Ephesians 4:14-16

Standing Together Against the Waves

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; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all [aspects] into Him who is the head, [even] Christ, 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.

# Since We’re Maturing

Just in case having Christ as the end goal of the maturing believer was a bit lofty, Paul fills in some connecting pieces so that we can understand what body life looks like so that Christ-likeness doesn’t seem an improbably outcome, but a likely outcome. Maturity is something we should also be comprehending in a spiritual context, observing as the Holy Spirit grows us, and something that we seek to participate in in regards to our interactions with one another.

## As a Result

While ‘result’ is a conjunction (sometimes translated ‘so that’) what’s key about the Greek construction in this passage is that ‘we are no longer’ is subjunctive. Subjunctive mood verbs are given to relate the idea of possibility or potential. Their relationship to reality is not being presented as fact or command, but as something that is to be understood and possibly worked towards[[1]](#footnote-1). Therefore, we see ‘as a result’ offering us an exciting Christ-life opportunity if we abide as individuals and as a body.

### We Are No Longer to be Children

*How would we describe behavioral and discerning characteristics of children?*

Paul specifies that believers – as a whole group – are not to stay living and thinking like children. There are two Greek words for children and this word is most commonly used for being infantile. The word is a compound word meaning unable to speak. Immaturity comes with a lack of understanding, but Paul is encouraging the believers to build on the foundation of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers towards maturity.

### Tossed Here and There by Waves and Carried About by Every Wind of Doctrine

*How would the saints receiving this letter be getting ‘winds of doctrine’?*

The saints in Ephesus would have had several sources for doctrine:

* The Old Testament
* Tradition
* Culture
* Special Revelation
* Teaching and letters from the Apostles

Only a few of these are legitimate sources of doctrine! Tradition is not inspired. Culture is not inspired. When infantile believers hear doctrine without discernment they are more likely to internalize that doctrine and face longer term impacts from the error.

The Ephesians were in a port community [now 6 miles inland due to silt build up] and they would have been used to seeing what happened to vessels that were thrashed around by the waves. In addition, they would have seen boats unpiloted and carried around by every wind of doctrine. Paul’s use of these illustration would have hit them where they lived and they would have known the danger involved. This isn’t just talking about being influenced, but the risk of hitting rocks or being capsized was real. Paul doesn’t want the body in Ephesus tanked by bad doctrine flowing through the community, instead he’s interested in truth being learned, spread, and carefully, gently spoken.

### By the Trickery of Men; By Craftiness in Deceitful Scheming

*Why would the men be tricky, crafty and deceitful?*

The Greek word for ‘trickery’ here refers to the idea of gamblers with loaded dice. If they can swindle and cheat and come out with control or power these deceivers leave you beholden to them. This is in stark contrast to the truth, spiritual growth and the legacy principles presented earlier in Ephesians.

# Body Growth

Paul’s language in the following clauses is plural. We can’t have plural growth without the individuals growing, but we cannot grow alone. Ephesians is replete with togetherness concepts. Each chapter is chock-full of the need for one another – and this chapter addresses the one and the many of Christ’s bride.

## But Speaking the Truth in Love

*Why are the plural believers speaking here?*

Paul gives us a bit of a play-on-words here. He’s gone from kids who can’t speak, to speaking the truth in love. There are a few bits of Greek that seem to float around Bible churches no matter their orientation and this little snippet seems to be one of them: we hear that this means, “Truthing in love.” That’s not a terrible translation. The idea, however, is not just about speaking to one another in truth, or speaking truth in a loving way if you have to correct someone. That misses the whole context of Ephesians and what Paul is trying to say in light of the body’s growth. Instead we should understand that we should be living and teaching the truth in love in contrast to the deceivers.

Paul knew that his audience had at least some Jewish heritage where they grew up with an understanding of the Law. In the Law Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 6:7, “You shall teach [the 613 Laws] diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up.” In contrast in the New Testament with new content being delivered by the Holy Spirit through Apostolic letters and specific messages through the prophets these truths needed to be spoken and delivered in love, not legalism!

## We are to Grow Up in All Aspects into Him Who is the Head, Christ

*“We are to…” sounds like legalism. How can we handle this?*

Paul is not a legalist. He’s not interested in delivering legal ideals. However, the New Testament is densely populated with imperatives (things we are told to do). This is not a conflict, deception, or any other sort of problem, but instead aligns with the biblical principle that if something is true, and we are biding, this should be the logical outcome. This doesn’t remove our will and volition, but instead because our will is aligned with God’s will we seeing the outcome of the imperatives in our lives. Assuming an abiding body we see that we are to grow up in all ways into Christ-likeness. That’s not lofty if the Holy Spirit is doing the work and we’re being conformed to His image (like 2 Corinthians 3:18 states).

*What does a mature body look like?*

Paul continues on in the next few clauses to describe a maturing body that has parts being held together in their roles, building each other up, and moving beyond infancy towards adulthood.

## From Whom the Whole Body

In Paul’s typical run-on sentence form here we see that he links a slew of ideas together in relationship to Christ’s involvement with the body. God’s interaction with the body, as states earlier in this chapter (c.f. 1-6), is one of leadership, love, and equipping.

### Being Fitted and Held Together by What Every Joint Supplies

*What do joints supply here in Christ’s body?*

It’s easy to consider natural biological structures like the human body, see that gravity pulls them down, tendons connect, and be amazed by the complex systems God has created for us, but Paul’s meaning is personal and appropriation oriented. God has brought us together and intended for us to be part of one another. Just like we need to be learning about love from one another in Ephesians 3, learning about truth from one another from pastors and teachers, we’re to be learning about unity and interaction as a body together from one another as we interact.

### According to the Proper Working of each Individual Part

*How do you know that you’re working properly within the body?*

Most of us when we are younger are faced with the quandary of purpose in this life. We look for careers, partners (or not!), and some grand mark we’ll leave on the universe before we die. We seek some sense of individual purpose. God has a purpose that is both individual *and* corporate for us. We have questions we will ask, services we will serve, loves we will love and they’re in light of His will for us to come together to an abiding expression of His purpose.

If we’re not seeing the fruit of the Spirit we can know that we need to be abiding and walking in the Spirit as Paul has outlined for us, but the goal of the Christ-life is relationship with, and glory to, God and growth in His love through us towards one another.

## Causes the Growth of the Body for the Building Up of Itself in Love

*What does a body headed by Christ stir in one another?*

Christ’s headship, with our walking in the Spirit, causes the body to grow and to build up itself in love. We don’t get the glory, but we get to be active members of a living body. Not only that, but we get to participate in benevolent, agape, love. The love that we see building up one another; encouraging one another; correcting (in love!) one another; and seeking the well being of one another.

*Considering the roll of love in God’s plan (c.f. Ephesians 2:4-5; Ephesians 3:16-19) what does it mean that we get to be part of that expression?*

God’s love is what brings us together. It causes us to be interested in one another as His children, His bride, and His body. When we see it modeled in the body it causes us to be in awe. When we see it cover a multitude of sins within the body we’re even further amazed. God’s love is the only thing that could cause this sort of building between Jews and gentiles. It’s the only thing that could sustain things that the flesh would reject in His plan through us.

# Conclusion

We have this amazing life that God has planned for us to live out if we walk by the Spirit. There are few things more exciting than His sacrifice, rooted in love, being rendered through us in His power.

1. Where work is not intended to imply any legalism. The idea is a will in alignment with the Holy Spirit’s direction. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)