

**Valley Bible Church**  
**Sermon Notes for October 28, 2018**

**The Growing Church**  
**Ephesians 4:14-16**

I. The growing church discerns doctrinal error (4:14)

*14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.*

- We have seen the purpose for why God has given the gifts of teaching leadership in verse 11
  - That was for the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of ministry
  - As saints are equipped by the Word of God, they will actively engage in ministering to others in the body of Christ
  - This will mature the church to look more like Christ
- What can we expect that mature church to look like?
- What does the growing Christlike church actually look like?
  - We find our answer beginning in verse 14
- The growing church will discern doctrinal error
  - Stated negatively, the growing church will not be infant or childlike in their knowledge and conviction of truth
  - “The term νήπιος refers to infants or to children up to puberty. It connotes not only physical age but childish understanding, that is, foolishness, inexperience, or lack of insight... In the present context it has reference to a child’s gullibility, lack of understanding, or lack of perception”<sup>1</sup>
- Since Paul’s aim was to present everyone mature in Christ, he highlights the danger of doctrinal error leading the church astray
- This was a frequent concern for Paul as he wrote letters and ministered to the early churches in his ministry
  - 2 Corinthians 11:3 “But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ.”
  - Colossians 2:8 “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.”

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<sup>1</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 560–561.

- Galatians 1:6-7 “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”
- Galatians 3:1 “O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?...”
- 1 Timothy 4:1 “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,”
- 2 Timothy 3:1-9
  - In the last days, people will only increase in their sinfulness
  - They will oppose the truth and be corrupt in their mind
  - Paul calls Timothy to avoid such people
- Acts 20:29-30 “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”
- However, those churches that remained infants and children in regard to their beliefs only set themselves up for a life adrift on the seas of unsteady sailing
- They would believe anything that was taught to them and thus be tossed to and fro
- How amazing it must have been for Paul to preach to the Bereans only to find them checking everything he was saying in accordance with Scripture as opposed to simply fanboying over everything he said
  - If we desire to be a healthy, growing church, we must practice discernment
  - We must heed the warnings of the Apostles in the New Testament
  - False teaching from deceitful men will abound
  - We must be equipped with the Word of God and ready to respond

## II. The growing church declares the truth in love (4:15)

*15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,*

- Paul now moves from stating the negative to the positive with the word “rather”
- Paul’s point in verse 15 is that a healthy church will not remain in infancy but will actually grow
  - Contrast between verse 14 and verse 15
  - Verse 14 - “so that we may no longer be children”
  - Verse 15 - “Rather... we are to grow up”
- A healthy church is a growing church
- If a church or people in a church are not growing, there is a problem!
- If the saints are being equipped with the Word of God for the work of ministry, then believers should be growing as they minister the Word of God to one another

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- This is exactly Paul’s point in the phrase, “speaking the truth in love”
  - What a wonderful and necessary phrase in the bible!
  - As believers speak the truth of God’s Word to one another in love, then we should be growing
  - That’s it!
  - In one sense, that is simple, isn’t it???
  - You want to grow and see this church grow, speak God’s truth to one another in love!
    - We will not give ourselves to the so called secrets of how to grow your church in three years or how to double your church membership...
    - Those are man’s strategies for man’s outcomes—more people
  - Instead, we will give ourselves to the practice and speaking of God’s Word to one another in love
    - As a leadership, we will keep speaking the truth of God’s Word as faithfully as we can in our teaching
    - We will keep providing opportunities and times where we can interact with one another and speak truth to one another in love
    - And we will pray fervently that God’s Spirit works in your heart to grow personally and corporately as you minister to others
- Now, I know that I have made this sound overly simple
  - Speaking God’s truth in love is a short concept to repeat but it is a difficult balance to strike, isn’t it?
  - The balance in this statement is incredibly difficult but absolutely vital
  - We must not be lopsided in our follow through of this picture
    - Too much truth and not enough love and we will successfully run everyone over that has been so unfortunate to be in our path
    - Too much love and not enough truth and we will lack the substance and life-changing power of God’s Word in our ministry to others
  - The balance is vital
  - The balance is the means by which we actually grow and mature as a body of believers
  - “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 firstfruit is ‘love’. There is no other route than this to a fully mature Christian unity.”<sup>2</sup>

- Paul reminds us at the end of verse 15 that the goal of our growth is Christ
  - He says, “we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,”
  - A mature church will be growing in every area of life to look more like Christ
  - Think of all the ways that Christ is maturing us to look more like Him...
    - He ordains situations for us to love more like He loves
    - He provides times for us to exercise patience as He is patient
    - He grants opportunities for us to obey as He humbly obeyed
  - There is no end to the growth that ought to be taking place in the healthy church
  - We can and we must press further and deeper into our imitation of Christ as a church

### III. The growing church develops together in Christ (4:16)

*16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

- The way that Paul begins verse 16 proves to be an important statement about church growth
  - He begins by stating “from whom”
    - Who is the “whom”?
    - Christ, as Paul ended verse 15
  - Thus, we see that from Christ something happens
  - What is it that happens?
    - “The body grow(s) so that it builds itself up in love”
  - Therefore, Paul is saying that the church grows from Christ
- Christ is not only the goal of our growth (v. 15), He is the very source from which our growth originates (v. 16)
- In Ephesians we have seen that we have been saved and made alive by Christ (2:1-10)
- Now we see that we grow as a church by Christ (v. 16)
  - Christ is the One who strengthens us to do all things in life for Him
  - The same holds true for our maturity and growth as a church

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<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, *God’s New Society: The Message of Ephesians, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 172.

- The growth of Valley Bible Church has been and always will be something for which Christ is responsible
- As Christ, Himself, told Peter in Matthew 16:18b, "... I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."
- However, this growth is not something that we sit back and wait for as a passive agent
- We are actively engaged and involved in this growth as verse 16 goes on to describe
- After stating that our growth can only come from Christ, Paul goes on to say, "the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow"
- Using the anatomy of a human body, Paul describes our unity and togetherness
- We are all functioning parts of the body that are "held together" by one another
- When all the ligaments, muscles, joints and bones of a body are in place and properly joined together, growth can occur
- So too in the body of Christ
- When we join together as joints having contact with one another, then we are equipped and ready to grow
- Thus, without contact with one another, we forfeit our opportunity to grow
- We must take seriously this picture as a charge for us to join together in the body of Christ
- While healthy churches are grown by Christ, the members of the church must work to join together and share that growth with one another
- He states the environment in which this joining together must take place at the end of verse 16
  - Paul states, "so that it builds itself up in love."
  - It is in an environment of love that the body of Christ joins together and grows
  - Love is that attribute and action that moves us to seek the highest good in one another
  - When we have a sacrificial commitment to love one another, then we will join together for the sake of the entire body's growth
  - To separate from one another is to stunt one another's growth
  - To separate from one another is far from an act of love
- Thus, a growing church finds Christ as its source of growth while drawing together to contribute to the growth of one another