introducing a contrast to the idea of being children in our faith. Paul tells us that instead of being children, we are to grow up in all aspects into Christ.

And there's an interesting phrase that Paul inserts here as a key part of this growth process: "speaking the truth in love." In contrast to being children who are always being led astray by false teachings, we are to be speaking the truth and speaking it in love. The people in verse 14 were speaking lies intended to deceive and lead astray. But we are called to speak the truth of God's Word in love. The lies are being spoken with evil intent. But the truth is to be spoken to accomplish good in other people's lives. And this speaking of truth is essential for each of us to be able to grow up into Christ.

And what kind of love are we talking about here? The Greek word for love used here is *agape* love, which is the distinctive love by which Christians are to be

known. This is not a love that is rooted in our feelings or that arises because we feel a connection with someone or get warm, fuzzy feelings whenever we're around a person. This *agape* love can be defined as good will, benevolence or brotherly love. We can call it Christian love because there's no equivalent outside of the Christian faith.

This is a love that is displayed in actions and not just words. *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* describes it this way: "Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all...and works no ill to any...love seeks opportunity to do good to all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of faith."

If you want to see how unique *agape* love is when compared to worldly love, spend some time studying the love chapter in the Bible: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 13. Try to listen to this description of *agape* love we find there as if for the first time, in the context of what we've been studying in Ephesians chapter 4 about walking in humility and gentleness, working for unity, and speaking the truth in love:

***Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails...***

There is no other love that even comes close to the *agape* love that Jesus Christ has shown and continues to show each of us every day and in every circumstance we face. And He calls us to share that same love with others in everything we do.

Back in verse 15 of Ephesians chapter 4, it's also interesting to note that the truth isn't just to be known, it's also to be spoken. Now some of us may have a lot of knowledge and wisdom from God's Word that we know in our heads and speak to ourselves to help us grow and become more like Christ. And having that knowledge and wisdom is so important for us personally. Speaking those truths to ourselves is most definitely part of what Paul is calling us to here. But what we

need to remember is that we are also called to edify each other and to spur each other on to growth in the Lord. Sometimes we need to get brave and share truth that God has taught us personally with our fellow believers in an appropriate and loving way.

This speaking of truth can take the form of sermons or teaching or can simply take place in everyday conversation with our fellow believers as the Spirit leads and prompts us. This is not a situation where we go around with the intention of sharing our amazing knowledge and insights with those “less fortunately endowed,” or where we spend our time nit-picking other people about our own pet peeves and personal preferences. Instead this is a situation where we allow the Spirit of God to guide and direct us and are willing at appropriate times to gently speak the truth in love, always with humility and gentleness. This Spirit-led speaking of truth in love will often involve simple encouragement of others, but may at times also involve gently confronting others when they are involved in destructive behaviors that are clearly out of step with Scriptural principles.

And we are also called to speak truth to those who don't yet know Christ. As we're reminded in Romans 10:14-15: ***How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!"*** Truth is to be spoken. In 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:15 we're instructed to always be ready to share the reason for the hope we have in Christ with others, always doing it with gentleness and respect.

And Paul is telling us in Ephesians today that as the members of the body of Christ speak the truth in love to each other and to the world around us, serving and loving each other in both words and action, we begin to grow up into Christ...the body of Christ begins to take shape, with Christ as our head.

And we don't just grow up in some areas of our lives while we refuse to allow God into other more challenging and sensitive areas. We grow up in ALL aspects.

Think about your life right now. Can you identify any areas in your life that God needs to work on? Can you identify areas where you're having a bad attitude or refusing to let God have his way or heal you? What's keeping you from letting God into that area of your life and is it affecting your overall relationship with Him?

Let's face it. We all have areas in our life where we struggle and where we are especially weak. But the important thing to remember is that we should never just accept those areas as normal or just an inherent part of who we are. If an area of our life or an attitude is out of step with God's truth, we cannot simply accept it and leave it alone and ask others to do the same. If we do that, it will affect the quality and closeness of our relationship with God. Rather than accepting it as part of who we are, we need to constantly and repeatedly hand it over to God and ask for His cleansing and healing power to take hold in that area of our lives.

Do you believe in the power of God? Do you believe that He answers prayers that are prayed according to His will? Then there is no area of my life or your life that cannot be healed and transformed by the power of God. Don't accept it. Don't think it's an unchangeable part of who you are. Keep repenting and bringing it to God until He heals you and guides you into the truth that will set you free in that area. Amen?! God promises that His truth will set us free!!! Let's allow God's truth and His power working inside of us to cause us to fully grow up into Christ, withholding no part of our lives and dreams from Him.

## V. THE SOURCE OF OUR GROWTH

This brings us to our last verse for today, verse 16 of Ephesians chapter 4. In this verse and in the last few words of verse 15, we discover the source of our growth. You see we can spend a lot of time learning how we should be living and what we're doing wrong and in trying to work up our motivation to make needed changes in our lives. But if we never connect to the power source and instead try to accomplish changes through our own self-effort and willpower, we're either going to lead a very frustrating and defeated Christian life or, if we have some surface success in cleaning up our behavior, we'll end up walking in spiritual pride and arrogance like a Pharisee.

