Opening Words

Are you a Christian? Are you part of the Church, the Body of Christ? Do you have this grand destiny of being a mature person, of measuring up to the fullness of Christ? Then, move toward that destiny which requires that you stop being a spiritual child.

63 Eph Grow Up!

We have been looking at the glorious picture of the future Church when Christ comes again. Paul describes it as perfect wholeness where there is no more brokenness. He describes it as knowing Christ just as he knows us. He describes it as becoming an adult. Finally, he describes it as growing up so that we will fit into the new clothes God has for us. We will measure up in that day and be a suitable partner for Jesus Christ. This is, by the way, why Paul says in Ephesians 3:21, "To God, be the glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus." Jesus has already attained to glory. We look forward to the day when His people attain to glory and then Christ and his people will reign forever and ever.

And so, Paul paints a glorious picture of our destiny and explains that this is why we have the diversity of gifts in our churches. All the diversity is to bring about the oneness of the Body of Christ, which, by the way, is the theme of the first 16 verses in Ephesians 4 – unity and oneness.

Now, with this glorious picture, we must ask ourselves, what are we going to do with it? How does it change us? What difference does it make in our lives? How does it affect our behavior with others? How does it influence the way we think about ourselves, about others, and about life?

That's the topic we look at today. Follow along as I read Ephesians 4:14-16.

> 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.

"As a result," Paul says, or "considering the vision I have just laid out about the glorious destiny of the church, this is how you are to respond." And then Paul gives us two steps to take. One is negative and something to avoid. The other is positive and to be embraced fully.

Here is his first point – stop being children. Are you a Christian? Are you part of the Church, the Body of Christ? Do you have this grand destiny of being a mature man, of measuring up to the fullness of Christ? Then, move toward that destiny which requires that you stop being a spiritual child. "We are no longer to be children," Paul says and then he goes on to characterize one of the marks of childishness – instability. He compares spiritual children to a small boat in rough waters, being tossed by waves and wind. The wind blows one way and off the boat goes in that direction. Then it blows another way and off the boat goes in a new direction.

What are these winds? They are the winds of false doctrines. In Paul's time, he had many spiritual dangers that the believers faced. They were dangers from false teachers or Judaizers. They were dangers of pagan religions. With the Judaizers, the danger was their teaching that to embrace the Messiah, one had to be circumcised and keep the whole Law. With the pagans, the danger was failing to see the uniqueness of Christ and the biblical worldview. It was seeing him only as another manifestation of the unknowable God. This, eventually, found expression in Gnostic ideas that in the centuries to come posed a grave threat to the church.

Paul said these men who were teaching these things were tricksters, and literally this means, "dice-throwers." These were men who played games on you and cheated you, like someone playing the shell game at a carnival. But this was no carnival. This was no innocent state fair. This was for real. These were out to captivate you and lead you astray. This is why Paul also said that they were deceitful schemers. Their actions against you were premeditated. They continually plotted and schemed to capture people. These kinds of deceitful schemers loved to prey upon the spiritually immature. It was that way then, and it is that way now. I think of cults that go door to door and prey upon those who do not know the word of God.

As I think about Paul's admonition and warning that we not be children who are unstable, it reminds me of one of the gifts that he mentions in these verses – the gift of apostleship. Apostles were to lay strong foundations in local churches. As we studied this in recent days, we discussed how important it is for churches and people to have strong foundations – understanding who Christ is and understanding fully what he has done for us in his death on the cross to obtain our full pardon and justification before God. When we have this strong foundation, or to use a metaphor consistent with Paul's picture, when we have a bigger ship with a good anchor, a good rudder, and a good steering system and leaders who know how to pilot the ship, then we will have protection against the wind and the waves of false doctrine.

Well, that's point one. Don't be a child. What's point two? Grow up! Paul says, "grow up in all aspects into Christ" who is the Head of the Body, the Church. I love the phrase, "in all aspects." We are to grow up in every way, and it brings us back to a point that I made in chapter two of this book – spiritual growth comes in four directions. We are to grow – up – that is, grow in our relationship with God. We are to grow – out – that is, grow in our relationship with others. We are to grow – down – that is, grow in our relationship with the resources God has given us. And we are to grow – in – that is, grow in our understanding of ourselves and how God has made us. These are the four directions of spiritual growth and I think this is a good way of applying Paul's statement to grow up ***in all aspects*** into Christ. If we are to be well rounded, mature men and women of God, we cannot specialize in one type of growth only. We cannot just be good with Bible study and prayer and not good in our relations with others. We cannot just be good in our relationships with others, loving them, serving them, and not be good with our resources such as taking care of our finances or our home or being good workers on the job. We cannot just take care of our homes and jobs and finances and ignore the deeper things in our hearts and refuse to let God bring out the painful things in our hearts and heal them. We must grow up in all aspects into Christ.

How do we do this? Paul gives a very practical step to grow up. He says in verse 15, "but speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects." There are two components to this step. I'm sure

you see them both – truth and love. We need the truth of God in our lives and we need the love of God in our lives.

Let's talk about the truth part. Our translators have rendered it, "*speaking* the truth in love" but in the Greek, it says this, "truthing in love." There is no word for *speaking*. Paul takes the noun truth and turns it into an action word – we are to truth in love. Now, that's a little awkward for us to say in our English language. We don't use truth as a verb or participle so it seems a little strange, but Paul uses it that way, and I want to mention it to you because Paul has a lot more in mind than *speaking* the truth. We are to let truth dominate every part of our lives. We are to think the truth in love, act the truth in love, pray the truth in love, motivate ourselves by the truth in love, as well as speak the truth in love. Every thought, every motive, every desire, every act, and every word is to be dominated by truth. And when we are committed to the truth of God's word and his plan of salvation for the world, when we let truth dominate us like this, we will grow up. We will no longer be children. We will not be susceptible to deceitful schemers and tossed here and there by the wind and the waves.

But notice that we are to truth *in love*. We must have love in this. If we do not, then we will become emotionally hardened by truth. Truth needs love to soften the personality so that we are not unnecessarily offensive. Love needs truth to firm up the personality so that we are not mushy and weak and an easy pushover. We must be committed to the truth of God's word with a heart of love.

Paul concludes this great section by using the Body metaphor again. He tells us in verse 16 that the whole Body is connected to the Head, Jesus Christ, and that the resources and energy for growth come from Him. He tells us the Body is fitted and held together by the supply of every part. In other words, every member of the Body is needed. He talks about how each individual part must work properly. I love that phrase. That is a mandate to discover the way God has made each of us, to learn what our unique gifts are and to use them to the maximum in a proper way. Then others will benefit the most and the Body will build itself up in love.

As we bring this section on oneness to a close – Ephesians 4:1-16 – I want to ask you, do you have a glorious vision of the Church, and are you leaving spiritual infancy behind and growing up into spiritual adulthood? I hope so. I hope also that you are learning your gifts, that you are reflecting on the oneness of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and that you are growing in Christian character as Paul described in the first three verses of chapter 4. If you are, if I am, then we will bring oneness to the Church and much glory to God.