What we find in verses 15 and 16 is that we will only grow and progress in our faith when we are fully immersed in Jesus Christ and more and more trusting in His power to work through each of us to bring about both our own personal growth and the growth of the body of Christ as a whole.

Paul warns against trying to perfect ourselves through willpower and harsh treatment of our bodies and through putting our faith in anything other than Christ. In Colossians 2:18-19. He says, ***“Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joint and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.*** Paul was sending out a stern warning that we need to keep our eyes fixed on Christ, and not allow ourselves to rely on our own strength and experiences to bring about the growth we need. God brings about our growth as we hold fast to our head, Jesus Christ.

Notice also back in Ephesians that we are to grow up into Christ. Everything in our lives is meant to lead us further and deeper into Christ and dependence on Him, and away from depending on ourselves and our extremely limited knowledge and perspectives. And it is from Christ that the whole body grows. We grow as a body when Christ our head is allowed to guide and direct and empower each member of the body of Christ.

I find it interesting that when you really analyze and pay close attention to the wording in verse 16, you notice that it’s actually the whole body, each member immersed in Christ, that causes the growth of the body. In other words, it’s not just a really gifted pastor or a really great Bible teacher that sets in motion the growth of the body. Instead, it’s each member walking closely with Christ and using the spiritual gifts they’ve been given that brings about the growth of the body. Every person is important and contributes to the growth of the body. The proper working of each individual part is necessary for the body to grow. That’s one more reason why we each need to be using those spiritual gifts we’ve been given!

Notice also that phrase in verse 16: ***“being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies...”*** The Colossians passage I read for you a few minutes ago

said something very similar: ***“being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments.”*** Those of you who’ve heard my previous messages on Ephesians may remember how I talked about the bond of peace that is mentioned in verse 4 of Ephesians chapter 4. And if you’ll remember, I mentioned that the Greek word for “bond” is a word that is used to describe how ligaments hold joints together and allow the body to move and run and do things that would never be possible without the bond that the ligaments provide. This bond or ligament of peace among believers is what holds the body of Christ together and this peace comes about as we walk in humility and gentleness and patience with each other and are diligently working to maintain unity in our body. So I believe that when Paul is talking about ***“being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies...”***, he is talking about this process of walking in humility and gentleness toward God and toward each other and maintaining the bond of peace. This way of walking is what holds the body together in unity.

So as we tie verse 16 of Ephesians chapter 4 all together, we see the following picture of how God brings about growth in the body, leading us into unity and maturity and to becoming an accurate representation of who Christ is to each other and to the world around us:

- 1) Each member of the body of Christ is walking in close relationship with and dependence on Christ, allowing Him to guide and direct and lead.
- 2) Each member is walking in humility and gentleness toward God and toward each other, diligently working to promote unity and maintain peace in the body.
- 3) Each member is using the spiritual gifts they’ve been given to edify the body of Christ and contribute to its overall growth.

And through these three processes, God causes the growth by using each member of the body for the purpose for He’s designed and empowered them. The whole body, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body. And the end result is that the body of Christ is built up in *agape* love and God is glorified. When we walk in this manner, we become a beautiful picture of who God is to the world around us.

## VI. APPLICATION

So as we close today, I want you to think back again to that story I told you about that ship and the violent storm. The ship in that story was at the mercy of the wind and the waves and could do nothing except try to ride it out and hope to just survive. The storm was in control and the ship was not able to accomplish its mission or go where it intended to go. And this is just what we're like when we remain children in our faith; when we hold back areas of our life from God; when we allow our personal preferences or our hurt feelings to rise up and create disunity in the body; when we allow bitterness to take root in our lives; when we walk in pride and arrogance instead of the humility and gentleness God calls us to; and when we don't use the spiritual gifts God has given each and every one of us.

One thing is clear from the passage we've been studying for the last two weeks: God has a big plan for each of us individually and as a unified body. He has provided us with spiritual gifts that are to be used for the equipping of the saints and for spurring each other on to sharing Christ's love in practical ways, bringing growth and drawing us into unity and maturity in our faith. He is calling each of us to know Christ deeply and fully and to depend on his power and strength and wisdom in moment-by-moment decisions we make every day. He's inviting us to know the truth of His Word and speak it out in love to each other. And when we walk in and cooperate with God's plan, this body of believers will become a ship that can navigate even the harshest of storms...a ship that can continue to accomplish its mission no matter what the weather brings...a ship that isn't tossed about helplessly by the wind and waves.

So what is God speaking to you today through this passage in Ephesians? Do you need to just draw closer to Him and depend on Him more fully? Do you need to ask Him to increase your faith? We're told in Scripture that even our faith is a gift from God given by grace. Do you have an area of your life that you're holding back from Him and doubting that He can heal or change? Do you know what your spiritual gift is, but you're not using it? Do you need to deepen your knowledge of God's Word and allow it to penetrate more fully into your mind and actions?

I don't know where each of you are at in your walk with the Lord today. But I do know that we serve a great God who loves us more than we can imagine and wants to fill each of us up and unify this body to accomplish His purposes.

Let's draw near to God and ask Him to have His way in our lives. Let's not hold back anything from Him or doubt His ability to bring about the changes we need. Nothing is too difficult for God and He's just waiting for us to call on Him and pursue Him with all that we have.